

# DESIGN – A QUESTION OF FORM FOLLOWING FUNCTION? OR MUCH MORE?



Trouble at the Design Museum in London. This is how The Telegraph describes it

The Design Museum in London has been thrown into crisis by the sudden resignation of its chairman, James Dyson, in protest at what he sees as the museum's misguided pursuit of empty style over substance.

In a terse letter to his 11 fellow trustees Mr Dyson,

the engineer and inventor of the vacuum cleaner that bears his name, said he was resigning after five years in the role because he believed that the museum had abandoned its founding ideal of promoting function-led, problem-solving design.

It was “ruining its reputation” and “betraying its purpose”.

The museum at Butler’s Wharf on the south bank of the Thames had “become a style showcase” instead of “upholding its mission to encourage serious design of the manufactured object”, Mr Dyson told the trustees.

These include Sir Terence Conran, its founder; Lord Palumbo, the former arts council chairman; Richard Seymour, a designer; and Denise Kingsmill, the former chairman of Sadlers Wells.

The Guardian heads its report “How a flower arrangement caused fear and loathing.”

It seems like the old separation of style and function – one that many an archaeologist has upheld. But the Design Museum has long made it its business to show how design and making recognise no such distinctions between meaning and substance, engineering and styling. I challenge any archaeologist or design historian to prove the primacy of function, however defined.



### James Dyson's vacuum cleaner – pure manufactured function?

Form can hardly be said to follow function in his well-known vacuum cleaners.

It looks like the argument is actually about how to run an institution or organization – with at least three alpha characters (Dyson, Conran, and director Alice Rawsthorn) wanting to run the show. Haven't they learned that the notion of the "designer" is also a modernist myth and that we should be looking at collective and distributed networks driving design, not individual genius.