



Tintoretto (1550-60). *Susanna at her bath*. 167cm X 238cm. Musée du Louvre. The Elders staged *top right* are part of the Biblical ([apocryphal](#)) story. The "[mouse-trap](#)" at the back with the two Elders, has the function of a showpiece discussed here: which explains to the viewer the nature of what we see.

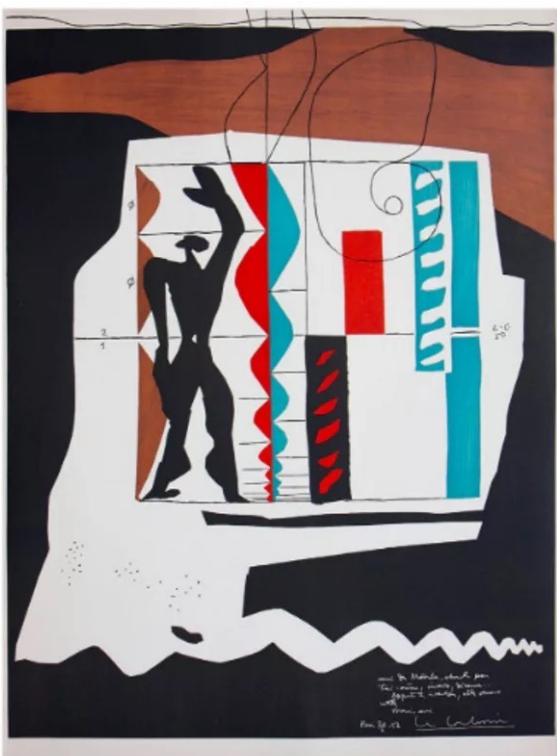
A possible way to *stay clear* of planning, learning management systems (LMS/Canvas) and pedagogical discussions—though vital and important, of course—could be to have a look at the role of *showpieces* in our culture of education. The showpiece could provide a *lens* through which a variety of *outputs*, produced by the students, but also by the teachers, could be essential to the development of a *culture of education* ([Ingold](#)) in the design-field at KHiO. With possible relevance to other disciplines at KHiO. To get there we need a working-definition of 'showpiece'.

Of course, from our actual practice at the dpt. of design, we can think of showpieces in a variety of ways. That being the case, I am incline to open the topic with some questions: are the *exhibits* of student works—whether final or at milestones/crits—showpieces? Or, rather, what are possible

and interesting issues that are *implied* by considering such work as showpieces (*as if...*)? Are the elements they include into their folders, at the exams, another example of showpieces? Is a log-book that show-cases reflective process a showpiece, in the sense of an alternative [portfolio](#)?

If this is acceptable—or, at least, valid enough for a discussion among the collegium—it could be of consequential for how the students meet the job- and market, as *water-posts* for discussing design education and also how we plan, manage and teach our courses. So, it is not a matter to be taken lightly. Naturally, it is impossible to conduct such a discussion beforehand, without a *deeper* understanding of what the staff is thinking: their experiences with the matter, starting with our *course-descriptions* that could be conceived as the showpieces from our *study-plan*. We'll see...

For the time being, I want to discuss some implications of a discussion I have been having with Bjørn Blikstad, on the possibility of expanding *anthropometry* (in the design sense) to establish the *measure of things human* in different areas. That is, such elements that provide readability to something



Le Corbusier's *Modulor* (1962), Lithograph 29" X 21,5".

*else*: like a title-block in a drawing, the legend on a map, a [wind-rose](#) and of course the proportions of the human body designed to conjoin human usership with proportions mapped unto a body as Le Corbusier's Modulor (last page).

However, these examples are immediate and conventional. What if we extend the notion of anthropometrics to determine a wider scope of *showpieces*, not directed to experts but to society at large? If we are *no longer* an industrial fringe-culture with roots in the *arts*, and that also the post-industrial mode of production needs to be revisited to *act* for sustainability, then showpieces could offer an approach to empower people in developing a culture of sustainability (rather than using showpieces to empower the corporate- and government sectors). People—*beyond* users!

That is, showpieces used to improve practices in the entire [supply circle](#) beyond the product: all the way to *people* and *planet*. In this scope, the showpiece becomes a forerunner to where we want to go: where as a prototype, it acts as a *public reference*, rather than a more/less secretive industrial blueprint or test-item. Items that are advanced and inventive in what one could call the synergies of *caring*: between aesthetics, social justice, sustainability. In a way that adds *depth* to the life-world, the practices we have to teach ourselves, to the things we need to live a good life.

The instances that are examples of showpieces and how they work, are rife. For instance, moon-landings are showpieces to demonstrate what a country is capable of undertaking (cf, [India's lunar triumph](#)). In Norway, the construction, journey and landing of the rigs on the continental shelf, was in some cases compared to [moon-landings](#). In the wake of the demonstrable power of show-cases, are we able/willing to define *environmental* "moon landings" (not withstanding Elon Musk's [escape-plans](#) to Mars)? Like doing the impossible in the conquest of climate change/damage.

We cannot spend time asking why we haven't already done this. But what we must ask is what we can do not to give the human *inclination* to create and spread lies another chance. Charity begins at home, so let's start with ourselves. For instance, if our work is show-piecing something, we cannot say that it is *art* whenever it fails to do so. Since the introduction of elements in a work that provides readability to the remainder, arguably comes from the art field. And still does. So, then there is the question of what kind of knowledge is attracted when it goes *beyond* art.

That is, when the showpiece is worked out to demonstrate the workings of something *beyond* the work itself, and accesses the *material, embodied* and *public* life-world, in aspects that we can reach for, it is likely to attract and produce knowledge of a *different* kind: not restricted to art history, aesthetics and design practice. Taking a decisive step from *performance* as an addition to the visual art palette, to *performatives* changing operative social structures and working directly on the fabric of cultural relationships. And in this sense show-piecing is working *politically*.

At present we may well be living *between* two cultural turns: the *first* cultural turn from the 1960s moving away from art for art's sake; the second cultural turn to reframe our natural *environment* as a cultural *heritage*. With the first cultural turn the passage from performance to performative is exemplified by the so-called quality-framework (kvalitetsrammeverk). It has changed social structure because it used in our study programmes, as a basis for course-descriptions. It does *not* take much imagination to think of an equivalent that moves us from social justice to sustainability (2009 onwards).



Photo from The Economist, Aug. 23rd 2023 Delhi. From an article featuring [India's lunar triumph](#).

Or, from the *first* to the *second* cultural turn. After some years such frameworks tend to lose their *vitality*. Does a *showpiece*—in contrast—provide us with an *experimentarium* in which random elements of *production* combine with random elements of *reception*, with a mutually constraining impact, that in some cases will be vital to improve practices in the larger field accessed by the work? That is, realising that what first appeared as *blindness* to the topic, is revealed a *blind-spot*: the nerve that actually allows us to sense/see in an area that was previously unsegmented to us? Can we do this? Let's see...