

Concepts and ideas go wherever we go. When you buy something, you are also buying *into* something - for instance, when you buy washing powder you are not only buying a product, you are also buying into a brand. But ultimately what you want is the product itself: washing powder, bread, clothing, cell phone, and so on.

All the products we see around us, and use day-to-day, have been designed with a certain intent or purpose in mind. Branding and the marketing of brands make the intent more clear and directs it toward a specific consumer/buyer. This is why some products inspire us to 'more', while others look undesirable to us, depending on what we want from the product. There may be little or no difference between two products, but their branding will tell us otherwise and will ultimately lead us to making our choice.

It is then clear that when we buy into a brand, we are buying into what that brand represents (value, lifestyle, quality, ethics, beliefs) and what it says about us as consumers (and even as people). The things that the brand represents are intangible; they are concepts or ideas. So, having said that, I hope to illustrate to you that concepts are all around us - every single thing that you buy and/or use has a whole array of concepts and ideas that make it what it is. In other words, you are already a consumer of ideas; the underlying ideas and concepts of things affect all the choices we make.

In conceptual art, the underpinning concepts of things are brought to the fore. Ideas are emphasised for their importance in how they influence our thinking, and eventually our choices and behaviour. If the art object is the product, and the concept is

the wrapping, what conceptual art seeks to do is to do away with the product, take the wrapping and analyse it: turn it inside out, twist it, tear it, and continue to find new ways to understand and re-invent it. In other words, conceptual art is more interested in *why* it is than *what* it is.

Conceptual artists see this so-called 'wrapping' as a work in itself. The way people think about things - art in particular - is more interesting and important than the product (the artwork; the thing you look at or use) itself. A conceptual artwork will then be a re-presentation of this 'wrapping' that reveals something about the intangible things it stands for or could represent. By this doing-away of the product and continual processing of ideas, conceptual art broadens the horizons of what an artistic work can and should be, and challenges the ways in which we think about the things it reveals.

Some further reading:

Ways of Seeing by John Berger

Society of the Spectacle by Guy DeBord

Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology edited by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson

Rewriting Conceptual Art edited by Michael Newman and Jon Bird

The Arcades Project by Walter Benjamin

Kant After Duchamp by Thierry De Duve

The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art by Arthur Danto

etc.

Conceptual Art For Consumers

Lucienne Bestall
E: lucienne.bestall@gmail.com
W: lucienne-pallas-bestall.tumblr.com

Sharné McDonald
E: sharnemcdonald@gmail.com
W: sharnemcdonald.com



One and Three Chairs

Joseph Kosuth
1965

Wood folding chair, mounted photograph of a chair, and mounted photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of "chair"



Cher, Chair, Share (Hello, Joseph)

Ole Ukena
2011

Poster of the singer Cher, a chair, a printed definition of the word share



Brillo Box (Soap Pads)

Andy Warhol
1964

Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on wood



Yoko Ono

Ed Young
2007

Joko tea packaging and Omo washing powder packaging



The Treachery of Images

René Magritte
1929

Oil painting
(Sentence reads: 'This is not a pipe' in French)



Untitled (Dream Performance)

(A Performance Work Where I Appear In People's Dreams)

Matthew King
2012 – present
Inkjet prints on card

Concepts Around Us

SHARNÉ MCDONALD