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Yes we Can: Ready Made in Design

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Abstract

In a world where everything tends to be new instead of something with a story, where one's junk is another's amenity, the content presented in this paper is the result of an 8-week project developed by first year students of the Product Design course, at Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo. By understanding the birth of Ready Made art concept, during 1910s, and analysing ready made products *made* by well-known designers, since the 1950s until nowadays, the purpose of this project was to call to action towards a more sustainable lifestyle. In this sense, *the* aim of this project was, in addition to stimulating imagination and creativity, the transformation of common objects, mass produced, into extraordinary design products, where common objects are easily recognized and integrate an original design piece. Besides that, the final solution should be innovative, respond effectively to a problem presented by the student and, at the same time, have stimulating characteristics for a wider universe of users.

Keywords: Ready Made; old or used artefacts; product design; sustainability.

Introduction: Ready Made origin's and evolution

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) created the first ready-made work, the Bicycle Wheel (1913), as a protest against the excessive importance assigned to works of art. By selecting mass-produced common objects, Duchamp tried to destroy the notion of the art object's uniqueness, the result of which was a new and controversial definition of art - art as an intellectual rather than a material process. Duchamp and his ready-made works were adopted by several artists integrated in the nihilist Dada movement, from 1916 to 1920 (EB, 2019).

Ready-made, which continued to be an influential concept in Western art for much of the twentieth century, provided an important basis for the Pop Art movement of the 1950s and 1960s, whose main theme was mainly the common objects of popular culture. Its intellectual emphasis also influenced the conceptual art movement that emerged in the 1960s, and which considered the artist's idea more important than the final product (EB, 2019).

In the field of design, which has always developed in parallel with the artistic and cultural movements of its time, ready-made objects related to the Pop Art movement consisted of forms designed to respond to new social behaviors. The mutations endured in these transformed functional objects were also a reflection of the political and artistic context of the late 1960s.

Among the many transformed objects, works carried out in the 1990s by the Campana brothers (Brazil) or the collective Droog Design (Netherlands), who incorporated a strong local material culture in their pieces, can be mentioned. It should be noted that Droog Design's conceptual products have become a model for a worldwide trend towards simplification and reduction, and “[...] what remains constant in the field of design [in general] is the search for clarity of purpose and economy of means, attributes that still characterize a modern attitude in design” (Antonelli, 2003, p.249).

In addition, the emotional component of the transformed objects continues to define one of the paradigms on which the theory of design focuses, referring that the understanding of a piece does not depend exclusively on the object itself but on associations that are made to it:

“[...] Hidden associations can be revealed when one object is related to another, or otherwise taken out of context, or when a single detail is removed or altered. If the resulting metaphor is sufficiently powerful, even the most ubiquitous artefact may be transformed into an object of emotional rather than practical utility: a work of art. [...]” (Antonelli, 2003, p.249)

Background of research

In Portugal, as in the rest of the world in due time, at end of the first quarter of 2020 we were caught up by the Covid-19 pandemic and all new circumstances related to it. When the state of emergency restricted the movement of people and the duty of home curfew, this occurrence forced us to explore new ways to continue with our lives and, at the educational level, to rethink the methods of knowledge transmission, giving continuity to subjects studied in class.

As result, in the subject of Introduction to Project, of the Product Design course at the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo, it was decided to face this situation as an opportunity for students, in their own space and environment, to discover a different approach to create a new(er) product.

In this context, the present article intends to present and analyze the project developed by the first year students of that course, untitled “Ready Made in Design”, which consisted in the exploration and interpretation of the Ready Made concept, as well as in the execution of a prototype that brought together its guiding principles.

So, in this scenario, it was our intention to find if it was possible that students achieve results that meet the objectives and requirements of the project, as well as if it was conceivable for them to execute the prototype, by themselves or with the help of third parties (family members), in a way that the experience of "learning by doing" was not compromised.

Project scope, main problem and objectives

The "Ready Made in Design" project was developed as part of the Introduction to Project subject, of the first year of the Product Design degree taught at the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo. It was designed with the aim of stimulate students' imagination and creativity, through the transformation of mass-produced common objects into design products where, on the one hand, the objects should be easily recognized and, on the other, they would be part of a creative design piece.

Besides that, and with the intention of trying to achieve a simple design, ie, without many changes to the original object(s), mass produced and ready to use, students should add other raw materials and/or other objects to create a new product design. In other words, students should transform common, everyday objects, found in the family space, into unique products, with new functions, utility and appearance, but that could be easily reproduced by hand or industrially.

Project methodology

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this project was fully developed via eLearning, having been accompanied by videoconference, in two weekly sessions, over a period of 8 weeks.

Following the principles of a project-based learning model, the project was divided into 3 phases.

The first phase, of preliminary design, lasted one week and corresponded to the research for ready made products, from well-known designers/companies and unknown authors, which should be properly identified (author, name of the piece, year and production company, if possible). With this research it was intended that the student understood the scope and possibilities of developing a project of this nature as well as identify the most relevant characteristics on this topic. Also at this stage, and taking into account both the concept of contemporaneity and the principles of sustainability, as opposed to the planned obsolescence criteria (Fiell & Fiell, 2006), students select unused objects stored in their homes, that could be used, reused or recovered, which would be the basis for building a new product. In parallel, they

should define the problem for which they wanted to find a solution (What do I need? What does my home need? What would I like to have? What can I offer to ...? ...).

After this stage, the project phase began. This lasted for five weeks and was characterized by the product shape development, ending with the development of ideas for an exhibition/marketing label.

The last phase, which lasted two weeks, coincided with the production of the prototype of the piece, the respective label and the dossier for presentation and justification of the work developed. In the production of the prototype, the assistance of third parties within the family was recommended. In most cases, this collaboration allowed for a workshop format learning due to the professional or hobby activity of close family members of each student.

Project Findings

The selection of mass-produced common objects/products was very diverse, with objects such as antique or old furniture and doors, skateboards, tire, coffee capsules, bicycle fork and rims, cutlery, wheelbarrow, wooden coil, cardboard boxes, pallets, agricultural tools, cans, bottles, among many others, being chosen as the main project component.

The problems proposed by each student were mostly to solve flaws within the common domestic space (indoor and outdoor) and only a few were for more specific needs of the student's own space - bedroom.

Although the range of project's typologies, carried out individually by 38 students, was not very wide (vide Tab.1), the final findings were surprising due to the creativity and the quality of the prototype's construction.

Considering that all the results integrate the Ready Made principles, and common mass-produced objects/products used are easily identified, the new design pieces also show a concern with environmental sustainability, especially the reuse of mass-produced common objects/products (extending their life cycle), as well as they exhibit a simple aesthetic language that, in most cases, corresponds to contemporary design standards.

In this context, we believe that many of the final findings present stimulating characteristics for a wider universe of users, just as most of the pieces have the potential to be mass produced.

We also consider that most students have created a new, unique design product, managing to assign new functions, utility and appearance to old or end-of-life common objects/products, and clarity of purpose to the designed piece.

Typologies		units	
Lighting	table lamp	9	
	floor lamp	1	
Indoor furniture	Shelf	standing shelf	1
		wall shelf	3
		suspended shelf	1
	Seat	bench	2
	Bed		1
	Mixed	mirror / hanger	1
		wall lamp / mirror	1
		bench / side table	1
		couch / work table	1
Storage and organization	tools stand	2	
	shoe rack	1	
	hanger	2	
	Support for	vinyl disc	1
		tablet / smartphone	1
		coffee capsules	1
		plants	2
Outdoor furniture	Couch	2	
	Chaise longue	1	
	Leisure table and couch	1	
	Table and benches for meals	1	
Recreation	Game	1	
total projects / prototypes		38	

Tab. 1 – Typologies/quantity of the projects /prototypes executed by students



Fig. 1 - Lamps collection: “Bic Lamp” by Teresa Ferreira, “Coffee Lamp” by Diana Sousa, “Forqueta” by Sofia Teixeira and “Berkus” by Paulo Silva

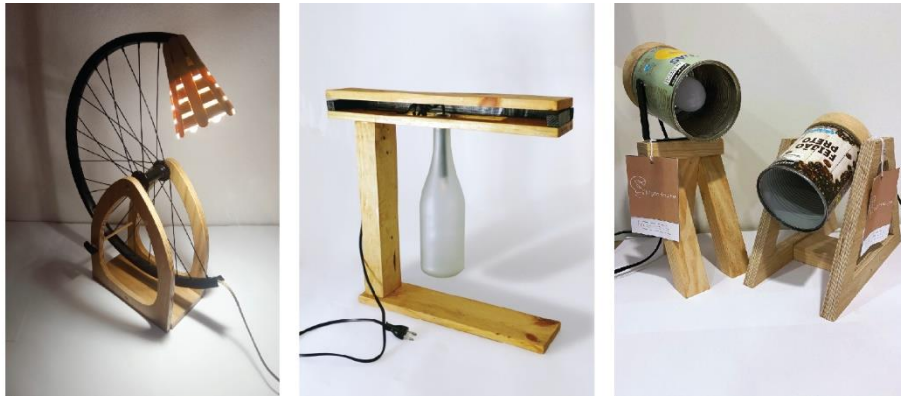


Fig. 2 - Lamps collection: “Curvaluz” by Marco J. Cerqueira, “Light Bottle” by Salvador Rodrigues and “Light House” by Ana Canosa



Fig. 3 - Entrance hanger “Lignum Rake” by Marco Faria, backlit wall mirror “Amaryllis” by Ema Brandão and up to 13” tablet and smartphone support “4 Spons” by Sara Silva

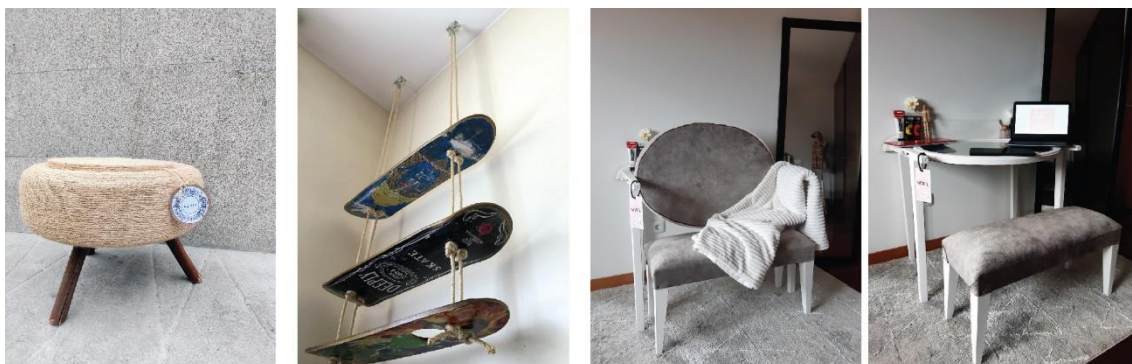


Fig. 4 - Stool “Raster” by Inês Queiroz, suspended “Shelf Board” by Sérgio Gonçalves and convertible “DeskSofa” by Joana Miranda



Fig. 5 - Football table “Mini Mat” by António Ribeiro and chaise longue “PushCart” by Joana Santos

Conclusion

The prototypes of the “Ready Made in Design” project show that even with an eLearning method it is possible to transmit knowledge and guide the student so that he/she reaches the objectives and requirements of a project of this nature.

At the same time, and because most of them have access to tools or small family workshops, the final results surprised by the quality of execution, which demonstrates that "learning by doing" is possible outside academic environment, in many cases with better results. We considered that the better results are due to the lack of need for transportation between places (school - home), with the execution being done in free or family time, as well as being a response to a problem that needs to be solved for that person/family in particular. The results also show the possibility that each design piece has to be produced industrially, which was also a goal for this project.

Simultaneously, the results show a commitment to the sustainability of the planet, particularly at the moment we are going through, of great environmental, social, humanitarian, economic and political challenges. It was in this scenario that the importance of the role of design was highlighted, as an interpreter of the emerging needs of a consumer society that is increasingly aware of the problems surrounding it and more demanding in relation to the solutions presented.

The way this project was approached explained to students how and where (or how else) sources of inspiration can be found for creating new products. It has also become evident to them that the products will only be useful if they effectively respond to someone's need. We believe that freedom, both in the definition and in the approach to the problem, granted at such an early stage in the training of students, provided them with a better understanding of what is useful and functional or futile and inoperative. This was possible through the application of a

methodology that allowed them to understand, test, reject and approve the generation of concepts and ideas that were directed towards the resolution of a problem that was intimately familiar to each one of them.

We tend to believe that these results were only possible because of the specific moment we lived, of home confinement due to Covid-19. Although this project was designed especially for this scenario, we consider that the results would be completely different (in materials and size of most of the pieces) if it has been done in the academic space. To prove this we need to present the same briefing to students having classes in presential mode.

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