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Dysfunctional Art & Design (Question 4.)

Art and Design philosophies have had a relatively linear and consequential development thus far – often, they emerged as reactions to, or extrapolations of, preceding movements or societal and cultural changes. However, in the highly volatile and simultaneously interconnected fabric of culture we are enveloped in today, Art is becoming increasingly non - discrete and its development, non-linear. Instead of being correlative and connotative, it now exists as a self sustaining abstract entity, capable of reflecting a multitude of meanings, depending on the audience and other contextual factors. This, coupled with the rise of technology, has also rendered Art more nuanced and less visible to the average eye.

We are transitioning away from obsessing over any end outcome, with the focus instead on intangible concepts such as the process and user-artist interaction. The future design trends of the next 5 years will firstly be reflective of the ‘chaotic’ society we live in today and secondly, encapsulate the characteristics of a technology savvy interconnected population. Taking into consideration the current state of the world, I believe ‘Dysfunctional Art’ would be an apt name for the next Art and Design Movement.

Art in a large sense is driven by philosophies that come about because of key moments in a particular society. Hence, to predict where Art will be heading towards in the next few years, it

is important to first understand where we are as a society in the present. Climate Change is at an all time priority with Greta Thunberg (a 16 year old 'kid' openly desecrating top government officials for debunking climate crisis as a myth) ("*Greta Thunberg Tells World Leaders 'You Are Failing Us', As Nations Announce Fresh Climate Action*") becoming the face for the championing of its relevance. Donald Trump, a highly controversial and radical character is the President of debatably the most influential country in the world and the violence and discourse in Hong Kong, in its fight for liberation from China is at an unprecedented stage. All these are happening simultaneously in real time, affecting global economics and culture. These have led to subversion of known laws that have governed society thus far.

We are living in a time where the familiarity of established 'laws' or 'protocol' methods no longer yield effect, leading to a dysfunctional society. Old laws are being abolished, making way for new laws that can adapt to the veracity and velocity of the changes we are experiencing today. In retrospect, Art birthed from this era will also be lawless and dysfunctional as the notion of basic function seems to have outlived its purpose. It has reached a plateau where attempting to develop or improve it leads to no results. Instead, analysing dysfunctions and flaws to propose new insights seem more viable for our progression. This has caused the erosion of Art having a perfect form and instead imperfection is celebrated and showcased. We increasingly want people to be acutely aware of the failings of our current society more so than to continue to bask in the comfort of archaic and pointless 'rules'.

One example of how imperfection is being brought to the forefront of design would be the recent Venice Art Biennale which features a show literally titled Dysfunctional Exhibition. Amongst many of the Artists that took part, renowned designer and creative director of LV, Virgil Abloh was one of them. His work featured ‘sinking’ furniture — chairs with tapered legs to address rising sea levels caused by climate change (*Hitti*). Here, the utilitarian function of the chair falls apart as one is unable to sit on it. However its dysfunctionality then becomes the work’s conceptual function. Through subverting the very notion of what a chair is used for and still presenting it in a similar form, we are made aware of the impact of climate change.

On the abolishment of archaic laws, in our local context, the Singapore Government recently passed a law (under the Religious Harmony Act) that explicitly protects members of the LGBT Community from religious violence (*"New Legislation Protects LGBTQ Community From Religiously Motivated Violence But Law Is 'Same For All'"*). Furthermore, Law Minister K Shanmugam, acknowledging their existence, has gone ahead with allowing Dr Menaka Guruswamy, senior advocate of the Supreme Court of India to proceed with her talk in Singapore with regards to her successful repeal of S377 which criminalises gay sex in India, despite outburst from the Singaporean Christian conservative community. 40,000 members petitioned for the speaker to be ‘banned’ given the fact that Section 377a was being legally challenged by lawyers in Singapore. (*"Singapore Activists Challenge Gay Sex Ban In Court After India Ruling"*) This goes to show the power of the flow of change and it’s inevitability. Such support from the government would have been unfathomable just a few years back. This

underscores the rapid rate in which society is evolving in present time. Hence, Design too has to embrace these changes and thrive on fluidity and inclusivity to stay relevant.

When rules fall apart, rules that govern art consequently fall apart too. It becomes accessible and more open source. The idea of the one true artist voice is diminished and instead a collaborative or culminating voice involving both the artist and the audience holds the most affect in today's world. People want the freedom to feel, perceive and appreciate 'art' in their own unique ways in spite of their differences, without being forced to a definition. However at the same time, as artists and creators in the industry we have to set parameters to contextualise our works - allowing bubbles of multiverses to exist within a larger universe. This is the increasingly difficult role of the artist. Future art trends will potentially embrace this idea and we must be hypersensitive to everything we are exposed to so as to shape our creative voice.

The second key characteristic of the next design trend would be the advent of technological proficiency which increasingly allows us to hijack, find loopholes and break into systems. I attempted to manifest this myself, in my recent visit to the ArtScience Museum FutureWorlds Exhibition. When I reached the Sketch Aquarium Exhibit, I sat down at the drawing tables that were occupied by kids and their parents and observed how drawings were being converted into animated images onto a huge projected aquarium. Hence I decided to disrupt the idea and demography of the work by making a 'protest' Jellyfish with the slogan "Free HK".

The open source nature of the exhibit allowed me to scan in the seemingly harmless jellyfish as Trojan horses and hack the system without breaking any laws to convey a highly controversial message. This is due to the impossibility to fully monitor and police the use of tech due to how accessible, replicable and customisable it is. We hence have to use this to our advantage and design trends of the next 5 years will capitalise on this. This is especially important in a time where we yearn for more creative freedom of speech without having to be suppressed or restricted. Ideally the movement will have to be technologically conscious, and its ownership will likely be distributed among many creators and co-creators preventing it from being easily 'shut down'.

Furthermore, association in the digital age, with the rise of mechanisation and the internet, have become more introspective and metaphoric. Instead of associating a certain sensation to a definite imagery, we are inclined to associate it with a multitude of simultaneous feelings or fragmented ideas derived from constant exposure to social media, the internet, and mass culture (*Lovejoy*). These in turn come together in that moment to form a temporal experiential bubble that is unique to each individual.

Art then becomes less visible and starts to exist as a concept in our minds rather than a manifestation of anything physical per se. Art of the next 5 years will be self sustaining and be able to exist and propagate on its own. Though 'less visible' and less discrete, It will be visible to those that have more a tuned senses. Essentially Art and Design will be what you want it to be.

The qualities of 'Dysfunctional Art Movement' will not only reflect the dysfunction and attitude of society but act as a critique. The established idea of a descriptive 'function' will be usurped and replaced with the idea of a 'purposive' function. It also cannot be isolated from the use of technology as discussed earlier. I believe as creators, to set this inevitable trend into motion, we will have to embrace and adapt with rapidly changing mindsets to cater to and be able to affect the increasingly complex human condition.

1399 words

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