

Copy & Authorship at DMY

Exhibitions / Product design



German students copying Dutch designs under the guidance of a Dutch teacher were exhibited during DMY proving that attitudes to open source and copy culture are rapidly changing.



By Gabrielle Kennedy / 09-06-2011

One of the most intriguing exhibitions at last week's DMY was presented by Lucas Verweij's students from the School of Art and Design Berlin Weissensee.

Titled "Copy and Authorship" the industrial design students openly pursued copying as a design strategy.

Three Dutch designers were copied – Jurgen Bey, Maarten Baas and Tomas Libertiny.

"That was probably more because our teacher knew them personally so could help us to get permission," says Josefina Schlie who copied a Baas chair from the Smoke series.

Copying within the comforting confines of education has been done forever. It's usually called looking for inspiration. Out in the real world, however, the border between plagiarism and inspiration has always been murky and as talk about copy/culture and open source design spreads, it's a subject garnering much more attention.

"Many of my friends are paid a flat fee for a design and do not receive royalties," says **Johanna Keimeyer** who copied Tomas Libertiny's Honeycomb Vase. "They don't have the exclusive rights to their designs nor are their names published with the product. I think royalties will eventually be phased out and design work will become more like a service."

Tomas Libertiny responded well to Keimeyer's copy proposition, but told her it was unlikely she could complete the project on time. "But I did it and he was very complimentary," she says.

Jurgen Bey also had a very positive reaction to Jacob Cranz's copy of his Tree Trunk Bench. "Mostly he wanted to know how I did the bronze casts, which admittedly were the hardest part of the project," he says.

For Cranz the project was less about working with shapes and materials, than exploring an idea. The stark contrast between the exposed trunk and the detailed chair backs fascinated him. "Both parts of the chair serve their function, but are just so different," he says. "One is so calculated and the other is so natural."

The research brought Cranz back to civilization and the motivation to design. "Sitting is such a natural thing," he says. "We build and create ways to make it look better, which is really just a way to defy nature."

Josefina Schlie found copying was a great way to properly refine and understand materials and techniques. She used wood and fire to recreate Baas' Smoke chair.

"I would never just copy per se," says Schlie, "but if I found a technique that I liked and could design products that had no hint of another designer, then yes I would use it."

Keimeyer's perspective is that neither she nor Libertiny own the idea and that if copying leads to something else, then that is fine. "There are many bee artists who work with this technique," she says, "but Tomas had success with it and pushed the idea one step further using colour and even doing live installations at Art Basel using real bees."

After making the vase, she also took the idea a step further by casting a wax spoon in silver. "In that way you can really use the object," she says.

Images: main at top Keimeyer's copy-cat bees, small from top Keimeyer's copy Honeycomb Vase, Libertiny's authentic Honeycomb Vase, Keimeyer's silver honey spoon; Schlie's copy Smoke chair, Baas' authentic Smoke chair, Cranz's copy Tree Stump Bench, Bey's authentic Tree Stump Bench.

