

The ‘Paul Mijksenaar Design for Function Award 2011’ is a posthumous tribute to Edward Hines, whose genius led to white centerlines on streets and motorways

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White lines down the middle of the road: What could be more obvious? And yet they were once – in 1911, to be exact – a brilliant new idea. In Michigan, Edward N. Hines, a member of the Wayne County Road Commission, saw a leaky milk wagon leaving a liquid trail on a dusty roadway. It made him think of painting white lines down the centre of the road to create lanes that would clearly separate traffic moving in opposite directions.

It’s impossible to estimate how many motorists and other road users can attribute their lives and wellbeing to Edward Hines’s astute insight, but the value of his discovery can hardly be overrated. Thanks to the enormous contribution his concept has made to traffic safety, the first ‘Paul Mijksenaar Design for Function Award’ goes posthumously to Edward N. Hines (1870-1938), who conceived the white centerline 100 years ago. Hines’s concept fully satisfies the three criteria that Paul Mijksenaar used to determine the winner of this somewhat unorthodox design award: durability, utility and beauty.

‘The general public often confuses “design” with “artistic appeal”’: beautiful objects or knick-knacks for decorating the house,’ says Professor Mijksenaar. ‘In the past 20 years, this emphasis on the visual aspect of design has shifted in a cultural direction to some degree. What’s needed for our country’s future, however, are innovation and ingenuity. If we want to stay afloat, we need useful design, not only from an economic perspective but also for the development of smart sustainable solutions. We seem to have lost sight of the essence of design. This award is a response to the current situation.’

Presentation of the ‘Paul Mijksenaar Design for Function Award 2011’ will take place on Wednesday, 2 November 2011, in the auditorium of the University of Amsterdam. The introduction of this award by the Paul Mijksenaar Foundation coincides with the 25th anniversary of Mijksenaar bv.

Note for the editors (not for publication):

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Enclosures:

First centerline painted on a road in Wayne County, Michigan (source: MDOT)