

Sybrand Zijlstra :

The Big Picture

Seven days to yesterday I have not seen her,

And a sickness has invaded me.

My body has become heavy,

Forgetful of my own self.

If the chief of physicians come to me,

My heart is not content with their remedies;

The lector of priests, no way out is in them:

My sickness will not be probed.

Beautiful words, more than 3000 year old, from a man in ancient Egypt who misses his mistress. They could just as well have been written yesterday. In three millennia a lot of things have changed and a lot of things haven't. What we call progress is usually an exaggeration of what is mere change. An exaggeration in which we like to believe, but which often covers up the fact that not every innovation is an improvement.

Design is one of the prime subjects (or should I say suspects) in this exhibition. As you can see designers make things. They intend to improve on the existing; it's their job. After all, if there is any progress to be made, then it is by avoiding yesterday's mistakes.

To design also means having a plan, which implies looking ahead. To do their job responsible designers should look well beyond the existing. Acting upon the market, however, they are often restricted to propelling today's craze or at the utmost tomorrow's fad. The least of our whimsical desires are being fulfilled, bringing economical profit but also environmental loss.

(...)

But we cannot expect designers to cure the sickness that has invaded our world. We can only help ourselves. We have to become clear about what our real needs are and consider the impact of our consumerist behaviour. We should realize that the real cost of a product is more than what its price-tag says.

We must get used to seeing the big picture, learning not only from the past but also from the future.

This takes a different way of thinking, which is maybe best expressed with the words of Indian chief Seattle: "We did not inherit this earth from our parents, we are borrowing it from our children."

Sybrand Zijlstra (Netherlands) studied Philosophy. Since 1990 he has been the final editor of 'Vormberichten', the magazine of the Association of Dutch Designers (BNO), in which he also regularly writes about design. In addition he has worked for the Dutch Form Foundation and the Netherlands Design Institute. Since 1995 he has a post at the post-graduate applied arts programme at the Sandberg Institute Amsterdam. He is also active as a free-lance editor and writer.