

## Designing a Future

Design, like many other fields, has its own language, and its goals and ideals can be difficult to express to anyone beyond related fields. It is dynamic, moving between fleeting styles and rational functionalism. We tend to see its products only, while its true essence remains hidden and changing. Products could be either fine art or kitsch, vividly colored or monochromatic, and composed of an infinite combination of materials, shapes, and textures. The unifying strand for those who passionately pursue design disciplines is a celebration of the marvel experienced in the process of creation. I believe Erik Adigard, founder of M.A.D design studio, provides a broader and less abstract definition of design that all can understand. "Design is in everything we make, but it's also between those things. It's a mix of craft, science, storytelling, propaganda, and philosophy," states Adigard. Though industrial designers may work for companies with concrete goals to design specific items for contracted jobs, we are truly artists at heart. Leo Tolstoy claims that, "Art is not a handicraft, it is the transmission of feeling that the artist has experienced." I believe that these conveyed feelings such as hope and future centered optimism distinguish design from any other occupation.

Rather than a more monotonous office job, design work allows for one to seek jobs, projects, or parameters which allow for an overlap between a designer's personal goals and morals and the task's requirements. Charles Eames' diagram, "What is design," utilizes amoebic forms and basic hatching to emphasize the collaboration and consensus involved in design. Multiple parties with varying and changing interests participate in this process from designer to firm to client, but there should be some areas of agreement. Eames believes good design to be the pursuit of this evolving ideal. Unfortunately, the economy is forcing some designers to take a broader range of jobs outside of their concentration. However, "design" insights can be beneficial in any field as all work-related tasks are *designed* to create products or services that provide value to consumers. This is accomplished by improving their environments or adding convenience to required everyday tasks. "Good design" will result when designers are able to strike such a balance between exterior problems like one's employer or clients' demands and internal motivations like stylistic preferences or more emotive or spiritual ideals.

Dutch printmaker M.C. Escher stated it well when he said that, "We adore chaos because we love to produce order." It is this desire for harmony in the midst of chaos that led to the first written language and the invention of tools as well as the creation of art and architecture. More modern social concerns in design include population density, sustainability, and renewable power. One of the beauties of design is that such problems may often be solved in multiple ways. This speaks to the great breadth of designers today and the wealth of their different goals, styles, and designs. Late 18<sup>th</sup> century English poet William Cowper described this richness of meaning when he said that, "Variety's the very spice of life. That gives it all its flavour." Despite the varying importance designers place on aesthetics versus functionality (though they should not be mutually exclusive), all are in some way seeking to improve the items and environments with which we surround ourselves. Though we may never truly understand why we are here, we can use design to structure our lives in a way more conducive to our success, both as individuals and as cultural or societal wholes. It is our hope as designers that many of the world's problems, both physical and psychological, may be abated by a better understanding and evolution of our surroundings and the roles we play within them. It is not as if designers are claiming to know what is best for all though some movements may do exactly that. Many of our inspirations are drawn from nature and even from some pre-coded appreciations for symmetry and certain proportioned forms. This gives an almost spiritual aspect to design which I see embodied in many of the simple, clean, and pure Asian designs or the natural craft and humanity expressed by some Scandinavian designs.

Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw stated that, "Without art, the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable." Many events and trends have come to pass or developed causing people to question, "What has happened to the world?" The only certainty seems that the world will continue to grow in size and complexity. Completely new issues arise while other age old problems remain. As population density increases and digital technologies more fully cover the globe, future designers are some of the few with the power to change such a world. As long as we are required to wait for problems to manifest before addressing them, we will always be playing catch-up. Advanced design theory incorporating earlier forecasting of more distant market and global trends, better and more closely integrated systems' design, and a balanced appreciation for both history and today's constantly evolving contexts is necessary to right wrongs yet un-made. It is my sincerest desire to be one of the designers of the future on this forefront of study and design. Too much fanfare has been blanketed over every material work of known designers, while the true gifts are the insights their works can give us about ourselves or the world. Michelangelo described this ability to see what could be saying, "I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free." Thus as designers it is not truly ourselves who determine our potential, but our ability to recognize the good in the world, to transform or replicate it, and to create environments that allow all things to grow without conflict. Surely it is possible that future generations may one day thank those that have come before them and celebrate in their triumphs.