

"Mind the Gap: The Separate Spheres of Graphic and Product Design"

Design Studies Forum Special Session
College Art Association Annual Conference, New York City, Feb. 14-17, 2007
Hilton Rockefeller Center, New York

Session chair

Michael J. Golec, Iowa State University

Panelists

The Changing Face of Packaging
Hsiao-Yun Chu, Buckminster Fuller Collection

Mend the Gap: Elevating Visual Rhetoric in Design Artifacts
Leslie Atzmon, Eastern Michigan University

Consumer Connections: Nostalgia in 1980s Hong Kong Design
D.J. Hupatz, Pratt Institute

An Empowering and Constraining Experience: A Multidisciplinary Student Design Collaborative
Carolina Gill, Ohio State University; Peter Chan, Ohio State University; Blaine Lilly, Ohio State University

Design history encompasses a network of materials, forms, and concepts related to both graphic design and product design. Increasingly, these two practices-graphic design and product design-have come to occupy separate but overlapping spheres in how their history is taught (sometimes separately), how their practitioners are trained (differently), and how their criticism addresses the content of each.

Although there are avenues that attempt to bridge this gap-such as product semantics, Virginia Smith's concept of the "visual set" unifying typography, architecture and the design arts, the careers of designers such as Peter Behrens who worked comfortably across both fields, and social history-the time has come to investigate this so-called gap at a moment when design history is maturing into a widely recognized field that is generating new publications, new positions, and new ideas. Tracing these overlapping spheres of influence raises many questions about the practice of design, its history, and its criticism.

For example, what unites graphic design and product design? What separates them? What do we gain or lose when we conjoin or separate them? Does this gap exist for the consumer, who relies on packaging to select a product? Do practitioners now, or did earlier practitioners (as well as historians and critics), perceive a divide? How can we acknowledge the inter-relationships without threatening disciplinary integrity? Do these questions overlook connections between these practices and other subsets

of design, such as fashion and interiors? Do art history, communications, consumer studies, anthropology, material culture studies, and other cultural sciences offer useful lenses through which to examine these questions?

Papers are sought that both acknowledge similarities as well as make strong claims for differences between education, professional development, and conception and production of objects.