THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ART AND DESIGN

by

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INTRODUCTION

I came to Purchase College intending to major in drawing. As a sophomore, the lure of potential employment caused me to change directions. I committed myself to majoring in design without understanding the difference between art and design.

What is the difference between art and design? This question has followed me since I switched majors. The difficult transition from making artwork to making design work has helped me solidify this answer: Art requires the artist to put all of him or herself into the work. Design requires the designer to put none of him or herself into the work.

As convenient as it would have been, I did not come to this conclusion instantaneously. Solidifying this answer has been a concluding event of my senior project, not a beginning.

My senior project consists of 7 projects. The following topics are discussed for each project: Description, Goals, Approach, Challenges, Results, and Reflection. I categorize projects 1-3 as artwork projects 4-7 as design work. At the end of projects 1-3, I found myself attempting to do the same thing: To force my artwork into my design work.
Description
• A gun, an object built to cause death, inhabited by a living community.
  • A group of human figures portrayed sleeping, playing, and working inside a handgun. The work of these human figures is to bake cupcakes and then place them inside the chambered bullets.

Goals
• Exploration

Approach
• Research
• Familiarizing my self with the gun’s form by tracing printed photos of the same gun at different angles.
• Sketching on top of a printed photo.
• Drawing
• Digitally retouching the drawing
• Adding color

Challenges
• Maintaining good craft

Results
• The drawing is not instantly accessible, but the viewer is rewarded for spending time with it.

Reflection
• While preparing a portfolio to submit to the Design Department’s Sophomore Review, I was unsure of what to do with this drawing. My excitement about the drawing made me determined to include it in my portfolio, however I knew it was an art project and not a design project. At the time, I was under the impression that the presence of typography would make my drawing half artwork and half design work, and therefore appropriate to include in my portfolio. I added some copy and a Nutrition Facts label.
I had recently switched my major from drawing to design and, at the time, I did not understand the difference between the two. In hindsight, I believe my attempt to transform my drawing into an art-design hybrid exposes a lack of understanding about what design is. I now feel these additions strongly detract from the drawing's overall impact as artwork and do not convert it into an art-design hybrid.
**Description**

- An exploration of encouraged indulgent consumption.
- This drawing is incomplete. Several elements that were drawn on separate pages and will be comped into the final work. Color has not yet been addressed.
  - Giant cereal boxes spill onto a fenced in house containing a proportionally oversized child. The child digs into the cereal box looking for the advertised “Prize Inside”. Fighter jets fly out of the cereal box and drop bombs on the house. The scale of the fighter jets, relative to the child and the cereal boxes, suggests they are toys and that the bombs are therefore toys as well. The scale of the fighter jets, relative to the fenced in house, suggests they are real and that the bombs are therefore real as well.

**Goals**

- Exploration
Approach

- Sketching the same scene from multiple vantage points.
- Recreating the scene in Google SketchUp, a 3D modeling program.
- Positioning the Google SketchUp camera and exporting, or “shooting”, a picture of the 3D model.
- Comping elements created in Photoshop onto the two images exported from Google SketchUp.

- Printing the two images and drawing on top of them.
- Tracing the two images.
  - Some elements are printed at larger scales and traced on separate sheets of paper to allow for more detail.

- Comping the traced elements together.
- Adding color.
Challenges

• Developing and refining the approach.

Results

• A high detailed drawing.
• Perfectly rational perspective.
• The drawing is not instantly accessible, but the viewer is rewarded for spending time with it.

Reflections

• The more time I put into this drawing, the more uncomfortable I became with the fact that it was very clearly artwork and not design work. To cope, I decided I would turn the drawing into an illustration for a poster for a lecture series about the effects of commercial advertising on children.
• The more time I spent with this decision the less pleased I was about it. I didn’t want to bastardize my drawing by changing its original identity. Also, I knew the drawing was not appropriate for a poster because it did not instantly communicate its meaning. Eventually, I put the project on hold. I plan to return to it. I will let it be artwork. I won’t try to fit it into a design application.
Description

- An exploration of a self-destructive domestic system.
- A high heeled shoe hold a gutted fish that spills eggs into a honeycomb plane. The eggs sink into hexagon sections and are tended to by honeybees. Instead of producing fish, honeybees, or a hybrid, the eggs produce venus fly traps that consume the honey bees.

Goals

- Exploration.

Approach

- Image Research.
- Photo collages.
- Drawing color separations.
• Assembling color separations.
• Coloring.

**Challenges**
• Developing and refining the approach.

**Results**
• A detailed drawing with good craft and ambiguous meaning.

**Reflection**
• When I finished this drawing I found myself in the same situation. Making artwork was something I held very dear and I wanted to successfully marry it to design work. I decided the most appropriate design application of this drawing was album artwork.
Description
• Design an album for an imagined band, “Honey Fish”

Goals
• Apply a finished drawing to a design project.

Approach
• Imagine a band based on the content of a finished drawing.

Challenges
• Designing backwards.
  • Creating a problem to match an already completed solution.
• Applying a detailed drawing to an object with multiple formats.
  • Vinyl
  • CD
  • iTunes
  • iPhone
Results

• I concluded that my drawing could not function in multiple formats.
• I created a typographic solution to the band I had imagined in response to my drawing.
  • Front

![Honey Fish and Diagram](image)

• Function of the typography:
  • The typography of the Front can be divided into two interacting parts: Honey Fish and Diagram.
    • Honey Fish:
      • The text “honey fish”, as seen on the front cover, is meant to be visually self descriptive.
      • The text is drawn with one continuous fluid line that loops around itself and other elements suggesting the movement of a fish in water.
      • The Honey Fish text is handcrafted to compliment the organic connotations of the word pairing “Honey Fish”.
      • The color describes Honey.
    • Diagram:
      • The text “Diagram”, as seen on the front cover, is set in a geometric sans serif typeface (Avant Garde) that, through contrast, is meant to accentuate the organic form of the text “Honey Fish”.
  • Function of the strait white lines:
    • To accentuate, through contrast, the organic forms of the text “Honey Fish”.
    • The strait white lines are numbered labels for areas of the text “Honey Fish”.
• Function of the hexagons:
  • A homolog relationship between bubbles and honeycomb.

• Function of the strait white lines:
  • To suggest fishing line.

• Function of the interaction between the hexagons and the strait white lines:
  • The looping interaction is meant to visually relate the back to the front.

• Function of the Tracks list:
  • The Tracks list doubles as the key to numbered labels on the front.

• Interior

• Function of the hexagons:
  • A homolog relationship between fish scales and honeycomb.

• Function of the filled in hexagon:
  • The CD and the field behind the CD are both covered with tiled hexagons. One of the hexagons on the CD and one of the hexagons on the field behind the CD is filled in with color. Removing the CD causes the filled in hexagon to jump from one position, relative to the CD case, to another. This jump is meant to suggest the movement of a bee.

**Reflection**

• My attempt to create an art-design hybrid spawned a new project that I categorize as design work.
5 BRAVE NEW WORLD BOOK COVERS

Description
• Two designs for the same book cover. One typographic solution and one image based solution.

Goals
• To visually communicate the tone of the book’s story to the book’s target market.

Approach
• Research
  • Analyzing the tone of the book’s story.
    • Dystopian.
    • Dehumanization.
    • Pure industrialization.
  • Analyzing the target market
    • Pessimistic intellectuals.
    • Skeptics.
    • Fans of George Orwell’s 1984.
• Sketching
  • Sketching allowed me to explore ideas without becoming attached to them.
• Comping
  • Comping allowed me to make more accurate typographic assessments.

Challenges
• Working with a detailed illustration in a small format.
• Compensating for discrepancies between the computer screen and the printer.
• **Typographic Solution**

  • Function of the window in the front cover:
    • Brave New World predicts a bleak future. The presence of the window is meant to be metaphorically parallel.

  • Function of the Modernist aesthetic:
    • To communicate a loss of humanity and a rise of industry.

  • Function of the white dot:
    • An instance of intense contrast intended to focus the viewer’s eye toward the two highest elements in the hierarchy: the title and the author.
• To communicate a world devoted to production.
• Function of the light grey circle:
  • A homolog relationship between the world and a gear.
• Function of the illustration’s schematic quality:
  • An interpretation of Brave New World as schematics for a takeover of society by industry.
• Function of geometric aesthetic:
  • To suggest a lose of humanity and a rise of industry
• Function of the conveyer belt:
  • A reference to industrial productions and Fordism.
• Function of the prescription pill bottles:
  • A modern day reference to Soma, the drug used to placate the masses in Brave New World.

**Reflection**

• Both book covers would benefit from higher shelf impact.
Description
• An identity for Wesendonk, an online miscellany mainly comprised of local and global political commentary.

Goals
• To visually communicate the identity of Wesendonk.
• To enhance the assumed credibility of Wesendonk by giving it a visual identify.

Approach
• Research
• Mindmapping
• Sketching

Challenges
• Wesendonk has an ambiguous identity because the writing it produces is not specific to one category.
• Wesendonk does not have a specific intended audience.

Results
• Two proposals.

Reflection
• Creating a meaningful visual identity for an ambiguous client is challenging.
Description
- Redesign a Sherwin Williams paint can.

Goals
- Ambiguously defined.

Approach
- Research
- Mindmapping
- Sketching

Challenges
- Compensating for discrepancies between the computer screen and the printer.

Result
- An unconventional paint can.

Reflection
- This project failed because I created a design that I personally found interesting. I should have created a design that conformed with the target market’s expectations of what paint cans look like.
CONCLUSION

Design is a service industry and in order to provide a service, a designer needs to have one decisive concern: the client. A designer with a personal style will be constantly split between making things look how they should look and making things look how he or she would like them to look.

How should things look? Things should look how the audience for whom they are intended expects them to look. Every culture and subculture has expectations about how nearly everything looks. Far more important than satisfying formal relationships is a design's ability to instantly communicate its identity to a viewer. Instant communication between a design and a viewer is dependent on the design conforming to the viewer's expectations. It is the job of a designer to facilitate this communication.

Before my senior project, I did not understand the importance of commonness. If the design of a paint can does not conform to its target market's expectations of how a paint can looks, then it's a failure. If the paint can communicates its identity to its target market then it's a success regardless of whether or not the target market thinks the paint can looks interesting. When it comes down to it, the target market buys paint because they need paint. The qualities of the paint sell the paint, not design. Design exists to facilitate communication of the paint's qualities.

In hindsight I can see that so much of my design work has not been about communication but rather about self-expression. The paint can from project 7 is a perfect example. The paint can I designed is the paint can I would want to buy. Unfortunately, Sherwin Williams's target market isn't 22-year-old males interested in typography and detailed line drawings. As a designer, it is inappropriate to harbor a predetermined idea about how I want my design work to look. As a designer, the most valuable service I can provide is to make things look how they should look. Design that achieves commonness is design that instantly communicates its identity by conforming to its intended audience's expectations. As mentioned, the concluding event of my senior project was understanding the difference between art and design. As I understand it, art requires the artist to put all of him or herself into the work. Design requires the designer to put none of him or herself into the work. I feel this understanding has been the most valuable part of my senior project.