

Anglais
2e prix – Mme Teresa Lander

Vintage: material and memory

How can an outmoded toy – a remnant of the past in exile – avoid being lost in the long succession of things forgotten? What communal whim placed vintage at the forefront of fashion even though it remains of another era?

When the Pequod chased Moby Dick through the southern seas and foundered under the onslaught of the White Whale, the melancholy narrator of the story, Ishmael, survived thanks to the (empty) coffin of his friend Queequeg, on which he drifted for a whole day and night until he was picked up by the Rachel. This unique wooden shroud from a sailor's graveyard was what saved him from death.

Such is vintage, unconquered by time, whose obsolescence guarantees its persistence in a world where it so clearly no longer has a place.

The main, and perhaps the only, marker of a vintage object is that it must be at least 30 years old. Unlike the “brand-new ruins” commissioned by the Prince of Ligne, or the digital photographs with the sepia effect that gives – or takes away – the coloration of a stereographic photograph, or more recent objects which are easy to age artificially (the “traditional” baguette, the retro look, the fake rotary-dial telephone, etc.), vintage must genuinely date from the era it represents. Child of nostalgia, brother to kitsch and cousin to the out-of-date, vintage stands out from its peers because it does not try to deceive. Like the performance artists who paint their canvases in the red of their own blood, although red dye would do the job just as well from the spectator's point of view, [...] vintage displays an ostentatious modesty which does not seek to imitate, but loudly cries its wares of authenticity, even flamboyance, from the market stall of truth.

Appearances count, but belonging counts for more: it is not looking out-of-date that matters, but being genuinely out-of-date. [...] And vintage is actually not at all backward-looking. It is not about going back to the past, but about noting its strange presence in the present. Something is vintage if, today, it dates from yesterday.

Vintage does not claim that things used to be better, but that things used to be. That the “what-is” existed *before everything was subjected to digitalization. The nostalgia reflected by vintage does not apply to an era, but to the “what-is” itself, and to the much-abused tradition of a purchase which takes up space and justifies the space it occupies. Vintage is not intended to halt time but, on the contrary, to preserve as far as possible the era when time still passed.*

[...]

It remains to be seen how vintage will fare when nothing ages any more; when, in 30 years' or 100 years' time, our immediate past will have nothing but abstract objects to offer in passing to those who, although history has come to a halt, still seek to embark on the remembrance of times past.