

Eames Demetrios: open to every possibility

 By Herman Manson 26 Feb 2010

Eames Demetrios created another world to open us to the possibilities of this one. Bizcommunity.com talks to him at the 2010 Design Indaba currently happening this week in Cap Town. [[view twitterfall](#)]

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Eames Demetrios is a filmmaker, a 3D storyteller, author, designer and guardian of the design legacy of his famous grandparents, Charles and Ray Eames. And, while he might be carrying their name, he has firmly established his own following and influence through his innovative 3D storytelling project Kcymaerxthaere.

An advocate for design (rather than style), Demetrios also opens the door, allowing us re-imagine our environments and rediscover the opportunity held even by that which we have already discarded.

Bizcommunity: Can and should designers make design more accessible to the general public? so - how can it be done?

Eames Demetrios: I think there are a couple of interesting issues in the question. First of all, design is accessible right now - the entire built environment (and most of our access to the natural environment) and every object in it has been designed. Whether it is well-designed is another question entirely. Design is a fact. Good design is a challenge.

Secondly, I would say that I hope you are asking about design rather than style. Charles Eames used to say "the extent to which you have a design style is the extent to which you have not solved the design problem. These days the media - and even many designers- use the terms synonymously but they are very different.

The reason I am calling attention to these points is that it is important to fight the right battle. If the goal is to make famous or trendy forms less expensive, then it probably not even worth the trouble of talking about it. If the goal is to make good solutions more available, then that is worth a bit of trouble. If the idea is to make public understanding of true good design and its problem-solving essence more accessible, then it becomes a lot more interesting.

Which brings me back to my first two points, what do we mean by design?

If we mean things that truly address a need in a deep and wonderful way (and that can be systems as much as objects) and can make people critical and comfortable consumers of that, then we should. To do so, I would start by doing things like eliminating this Otherness that has lately been attributed to design (and, therefore, implicitly, good design). One of my favourite examples is when people complain that something didn't work because it is too design-y. If it doesn't work, then it wasn't design-y enough!!!

Biz: You view design as a life skill rather than purely a professional skill. Do you think our educational systems and social structures are up for that challenge?

Eames: At this instant, it is easy to be sceptical of these structures. In the US, arts education (for want of a better phrase) funding is way, way down. But if we started teaching design to all kids and got them to

embrace the process, it could do a world of good. Why?

Firstly, design is broad. We want our kids to study music even if the odds of a career are low, because it enriches their brains to have another type of thinking in there. Same is true for design education.

The second is more tactical. Design inherently engages with change. The current generation of kids is going to be redesigning the planet in fundamental ways (both through vernacular design for a new age and through design by designers) - and even if not consciously engaged in it, their careers are going to be changing all the time. They are going to need to be real comfortable with an iterative process from day 1. Design thinking can be a profound anchor for that.

Biz: Your Kcymaerxthaere project creates an alternative universe - you've referred to it as 3D storytelling. The intersections you create between places in our world and Kcymaerxthaere sometimes recasts places of seemingly little value into places of significance (at least to fans of Kcymaerxthaere). Is this part of a social statement urging us to take a closer look at our environment, seeking its value rather than assuming we know it already? Is this how you view sustainability - as a process of reinventing what we have discarded - and valuing it (even if not in a monetary way)?

Eames: These observations are fair ones, but I feel the pragmatic component of Kcymaerxthaere actually has a lot more to do with the simple act of seeing possibilities. That doesn't SOUND pragmatic perhaps, but I think it is very powerful to be reoriented in a visceral way to what might be. We are so focused on what is that we tend to consider the visual environment as inevitable - it wasn't and isn't.

One other point is that language and context are an important part of perception. And therefore I love to give people an aesthetic experience of that fact, that reality if you will.

Landscape is a perfect example. I just went to the District 6 museum that makes that point beautifully - trying to give the visitors the tools so they can see what the residents see. In a way, this project is utilising a relational toolkit to tell a story. It is so hard to deeply reconnect with place and its inherent natures and see it truly free.

Man-made environments are clearly examples of this as one imagines alternate human histories (and then not just alternate human histories, but different cultures or even laws of physics). But ultimately I try to harness storytelling tools that allow one to create new worlds and stories in one's head. To make a constellation in one's mind drawn from the powers of words, image and place - among still others.

Biz: It seems that interactivity and collaboration are two very important components of the Kcymaerxthaere experiment. Do you believe these components should also be part of the design process?

Eames: Interactivity is definitely important to the project — but not necessarily in the way the term is often meant today, which is usually implicitly digital. Instead I mean it in a broader sense of how it brings it into the mind experience of the user (the physicality, experienced once, enriches all future experiences).

In design, I would simply say interactivity is necessary when appropriate.

As for collaboration, there is definitely a targeted collaborative component in Kcymaerxthaere, but it is with the authorial voice that I set. It is not a free-for-all. As for whether these aspects are essential for Design,

that is a good question.

I would say that collaboration of some kind, whether with the client, a partner, or the world at large, is implicit in design. And if that implies interactivity, I would agree it is can be part. And, obviously, most designs are meant to be used.

However, usually interactivity in design refers to the end result rather than the process.



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Herman Manson is a freelance business journalist and media commentator who helped Bizcommunity.com cover Design Indaba 2010. He blogs at <http://www.marklives.com> and his work has appeared in newspapers and magazines locally and abroad in titles as diverse as *AdVantage*, *Business 2.0*, the *Mail & Guardian*, *Men's Health*, *Computer World* and *African Communications*. He co-founded *Brand* magazine. Follow him on Twitter at [@marklives](#).
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