

London 24 September 2007

Dear Mr. Mendini,

I would like to thank you for your letter. I too appreciate constructive dialogue and it gives me the opportunity to outline my thoughts towards the Lasting Void. You write in your letter that you don't believe my design to be motivated by ethics or by values – I disagree.

Is an object that has the death of an animal as its starting point more ethical if it hides its origin as best as it can? In response to this question I designed the Cow-bench, an object linked as closely to its animal origin as to its object outcome, the leather couch. For the Lasting Void I am exploring a different design path to those normally condoned by our culture, going back to the source of these materials, the animal. I am hoping to develop objects that will raise questions about how we interact with the world around us, how we consume resources and to which purpose we design. I believe that research does not always have to be textual but can also be undertaken on an object level.

Design has to be more than merely 'pleasant'. Our lives are increasingly mediated through objects and revolve around consumption. It is the responsibility of the designer to embed in objects an added emotional and ethical functionality. Design should stop us from becoming numb to the world and instead prompt us to rethink how we lead our lives.

You have also compared my work to art concerned with epic sacrifice – however, my subject is not art. I am concerned with design and its material origins. Some of these are derived from animals, which we have become used to seeing as expendable life forms, epic only in numbers. Thousands of cows are slaughtered every day in the EU alone, supplying us with 6.3 million tons of beef per year – in an accepted process of anonymous killing and docile consumption of nondescript products that often disguise their animal origin. The calf I used to make the Lasting Void was a waste product from this process. Deemed unfit for human consumption after it had died of natural causes in the field it was going to be incinerated. By casting the negative space inside it I preserved the memory of a single, discarded creature that was deemed of no value for conventional use.

To present the Lasting Void in an exhibition showing designers' interpretations of everyday design objects i.e. stools is in this sense attractive as the mundane nature of the objects is in keeping with our casual consumption of livestock. More importantly though the well-publicised limited edition gallery pieces give us an opportunity to communicate ideas – if we as designers are willing to leave well-trodden paths and engage in debate.

Julia Lohmann