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Practicing cherish-ability as a designer 2017

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Introduction

This paper provides a reflective review of the authors commercial textile design label 'SK Mclauchlan' founded in 1980 and practicing sustainable design since 1999. SK Mclauchlan's design philosophy involves designing 'pieces' that act as modern family heirlooms that can be passed from one generation to another using only materials that have already had a first life. This collaborative design process is undertaken in consultation with the end user and the design specifications are tailored to their own identity and personal preferences. This involvement added: individuality and content for the design pieces, which ranged from cushions / Christmas stockings, wall hangings to bed spreads. The pieces were either designed for the actual client or designed for another person to be gifted by the client.

This paper will provide an overview of SK Mclauchlan's design process and explore emotional durability within a textile design context. Furthermore, research will be undertaken to revisit a sample selection of pieces from the client's own archive to identify if they are indeed as emotionally durable, as intended. Finally, closing discussion will make recommendations for future research and share personal insight for fellow designers.

Practice Led Research

This case study references pieces made specifically for a particular client who contributed to an inclusive design process and together they developed a piece that incorporated emotional durability and explored cherish-ability (Chapman, 2006). This longitudinal study evolved over an extended period of time (1999-2017) and took place through physical and digital consultations and visual exchanges until the content and composition was agreed upon. The commissioned piece was then further designed and hand stitched by SK Mclauchlan adding decorative stitch via hand embroidery which was further embedded into the cloth.

Research

This research will apply an ethnographic approach to reflect back upon the designed artifacts to examine if the bespoke items are still in circulation, have they been kept and treasure? Have they been passed onto another generation as intended or have they been discarded? The findings from this enquiry will form the basis of the paper

and proposed work shop.

This research will be a comparative analysis between a 'cherishability' model and a traditional commercial model.

Rationale

According to Chapman, 'emotional durability' can be achieved through consideration of the following five elements. Each of the values below has been adhered to during the design process and the principles imbedded into the philosophy of SK Mclauchlan as a practicing textile designer.

Narrative: How users share a unique personal history with the product.

Consciousness: How the product is perceived as autonomous and in possession of its own free will.

Attachment: Can a user be made to feel a strong emotional connection to a product?

Fiction: The product inspires interactions and connections beyond just the physical relationship.

Surface: How the product ages and develops character through time and use.

Methodology: Adhering to the above principles research was collected digitally and orally using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was a method that would directly enable SK Mclauchlan to find out if the intended longevity of the pieces had been met.

Reasons for commissions

The original pieces were commissioned and gifted to clients from Scotland, London, Los Angeles, Canada and Australia. Age of pieces range from 1993-2017(1year to 24years). A range of reasons were given for design requests: Celebration /remembering an important event (18th birthday/ Wedding anniversary/ recognition of tradition / marking of a significant time or event/ a personal message of love. All requests were unique and personal to the client or commissioned by the client to gift to another.

Surprising Finding

An unexpected finding which further demonstrates the theory behind the practice: A client from Denmark had a problem: Her new puppy had quite severely damaged her commissioned wedding blanket. The choice was to replace

the blanket with a new one or commission a repair. She chose to commission a repair and add this repair to their family story the repair was not perfect but the story it held was more important.

Some of the original reasons for ordering the pieces had changed but the pieces were still 'cherished'. (E.g. Blanket designed for a young boy whose teenage style now does not connect now with the younger content but the piece is still kept for the future it's the hope that blanket will be given to the next generation.)

Some of the younger clients who the pieces were designed for interpreted the work in a different way in which it was intended-noted that they enjoyed owning a piece that had a history to it. Clients have enjoyed the hand stitched quality of the work more than ever envisaged.

Clients responses

- Visually transport to a happy time (child now grown up)
- The piece 'tells' a story which adds to the families own history.
- Child slept with it acted like a security blanket.
- Pleasure that you have given and own something that will last a very long time.
- Personal enjoyment that someone has gone to the effort to design something especially for you.
- Several clients stated pleasure of owning something. Unique to them.
- Recognition of hand skill added value to the piece.
- Creating our own family tradition.
- Pleasure each time it is 'brought out' for Christmas. The family are making their own traditions.
- 'Most prized possession' hope that it will be handed down each generation and the memory of them will continue after their life and ceased.
- Celebration of the child's personality.
- Visual marking of time.

Comments on material longevity

Condition of the piece had lasted extremely well many saying "it was as good as new" even though several years old (oldest piece 24years old).

Tactile quality enhanced due to the nurturing feel of wool. The material is generally considered a high value material and as such increased its purpose and life span.

As a strategic approach, "emotionally durable design provides a useful language to describe the contemporary relevance of designing responsible, well made, tactile products which the user can get to know and assign value to in the long-term. Professor Jonathan Chapman.

"Cradle-to-cradle also challenges us to think about the real problem why we invented a product in the first place, and then think about ownership. In this way new business models can be designed."

The client felt involved in the process which further added

to their emotional investment in the piece and added further value to the gift. The selection of the materials further added to the longevity of the piece. In terms of care and maintenance restricting the materials to either 100%wool or 100% cotton further encouraged product longevity. Tactile quality and material longevity further extended life time and appeal.

Additional benefit in selecting (1) material will enable the piece to be disassembled more successfully". Create products that are easy to disassembly: easy to repair/ modify " Fiona Balgooi

Materials for the proposed workshop have been collected via 'drop' off bags placed in the Textile studio at ECA. The bags have a suggested colour label attached to the them to encourage design students to value all resources. It acts as a visual display and a constant reminder of the surplus resources generated by textiles. Finding a 'use for this surplus is circular and recent involvement in <https://remantleandmake.wordpress.com/about/> highlight the quality of some of the surplus resources founding manufactures in Scotland.

Traditional Commercial Model

The traditional role of commercial textile designers encourages them to design products directed by current trends. Material and content selection is driven by trend forecasts. This model encourages the designer to create many possibilities for the client. Choice encourages excess as many interpretations of a trend are demonstrated and presented to the client (the selection process generates waste)

The practice encourages choice with many pieces designed in order to determine the maximum option for the client. This model inevitably generates excess. It is estimated that the ratio of successful sales is 40% then a further 10% lost at production. As a designer, the wasted resources needed to fulfill this role was compared to SK Mclauchlan's Cherishability model which generates no waste.

Conclusion

In terms of designing a product that is designed to last we must also take care to enjoy the product. The product can become sacred with little or no inter action. Tactile purpose redundant and emotional connection lessened.

The over all opinion which was constantly commented on was the pleasure gained for a product that was not throw away was immeasurable. It sought to add balance in our modern 'throw away' society. Ownership was long lasting and grounded by passing the product onto another generation.

The more purpose and individual the product was in relation to the client the longer it appears to be cherished and if it is cherished it will be cared for and considered important enough to become a modern family heirloom which will enhance it's product longevity.

To date all design pieces since 1999 are in circulation with the intention that they will be passed onto the next generation.