Useful Articles

A “useful article” is designed to serve a utilitarian purpose. Examples include the overall shape or design of a car, an airplane, clothing, a food processor, a television set, or a golf ball. Useful articles can have both copyrightable and uncopyrightable features.

Copyright never protects the mechanical or utilitarian aspects of an article, whether useful or not. No matter how novel, distinctive, or aesthetically pleasing any clasps, motors, or other functioning parts of an article may be, copyright does not protect them.

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Some designs of useful articles may be protected under federal patent law. Contact the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450; (800) 786-9199 or (571) 272-1000; www.uspto.gov.