

Anglais
1er prix – Mme Elke Lohan

Vintage: Matter and Memory

What causes an old-fashioned toy – an exiled piece of the past – not to sink into oblivion like so many others before it? What collective and arbitrary vogue lets vintage items be fashionable and yet *of a different time*?

When the *Pequod* (the whaler that criss-crossed the South Seas in pursuit of Moby Dick) foundered under the onslaught of the white whale, Ishmael, the melancholy narrator, drifted on the ocean for a day and a night before the *Rachel* rescued him. He owed his survival to the (unused) coffin of his friend Queequeg, and had it not been for that only wooden tomb in a watery graveyard, he would have been lost as well.

Things vintage, by definition, have not been lost to time, and their very obsolescence guarantees their continuance in a world where they no longer seem to have a place.

The first (and maybe only) requirement for a vintage item is that it be at least thirty years old. Thus the “new ruins” the Prince of Ligne was so fond of commissioning, or the “sepia” setting that changes (or rather fades) digital photos to the hue of a stereogram do not qualify, and nor do items that, albeit brand new, are easily “backdated” – the artisanal baguette, the retro style, the phony rotary phone, and many more. Vintage items must absolutely date from the era they represent. It is their very honesty that sets these children of nostalgia, these brothers of kitsch and cousins of the outmoded, apart from the rest of the family. Like certain performance artists who use their own blood on the canvas (when any observer would have been quite content with paint) [...], vintage items in their prideful humility never imitate. Instead, they flaunt their veritableness, even their spectacularity, and use authenticity as their selling-point.

Appearance counts for less than *affiliation*: It's not about trying to make something look old but about it actually being old. [...] And yet, *vintage* does not glorify the past at all. It's not about the prevalence of the past, but about its bizarre presence in the present. Anything that dates from yesterday counts as vintage today.

Vintage does not imply that “things were *better* in the past”, but that, in the past, things *were*. That things existed, before everything became digitally searchable. This points to a nostalgia not for a particular era but for the very fact of being and for the much-reviled tradition of buying things that take up room in their solidity. *Vintage* is not meant to arrest time. On the contrary, it seeks to *preserve, as much as possible, the era when time was still passing*.

[...]

It remains to be seen what will become of *vintage* when things no longer age, when, in thirty or a hundred years, our recent past will have nothing but abstracta for those who, despite the end of history, still wish to go in search of lost time.