

Anglais
Mention d'honneur – Mme Miriam Gartenberg

Vintage: Style and Substance

What makes an outdated toy — a blast from the past — stand out in a crowd of long-forgotten objects? To what collective and arbitrary favour does something labelled “vintage” owe its being “in” while stemming from another time?

When the *Pequod*, chasing Moby Dick on the South Seas, sinks after being battered by the white whale, the melancholy narrator, Ishmael, owes his survival to none other than his friend Queequeg’s (albeit unused) coffin, to which he clings for a day and a night, at the mercy of the sea, before being rescued by the *Rachel*. Ultimately, it is thanks to this unique wooden tomb, built for a watery grave, that he, himself, does not perish.

Such is “vintage”: that which time has not ravaged, while its own obsolescence guarantees its survival in a world where, to all intents and purposes, it no longer has a place.

The primary (and perhaps only) criterion for an object to be characterized as vintage is that it be at least thirty years old. As opposed to the “new ruins” installed in the gardens of Belgium’s Prince of Ligne, or digital photos with the “sepia” option selected to add colouring to (or remove it from) a stereoscopic snapshot, or even the latest craze for artificially “aged” products — “distressed” furniture, the “retro” look in clothing, fake rotary telephones, etc. — to be vintage, an item must truly date from the era it echoes. A child of nostalgia, cousin to kitsch and sister to just-plain-out-of-style, vintage stands out by holding nothing back. Like a live art performance featuring the artist’s own blood used to paint a canvas red (while to the viewer, red dye would have sufficed) [...], vintage takes modest pride in imitating nothing while happily trading in cheap but spectacular realism at the kiosk of truth.

Appearance counts for less than genuine *belonging*: the point is not to *appear* used, but to have *actually been used*. [...] Yet, vintage is not about living in the past. The crux of the matter is not the pervasiveness of the past but rather its curious presence in the present. Vintage, today, is whatever *belongs to yesterday*.

Vintage doesn’t insist that “things used to be *better*”, merely that they *used to be*. That the state of *being* once existed, before everything was digitized. The nostalgia it reflects pertains not to a specific era but to the fact of *having been*, in and of itself, and to the time-honoured tradition of a purchase that takes its place and holds its own. The role of vintage is not to stop time, but rather to *preserve, as much as possible, the memory of when time went by*.

[...]

It remains to be seen what will be considered “vintage” when nothing ages anymore; when, thirty (or a hundred) years from now, our immediate past will have nothing but abstract objects to offer the passerby who might still wish, despite the end of time, to set out in search of lost ways to remember things past.