

# authentic {1/2}

An authentic object conjures up the image of something that might be old, familiar, handcrafted and of limited availability. The contemporary version of authentic design is perhaps something that is innovative, part of a limited edition and has the identity of an 'on trend' brand. There also seems to be another version of a contemporary authentic object arising, it is a product with an invented narrative used for marketing purposes; this causes disharmony between objects with genuine authenticity and those that appear to be genuine. {March 2012}

An IKEA catalogue seems to come to life in a scene in David Fincher's 1999 film, *Fight Club*. The voiceover says, 'The things you own, they end up owning you... My hand-blown green glass dishes with the tiny bubbles and imperfections, proof they were crafted by the honest, simple, hard-working indigenous peoples of wherever.' This sardonic account of the process that objects undergo seems to be a symptom of mass production and suggests that as consumers desperately attempt to keep up with trends, brands and materialistic pleasures, they are creating an environment that perhaps strips them of their individuality.

The appeal of owning something that is up-to-date and in fashion is appealing to most. However, when the pace of change is too fast to keep up with, there is no doubt that shortcuts, copies and cheaper options are tempting. In 2011, Apple filed a lawsuit against competitors Samsung for 'copying' the iPad and iPhone. Though it lacks the sleek advertising and consumer lifestyle associations that Apple offers to its consumers, the Samsung Galaxy phone is a more affordable smart phone option. The fashion industry is also no stranger to the situation where designs are copied; there are many instances of high street retailers taking too much 'inspiration' from one of the high profile fashion houses and then reproducing clothing and fashion accessories in cheaper materials at affordable prices. This scenario is also replicated in the furniture and home accessories sector. For example, the 'Mirror Ball Light' by Tom Dixon [2003] is 40cm in diameter, made from chrome and can be bought for £375. A similar version, 35cm in diameter can be found in DIY specialists, B&Q, titled the 'Reflex Hanging Ball Pendant Chrome Effect', for an appealing £64.98. 'Chrome Effect' suggests that another material that looks like chrome might have been used as an alternative; and this is one of the ways of cutting costs and therefore the price.

The idea of using an alternative material to conceal, improve, raise value or cheapen an object seems to influence whether it is perceived as authentic or indeed, inauthentic. The use of veneers on furniture for example, allow objects to have a finish or appearance that in actual fact might be unsuitable; moreover, the original material may never be able to take on the form that the new cousin imitates. For example, the John Lewis 'Vier Sliding Wardrobe' [2012] has two sets of identical walnut veneer panels; yet it is impossible for real wood to have the same grain on two pieces of wood. It seems that the forgery of material can be used to give an additional identity or value to an object.

Stuart Haygarth's chandeliers use the stories behind waste and everyday objects to create pieces that symbolise an occasion. For example, Haygarth collected party poppers on the 1st January 2000 for the 'Millennium' chandelier [2004]; the chandelier became a memento for that particular period in time. His other chandeliers are made from prescription glasses, disposable wine glasses and glassware found at flea markets. The use of such objects encourages users to reconsider their value. In this way, they are 'upcycled' to a design-art status and are appreciated not for their original function but what they represent in their new context. There are various reasons that Haygarth's chandeliers might be classified as authentic design, such as, the decision to use objects with a story, the spectacular form of displaying these objects, the limited availability of the chandeliers and their upmarket audience.

The manner in which fashion operates in cycles seems to be a process, which can revitalise an object. But is it fair to claim the 'original' version is more authentic than the updated or altered piece when perhaps the original is no longer obtainable or outdated because better technology has become available? In 1974, Enzo Mari designed the self-assembly 'Sedia Chair'. In 1998, Tord Boontje designed the very

Quality  
Branding  
Convince  
Versions  
Artificial  
Features  
Cheap  
Copy  
Personality  
Story  
Louis Vuitton  
Overpriced  
Nostalgia  
Invented  
Originals  
Black Market  
Precious  
Real  
Legislation  
Trust  
Honest  
Appreciate  
Fake  
Multiples  
Material  
Value  
Editions  
Conceal  
Trend  
Bored  
Modify  
Economical  
Escape  
Budget  
Marketing  
Success  
Copyright  
Scammed  
Souvenir  
Fair

A  
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authentic {see also process, upcycling}

similar 'Rough and Ready Chair', a guide for consumers to build their own chair. In 2010 Mari's chair was again put into production by Finnish furniture brand Artek. Both chairs encourage making skills and DIY, allow for customisation and give a sense of something that could be personal to the owner. It is difficult then to identify which is more authentic than the other; perhaps, this is where other factors such as the status of the designer, price tag and availability have to be taken into consideration.

The creation of a one-off or limited edition piece of design seems to add authenticity to an object often because of the specialist tooling used to create it. There is a growing appeal to design in this way because of the art/design status or fame that can be achieved. The unfamiliar processes of mass production do not allow for a relationship to form between consumer and object. The anonymity of mass-produced objects means that to market the end product, fake stories or identities that promote 'authentic' design are created. IKEA, for example, have begun putting 'designer profiles' with their products. The use of a narrative with the product makes the product and the brand seem to have an authentic quality.

**Rip-off**

**Affordable**

**Dispose**

**Guilt**

**Reproductions**

**Sue**

**Retouch**

**Airbrush**

**Scan**

**Appeal**

**Cheat**