

THE GOODS

Son of Dogs Playing Poker



Niels van Veen

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FEW ideas have caused as much academic navel-gazing as kitsch. An unfathomable amount of highbrow ink has been spilled in the name of explaining why so many people prefer paintings of dogs playing poker to the masterworks of Abstract Expressionism.

Among those fascinated by this conundrum of taste is Sander Mulder, a product designer in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. Rather than write a dissertation, however, Mr. Mulder chose to comment on the kitsch debate by creating the Woofer, a semi-lifelike statue of a headless dog that's as tacky as a lawn gnome. "If you're a true design lover, you wouldn't be caught dead with such a statue," Mr. Mulder said with a laugh.

But concealed in the Woofer's neck is a sophisticated speaker system, capable of transmitting the decidedly nonkitschy sounds of Brahms or Thelonius Monk. "In a moment, it transforms from a truly ugly piece into a truly desirable piece," said Mr. Mulder, a co-founder of the Dutch design studio **Buro Vormkrijgers**. Or, as the Woofer's marketing write-up puts it, "The wrong becomes the new right."

The Woofer was born on a 2004 road trip to Germany, where Mr. Mulder and a few friends were to attend a design fair. Their conversation turned to hi-fis and their boxy, boring speakers, which in turn led Mr. Mulder to pose a stumper of a question: Why are the bass-producing components of speakers called woofers, while the treble drivers are

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