



Small objects of desire

Is there still lead in the pencil?

THEO:

It's your design? It's lovely.

JEFF:

OK. Well, this is absolutely one of my most favourite items. The humble pencil. This particular one, I think it's absolutely beautiful. It functions brilliantly. It is beautifully made. And interesting enough, it's very simple. So you can take the whole thing to pieces, like this. So it has an eraser, has a little pin in the eraser, in case the lead gets blocked, which actually doesn't happen very often. And that's all the parts, like that. And the leads, of course, like that. It's such a simple object. And yet, apart from being well-designed, it's beautifully manufactured. Very high precision manufacture. So you can see how simply I took it to pieces, and how simply it goes together again. This piece at the end here is made of brass. And this, I guess, is some kind of stainless steel. It works absolutely beautifully. So you see, I normally have a notebook that goes with it, as part of my kit. And it works beautifully when you draw, etcetera. There's another manufacturer who makes similar pencils, but I find when I use them, that the lead breaks very easily. With these pencils, the lead very rarely breaks. So there is something magical about these pencils which makes the lead stronger. It's actually the same lead.

THEO:

Can you guess the reason why it doesn't break in this one?

JEFF:

I think it must be the precision engineering. I think that the sleeve that holds the lead must be very, very precise.

THEO:

Then the sleeve, it was also plastic...

JEFF:

The sleeve is some form of plastic. I don't know which plastic it is.

THEO:

It's interesting that it's a tubular form, but then has all these facets. It's very difficult... they are very small and thin. But I guess that's for better grip, or what do you think, Jeff, that you are using it?

JEFF:

Well, certainly, it's a very comfortable pencil to use. So you'll notice it's got these kind of indentations. And so this means it doesn't slip in your fingers when you use it. It's an interesting point about the facets, which you would have thought it would make it a little bit uncomfortable. But you don't feel that at all.

ROBIN:

A lot of the other designs are much fatter than that one, but that thin form is actually easier to grip, isn't it?

JEFF:

It's nice to hold, and it gives just the right weight for writing. It's wonderful.

GEORGY:

I'm interested in the material. It is a nice feel. It almost feels like painted wood, doesn't it, you know, in your hand? It does. It almost feels like lacquer.

JEFF:

Japanese.

GEORGY:

And I think that's so that you know that that's a pencil.

JEFF:

One of the good things about these pencils is they're relatively inexpensive. They're about five pounds. And that's a good job, because I keep losing it. And also, the spare parts are very inexpensive, so the leads are a couple of pounds.

ROBIN:

How do you think such a finely engineered product is being made to that price?

JEFF:

So I guess they may have been relatively more expensive at one time, but I think it must be just volume. It's obviously sold worldwide. For this precision of manufacturing, it shows that the design, the original design, which is probably 30, 40 years old, was absolutely excellent.

And because you're producing in quantity, you can make a really beautifully engineered item at a very low cost.

THEO:

Well, it has evolved, actually. I'm not sure that this is the same design that existed...

JEFF:

I'm sure there's some evolution.