

## BEAUTY, FUNCTIONALITY AND UNIQUENESS

In this paper, I will focus on my research for my chosen words.

I'll dig deeper into the concepts of beauty, functionality, and uniqueness. These are the three terms that come to me when I think of the design. It must be useful, appealing to the eye, and unique to the consumer to create an appealing design.

This will be emphasised in my research with examples from Soetsu Yanagi's book *The Beauty of Everyday Things*, David Hume's perspective on what beauty is, and featuring the works of Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, Phillippe Starks lemon press, and Ono Hakuko.

### Beauty

According to the Oxford dictionary beauty defines as “the quality of giving pleasure to the senses of the mind. Beauty is different to everyone, and what defines beauty is individual from person to person” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2022)

Beauty cannot be defined by anyone, as the stimulation and satisfaction from looking at something are subjective. “Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder”. David Hume, a moral philosopher and historian, expressed in an essay titled *Of the Standard of Taste* the outline of his perception of taste and beauty stating;

“Beauty is not quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them, and each mind perceives a different beauty.”

Explaining how different individuals have two completely different perceptions of what beauty can be. There are several factors that influence the individuals such as social media, culture, surroundings, and so on. The aesthetic sense of an individual is driven by the different experiences, each individual has created different perceptions of their surroundings, and impacting their judgment of beauty. (Online Library Of Liberty, 2022)

Soetsu Yanagi writes about how we often overlook the beauty surrounding us. The object that we use and see every day becomes the norm and we seem to fail to see the beauty. Our most familiar objects get ignored by the flow of time as the beautiful objects have no qualifying features. Objects like this get lost in the mass. As the object breaks or gets lost it can be easily replaced as they are meant to serve people's needs and failing to do that would be seen as an error. In the book, he writes about handcraft and how the natural differences in production create beauty naturally.

He gives an example of a pottery maker making identical pieces repeatedly. The artisan works without thought, unconsciously, not aiming to create beauty. Still, as they work with their hands, their hands become a part of nature, making the identical pieces naturally “imperfect”, which Yanagi describes as natural beauty. (Yanagi, 2018)

### Functionality

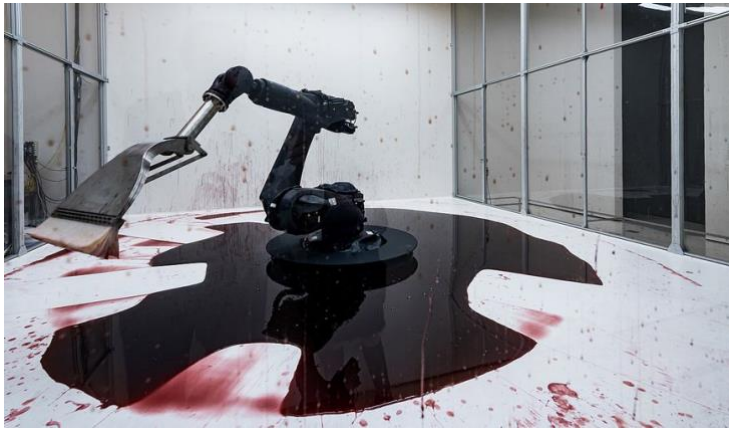


Figure 1 (Guggenheim, 2016)

The installation *Can't Help Myself* by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu lasted from 2016 to 2019 and was a commissioned piece for the Guggenheim Museum. The piece consists of a robotic arm, as seen used in production lines in manufacturing, in an acrylic case. The arm got one sole purpose to contain a thick red liquid within a certain area, with the use of thirty-two preprogrammed movements. The artists wanted to animate the

robotic arm with movements people make every day, and sometimes even seem like it got emotions with exciting movements. Making you almost feel empathetic for it. For three years the machine continuously kept swiping and clearing the liquid before being turned off in 2019 (Weng, 2022)

This programmed machine is very suitable for the specific purpose it was designed to perform. Therefore, showing functionality as it performs just as expected.

Functionality refers to if the designed worked as intended or meets the needs. The functionality however does not equal good design.

Phillipe Starck's controversial citrus press is an example of a design that I wouldn't categorise as a good design, but still as functional, but not in the traditional way that we would think.

The odd-looking press is designed to fit a glass underneath so you could press citrus fruit juice directly into the glass.



Figure 2 (Starks, 1988)

The idea of the design came from a squid as Phillipe was eating calamari with cut lemons on the side when he was inspired to make this piece. He came up with the idea, he sketched them out on napkins before showing Alessi who immediately thought the design was a work of art.

The spaceship looking press didn't live up to the function as it ended up leaving counters a mess. The design is still looked after as a design element, and the collector is most likely to never even try to squeeze lemons on the press. Making the press the opposite of functional.

But at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Phillipe Starks claimed that I was never supposed to work as a press but rather spark conversation. As the design has gotten so controversial and the topic of many conversations, the piece has fulfilled the purpose the designer intended. Making the press-fit perfectly into the functionality category. (Raup, 2019)

## Uniqueness

For a design to appear appealing to a consumer or a company the design needs to be unique or stand out from the others.

If you were to search up in Oxford dictionaries Uniqueness would be described as the fact of being one of its kind or something being very special or unusual. (Oxford Dictionaries, 2022) The thing that makes something unique can be both small and big, like the small details in a hand-painted vase. Every hand-painted vase could have the same design but by hand painting it each stroke will be different. Unique. This porcelain sake cup with gold foiling is something I could imagine Suetsu Yanagi tried to make the reader envision the beauty of everyday things in his book. The handcrafted cup is prone to the natural differences that will occur when created by hand.



*Figure 3 (Hakuku, 1980s)*

Ono Hakuku is a Japanese ceramist that paved the way for female artists in the 1980s. She mastered a very challenging technique called yūri-kinsai (gold foil underglaze), creating beautiful pottery refined to her aesthetic.

She knows how to work the gold leafing, cutting and placing it exactly where she wants them making beautiful pieces with incredible patterns and designs. Each gold leaf piece is placed by making each piece unique by nature. Uniqueness Soetsu Yanagi expressed in the book. Every piece coming out of the kiln will naturally be unique with random differences (Joan B Mirviss LTD, 2022)

## Conclusion

In general, I wouldn't expect my keywords to relate to one another in the manner they do. Beauty, usefulness, and distinctiveness are some of the fundamentals of design, according to my research. A design must be useful and perform what it is supposed to do in order to achieve its goal. Beauty is required for aesthetics and attractiveness. In our daily lives, we desire beautiful things to surround us. We are drawn to things that we find beautiful, but we also require practicality. So many lovely things become commonplace that we overlook them. They fade into the background, unnoticed. Is it possible that functionality detracts from an object's beauty? Small differences, or individuality, make something stand out. Such as the randomness in the gold leafing on the sake cup. Uniqueness is the small differences that drag the eye to something. So, in a way, they all collect together in the world of design.

Leading me to the question: Can beauty be the reason we find uniqueness in its functionality? Beauty is unique to the beholder. The fact that we find things beautiful is unique in and of itself as we perceive beauty in different ways. Could this be the reason why we notice its functionality as unique?

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Figure 1. (2016) Can't help myself by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, Retrieved from the website for

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