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Value Meal: Design and (over)Eating

Curators: Laetitia Wolff and Aric Chen



Value Meal: Design and (over)Eating will represent the United States at the International Design Biennale in Saint-Etienne, France, from November 6th through 14th, 2004. Featuring 20 commissioned experimental projects by as many American-based designers, the exhibition seeks to explore design's potential to address the obesity epidemic currently afflicting the United States and, increasingly, much of the world. Core77 asked Aric Chen and Laetitia Wolff, curators of the show, to provide a brief comments about their objectives for the exhibition:

When we were invited to curate the biennial's American section, our initial response was the most predictable one: we were going to mount a survey of contemporary work. We wanted to focus on designs for eating, as the obesity epidemic was very much on everyone's minds. However, while we were aware of how designers were responding to the effects of poor eating habits—for example, by enlarging their seating designs—the seemed to be little discussion about how they might influence those habits. If one thinks of design as an agent of communication and a mediator of human behavior, it seemed only natural to give designers an opportunity to more proactively address the obesity epidemic at its source.


Accordingly, for *Value Meal: Design and (over)Eating*, we asked twenty American designers to create projects that rethink the ways in which consumers eat, as well as the modes through which those patterns can be affected. Acknowledging the complexity of the problem, we sought the perspectives of practitioners from a range of disciplines from graphics and packaging to industrial, product and interior design. They could emphasize problem-solving, communication, or even provocation, but each was asked to create something that somehow makes consumers aware of what, how, or how much they're eating during the act itself.

As tangible objects and graphic works, or conceptual proposals and hypothetical scenarios, the results have been as varied as the designers themselves. Several have created interactive devices that measure food or the body, providing real-time information to help regulate eating decisions. Some have produced projects that question our relationship with food through sculptural or graphic means. Still others address the social and ethical implications of eating, some going so far as to develop implementable activist programs that promote more healthful habits.

We attempted to be sensitive while avoiding political correctness. Part of the reason we chose the name *Value Meal* is because we wanted to acknowledge that eating, and the manner in which we eat, is integral to value systems that are perhaps worth revisiting at a time when their unraveling is having very real and detrimental health consequences.

For sure, a range of social, economic, biological and cultural forces contribute to the obesity problem. However, while design may also be an accomplice, it's clear that it offers solutions as well. This exhibit is an effort to examine the myriad ways that design might confront obesity in a largely conceptual way. But it is also an exhibit to stimulate ideas which, however obliquely, could eventually be put into practice.

ERIC CHAN/ECCO Design; New York, New York
PiNA (Personal Intelligent Nutritional Aid)
 1.5 x .75 x .25 inches



Envisioned as a "diet guardian angel," Eric Chan's PiNA (Personal Intelligent Nutritional Aid) is a jewelry pendant that helps its wearer make better eating choices. It has a sensor that would read, within ten inches, the particles that are given off by food. It would then analyze their carbohydrate, calorie, sodium, cholesterol and even bacterial contents and, through a range of gentle vibrations, discretely alert users of the nutritional benefits or drawbacks of what they're about to consume.

ECCO Design founder Eric Chan works with leading companies to create everything from cell phones and MP3 players to cookware and furniture. With a mastery of form and sharp sensitivity to the senses, Chan pushes the conventional boundaries of familiar objects and elevates them to a different level. His clients have included Herman Miller, Virgin, Motorola, LG, Toyota, OXO and Cuisinart. His work has won many awards, and included in the permanent collections of numerous museums.

“Envisioned as a ‘diet guardian angel,’ Eric Chan’s PiNA (Personal Intelligent Nutritional Aid) is a jewelry pendant that helps its wearer make better eating choices. It has a sensor that would read within ten inches the particles that are given off by food. It is part of ‘Value Meal: Design and (Over)Eating,’ an exhibition that seeks to explore design’s potential to address the obesity epidemic currently afflicting the United States.”

