



Art&Design&Craft in the Two-dimensional World Culture

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Abstract

The article employs two-dimensional world cultural products as a case study to examine the nuanced relationship between art, crafts, and design within this realm. Given the vast array of cultural products within the two-dimensional world, the focus of analysis is narrowed down to in-game photography and figures. Initially, the article outlines the currently accepted definitions of art, crafts, and design. Subsequently, it delves into the diverse attitudes exhibited by various audience groups towards these categories. The primary conclusion drawn is that while the boundaries between the concepts of art, crafts, and design may be blurred, each possesses distinct characteristics and differences. Thus, whether considering specific products within the two-dimensional world culture or examining two-dimensional culture more broadly, it becomes apparent that, from a certain perspective, the three can be differentiated.

Keywords: Art, design, craft, photo, in-game photography, two-dimensional world

1. Introduction

In 2024, terms such as “video game,” “two-dimensional world,” and “figyua” are now widely recognized, transcending their original niche contexts. Yanev (2019) reports that over 2.5 billion individuals globally engage in video gaming, with the median age of players at 34 years. The widespread adoption of these terms not only reflects the dynamic evolution of language but also underscores the mainstream acceptance of specific cultural and artistic domains. Although it remains unnamed officially, the term “two-dimensional world culture” could tentatively describe this phenomenon, encompassing all associated products, behaviors, lifestyles, and philosophies linked to games and animation. This article employs a literature review methodology to explore certain phenomena related to two-dimensional world culture in contemporary society, aiming to analyze the interplay between art, design, and craftsmanship within this realm. Given the broad and complex nature of 2D world culture, the focus here is narrowed to two particular elements: in-game photography and character statues.

2. Body of paper

2.1. In-game photography

According to Farmer (2015), in-game photography is either an extension of screenshot technology or a novel form of art rooted in the concept of the screenshot. Fundamentally, it entails the process or outcome of capturing images within the virtual realm of video games. Players manipulate virtual avatars to navigate freely within the game's environment and capture screenshots at moments deemed spectacular or significant. Thus, the essence of this photographic activity lies not in mere appreciation of the game world but in creating images imbued with special significance and conveying specific ideas or meaningful concepts to the audience. Presently, in-game photography has gained recognition through exhibitions in physical art galleries worldwide. Despite occasional challenges to its validity and legitimacy as an art form (Poremba, 2007), it undeniably has stirred considerable interest within the art world.

A central point of contention in this discourse revolves around the classification of in-game photography as art. This debate is likely to remain inconclusive, given the ongoing controversy surrounding the definition of art and the evolving boundaries thereof. To arrive at a conclusive stance, it becomes imperative to delineate the contemporary understanding of art. Broadly accepted by the public, the definition of art entails the manifestation of imaginative or technical skills stemming from human creativity (Belton, 2012). Furthermore, art constitutes a philosophical facet of aesthetics, encompassing notions of creativity and interpretation (William, 1979). In essence, art represents a distinctive mode of expression rooted in human emotions and imagination, serving to articulate philosophical perspectives on the world and human existence, or the interplay between the two. It epitomizes the amalgamation of human cognition, emotions, ideas, and perceptions of the world, thereby offering a tangible representation of the integration of real-life experiences with the spiritual realm.

In this context, the question arises: do video games and in-game photography fulfill the criteria of this premise? As per Winfried (2018), in-game photography constitutes a photographic technique grounded in virtual imaging technology, with the objective of elucidating the photographer's thematic vision within the game world. Hence, the primary aim of in-game photography lies not in showcasing the technical prowess or intricate details of the game world but in expressing the photographer's themes and emotions through strategically captured screenshots. For instance, Duncan Harris, a renowned game journalist, produces images replete with creativity and artistic vision, reminiscent of still photography in film production. These visually striking and meticulously edited images (refer to images 1 and 2) are increasingly commissioned and endorsed by various game companies. Similarly, another accomplished game photographer, Rasmus Furbo, adopts a similar approach in his work (refer to image 3). Having spent the better part of his 33 years immersed in video games, Furbo contends that in many respects, in-game photography parallels real-world photography, affording photographers the opportunity to focus on characters and explore inaccessible locations within the game world (Amenabar, 2018).

Another cohort of in-game photographers employs a documentary-style approach to address themes pertinent to real society, as exemplified by Jon Haddock. Serving as a trailblazer in game photography during the latter half of the 20th century, Haddock utilized his body of work to illuminate various contentious social phenomena, such as the Tiananmen Square incident and the Rodney King incident (Lowood, N/D). While Haddock's photographic repertoire may lack the ostentatious allure and literary finesse observed in the works of the aforementioned photographers, there remains no ambiguity regarding the profundity of his

thematic explorations and perspicacious commentary on societal dynamics. Despite not strictly adhering to conventional aesthetic standards, Jon Haddock's photographs function as conduits for his nuanced perspectives on significant social events and his introspective contemplations on the human condition, thereby imbuing them with substantial artistic merit.

In summation, leveraging screenshot technology, in-game photographers employ methodologies akin to traditional photographic techniques to fashion their artistic compositions. These elevated screenshot creations, characterized by their chromatic vibrancy, compositional finesse, and thematic profundity, rival their traditional photographic counterparts in excellence. Consequently, irrespective of the dichotomy between in-game photography and traditional photography, the artistic caliber of in-game photographic works attains distinction owing to the intricate technical demands inherent in their production, coupled with the emotive and philosophical insights they encapsulate. Thus, it stands unequivocally true that in-game photography constitutes a legitimate facet of the realm of artistry.

Furthermore, as delineated earlier, in-game photography constitutes an integral component of two-dimensional cultural expression, with another salient facet being figurines. Primarily, in most instances, in-game photography appeals predominantly to a niche demographic comprising skilled gaming enthusiasts or photography aficionados, thereby paling in comparison to the widespread allure and commercial viability of figurines. As per Yuuka Abe (2019), the figure market in Japan alone commands a staggering valuation of 140 billion yen, approximating to 1.29 billion US dollars, thereby attesting to the pervasive popularity of figurines within certain global demographics. Functioning akin to artisanal artifacts, these diminutive objects have emerged as quintessential and distinctive commodities within consumer culture.

2.2. What is Figure?

The term figure, denotes unpainted resin model kits, constituting a distinct category within Japanese animation collectible models (Iwata, 2005). Originally, this term specifically denoted model kits devoid of coloration and assembly, necessitating model enthusiasts to undertake the task of refining and embellishing the semi-finished molds themselves. Resin stands out as a prevalent raw material for these molds, facilitating the exhibition of intricate details within the works. Crafting an exquisite figure demands a substantial investment of time, typically requiring individual enthusiasts to undertake the tasks of refining, assembling, and coloring. The manufacturing intricacy of figures far surpasses that of conventional assembly-type toys. Consequently, a meticulously crafted and aesthetically appealing figure not only commands enhanced commercial value but also embodies significant aesthetic merit.

However, owing to the inherent commercial value associated with figures, many contemporary model manufacturers opt to streamline production processes by completing various processing stages in-house, thereby offering finished products for direct sale. While this practice enables enthusiasts lacking in carving skills to procure their desired figures at relatively affordable prices, it inevitably leads to a decline in the collectible value of figures. Moreover, the proliferation of pre-finished products in the market fosters misconceptions, leading individuals to mistakenly perceive figures as akin to conventional toys available in retail outlets.

Furthermore, contemporary society widely perceives figures as primarily humanoid toys associated with the realms of two-dimensional media such as comics and video games. In other words, the focal point of figures encompasses characters originating from popular comics or renowned video game franchises. Individuals aspire to materialize and interact with these

characters in the three-dimensional realm, enabling them to appreciate and engage with them even in the absence of electronic devices. Traditionally, such enthusiasts were stigmatized as "otakus" by mainstream society, a term historically laden with derogatory connotations, implying individuals who secluded themselves indoors, indulging solely in animated content while eschewing work and social interactions (Nakamori, 1983). However, with the evolution of otaku subculture, this label has undergone a transformation, becoming less pejorative, and an increasing number of individuals now self-identify as otakus (Jakusoso, 2013). Despite the fact that these self-professed otakus may engage in conventional social activities, their self-identification stems from their profound fascination with the culture of the two-dimensional world.

2.3. The relationship between figure, craft and art

As previously analyzed, figure crafting entails intricate modeling by players, demanding a high level of skill. Each player possesses the autonomy to fashion their creations based on semi-finished products, tailoring them to personal preferences. In many respects, figures epitomize a form of craftsmanship. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that the definition of craftsmanship, akin to art, remains fluid and subject to evolution. Currently, no singular concept comprehensively and accurately delineates the essence of craftsmanship. From a widely accepted perspective, craftsmanship can be provisionally defined as the cultivation of refined skills, mastery of technique, and the relentless pursuit of perfection (Paterson, 2015). Essentially, craftsmanship epitomizes the manifestation of human creation through adept techniques, embodying a spirit of unwavering commitment to excellence. Whether an artifact is crafted for aesthetic appreciation or serves practical utility, adherence to the aforementioned criteria warrants its classification as a craft. Consequently, within this context, figures undeniably qualify as a form of craftsmanship, particularly at the high-end level.

However, despite its intricacies, figure-making is often categorized as a toy rather than a craft, largely due to two prevailing reasons. Firstly, in the conventional understanding, craftsmanship entails a lineage of skill transmission spanning generations, evident in artifacts such as finished products, jade sculptures, and wood carvings. Alternatively, it encompasses items that evoke profound visual impact and spiritual resonance, such as katana swords or medieval knight armor. Craftsmanship draws inspiration from daily life, with the resultant products often imbued with symbolic significance transcending mere existence, encapsulating the culture and history of a nation. Secondly, craftsmanship is characterized by its elevated aesthetic value; traditional craft forms are revered for their meticulous carvings and design language infused with rich ethnic nuances. Conversely, contemporary handicrafts often exude futuristic elements, featuring abstract, romantic, and imaginative designs. Anthony Howes' wind sculpture series exemplifies this trend, with artworks straddling the realms of sculpture and windmills, characterized by abstract, sophisticated designs and lustrous silver materials that evoke an otherworldly allure. Such creations elicit a sense of wonder and fascination among viewers, epitomizing the fusion of novelty and aesthetic appeal.

Conversely, while figure works may demand high levels of skill and enjoy fervent support from enthusiasts, they often appear somewhat crude and devoid of emotional depth to the general populace. As previously mentioned, figures typically depict characters from popular anime or video games, with a significant portion of purchases focusing on provocative, sexually suggestive female characters and "heroes" embodying Japanese aesthetic sensibilities (Rakuten.com). Despite contemporary advocacy for sexual liberation and the establishment of sex museums, societal norms still dictate a reluctance to openly embrace such themes, rendering it nearly impossible to display sexually suggestive models in homes or public settings

for widespread appreciation. Furthermore, for heroes characterized by Japanese aesthetic styles, the lack of contextual understanding or familiarity with their narratives often reduces them to mere entities clad in peculiar attire brandishing oversized weapons.

The figure finds its roots within the Japanese otaku subculture, a realm that inherently limits its potential for widespread public acceptance. Unlike wind-driven sculptures, which readily evoke themes of natural reverence and aesthetic appreciation, figures lack this universal appeal. However, such perceived limitations do not equate to a deficiency in artistic merit within the realm of figure-based works. Art serves as a unique conduit for human emotions and imagination, endeavoring to articulate philosophical musings on the human condition, the world, and their interplay (Vladimir, 2010). For enthusiasts, figures, whether crafted or acquired, serve as poignant embodiments of personal affection and emotional resonance, particularly in the portrayal of heroic characters. It is noteworthy that a plethora of video content on platforms like YouTube and other social media outlets attests to the fervent dedication of enthusiasts, with some individuals investing significant sums exceeding one hundred thousand dollars in the pursuit of their passion. When an object incites such fervent enthusiasm and sparks imaginative contemplation among its audience, it unquestionably earns the designation of art. Consequently, the subculture of the two-dimensional world has progressively infiltrated mainstream society.

According to research conducted by Yanev (2019), the primary demographic consuming two-dimensional cultural products falls within the age bracket of 18 to 34 years old. This demographic trend underscores the burgeoning influence of two-dimensional world culture among the younger generation, with numerous linguistic expressions associated with this realm gradually permeating public discourse. It is imperative to acknowledge that every form of art caters to a specific audience, with some enjoying broader appeal while others target niche demographics. Nevertheless, the size of the audience cohort has never served as a determinant criterion for the classification of art. Consider classical music, renowned for its elegance, sophistication, and academic pedigree, yet commanding a significantly smaller audience compared to contemporary popular music. Despite its narrower appeal, classical music remains universally recognized as an art form, illustrating that the breadth of an audience's reach does not dictate the essence of artistry. Conversely, the artistic merit of popular music has perennially been subject to scrutiny and debate.

2.4. Design, crafts and art in the two-dimensional culture

Design, an aspect not yet explored but undoubtedly integral to the two-dimensional world culture, stands out as the most intricate and contentious facet. As per Razzouk (2012), design constitutes a multifaceted process encompassing analysis, creative experimentation, model creation, feedback collection, and iterative refinement based on results. Alternatively, Kathleen A (2019) posits design as a purposeful, meticulous blueprint aimed at achieving predetermined outcomes. Moreover, design embodies a mode of thinking, facilitating the systematic organization of specific steps to attend to details and ultimately realize anticipated results. Contrary to common perception, design need not be predetermined and can emerge spontaneously during operational processes. Furthermore, design delineates into two principal categories: aesthetic design and industrial design, thereby straddling the realms of both art and science. Paradoxically, design eludes categorization solely within the domains of art or science, embodying an autonomous entity—a mode of thought that synergistically interfaces with various human behaviors and philosophies.

Within this framework, it becomes apparent that the realms of art, crafts, and design, while distinct in theory, exhibit considerable overlap in practical application, blurring the

boundaries between them. Despite their intrinsic distinctions, these domains often intermingle, giving rise to hybrid forms of expression and creation.

Taking in-game photography and figures within the two-dimensional world culture as examples, the classification of these products as works of art or crafts hinges upon the perspective of their audience. Advocates of these products typically attribute them with artistic and collectible value, whereas individuals disinterested in the two-dimensional world culture may perceive them as nothing more than inexpensive toys or ordinary photographs. Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that these products are meticulously designed; disputes typically revolve around issues of copyright ownership. For instance, within the realm of in-game photography, ambiguity persists regarding the delineation of commercial in-game images and potential copyright infringement vis-à-vis original game developers. Moreover, the stance of game production companies towards in-game photography remains nebulous (Trapani, 2006).

From the vantage point of in-game photographers, the process involves maneuvering characters within the game world to capture screenshots with appropriate composition. These actions are undertaken not to advance the game narrative but to fulfill the photographer's artistic vision. Each step in this process mirrors the approach taken in real-world photography. However, from the perspective of game developers, every aspect of the game world is meticulously crafted and orchestrated by the game development team. Whether consciously or inadvertently, the aesthetic details that captivate in-game photographers are inherently embedded within the game's design.

In regard to specific objects, is it possible to differentiate between the concepts of art, crafts, and design? The answer is affirmative. As previously discussed, there exists no universally recognized and precisely defined definition for art, design, and crafts. This indicates that the definitions of these three concepts are subjective and prone to variation from person to person, resulting in inherent ambiguity. Consider a well-crafted figure as an example, similar to the one mentioned earlier. Whether this item is deemed artwork or crafts hinges entirely on the perspective of the audience, irrespective of the preferences of the product designer. From the designer's viewpoint, the meticulously crafted figure represents a product completed through the application of design thinking and proficiency in design skills; therefore, it is not classified as a work of art. This is because the item fails to evoke any emotional resonance or satisfaction from the designer's perspective. However, within the hearts of the audience, the same figure may exude undeniable artistic allure. The distinction between crafts and art becomes less discernible when an object lacks evidence of refined production skills or a discernible pursuit of perfection. In such instances, the audience typically refrains from differentiating whether the item qualifies as crafts or art but rather perceives it as a utilitarian craft or ordinary commodity.

This scenario is equally applicable to in-game photography. As digital images, in-game photographic works are inherently divorced from the tangible craftsmanship that can be physically interacted with. Similar to figurines, the classification of works designed or captured through the lens of design thinking as artworks hinges entirely upon the perception of the audience. While the audience base for in-game photography may not be as fixed as that of figurines, there persist individuals who staunchly contest the notion that in-game photography qualifies as art.

Regarding the nexus between in-game photography and design, it is imperative to recognize that photography, in its broadest sense, incorporates design thinking. This entails a systematic approach to meticulously plan and execute each step toward achieving a predetermined objective. Both the selection of subjects in photography and the implementation

of composition techniques during actual shooting constitute manifestations of design within the photographic process. It is noteworthy that design encompasses not only a set of principles but also a cognitive framework—a *modus operandi* for conceptualizing and materializing ideas. Thus, design operates as both a noun and a verb, encapsulating both the tangible output and the intellectual process of arranging and realizing plans.

3. Conclusion

The article examines the intricate relationship between art, crafts, and design within the context of two-dimensional world culture products, using in-game photography and figures as focal points for analysis. Given the diverse array of cultural products within this realm, these two entities were chosen for their illustrative potential. Initially, the article delineates the prevailing definitions of art, crafts, and design. Art is characterized as a unique mode of expression grounded in human emotion and imagination, serving to convey philosophical insights regarding the world, humanity, or their interrelation. Craft, on the other hand, pertains to artifacts fashioned by human hands employing skilled techniques, epitomizing the relentless pursuit of perfection. Design is portrayed as a systematic approach, encompassing strategic thinking and meticulous attention to detail aimed at achieving desired outcomes.

Subsequently, the article delves into the varying attitudes of distinct audience groups toward these categories. It posits that individuals' perceptions of art, crafts, and design are subjective, resulting in differing categorizations of specific products. However, owing to its inherent nature as a cognitive process or mode of thinking, design enjoys a clearer delineation in definition.

In essence, while the boundaries between art, crafts, and design may appear blurred, each possesses distinct attributes and nuances. Consequently, whether considering specific products within two-dimensional culture or the broader spectrum of two-dimensional world culture, distinctions among these categories can be discerned from certain perspectives.

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Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4