

iF Design Award: what man can achieve when he designs his world with intelligence, passion and art

I had the honor and happiness of being invited to a great party.

For the first time in the 60 years history of the iF Design Award, one of the world's most prestigious and complete design awards, a Brazilian would be part of the jury of Communication Design, an area that grows year after year inside the wide range of categories that form the iF – International Forum.

We were a total of 50 jurors from 16 countries, experts in their fields who would evaluate 4.615 submissions from 55 countries. An intense work, still and above all a great party!

On January 13 at midnight I arrived at the hotel, located in the heart of a complex of exhibition pavilions where, throughout the year, commercial events of high specificity and international reach take turns, in Hanover, Germany.

Our first meeting with the organizers and jurors would take place on the following day at 6 pm. During breakfast I tried to identify some early birds that might have arrived before, like myself, amid men in suits who occupied most of the hotel, all of whom, as I found out later, represented floor covering companies at that week's trade show.

Identifying a designer among businessmen is not a difficult task, and little by little I spotted, here and there, combining the distinctive clothing and style with the jurors' pictures from the iF website, my peers, with whom I would share those three days of reflection, debate, exchange, judging and awards. The party was about to begin...

What is the importance of a Design award?

In the context that we live in, in a society structured around exchange values, pressured by commercial drives, by competition and survival, results and performance tend to always be interpreted and determined through the perspective of financial success. To be financially successful is the "prize" for performance that the market gives you, based on commercial results.

And what would be the ruler that measures and "awards" the quality of Design as a language, style, aesthetic and culture? Who evaluates the "extra commercial" results of Design, its rationale as expression of values and culture of a people and a time?

For that is that Design awards exist, where the focus, without naively underestimating the commercial dimension that permeates the discipline, is directed at discussing, evaluating, pondering and raising the bar of quality of what will be, in the end, identified as the expression of what "good design" is.

Close encounters of the first kind

We arrived at the central pavilion out of a total of four where, organized and prepared for our eyes, hands and judgment, the 4.615 products were distributed, from the most diverse categories of objects imaginable, traces of a civilization: from tractors and sports cars to lamps, from toy packaging to photo cameras, from chairs and beds to bicycles, from sex toys to surgical products.

The pavilion complex was accommodated beneath a beautiful and impressive wooden structure, constructed for the Expo 2000 in Hanover, which elegantly landed on the ground through pillars that resembled the futuristic and technological legs of an interstellar spaceship. Curiously, in the heart of this ‘spaceship’, in its inside, the products of man as they were organized there, side by side, seemed to be the findings of an exploratory expedition to another time or space, a kind of archeological site where, instead of the remainings of a past civilization, were the products of a future civilization, sorted and catalogued by type. A pacific and intelligent civilization that respects its fellows and its environment and cultivates harmony, ethics and aesthetics.

It all seemed to create a magical atmosphere and an encounter with a different world and a different time. An encounter with the beautiful, in its greatest manifestation and potency, as the expression of what man can achieve when he decides to leave his mark in the world and shape it in his own image.

The archeologists/designers/jurors gathered there, from different cultures, called to interpret and attribute value to the “findings”, came from different worlds and spoke different languages, but, through the magic of Design’s common language, dialogued, debated and understood each other like a Babel that has found harmony in the passion for Design.

“And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.”

King James version of the Bible, The Tower of Babel, Book of Genesis

I return home with the happy sensation of having been able to see up close, in each object presented there, the human soul in its greatest expression. Glad to have shared a precious and rich time with inspiring and passionate colleagues (I couldn’t get to know all of them and that makes me a bit sad...). And attentive, for having realized that Brazil, despite having won numerous awards, which is very good, still has ahead of itself a long journey of maturation, investment and consolidation in order to occupy the place that it can and that falls to it to occupy in this International Forum.

Ronald Kapaz, January 2014