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GALLERY
GUIDE*



OBJECT LESSONS

WHERE ART MEETS DESIGN

THE PERMANENT LEGACY OF DONALD JUDD

OPEN-PLANNERS: VITO ACCONCI, JORGE PARDO, RICHARD WOODS

THE GREAT DEBATE: RON ARAD, DAVID BATCHELOR, LOUISA GUINNESS, NICHOLAS SEROTA

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What's the use

A round-table discussion tackles the relationship between art and design from Donald Judd to James Dyson. Photography by Johnny Shand-Kydd



of art?

The panel:

RON ARAD: Designer and Head of Design Products at RCA

DAVID BATCHELOR: Artist, writer and lecturer at RCA

LOUISA GUINNESS: Art and design dealer

NICHOLAS SEROTA: Tate director, curator "Donald Judd"

OSSIAN WARD: Editor, *ArtReview*

City Inn Westminster, London, 8 December 2003

OSSIAN WARD: Donald Judd said his work was neither painting nor sculpture, but three-dimensional. How did this definition impact on art?

DAVID BATCHELOR: That whole generation, with the exception of Carl Andre, all refused the term sculpture. They all knew they were making something that was no longer painting, but they didn't want to call it sculpture. It clearly wasn't sculpture.

RON ARAD: There would have to be an awful lot of poetic license for Judd to be able to term his furniture 'design'. It's a reductionist view of what a piece of furniture is. They don't fulfil the necessary conditions to be understood in any context other than art.

LOUISA GUINNESS: But he didn't want them to be treated like sculpture. They're not limited editions.

NICHOLAS SEROTA: Judd, however, thought that he was making furniture and that he definitely wasn't making art. I don't think he thought of himself as a designer when he made furniture or an architect when he made buildings. The two activities ran parallel to his practice as an artist and he approached them all with an unusual degree of seriousness.

RA: I question the necessity of this discussion. It appears that today it is art and tomorrow it is something else. I don't see if that tells us anything. It's a question of who enjoys it. In the real world, I don't think it matters how we define it. If it had to be assessed as a piece of design, then it is a chair. But I have to tell you, they are lousy chairs.

LG: I think they serve the purpose for which he created them.

Judd believed that there were three positions: you stand up, sit or lie down. He didn't create a chair to watch TV. He made furniture with aesthetics that he then continued to develop, but it came out of a necessity as he was living in a place where there wasn't any furniture.

RA: A chair or a piece of design are many things. It is comfortable or uncomfortable, for example, or there is an industrial weight about it. But it's not just about that. It's about the whole world.

OW: Given Judd's use of metallic paint and industrial materials, do you think he was employing a design aesthetic?

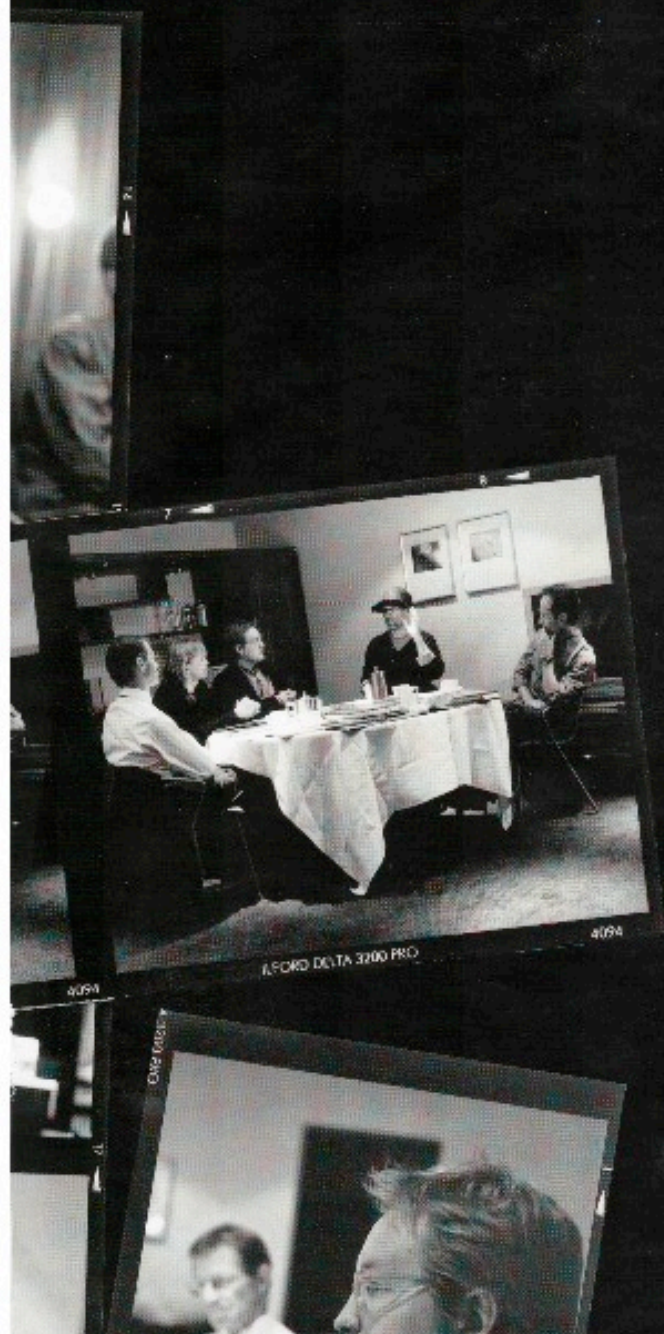
NS: I wouldn't use 'design aesthetic' in those terms. He was clearly intrigued by industrial materials and car paints and the effects they produced. He rarely painted a surface until the 1980s; most of the colours were applied during the process, rather than added later.

OW: Traditionally, an artist who went into the wider decorative arts or design would have been seen as devaluing their practice. Fine art is superior to these other art forms...

DB: In the 1920s, the constructivists, the Bauhaus and other groups all wanted to overcome the separation of the arts and design and the separation of high culture to the broader culture. It's not by any means a new idea.

LG: Museums, collectors and artists are focusing on design more as a subject to be individually approached. I've just done a project in which I asked artists to design jewellery. They all – nearly all – leapt at the opportunity to show their artistic skill in a different light.

DB: In modernist theory, painting distinguishes itself from sculpture and they in turn distinguish themselves from design and everything else; but actually there's evidence to show that in



◀ practice pretty much the opposite has occurred. Artists enjoy a degree of confusion, especially in today's environment. I feel that no artist can feel comfortable or confident in knowing where art ends and everything else begins. I think there is pleasure to be had in not having that confidence.

RA: How about Richard Artschwager? Is that more or less design than Judd?

NS: Artschwager makes representations of furniture, not furniture.

OW: So is the main difference function? Does the fact that Artschwager's work isn't actually used as a chair show us the main distinction between art and design?

NS: Oldenburg and Artschwager are both interested in the culture and the use of furniture that is made by individuals. I don't think Judd was interested in the way in which people use furniture as an expression of their values.

LG: Judd once said that if someone is making furniture, art and architecture, there will be similarities. Various interests in form will be consistent and simple forms in art will be complicated ones in architecture.

DB: He wasn't modest in his ambitions. Having been to Marfa, it reminded me in part of a latter day Shaker community and in part of Waco. There's something crazy about building your own world in your own image, and something quite impressive too. It was an attempt to create an all-encompassing personal environment. I think Judd wanted to build a city. He did – he took over half a town.

OW: The furniture itself might not be described as art, but when placed in this context, can the whole environment be called art?



DB: A *gambler's den*? I doubt that Judd would have thought of it in those terms.

LG: I think you have to call his furniture a work of art, even if he didn't necessarily want it to be. If you want a truly functional piece of furniture go elsewhere. It's more about the aesthetics. I live and work with his furniture and I find it perfectly comfortable to use, but they're not the most practical pieces. People who buy his furniture buy it because they like Judd and his vision.

OW: If the furniture isn't functional, then it can become a bit of art.

LG: Isn't that the big difference? A work of art won't have a function built into it during the creative process.

RA: Oscar Wilde made a comment on this once by taking a Rembrandt and using it as an ironing board.

LG: That is what I'm trying to do ... I'm exhibiting works by artists. It's functional objects by artists rather than designers. There's nothing that has been industrially produced. They've all been individually made. I'm asking artists, or finding that artists already have gone into areas outside their normal boundaries.

OW: Rehberger and Purdi play with the boundaries by making functional objects such as lamps and furniture. Does this make them designers?



LG: Ron's work does that, too.

AS: As does Scott Burton: what do you feel about his work?

RA: I'm not that interested in it. He does furniture-like things. His research isn't interesting. He doesn't make any major contribution to design work. It's not interesting sculpture either. I don't know what it is. It is nothing that hasn't been done before. He's decided to play the art game. He closes on Mondays like galleries. It's not interesting conceptually. It doesn't thrill me in either respect. I can be thrilled, however, by something new, be it art or design, like the iPod. By calling design art, it doesn't make it better design. It makes it escape to a different place, where the discussion and criteria is different.

DB: It reminds me of the art-and-politics conjunction. Bad politics are excused because 'it's art' and bad art because 'it's political'. It can be evasive.

RA: When I go to Tate Modern, to see the [Olafur Eliasson] installation there, all the components are recognisable to me. I can look at it and know what it's made of, the ways he has created space and the problems that have been overcome. It's all part of what needs to be thought about in architecture and design. It's thrilling and visually great. I don't care if it's done by an artist or designer

or architect. It's just good. It uses the expertise and the processes that we use when we do architecture. It's a good example of something that doesn't care which camp it lives in or where it belongs.

NS: What is your response to the work of Pardo or Rehberger? Both are artists who move on to the territory of furniture makers or designers.

RA: They are sometimes interesting. It doesn't matter about their past though. Accornel, for example, was a poet and then declared himself as an architect. I don't know why he felt the need to declare this, but he now operates as an architect. It doesn't make it any better or worse. It's not about the worlds they came from. We should just judge it or respond to it as we would to any other architecture.

LG: When you are creating a "New Orleans" or a "Big Heavy" and thinking about the original shape, are you thinking about sculpture or a chair?

RA: I am thinking about a chair.

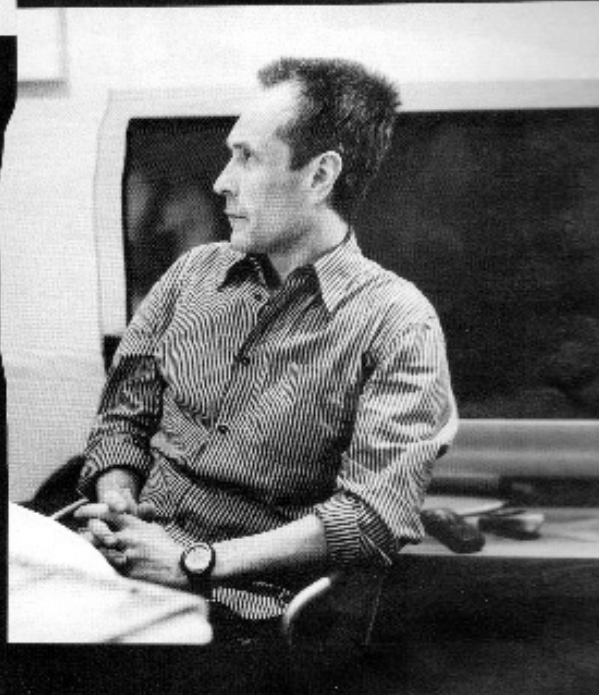
LG: Do you think differently when you're producing your pieces that go into mass production?

RA: No, not really, but I guess you have to take more things into consideration. Such as how well it sells and how well it communicates.

LG: So it restricts your creativity?

RA: Absolutely not. It's just a different logic, not less creative. It doesn't mean that if you do one, you can't do the other. Gehry said that he had to stop at the height of his career as a

'A different way to describe it maybe is that art is about things, and design is the thing itself'





'I could say any piece of design is art, but there's no point unless people take me seriously'



▲ furniture designer as he said people were starting to not take his architecture seriously. I know what he's talking about. It's a lot easier for architects to say what they do is design, than for designers to say what they do is art.

NS: Regarding your own work, if it were collected by institutions, would you be happier if it were collected by the V&A or the Tate?

RA: It is owned by institutions like Pompidou, MoMA and lots of other museums. Some pieces would be out of place in the V&A and some would be out of place in the Tate...

NS: I only ask because I think Judd would have liked to have seen his furniture in the V&A, his architecture in the RIBA drawings collection and his art at the Tate, and I imagine he would have been quite insistent on the distinction. I think you, on the other hand, are more interested in a notion of creativity that avoids distinction. I won't say 'blur', as somehow it's a pejorative word, and I think you want to give it a more positive attribute. You don't want to make the distinction between a direct functionality and an aesthetic.

RA: I think there isn't a distinction in any case. With some people there is. You can write a best-selling novel and be a leader of the Conservatives at one time and a prisoner at another time.

DB: Possibly. But, I don't see Pardo or Rehberger's work as being



DB: I don't think it's a case of just calling it art. There has to be, at some level, a consensus. I could go round and say any piece of design is art, but there's no point in doing so unless people take me seriously. Quite how this consensus comes about is rather complex. There was once a question about whether photography could be art. No one is troubled by that any longer.

RA: A different way to describe it maybe is that art is about things, and design is the thing itself.

DB: Art is about representation.

RA: Exactly. Design is James Dyson; Jeff Keene takes Heavers and plays with them. Ninety per cent of contemporary art is about things that have been designed before. It's not a question of who comes first, or which one is more important. As long as we enjoy it doesn't matter.

DB: I think what Ra is saying was that one is about the world and one is from the world. It's not a bad way of differentiating the two, as long as you accept that there will be points when this itself becomes uncertain. We can talk about the conventional distinctions and we can talk about habit and contingency, about things occurring in certain places rather than others. There is no essential difference between a sculpture and a chair. It's a difference of discourse, not a difference of essence.

RA: I think that you are equipped with a certain sort of culture and discourse. In fact, I think the discourse of art and design are not all that different, but the overlap won't happen because, like in every profession, everyone protects their own discourse.

OW: I think we've covered a lot and can think of finishing up...

RA: I'm only just started.

remotely like what Ron does. They're artists making strategic use of design, mainly but not always in art galleries.

RA: So they are 'artists' doing that kind of work. Why is that? Is it because they wear a certain uniform?

DB: Yes. They come out of a discourse of art rather than a discourse of design.

RA: So art is something that is done by artists and design is something that is done by designers? It comes down to training?

DB: They are both cultural activities that overlap sometimes, but most of the time they don't. People who go to art school come out with a working knowledge of the current issues and problems in art and that tends to frame their subsequent practice.

NS: Artists who paint generally remain painters throughout their lives and people who sculpt or use the camera, tend to stay with their chosen medium. When they do explore other media they can be very influential because they bring a different vision. There's a nicely argued line which describes the main innovations of 20th-century. It suggests that the most influential sculpture comes from painters rather than sculptors, Picasso and Matisse for instance. You could say that Judd, who began as a painter, is at the end of this argument.

OW: If you call a piece of design art, does it add mystery to it?

