

Anglais
Mention d'honneur – Mme Sara Boyes

Vintage goods: the stuff of memories

How can an old toy – a pastime in exile – avoid joining the serried ranks of the forgotten? By what collective whim are vintage goods simultaneously in fashion and “things of the past”?

When the *Pequod* – which was hunting down Moby Dick in the South Seas – was shipwrecked by the battering blows of the white whale, Ishmael, the melancholy narrator, owed his survival only to his friend Queequeg's (unused) coffin, on which he drifted for a day and a night, before he was picked up by the *Rachel*. He thus avoided his demise solely thanks to a wooden casket destined for a watery grave.

So it is with vintage goods, which time has not swallowed up and which, by their obsolescence, are granted an afterlife in a world where they clearly no longer belong.

The main, and possibly sole, criterion for a vintage item is to be at least 30 years old. Quite unlike the “brand new ruins” that the Prince of Ligne liked to have built, or digital photographs to which the “sepia” option can add (or remove) the tones of an old 3D image, or new things which are easy to age artificially – “traditional” baguettes, “retro” style, imitation rotary dial telephones, etc. – vintage goods must at all costs date from the era to which they hark back. Begotten of nostalgia, akin to kitsch and from the same family as the old-fashioned, vintage items stand out from their peers by not faking it. Like performance artists who, instead of red paint, daub their own blood on a canvas (when, for the spectator, pigment would do just as well) [...], vintage goods are a humblebrag, imitating nothing, cheerfully set out on the stall of truth as genuine, even spectacular.

What they look like is less important than where they come from: it is not a matter of looking out of date – but of actually *being* it. Nonetheless, vintage items are not *passé*, it is not about the pervasiveness of the past, but the strangeness of its presence in the present: vintage goods are “yesterday's news”.

Vintage goods are not a statement that things used to be better – but that things *used to be*: that, before everything was digitally boarded and searched, things *were*. This is not nostalgia about a particular period, but about *being* itself and the battered tradition of purchases that take up space and weigh a certain weight. The role of vintage items is not then to halt the passage of time, but, on the contrary, *to preserve for as long as possible the age when time still passed*.

It remains to be seen what will become of vintage goods when things no longer age; when, in 30 or 100 years, our immediate past yields up only abstract objects to those who, despite the end of history, still wish to go in search of lost time.