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Research in Context

ADAD5003

‘What is the role of the designer/maker in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and how might this role change in the next 10 years? Discuss your ideas with reference to two of the practitioners or thinkers discussed in your lecture strand.’

Word count: 2321

The designer/maker's role is to create art in response to the things that happen around them. It is their job as an artist to provoke emotion or start a conversation about or surrounding their work, whether the reaction is as minimal as someone finding something cute or as maximal as sparking political debates and causing heated discussions.

The world is ever-changing, as is its effect on the art community, and its response is ever-evolving. For example, the Dada art movement 'emerged as an anti-war movement following the brutality of the First World War' (Millington, 2020). Designers and makers such as Marcel Duchamp, Tristan Tzara, and Hannah Hoch used art to express and protest a pro-war society and new technologies. By using unusual materials and unconventional methods, they challenge and question what the viewers consider art and try to push those boundaries and conceive notions of the definition of art.

Designers and makers from the 21<sup>st</sup> century are going to continue doing the same as artists have done for millennia, continuing with the centuries-old tradition of using art movements like the DADA movement. As well as their own skills and techniques to further their art and provoke their viewer's emotions and thoughts.

This essay is about the role of designers and makers and how their roles may change in the next 10 years due to emerging laws, political situations, and global crises. The artists were chosen because of their strong political statements and standpoints, which are often included in their work.

Banksy is a famous but anonymous British Graffiti/Mural artist who makes political and impactful statements through his mural-like artwork in and on public spaces around the UK and the wider world. His murals are produced to provoke thought and start conversational awareness.

He often responds to things in the media, such as his recent mural in North London's Finsbury Park of The Tree, featuring green paint on a wall and a spray-painted figure with a pressure hose looking up. Only from an angle can the bigger picture be seen; the green spray paint transforms to mimic the foliage of a tree with an actual trunk and branches that have been over-trimmed, creating the rest of the image.

James Peak, the creator of The Banksy Story series on BBC Radio 4, speculates that the green spray of paint 'probably would have been created using a pressure hose or fire extinguisher' (Elton, 2024). He also goes on to say that the colour of green paint matches the paint used to create the signs in the local area by Islington Council. Highlighting Banksy's eye for detail.



Figure 1, Banksy, (2024) Finsbury Park mural

Banksy's The Tree mural has brought awareness to 'the 'savage' treatment of city trees' and how pollarding, 'a pruning system whereby the upper parts of the tree are removed, 'is often overdone to the point where over-pruning stops the tree from producing any foliage at all' (Elton, 2024). Therefore, it is harming the environment and biodiversity in the areas. If the tree were 'in flower, it would support insects and birds this time of year' (Elton, 2024). The mural also brings awareness to climate change and how trees play a vital role in reversing it. Giovanni Iozzi, founder of the Haringey Tree Protectors group, planted almost 900 trees last year and has said that 'Banksy's artwork highlights the plight of urban nature more broadly' (Elton, 2024). She then says, 'I think he's trying to highlight the issue – this is a microcosmic example of what we're doing to nature and trees on a macro global level' (Elton, 2024). Banksy's image highlights the broader issue of the harm and damage we are causing to the environment.

Another example of Banksy's work is his mural in Port Talbot. It depicts a child with their arms spread wide under the snowfall, sticking their tongue out, trying to catch falling snowflakes whilst a winter sledge rests on the floor at the child's feet. On the other side of the wall, where the mural appears, another mural depicts a large bin with a fire coming out of it, producing ash. However, moving further away brings the complete picture of both sides of the walls into view. It shows that the ash produced from the bin is actually what the child is standing under and sticking their tongue out to capture instead of the snow.

Banksy did confirm that he was behind the mural by uploading an image of it onto his website and a video onto his Instagram with the 'children's Christmas song Little

Snowflake '( the Guardian 2018) playing in the background. The camera starts with a view of the murals and then pans above the walls to show 'Port Talbot's rooftops and industrial works wreathed in smoke' (the Guardian, 2018).

It is speculated that the message behind the piece is to comment on Port Talbot's air pollution, 'with many having alleged that dust coming from the local steelworks has caused health risks and leaves their homes filthy' (Deacon and Williams, 2018).



Figure 2, Banksy, (2018), Port Talbot mural

Banksy will most likely continue to respond to local and worldly problems through his murals. However, due to the changing political climate and the threat of wars worldwide, he may become bolder in the placement of his murals and more to the point with his visual statements, trying to garner more attention and awareness of the subjects he wishes to highlight.

However, Banksy has faced criticism for his vandalism and property damage whilst making his murals. He is in a unique position where it is viewed that his work elevates and enhances whatever it may be on, some even considering it a valuable gift.

According to British law, graffiti is a criminal offence. With '80% of graffiti being a result of tagging ( the use of symbols to mark territory), 10% being gang-affiliated, and only 5% being artistic ( LawCareers.net. n.d.). The real art and meanings behind Banksy's work can get lost in the rest of the graffiti. However, even though his work is classed as graffiti, it can also be classed as a mural, and because of his popularity, ' finding a Banksy painted on your property is more likely to lead to a call to an auction house, rather than the police' (Leskys, 2010). Even though at the heart of it, it is criminal damage, whether it is done by Banksy or another person graffitiing.

However, it would be completely legal if he asked for permission from whoever owns the property to create his work. This would then fall under the guise of a commission, although no money would be exchanged between Banksy and the property owner, nor would there be communication on what kind of mural would be put up.

But Banksy will most likely not do this and will not do it in the future because of his wish to remain anonymous; he may face criminal damage charges in the future. Banksy may also become bolder in where he puts his murals, possibly even putting them on political, historical, or affluent buildings to further the meanings behind his murals.

The essay will now move on to discuss the work of Stella McCartney, a British fashion designer known for her fur- and leather-free apparel and famous clients. She has worked with Christian Lacroix, Naomi Campbell, and Meghan Markle and interned at

British Vogue. McCartney also collaborated with Gucci, making her demands clear that no use of leather or fur was allowed. She also released her first perfume in 2003, called Stella, and released an organic skincare line in 2007. In 2012, Stella McCartney designed the uniforms worn by athletes representing Great Britain at the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games (Cosgrave, 2019). In 2018, she also created the reception dress Meghan Markle wore after her wedding to Prince Harry in St George's Chapel in Windsor.

She launched her brand in 2001, becoming 'the first-ever luxury house to never use leather, feathers, fur and skins since day one' (Stellamccartney.com, 2024).

She has recently worked again with PETA (People of the Ethical Treatment of Animals), an animal rights organisation working on stopping the suffering of animals, on a campaign called 'It's about fucking time to end leather' (2024). It's a revival of PETA's 'I'd rather go naked than wear fur' campaign, which ran for 30 years and featured celebrities such as Christy Turlington, Tyra Banks, Pink, and Christina Applegate (Stellamccartney.com, 2024). It is also a hint towards,

Pamela Anderson's 2006 appearance in Stella McCartney's London flagship store windows, where she posed naked behind a banner stating 'We'd Rather Bare Skin Than Wear Skin' to raise funds and awareness for PETA (Stellamccartney.com, 2024).

The phrase 'It's About Fucking Time' came from a custom tank top that McCartney had worn and has been seen as a rallying cry due to create a global activist movement.

Inspired by McCartney and PETA's campaign together, 'animal rights activists, advocates and allies baring all in our New York City flagship store windows as well as street demonstrations in Soho and Washington Square Park' (Stellamccartney.com, 2024).

As part of this demonstration, they also wore unisex period underwear from The Period Company to bring awareness to period poverty and lessen waste.



Figure 3, Stella McCartney, 12 Sep 2024

McCartney has worked on a number of different projects, but none as important to her as the Falabella bag. 'The original vegan 'it' bag debuted as part of the Winter 2009 collection' (Stellamccartney.com, 2024). It quickly gained success and became the new standard because of the handcraftsmanship, durability and quality of a vegan bag, sharing all the same traits as a leather bag would have. The bag was named Falabella after McCartney's favourite horse breed since she was a child, showing her devotion to animals and their protection. McCartney even says that the bag 'is vegan down to the glue' (Stellamccartney.com, 2024).

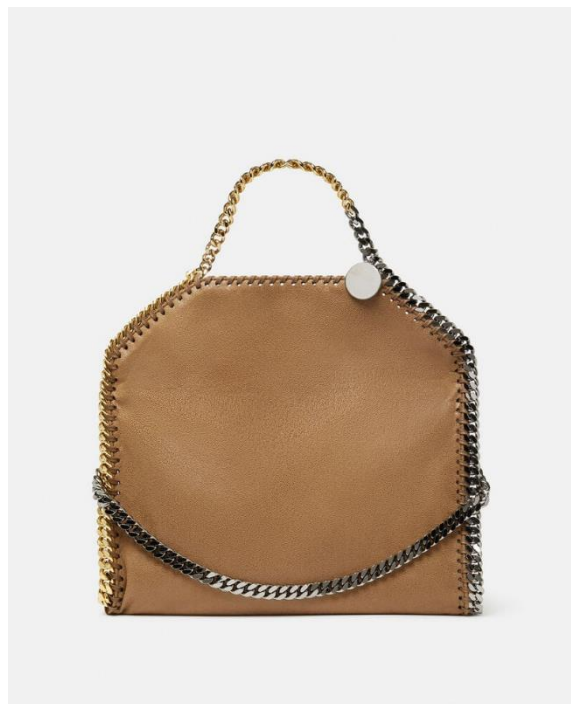


Figure 4, Stella McCartney, Falabella Fold-Over Tote Bag

She is constantly looking for ways to further her sustainability, including using ,

next-gen alternatives to animal leather: MIRUM®, a plant-based, plastic-free and fully circular material; VEGEA, using grape by-product from Italian wineries; and YATAY®, made from a mix of agricultural waste and recycled fibres (Stellamccartney.com, 2024).

Although it is clear that with these new technologies and alternatives used, she is unwilling to let the design and quality dwindle and strives for the best sustainable way to keep it.

Stella McCartney will continue striving for sustainability in the fashion industry and globally. Strong statistics show that 'the fashion industry kills over 1 billion animals for leather' (Stellamccartney.com, 2024), making it clear that it is a shocking statistic. The Falabella bag achieves all the things that make leather appealing, therefore making the use of leather both unnecessary and obsolete. Perhaps McCartney will look at a new range of non-leather shoes as they carry a significant carbon footprint.

Although she may face problems in the future through her business selling her goods globally, she may not need to worry about animal agriculture being responsible for 80% of deforestation because of her use of vegan leather. But she might stop receiving international orders for her business as people become more aware of their CO2 footprints ( 'the total amount of greenhouse gases that are generated by our actions' (The Nature Conservancy, 2019) and how it causes a chain effect when buying something that must be handled multiple times before it gets to you, creating a collectively larger CO2 footprint.

McCartney may also face the problem of people no longer or less frequently buying her goods as economic shifts in other countries leave people with less money to spend on non-essentials. '6 in 10 adults (62%) in Great Britain said they were spending less on non-essentials because of increases in the cost of living' (Office for National Statistics, 2024); this would leave only a select percentage that could afford to buy her goods consistently if at all.

These things may cause McCartney to change the demographic she markets and increase her prices to compensate for the lack of sales and keep her business open and running. However, from her previous campaigns on sustainability, she may find newer ways to prevent, if not reduce, her CO2 footprint and may even support other companies in campaigns to do similar.

Although Banksy and Stella McCartney are on very different spectrums of the designer world, they both strive to make political statements through their work and to change the public's views on their projects. They are both very passionate and dedicated people and their work is likely to continue.

To conclude, Banksy's work involves raising awareness and highlighting specific societal problems through often humorous murals. Thought-provoking and conversation-starting are the ways he brings awareness to the issues he's focusing on.

In the next 10 years, Banksy will likely continue to paint his murals anonymously without the property owner's consent. However, because of his popularity with the public, it is uncertain if anyone will press criminal damages against him in the future.

Stella McCartney is an innovative designer who is constantly looking for ways to be sustainable and cruelty-free by creating solutions to the fashion industry's problems. Collaborating in campaigns allows her to use vegan leather and alternatives to animal products, showing that she works resolutely for her cause, whilst proving that alternative animal products can be just as good' if not better.

In the next 10 years, Stella McCartney will most likely continue to support and run campaigns against the use of fur and leather in the fashion industry whilst creating and investing in new ways to be sustainable and cruelty-free. She may also start considering her company's CO2 footprints, the affordability of her products, and who she markets them to. However, this will not threaten the quality of her products as that is one of the things she prides herself on and would not sacrifice for her consumers.

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Banksy, (2018), Port Talbot mural

Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/dec/19/banksy-port-talbot-mural-south-wales>

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Figure 3

Stella McCartney, (12 September 2024)

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Figure 4

Stella McCartney, Falabella Fold-Over Tote Bag

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