

DESMA 104: DESIGN FUTURES

Prof. Peter Lunenfeld

FINAL ASSIGNMENT

The take-home final will be a 8-10 page (2000-2500 word) curatorial statement, accompanied by captioned descriptions of 25-50 images that make the case for your argument via their juxtaposition, inter-relationships, and even the wit with which you choose and arrange them.

One of the main points of this course is that the world of contemporary design is just too big and evolving too fast to “master” it. The question for all of us is how to negotiate our way to a productive relationship with this field, and how to relate our interests in design to broader issues in society. To help us do this, I’m proposing a transformation from “students” trying to “learn” the material, to “curators” proposing a show. The point is to demonstrate a sensibility that appeals to us or that causes us concern.

The author Mindy McAdams wants journalists to look at the news in the same way. She identifies five steps to curate, and I’ll summarize them here:

1. Selection of the best representatives
2. Culling
3. Provide context
4. Arrangement of individual objects
5. Organization of the whole

What I’d like you to do is think about the work we’ve been looking at, the texts we’ve been reading, and the discussions we’ve had in class, and the visit to the Hammer and use that as the starting point to look at the world of contemporary design and start to identify, pull out and organize a set of images, objects, and experiences that build an argument, make a point, and/or express a sensibility about the present moment in design.

You could, for example, think about how design and interaction come together in personal objects – from iPhones to eye glasses; or look at the ways that images get used in architecture from electronic billboards to supergraphics on buildings; or analyze in depth the impact of anime and manga on American youth culture. The possibilities are endless, but you are expected to focus, make your case for the importance and connections in 8-10 pages, and then “prove” it with the image/captions and their juxtaposition.

We talked about the Susan Sontag essay on camp, in which she writes: “A sensibility is almost, but not quite, ineffable. Any sensibility which can be crammed into the mold of a system, or handled with the rough tools of proof, is no longer a sensibility at all. It has hardened into an idea... To snare a sensibility in words, especially one that is alive and powerful, one must be tentative and nimble.” This assignment is about yoking images to words, creating “powerful” yet nimble associations. In other words, it is a certain kind of “design brief.”