

THE BUROBRAAK MANIFESTO

Welcome dear reader, potential collaborator or client. What you will read is a short collection of our ideas regarding our work and our approach to design as a tool in activism and the liberation of oppressed peoples. We hope this document helps you understand why we do what we do and how we relate to decolonisation and late-stage capitalism. We hope that this document is the starting point of our conversation. We are looking forward to meeting you.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

The Dutch design scene has operated on many problematic ideals for far too many years and now, as the world moves towards inclusivity, we must dismantle and shift how we operate as designers. A Dutch designer is problematic and the practice originates from violent roots: *the first brand conceptualised was the mark of the VOC and its extensive slave trade in the 17th century*. Design, however, is not owned by the Dutch, nor is it owned by Europe, and we can no longer pretend that awareness is a legitimate substitute for action. This manifesto is a written philosophy about design that aims to promote accountability, and encourage us to leave behind the toxicity that has plagued this design world.

Design practices around the world have become more homogeneous, referencing many of the philosophies and practices of the western visual movements. As a result, valuable design knowledge and smaller contexts are being erased. Many designers believe they are solving problems, but approach “solutions” from narrow lens. Many assume that the western model for design and problem solving is neutral. This is not true.

Unfortunately, this is a result of viewing design as an isolated tool. More often than not designers study only design, reference design, and create designs. This reinforces the false, narrow, western, and monolithic “design” lens.

People are the center of work driven to create social impact. Design is meant for people. It is unfair to wield the potential power of design without a nuanced understanding of intersectionality, race, ethnicity, economic disparity, physical and mental ability, and other layers of marginality.

We now live in a world that has a rigid, exclusive, western-centric, and classist sense of how to create an airtight solution, make it look stunning, and sell it fastest. This approach to creation often only serves industrial production, and subsequently creates a disconnect between creators and the people they create for. Here the meaning of “why” and “for whom”, is lost.

Designers have, for too long, created for ego, to “make a mark on society”, and “to be recognised”. By doing so they have seemingly abandoned the communities that they belong to, and have held onto the philosophies that reinforce “branding” and individualism.

Essentially, graphic designers are the messengers of lies. Many have sold aesthetics and progressiveness by projecting and amplifying qualities that may not necessarily lie underneath.

OUR APPROACH

We at BUROBRAAK don't want to lie. We need a design world that shifts away from ego, individualism, and individual impact. We need a world that values togetherness and collectivisation and centers people's humanity above all else. A client is a client but is first a person with needs, who has feelings of belonging and exclusion, and who has a dynamic relationship with societal power and with you.

Miscommunication is no longer an excuse. Designers are focused on their craft and should always work from an intersectional and interdisciplinary mindset. We should acknowledge that we do not know everything. Ask the right questions and be accountable when we make mistakes, striving to build the inclusive, emotionally competent, decolonized world we have needed for generations.

We believe that the work we do has to be meaningful, informed, and not driven by capital, but instead by the needs of the people around us. We must find connection to one another, learn the histories, value the stories. Are we being critical enough about the work of our peers? Are we aware of our own intersections and privileges? Can we act as designers on this knowledge?

We invite you to work with us in shaping a just, joyful and inclusive vision of our collective future.

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