

Student research in progress.

VISIBLE INVISIBLE PRACTICE. HANDBAG DESIGN AND PRODUCTION IN ESTONIA.

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Abstract

Background

The doctoral thesis examines handbags as visual signs from a designer perspective.

A handbag is a commodity of ambivalent meanings. Obviously it is functional and necessary item, so apparent that escapes observation, fuses into generic. Concurrently in contrary situations it can be a message, a statement. A handbag can be visible and invisible.

Purpose

The central purpose of this study is to find categories which outline the position of a handbag as a visual sign and reflect the relevance of representation in future. The aim of the artistic research is to explore identities and interpretation possibilities of handbags.

Method

The foundation for the research is the handbag design in Estonia during the first period of independence between years 1918 - 1940. The period between the First and the Second World War was very innovative for bag design in all over the western world. Modern materials, technologies and constructions were applied for new demands of the era. New conceptual approaches changed the bag design more than ever before. The subject field is not examined in Estonia. The cultural norms of communities towards everyday commodities have changed and the possibilities of cultural phenomenology open new perspectives to understand the material environment around us.

Analyzing and observation of handbags from the collections of local museums and representations of bags published in the periodicals of the era is the method providing inspiration and knowledge for modern designs concerning aesthetics, functionality, technological improvements and constructional innovations. Deductive approach and reflective practice are methods for artistic research.

Results

The artistic research consists of three projects of practical output and the theoretical framework connecting the handbag design of the 1920s and 1930s to the production of modern designer handbags.

Keywords for the first exhibition were controversial “visible” and “invisible”. The aim of the exhibition was to fetch a bag from its everyday context, bring it to the focus changing

environment (from streets and shops to the exhibition gallery) and hence refer to its ambiguous nature and ability to transmit messages. The approach of critical design was used to create bags and the phenomenological method of Edmund Husserl was used to make the installation for presentation.

Conclusion

The first exhibition of the thesis was presented in January 2016 and will be followed by the next one in 2017. The theoretical framework of the artistic research combines personal designer experiences on phenomenological ground to the views of semantics of Roland Barthes and visual aesthetics of handbags between the years 1918-1940.

The object of the research is both visual and material, handbag as a sign can be poetical midpoint or powerful statement of the identity of the owner and/or designer.

The designer approach to the artistic research aims to encourage non-verbal types of communication and to apprehend the personal and/or community identity through everyday commodities.