

Temporary Exhibition

Design Museum

Victor
Papanek

THE POLITICS OF DESIGN

31.10.19

02.02.20

PRESS KIT

Museu del Disseny
de Barcelona

Ajuntament de
Barcelona



Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design

31 October 2019- 2 February 2020, Barcelona Design Museum

With the exhibition “V́ctor Papanek: The Poĺtics of Design”, running from 31 October 2019 to 2 February 2020, the Barcelona Design Museum will present the first large retrospective focussing on the designer, author, and activist Victor J. Papanek (1923–1998). Papanek was one of the twentieth century’s most influential pioneers of a socially and ecologically oriented approach to design beginning in the 1960s. His key work, »Design for the Real World« (1971), remains the most widely read book about design ever published. In it, Papanek makes a plea for inclusion, social justice, and sustainability – themes of greater relevance for today’s design than ever before. The exhibition includes high-value exhibits such as drawings, objects, films, manuscripts, and prints, some of which have never before been presented. These are complimented by works of Papanek’s contemporaries from the 1960s to 1980s, including George Nelson, Richard Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, or the radical design initiative »Global Tools«. Contemporary works from the areas of critical and social design provide insight into Papanek’s lasting impact.

Faced with Nazi persecution in Austria, Papanek escaped to the United States in 1939. After pursuing a career as an industrial designer, during the 1960s he developed a critique of consumerism that would make him well known around the world. This position is also reflected in his designs, which he often developed together with his students or collaborators, including televisions and radios for African countries, electric vehicles, as well as the »Fingermajig«, an object designed to stimulate the sense of touch (1965–1970), and the »Living Cubes« series (1973), user-assembled furniture that could be modified to meet different needs.

Papanek’s true impact, however, is to be found in his work as an author and arbiter of a new and critical understanding of design. He lectured in universities around the world, inspiring generations of students, and tirelessly promoted a wider social debate about design. For example, beginning in 1961 he moderated a television series about design that was broadcast throughout the USA. Alongside his »Design for the Real World«, which has been translated into over twenty languages, additional books such as »How Things Don’t Work« (1977) or »Design for Human Scale« (1983) cemented his reputation as a pioneer of alternative design. In them he used pointed language and humour to criticize a blind belief in consumerism and adapt the ideas of the generation of 1968 to address practical issues of everyday life for a great number of people.

»Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design« is organized into four sections offering an in-depth look at Papanek's life and work. The exhibition begins with an introductory, large-format media installation presenting the designer's ideas in a contemporary context and follows with a biographical overview tracing Papanek's life from his escape from Europe to his international success. For the first time, organizers were able to draw upon materials of the Papanek estate held by the Papanek Foundation at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, which includes a number of documents that have never been exhibited, including notebooks, letters, furniture, pieces from Papanek's collection of ethnological objects, as well as over thousands slides that the designer used for his lectures.

Two other sections focus on the main themes of Papanek's work, including his fundamental criticism of consumerism and his engagement with social minorities, his commitment to the needs of what was then known as the »Third World«, ecology, sustainability, and »making« culture – creation and production using one's own resources – which had its origins in the 1960s do-it-yourself movement. Visitors can also view a wealth of designs by Papanek, his students, and other collaborators, including those by the Danish designer Susanne Koefoed, who as a student of Papanek developed the first International Symbol of Access in 1968.

The exhibition is supplemented with around twenty carefully selected contemporary works that transport Papanek's ideas into the twenty-first century by designers including Catherine Sarah Young, Forensic Architecture, Jim Chuchu, Tomás Saraceno, Gabriel Ann Maher, or the Brazilian collective Flui Coletivo e Questto I Nó. They, too, deal with complex themes such as global climate change, fluid gender identities, consumer behaviour, or the economic realities of migration, meaning they reflect the continuing resonance of the questions Papanek was already addressing in the 1960s. At the same time, they break out of the white, Western, and male-dominated world to which Papanek was bound despite all his efforts to the contrary.

»Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design« is thus both a retrospective as well as a themed exhibition. By focusing on Papanek the person, we can better understand a larger theme, namely the significance of design as a political tool. After all, what was revolutionary for Papanek's time is now generally accepted: design is not only about giving form to something; it is a tool for political transformation that must consider social and ethical points of view. This is reflected by the fact that today's debates over themes such as social design and design thinking draw upon Papanek's ideas as a matter of course. The exhibition seeks to rediscover Papanek as a pioneer of these debates – and as one of design's greatest forward thinkers – for the twenty-first century. At the same time, it examines how Papanek's socially engaged design is changing our world today – as well as how it can make the world a better one.

This exhibition is cooperation between the Vitra Design Museum and the Barcelona Design Museum, in collaboration with the Victor J. Papanek Foundation, University of Applied Arts Vienna, and is funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation.

Biography

Victor J. Papanek

Victor J. Papanek (1923-1998) was a designer, writer, educator and pioneer of social design, advocating a new progressive politics in which design was a force for social inclusion. Born in Vienna, Austria in 1923, escaping to the United States with his widowed mother in 1939 following the "Anschluss" of Austria to Nazi Germany, he was educated in architectural design at Cooper Union School of Art, claiming to have apprenticed with the eminent architect Frank Lloyd Wright in the 1940s. Early in his career he became a follower and ally of R. Buckminster Fuller who wrote the preface to the first English language edition of Papanek's seminal publication. *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change* (1971). The book's groundbreaking ideas and uncompromising critique of the design profession initially divided the design community. Ultimately, however, the polemic was a huge success, taken up by a generation of students and activists critical of design's role in bolstering on environmentally hazardous consumer culture focused on obsolescence and disposability. Translated into over twenty languages the book remains one of the most widely read design books to date, and enjoys an enormous renaissance in popularity today. Papanek's further publications (co-authored with James Hennessey) include *Nomadic Furniture I* (1973), *Nomadic Furniture II* (1974) and *How Things Don't Work* (1977). He is sole author of *Design For Human Scale* (1983) and *The Green Imperative* (1995). In the course of his career, which lasted into the late 1990s, Papanek applied the principles of socially responsible design to collaborative and co-design projects, promoting design as a force for the improvement of life quality in peripheral communities in Europe, the United States and the Global South. He travelled and lectured widely, incorporating the aesthetics and practices of vernacular design cultures into his thinking and teaching.

- 1939 arrives from Vienna to US as Austrian émigré seeking refuge, attends Cooper Union School of Art, NYC
- 1944-1946 influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright and emigrated architect/critic Bernard Rudofsky
- 1946 opens his first studio Design Clinic in NYC
- 1950 moves to California where he opens a gallery-studio Studio 44.
- 1955 takes up his first full-time teaching post as a designer at Ontario College of Art, Toronto
- 1955 encounters R. Buckminster Fuller at MIT lecture for the first time
- 1959 takes up position as associate professor at the College of Education, State University of New York at Buffalo
- 1961-63 presents TV broadcast Design Dimensions for WNED-TV Channel, Buffalo heavily influenced by the media theorist Marshall McLuhan
- 1962 chair of the Industrial Design Department, North Carolina State University where he begins designing objects for health care and disability as well as "developing countries", designs the iconic "Tin-Can Radio"

- 1964 Professor at Purdue University, Indiana, where he launches the first ever transdisciplinary design course
- 1965-1970 travels extensively in Nordic and Scandinavian regions, and shares the speakers' platform with design maverick Buckminster Fuller
- 1970/71 publishes *Design for the Real World* (first edition in Swedish) with an English language edition featuring a preface by Buckminster Fuller in 1971
- 1970-72 Dean of Design, California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts)
- 1973-74 co-authors with James Hennessey *Nomadic Furniture I* and *Nomadic Furniture II*
- 1974-76 active on the ICSID working group for developing countries, which culminates in 1979 with Ahmedabad Declaration outlining design's role in emerging economies
- 1976-1981 Chair of Design, Kansas City Art Institute
- 1977 co-author with James Hennessey of *How Things Don't Work*
- 1981 - 1998 University of Kansas, Chair of Design, School of Architecture & Urban Design
- 1983 authors *Design For Human Scale* (1983)
- 1995 his final book, *The Green Imperative*, is published
- 1983- 1997 travels worldwide, lecturing to a new generation of design students with emphasis on the environmental politics of design
- 1998 dies aged 74, in Lawrence, Kansas

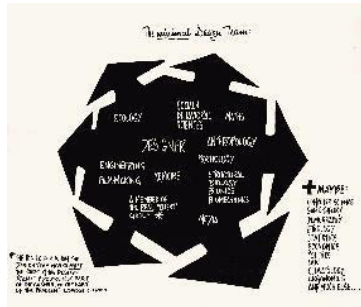
By Alison Clarke, Professor of Design History and Director of The Victor J. Papanek Foundation, University of Applied Arts Vienna

Press images:

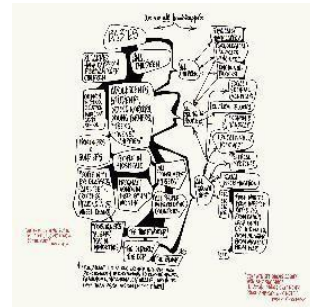
<https://eicub.net/share/service/publicSite?node=workspace://SpacesStore/d61410c6-f217-4ad5-ab64-e5ede0345177>



01
Victor Papanek: *The Politics of Design Graphics*.



02
Victor J. Papanek, The Minimal Design Team, section from Big Character Poster No. 1: Work Chart for Designers (1973, drafted in 1969). © University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



03
Victor J. Papanek, We are all handicapped, section from Big Character Poster No. 1: Work Chart for Designers (1973, drafted in 1969). © University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



04
Victor J. Papanek in Buffalo, NY (April 1959). Photograph kindly donated to the Victor J. Papanek Foundation by Nicolette Papanek © University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



05
Victor J. Papanek, Gallery of Living Arts, Corona Del Mar, CA, Entrance Lobby, design for exhibition space (1949 – 1952). © University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



06
Victor J. Papanek, Dining chair Samisen series (1952 – 1956). © University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



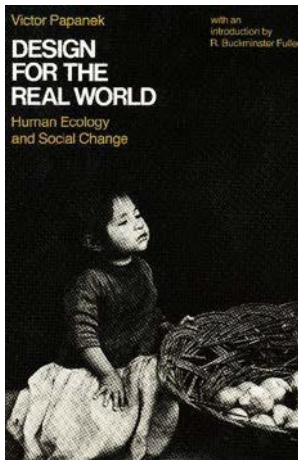
07
Victor J. Papanek filming the WNED-TV Channel 17 programme Design Dimensions in Buffalo, NY (1961 – 1963). © University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



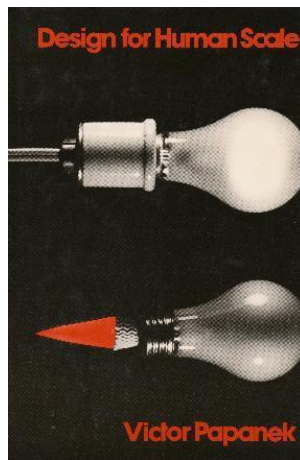
08
Victor J. Papanek, Tetraikadechrahedral movable playground structure (1973-1975). © University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



09
Victor J. Papanek's former student Jorma Vennola, Fingermaijig, tactile plastic children's toys, Finland (1965 – 1970). © University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



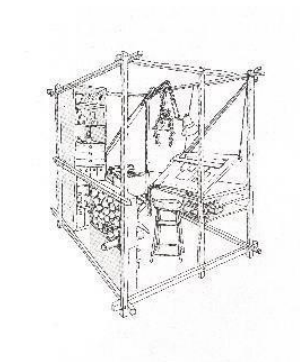
10
Victor J. Papanek, Design for the Real World. Human Ecology and Social Change. 1st US-edition, New York: Pantheon (1971). Front of jacket photography by Georg Oddner /TIO. Jacket design by Helen Kirkpatrick.
© Pantheon Random House, courtesy University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



11
Victor J. Papanek, Design for Human Scale. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company Inc. (1983). Jacket design by Ben Kann.
© University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



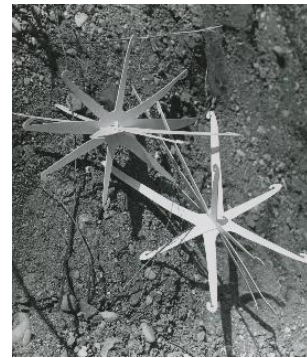
12
Victor J. Papanek, Samisen dining chairs (1960 – 1970).
© University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



13
Victor J. Papanek and James Hennessey Work Cube (1973).
© James Hennessey and University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



14
Victor J. Papanek and James Hennessey, Lean-To Chair (1974).
© James Hennessey and University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



15
James Herold and John Truan, Artificial Burrs coated with plant seeds and a growth boosting solution, designed under direction of Victor Papanek to reverse erosion cycles in arid regions (1968).
© University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



16
Victor J. Papanek and James Hennessey Work Cube (1973).
© James Hennessey and University of Applied Arts Vienna, Victor J. Papanek Foundation



17
Frank Gehry, Sleigh Chairs from the Easy Edges series (1972). Featured in Nomadic Furniture by James Hennessey and Victor J. Papanek, New York: Pantheon Books (1973).
© Vitra Design Museum



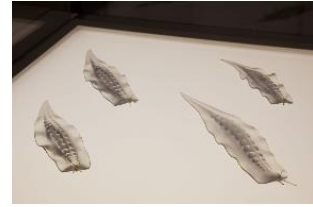
18
Piero Gatti, Cesare Paolini and Franco Teodoro, Sacco, produced by Zanotta (1968). Featured in Nomadic Furniture by James Hennessey and Victor J. Papanek, New York: Pantheon Books (1973).
© Vitra Design Museum



19
Karl Montan, International Symbol of Access, (1969), modified from the original design by Victor J. Papanek's former student Susanne Koefoed (1968).



20
Flui Coletivo and Questto | Nó in partnership with IED São Paulo, Bomba Hacker [Hacker Pump] do-it-yourself water pump (2014).
© Flui Coletivo, photo: Stefano Leggieri



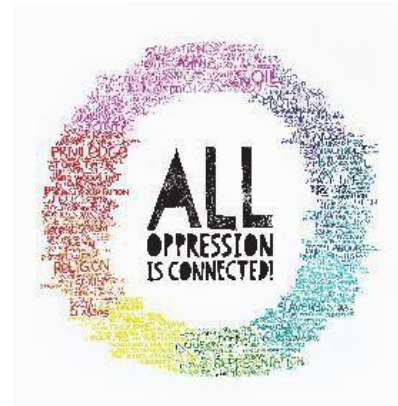
21
Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg Mobile Bioremediation Unit, models from Designing for the Sixth Extinction (2013), installation view at Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe (ZKM).
© Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, photo: Jonas Zilnius



22
UN Women, The Autocomplete Truth: Need, advertising campaign (2013).
© Photo: Mermac Ogilvy & Mather Dubai



23
UN Women, The Autocomplete Truth: Cannot, advertising campaign (2013).
© Photo: Mermac Ogilvy & Mather Dubai



24
Jim Chuchu, All Oppression Is Connected (2013).
© Jim Chuchu

Victor Papanek: THE POLITICS OF DESIGN

What role should design and designers play in today's world to be truly useful to society? This exhibition is the first retrospective focusing on designer and activist Victor J. Papanek (1923-1998), who considered that design should be a critical occupation committed to social issues and the environment. His ideas are still very relevant today and form the basis of current critical and social design.

INAUGURATION

Opening lecture:

Amelie Klein and Alison J. Clarke, curators of the exhibition

30/10/2019, 6 pm

TALKS AND DISCUSSIONS

DESIGN FOR LIVING PROGRAMME*

Cinema discussion. *Demain* by Cyril Dion and Mélanie Laurent, 2015

15/11/2019, 6 pm

Talk by John Thackara:

Pathways to sustainability. Finding your place in the next economy 10/12/2019, 7 pm

Discussion: *Papanek reviewed by art*

03/12/2019, 6.30 pm

Discussion: *Collaboration vs Resistance*

17/01/2020, 6.30 pm

Closing event

31/01/2020, 7 pm

Free activities

Limited capacity

**Design for living* programme: Basis for reflecting on socially responsible design

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Party: Design for all the family

17/11/2019, 11 am to 6 pm

(free admission)

Workshop: "The world of Victor Papanek" Saturdays, 11.30 am

Suitable for ages 6 to 12

(advance booking required)

GUIDED TOURS

Tours with individual registration

Saturdays at 11 am (included in the ticket price)

Tours for schools and the general public

(advance booking required)

WORKSHOPS

Workshops: ***Designing real worlds***

Papanek at the Joan Oliver-Pere Quart and Villa Urània Civic Centres

January 2002 (free admission)

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Re/- Barcelona Sustainable Fashion Event

Sustainable Fashion association

29/11/2019 and 30/11/2019

Exhibition of the Catalonia Prize for Eco-Design 2019

Government of Catalonia -

Department of Territory

and Sustainability

19/12/2019 - 19/01/2020

Publication



Victor Papanek The Politics of Design

Editors: Mateo Kries, Amelie Klein,
Alison J. Clarke

Design by Daniel Streat, Visual Fields

Date of publication: October 2018

Softcover, 19 x 25 cm

400 pages, Approx. 500 illustrations

ISBN 978-3-945852-26-2

The designer, author, and design activist Victor J. Papanek (1923 – 1998) anticipated an understanding of design as a tool for political change and social good that is more relevant today than ever. »Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design« gives an encompassing overview of Papanek's oeuvre, at the heart of which stood his preoccupation with the socially marginalized, his commitment to the interests of areas then called the »Third World«, as well as his involvement in the fields of ecology, bionics, sustainability, and anti-consumerism. Alongside essays and interviews discussing Papanek's relevance in his own era, the book also presents current perspectives on his enduring legacy and its influence on contemporary design theory. Original Papanek family photographs, art and design work, drawings, correspondence and countless materials from the Victor J. Papanek Foundation archive, University of Applied Arts Vienna are reproduced here for the first time, alongside work by both Papanek's contemporaries and designers working today.

Text by Jan Boelen, Alison J. Clarke, Elizabeth Guffey, Orit Halpern, Jamer Hunt, Amelie Klein, Felicity Scott, Cameron Tonkinwise, Alice Twemlow and others.

Fact Sheet

Title: **Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design**

Curators: Amelie Klein (Vitra Design Museum) Alison Clarke (Victor J. Papanek Foundation, University of Applied Arts Vienna)

Advising Curator: Jan Boelen (Z33 – House for Contemporary Art, Hasselt, Belgium, and Design Academy Eindhoven, Netherlands)

Assistant Curator: Erika Pinner (Vitra Design Museum)

Press conference: 29 October 2019, 12 am

Conference and opening: 30 October 2019, 6 pm

Duration: 31 October 2019 until 2 February 2020

Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday, from 10 am to 8 pm

Press images:

<https://eicub.net/share/service/publicSite?node=workspace://SpacesStore/d61410c6-f217-4ad5-ab64-e5ede0345177>

press contact

Divina Huguet

Premsa.musedeldisseny@bcn.cat

An exhibition by the Barcelona Design Museum and Vitra Design Museum in collaboration with the Victor J. Papanek Foundation, University of Applied Arts Vienna.

Col·laboradors:

**Vitra
Design
Museum**

di:'Angewandte
University of Applied Arts Vienna
Papanek Foundation

Finançat per:

**KULTURSTIFTUNG
DES
BUNDES**

Patrocinador global:

VOLKSWAGEN
GROUP