

SIGNED

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HONG KONG DESIGN INSTITUTE

2020
ISSUE 24

HUMAN

VALUES-BASED



DESIGN

IS THE KEY

FOR

WELL BEING

DESIGNING A POSITIVE FUTURE IS A COLLECTIVE EFFORT

As these last three issues of Signed have highlighted, when designers use their considerable creative powers to bring people together to identify and then rethink the problems they face, it is possible to make a dramatic difference to their lives. Whether it is painting street intersections, joining a running group, collecting rubbish, baking bread, or talking about death, the projects introduced in these issues highlight a simple fact—the actions around connecting people are at the heart of substantive and meaningful change.

Human-centred Design has served as the overarching concept for the spectrum of approaches over the three 2020 issues of Signed. The stories have introduced a variety of Design concepts, including: community design, place making, citizen science, co-design, co-operative design, and more. But without exception, all the activities featured have the core objective of connecting people, and using their combined power to address problems they face in their lives. These examples fit comfortably into the idea of Human-centred Design, and hold valuable lessons for anyone wanting to help build a better and more people-friendly society.

At its simplest, every design project is the same—understand the problem, agree upon objectives, decide a plan of action, and then carry it out. But, as we have seen with the difficulty and gravity of the issues covered in the 12 stories featured, when it comes to societies, communities, and individuals, few problems of significance are uncomplicated and easy to solve. However, given the creativity and effectiveness of the activities introduced, it is clearly possible to make a difference, and the flow-on effects of successful projects can exceed expectations.

Our extended exploration of socially beneficial design has focused on the most vulnerable in society, and those in need of tangible improvement in their lives. The stories contain a hopeful message to take into the future. Namely, designing for social change works best when it is inclusive, engaging, meaningful, fun, and generates appropriate solutions to the problems being addressed. It is a message for our times, more important than ever as the world collectively struggles with communicable diseases, increasing social dislocation, and uncertain economic and environmental challenges.



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The Hong Kong Design Institute is a member institution of the Vocational Training Council.

For more information about HKDI, please check our website on www.hkdi.edu.hk, or email us at hkdi@vtc.edu.hk

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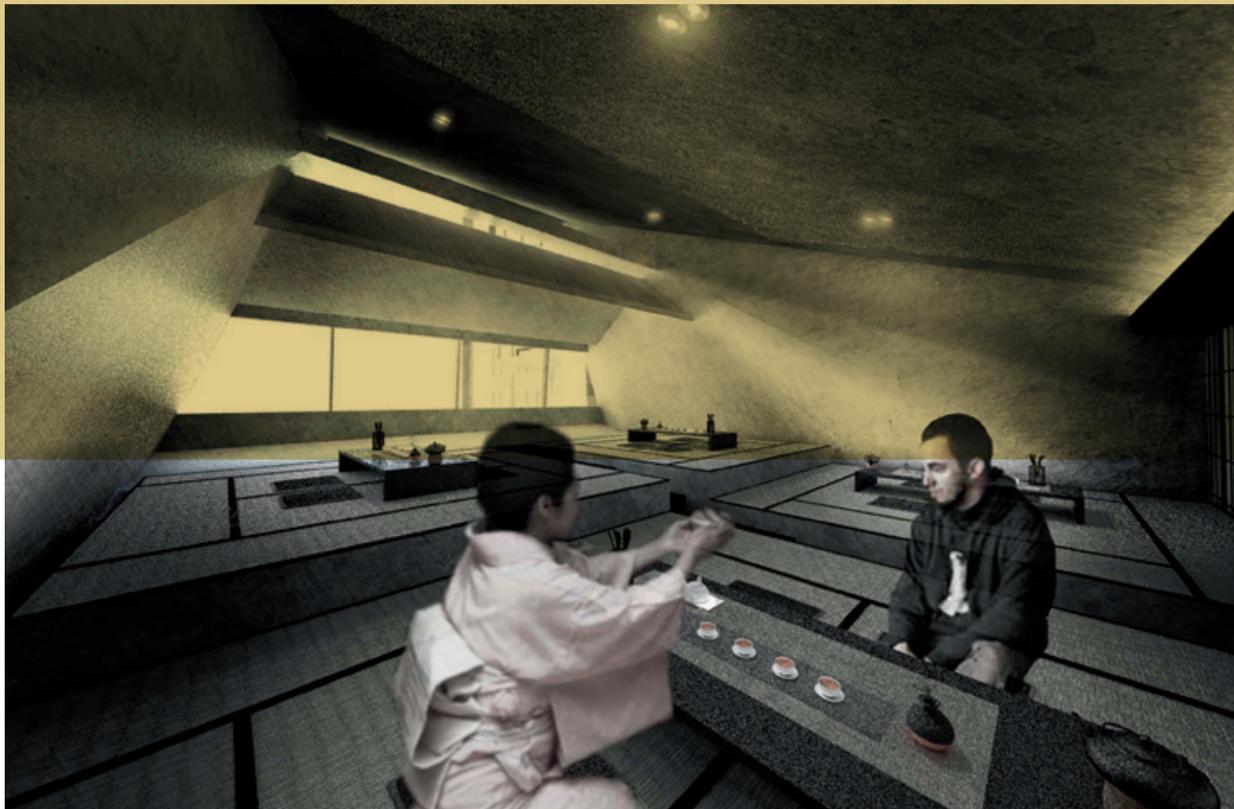
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Music Therapy Tea House

|| This issue, we bring you the latest award-winning designs from students and alumni of Hong Kong Design Institute (HKDI), and an introduction to the unique E5 design thinking actions developed by HKDI's very own Design Thinking team. ||

HKDI alumni Ka-wing Chu impressed the Global Awards Programme (GAP) jury panel with his creative design project Music Therapy Tea House. The Interior Design graduate gained a Silver Award in this prestigious global architecture award presented by the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers (IFI). Already bearing a Gold Award from the student category of the 2017 Asia Pacific Interior Design Awards, Music Therapy Tea House is an interior design project incorporating conventional interior design and innovative acoustic elements. Chu studies and utilises the natural landscape of Shing Mun River in Sha Tin, and adopts characteristics of sunlight, breezes, flowing water and rustling leaves in his design to form a harmonious experience inside the tea house. Chu admits that he was inspired by the concept behind Japanese Chado

when creating this relaxing getaway. He hopes people could maintain a peaceful state of mind while enjoying the making and tasting of tea in the relaxing getaway.

Chu's award-winning tea house design employs concrete as its sole construction material. Cool-toned simple colours are visible throughout the entire space with inclined walls to amplify natural sounds. The tea house invites people to rediscover their primitive senses through engaging with the multi-sensory experiential space. With the help and guidance of HKDI's Department of Architecture, Interior and Product Design lecturer Penny Chan was able to formulate a comprehensive spatial experience through architectural textures, materials, spatial and acoustic designs.

Human Light

Mei-yee Lui's night light Human Light precisely captures the phrase "a hug lights up one's world". Inspired by the image of two people hugging each other, this innovative design gained a Bronze Award in the Student Division Conceptual Group of the Hong Kong Smart Design Awards 2020. The simple yet versatile design makes Human Light possible to be used not only as fixed lighting, but also an illuminating bracelet and even a doorstopper. The luminous band can be separated from its base, allowing users to easily pick it up and carry around at night.



REASY



REASY not only simplifies the daily domestic recycling process but also encourages people to keep the habit of compressing packaging prior to disposal. Narrowed midway, Shing-kai Liu's design takes a slender pillar shape that has an inner compartment for compressed waste. The bottom compartment of REASY contains a filter to drain water from washed packaging. To strengthen the connection between domestic and public recycling, REASY is lightweight and safely concealed, allowing users to carry it to public waste collection stations worry-free.

Design Thinking PMQ

The PMQ Seed – To Open Minds programme is a series of educational projects and activities targeting primary school students. It consists of a teaching team made up of 30+ participants of design professionals, architects, IT experts, performing artists and primary school teachers. HKDI recently hosted a train-the-trainer workshop for the PMQ teaching team, in order to help them better navigate through design education. During the workshop, HKDI continued to emphasise on the importance of empathy, and also introduced its unique E5 design thinking actions.

Empathy is a key element to both education and design. Therefore, participants were highly engaged in action-based activities such as lead user interviews and co-creation exercises. Through these activities, trainees gained a more thorough understanding of end-users' needs and expectations.

Developed by HKDI's very own Design Thinking Team, the E5 actions is composed of 5 categories: Engage, Envision, Experiment, Evaluate and Enable. During the training workshop, HKDI encouraged interdisciplinary discussions and collaborations, and embraced the exploration of both divergent and convergent actions for user-centred innovations. After the 18-hour workshop, participants could skillfully embed design thinking methodologies into their own programme-planning processes.



The informative and practical workshop came to completion with all participants feeling fruitful, gaining design-thinking and education insights and looking forward to the commencement of the Seed – To Open Minds programme.

New Generation, New Force

Emerging Design Talents returns in 2020 with a diverse line-up of online exhibitions and virtual activities. The annual design show presents a curated selection of cross-disciplinary works ranging from Fashion and Image Design, Communication Design, Interior Design, Product Design, Digital Media and more. This year's theme is "Design for Well-Being", both a prompt reflection on today's social needs and an advocacy for better living.



The annual event opens with "The Revolutionary Image of the New Generation", an exhibition taking place at the West Kowloon Cultural District, showcasing wearable arts created by graduates of Higher Diploma in Fashion and Image Design. This year, the online programme is as vibrant a scene as the physical venues. Fashion and Image Design graduates also present "New Fashion Force" online, in addition to a digital version of the opening ceremony image show; Graduates from the Department of Communication Design host a

virtual graduation show followed by a panel discussion with leading industry partners and distinguished alumni; Graduates from the Department of Digital Media bring live performances including "Music in Motion 2020" and "Unleash Your Musical Self", as well as motion picture screening "Beyond Imagination". The opening event and programmes act as powerful previews marking an even more inspiring and creative lineup of exhibited projects. Below are some highlights.



Musubi by Pui-yi CHAN

Musubi stands for "knots" in Japanese. As the name implies, Chan provides an interesting and distinctive interpretation on the bonds between humans, society and cultures. Technique-wise, the project bridges culture and time as Chan applies traditional techniques such as bundling, weaving, and tangling on modern clothing design; and takes inspirations from traditional Japanese patterns.



VARIETY Optics by Ka-po YIU

Natural phenomena such as gradient, refraction, reflection and perspectives become powerful tools and inspirations in designer Yiu's fashion series "VARIETY - Optics". Yiu uses techniques including stitched shibori, pleating, printing and draping to achieve versatile forms and silhouettes, mimicking the unique natural effects of optics.



Feeling by Kai-tsz CHIU

Chiu hopes to raise awareness of environmental pollutions we currently face but tend to overlook. Through her video project, Chiu reimagines a way of living allowing humans to enjoy the diverse yet delicate sounds and scenery of nature. The project advocates for us to be more present and conscious about our living environment.

Mid-Summer Bloom

by Kwan-ching PANG

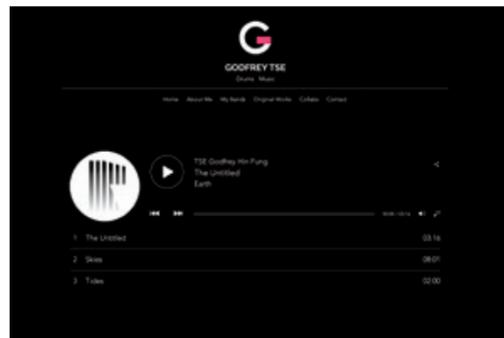
Pang's project consists of three original songs "Free", "Summer Bloom" and "Indian Guidebook". The summery theme brings listeners on a joyful experience, as Pang hopes to use his music to inject positivity into people through this time of uncertainty.



The Nature

by Godfrey TSE

Tse's series includes "the Untitled", "Skies" and "Tides". Together, "Nature" depicts weariness and loss faced by many urban dwellers. Tse aims to encourage listeners to learn the valuable lessons from negative experiences, but not necessarily defined by them.



The Missing Wallet

by Ikey POON

Poon intends to provoke evidence-based thinking, logical deduction and informed decision-making skills within children using an interactive booklet The Missing Wallet. In addition to reading, the booklet contains a series of card games, taking young readers on a mission to seek answers in every little detail within Poon's careful illustrations.

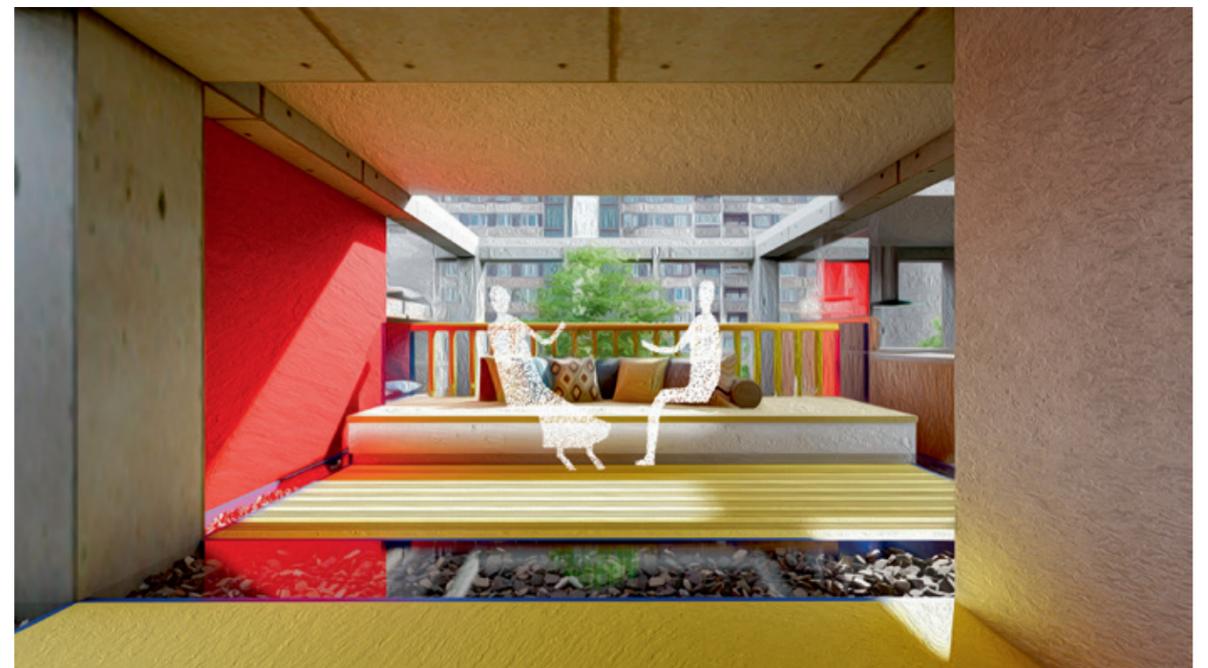
Not only designed to facilitate children's intellectual development, The Missing Wallet also emphasises cultivating children's empathy and caring for others.



Yuen Sek Oriental Tableware

by Alvin LIU

Inspired by Oriental food culture, Liu's design accommodates eating habits of the Far East. "Yuen Sek- Oriental Tableware" is a collection of dinnerware that includes a lightweight octagonal plate, a similarly shaped bowl, chopsticks for easily picking up food, zigzag-edged bowls for securing noodles, and mini bowls for placing bones and shells.



Safe House for Everyone

by Lammie LUK

Luk did extensive research on sheltering facilities in Hong Kong and found they were prone to gender and age biases. Therefore, Luk makes sure in the conceptualisation and designing of "Safe House for Everyone", that is a welcoming environment for any victims of domestic violence, regardless of gender and age.

DESIGNING FOR BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

Text by Steve Jarvis

Design, and designers, exist in a complex new age and work within a vastly increased range of actors and design considerations. Beyond the creation of a standalone product or service, successful design is now also gauged on how effectively connections amongst people, products, and services are realised. Consequently, the 2020 series of Signed is dedicated to understanding why people's need must always be the starting point for any designed solutions.

The concept of Human-centred Design has been central to helping us understand the potential of Design to make positive impacts within societies. In Signed #22, we concentrated on the principles, processes and strategies used by Social Design organisations to stimulate social change. In Signed #23 we focused on Wellness Design services, introducing practical examples of projects that give hope, dignity, and social connection to individuals and communities. In this final installment, Signed #24, we extend these themes and highlight a selection of products that demonstrate the capacity of Human-centred Design to help overcome pressing physical and social divides.

Our first story, Life Café, shows how carefully designed communication spaces can reduce people's resistance to talking about important subjects and difficult transition periods in their lives. The second story, Open Style Lab, provides a compelling example of participatory design enabling people living with a disability feel more included in mainstream society. The third story, Eatwell Assistive Tableware, demonstrates how needs-appropriate design can restore dignity and pleasure, to the rudimentary act of taking a meal. Our fourth story, Empathy Toy, highlights the importance of play as a way to build and refine the foundational skill of empathy and foster harmonious interaction under challenging circumstances.

Finally, by way of conclusion to the three issues, is a discussion with Professor Kees Dorst, which explores the significance of the previous twelve stories using the lens of values-based design. His argument, that only by identifying and responding to our deepest human values will we be able to address the most pressing challenges in our society, is both compelling, and a fitting conclusion to this three-part exploration of Human-centred Design.

SHARING ABOUT DEATH GIVES MEANING TO LIFE

Sitting in a group talking about the best ways to finish up one's life may seem a bit morbid, but the reality is it can be very life-enhancing. All too often important things in a person's life go unsaid – it can be a heavy burden to carry, and can leave scars of regret after it is too late. In England a new, but reassuringly familiar way to tackle such heavy subjects is starting to take root.

Text by Steve Jarvis Photographs by Life Café

While increasing standards of living and access to healthcare is always good news, it also means that ever greater numbers of elderly are coming to terms with their finite time on the planet. In countries such as the United Kingdom, where nuclear families have become the norm, it also means that the majority of people face the prospect of spending their final days in aged care facilities separated from their loved ones and familiar surroundings. When the cause of aged people's suffering is estrangement from loved ones and community, there is no quick medical fix. In fact, it is the opposite approach of increasing human connections and allowing people to express their most intimate thoughts in a relaxed and comfortable setting, that is proving most hopeful in easing the emotional turmoil of end-of-life care.

In aged care homes and community centres around England, small groups of friends and residents gather around gingham clothed tables, fill their cups and select something sweet from the cake stand. It is an everyday scene, but in this instance, the people have come together to share their thoughts on how they want to spend the final stage of their lives. Broaching the subject of death can be a sensitive topic for all concerned, but joining a Life Café is one way for people to talk openly about their feelings. The goal is to make people feel comfortable and at ease, so they can share stories about care and how they feel about it, and how they want to feel in the future. It is a space to uncover what is meaningful in life and in care, a process made easier by the Life Café Kit, a carefully curated selection of resources and activities to promote meaningful conversations.



A research project takes on a life of its own

Life Cafés emerged from the Design to Care programme, a research project funded by the charity Marie Curie. The Life Café was designed by Sheffield Hallam University's Lab4Living, an innovative social research centre with a track record in using co-design and community engagement in their research activities. The project aimed to reconceptualise approaches to palliative and end-of-life care in a way that is more aligned with the wishes of all involved, and done in a way that is dignified and accessible. While conventional approaches to end of life issues focus on technical and clinical aspects, Professor Claire Craig and her collaborator Helen Fisher turned to community engagement as a pathway rich in possibilities for improving the quality of a person's last stages of life.

The Life Café was originally a research methodology designed to answer the questions of what does care look like now, and how can it be done better. Craig wanted to call it the Life Café because it was not so much about dying, as about living well toward the end of life. Drawing on Craig's previous research into "object elicitation," they brought together groups of people in aged care facilities and community settings and used a range of visual and cognitive props, including photographs, question cards, and objects such as pine cones to stimulate discussion. These conversation tools were deliberately abstract and open-ended enough for participants to reflect on the props as a way to explore personal issues. The response surprised even

the researchers, as they found that people tended to settle down very quickly and talk about incredibly deep things.

Having people bring objects to supplement the objects and devices already in the box helped with the iterative co-design process. Fisher describes it as "a kind of behind-the-scenes co-design process, where we would identify themes and trace similarities in conversations that were developing. We were able to identify what artefacts should be in the box, what the box looked like, and adding such things as a cake stand." For Craig, "The plan was never to have the kit as a finished product, it was simply a research tool. But people kept asking where they could get one from, and people wanted to have one because the conversations they were having with the aid of the kit were so rich and so immediate we felt it was a bit mean to take away such a valuable tool just because it was part of a research project."



THEME

Life Café

- 1. Simple objects evoke memories or become metaphors
- 2. A relaxed environment puts all at ease
- 3. Pop-up people can help voice deepest desires



1



2



3

There is no one way to share

Craig maintains, "It is essential for people to take ownership of their own Life Cafés, so they can modify and use it how they wish. Many of Life Café's facilitators have little experience in the role, so the kit takes this into account and guides them through the process, while also encouraging them to use it as they wish." Currently, there are at least 10 aged care homes holding regular Cafés, and the understanding gained from these is not only improving participant's human relationships, but is also being put to use in care planning. "The key to Life Café success lies in its ability to unlock the potential that already exists in communities but is overlooked," says Craig. "Life Café is designed to help unlock this potential by creating a safe space and inviting people to think and talk about things differently."

The positive feedback has been overwhelming, with many stories of deepening understanding between loved ones, and within the everyday lived environments of the participants. Craig continues, "Life Café reminds us of the importance of talking about the hard stuff in society, and having ways to ease these conversations is now more important than ever considering the pandemic. Something that has highlighted the dangers of conversations that need to take place not taking place, and once it is too late it only leaves regret. It is a terrible burden to live with." Life Café, and its ability to build bridges of communication, is a reminder that life is for living regardless of how much time may be left. It is an important lesson for us all.



Name: Life Café
 Location: United Kingdom
 Contact: www.lifecafe.org.uk



FUNCTIONAL FASHION IS A BRIDGE TO SOCIETY

Slipping on a coat, or pulling off a t-shirt are reflex actions for most people. Now imagine that every time you had to do this meant asking for help. Even more intimidating, when out in public what if you had to make this request to a stranger. Open Style Lab has set itself the mission to help reduce such daily struggles for people living with a disability.

Text by Steve Jarvis Photographs by Open Style Lab



2

From fashionista to fast fashion, whether we like it or not, what we wear every day says something to the world around us. Clothes, however, are designed almost exclusively for able-bodied people, so for those with physical disabilities, dressing is a constant reminder that one does not fit in. These individuals often need clothes designed to fit their unique physical and functional needs, an almost impossible challenge for the off-the-rack fashion industry. Fortunately, Open Style Lab (OSL) is raising awareness of this issue and supporting the design of functional and fashionable wearables for people that struggle to control their limbs, spend their time in wheelchairs, or any of the other infinite possibilities that an individual may require to feel well presented to the world.

New York-based Open Style Lab is a nonprofit organisation filling the gap in the fashion marketplace for adaptive clothing—clothes that meet the individual needs of people with disabilities. OSL started in 2014 as a workshop series, with 8 disabled clients having their specific needs addressed by teams of design students

1. Even the kit container is designed for easy access
2. Clear and detailed instructions
3. Expert input maximises outcomes
4. Hands-on experience in workshops
5. The programme can be life changing



3



5



4

mentored by experts in the field of design, engineering, and occupational therapy. In 2015, OSL collaborated with Parsons School of Design to bring their summer programme to New York with a sponsored class, as part of the CEO Grace Jun's full-time faculty position to connect education with research practice. Based on the OSL model of co-creation, the Parson's elective course and the summer programme brings together teams of fashion designers, engineers, rehabilitative professionals, and people with disabilities to produce high-quality designs and products such as adaptive clothing and style-hacking tools.

Personalised fashion changes lives

Under the guiding philosophy of human-centred design, OSL has made a dramatic improvement in its clients' lives. Design highlights include accessible winter coats, pants and skirts to aid the toiletry needs of the mobility impaired, raincoats for wheelchair users, and inflatable vests

for people living with back pain. The ten-week summer programme is based on an intensive and thorough co-creation process divided into two – the first half consisting of reading, writing and listening to guest lecturers, and the second half consisting of co-creating with clients. Co-creating teams get as detailed as possible an understanding of the client's needs, including interviews, and shadowing clients as they go through their daily routines. After this initial phase, close interaction with the client continues as the team moves on to brainstorming and prototyping. The programme concludes with a final presentation of adaptive garments and innovative style-hacking tools created by the teams.

OSL is on a mission to increase awareness of the importance of producing accessible clothing and accessories for people with disabilities. This includes outreach to school and various public forums, but also extends to pushing boundaries for materials and wearable technology that allow greater freedom of movement and integration into society. Another important element of their work is advocacy and

consulting. For the business world, the persuasiveness of their pitch rests on the potential for meeting the needs of the disabled market. Considering up to 20 percent of the US population identify as having some degree of disability, numbers that will swell with an ageing population, there is considerable opportunity for companies with the foresight and flexibility to address this market and its unmet demand.

Within society, the disabled population is often treated as monolithic, failing to pay respect to the incredible diversity of the needs and unique conditions that exist. Consequently, OSL works with fashion, technology and health companies to develop new designs and products that can be adapted to an individual's needs. In addition, drawing upon their research and development experience, technology innovation activities and rapid prototyping capabilities, OSL is able to help companies through the process of visualising and creating their own universally designed products.

THEME

Open Style Lab

These efforts to help shift the market are complemented by an empowerment mission for disabled people. Central to this is the Hack•ability Kit, a super-charged toolkit allowing disabled people to modify their own clothes. The kit is available for purchase online and contains all that is necessary for a crash course in ability-appropriate sewing. Contents include information on materials and their unique characteristics; a range of patterns and supplies to attach easy-access pocket; loops for hand grips; and instructional media introducing the strategies and tools needed to become a self-designer. The Hack•ability Kit lets users experiment with fashion, express their style, and with a range of specially designed tools included in the kit, they can reinvent the off-the-shelf clothes already in their wardrobes.

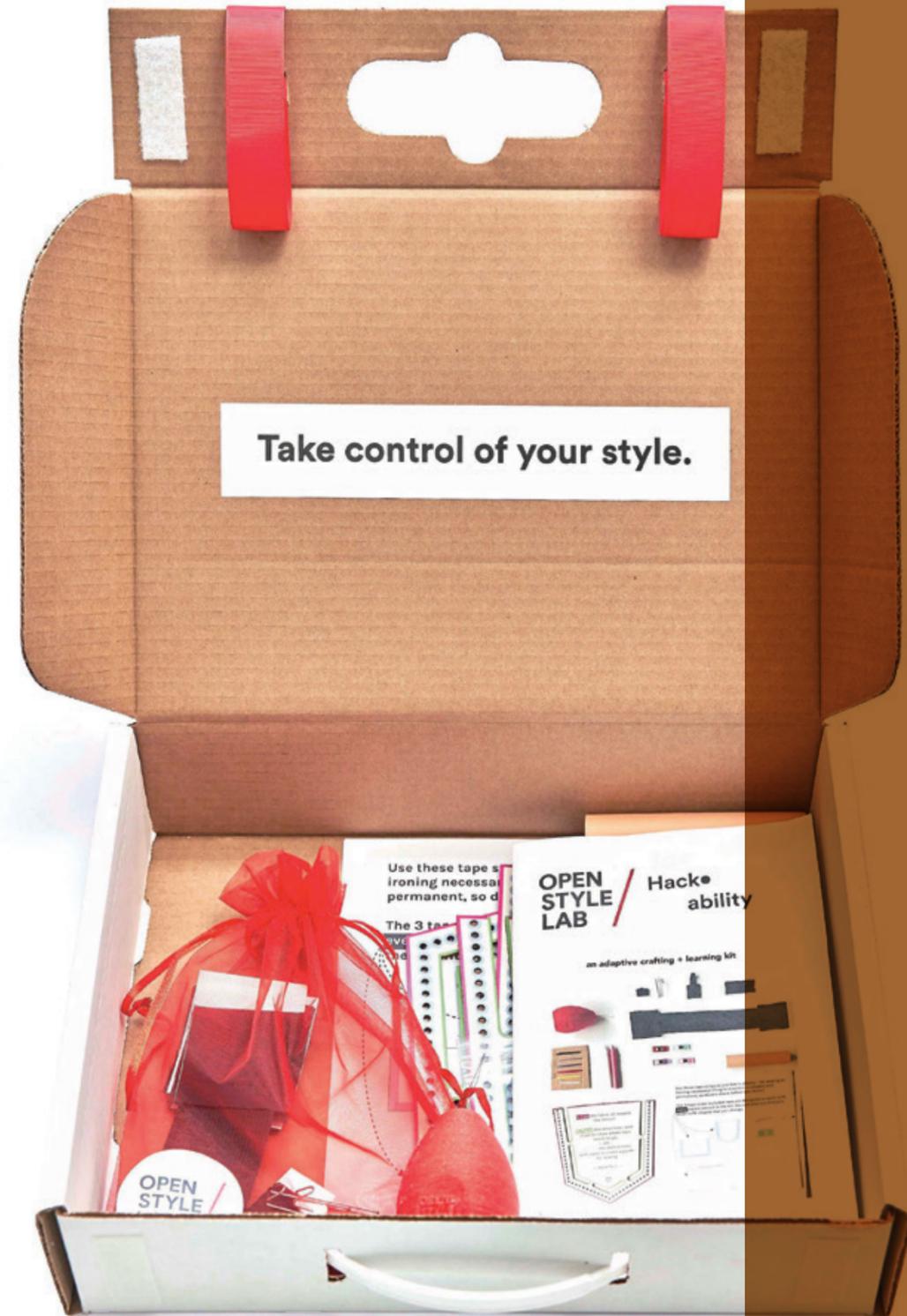
Working collaboratively with disabled clientele allows OSL to create products that meet the actual function and style needs of people with disabilities. The beneficiaries of these designs get the independence, freedom, and confidence they need to more wholly integrate into their communities. Irene Park, a former client and now OSL Ambassador, puts the challenge of bringing disabled people closer into the fold of mainstream society into perspective. "I loved that through Open Style Lab, young men and women realise wholeheartedly that disability isn't something to be feared or hated, but an ordinary challenge that like any other just needs the right solutions." It is an inspiring message, not only for designers but for all that seek to live in a more equitable society.



2



Name: Open Style Lab
Location: United States
Contact: www.openstylelab.org



3

1. Design is a collaborative process
2. The empowering process of making your own clothes
3. The kit includes all that is needed to get a start in personalised design

Eating is such a fundamental and enjoyable part of being human. However, for those dealing with age-related conditions such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease the simple task of feeding oneself is far from straightforward. Struggling at mealtime not only endangers ones' health, but just as importantly, it comes with a sense of helplessness and embarrassment that causes additional emotional suffering and puts stress on relationships.

Text by Steve Jarvis
Photographs by Eatwell

TABLEWARE DESIGNED WITH LOVE



1. Easy to grip and stable to hold
2. Independent eating gives dignity
3. Feedback was essential to the design process
4. A secured napkin saves spills and soils



1

Meal times are supposed to be a time of sharing and joy, but for people with impaired cognitive function it is all too often a time of stress and isolation. One solution to easing this burden has been created by a Taiwanese designer Sha Yao, who created Eatwell, an assistive tableware set that alleviates the physical and emotional burden of getting adequate nutrition. Eatwell Assistive Tableware is a universal design that can be used by anyone, but its brightly coloured and attractive tableware has been specifically designed for seniors

with cognitive impairment, as well as for small children and caregivers of those with special needs.

Yao's journey to creating a multi-award winning set of eating tableware started with her taking on the role of caregiver to her grandmother who was suffering from dementia. "It was heartbreaking, and I felt so helpless watching her suffer," Yao said. "She had always been very sharp and full of life." Unable to physically be there as a caregiver when Yao left Taiwan for graduate school in



3



2



4

the United States, she resolved to help her grandmother in a different way. "I decided to focus on helping her eat, because it was an activity she would do a few times a day, every day, and it was critical to her health," Yao said.

To better understand the disease and what she could do to help, Yao volunteered in adult daycare centers. "From exploring the daily activities through observation and talking with caregivers, I found that daily activities related to the everyday lives of people with Alzheimer's can be frustrating for their caregivers. I discovered that eating was one of the most challenging daily activities. It's very easy for the family members or caregivers of a person with dementia to get frustrated or feel helpless when that person loses interest or refuses to eat, and their health deteriorates or condition worsens from a lack of nutrition."

Through personal experience and wider research into cognitive impairments, Yao came up with a set of goals for the project: to increase food intake, maintain dignity for users, and alleviate the burden on care givers by making the process of eating as easy as possible. Yao devoted over 4 years

of research and development for the tableware, experimenting with materials and generating many iterations of design, sketches, mock-ups and revisions. The result was the Eatwell Assistive Tableware set, a seven-piece tableware set with 20 unique features specifically designed to meet the needs of those with physical, motor, and cognitive impairments.

From research she learnt that bright colours assisted people with cognitive conditions to maintain focus on the food and beverages, and also helped to contrast the food from the plate making the food easier to identify. For people with compromised motor skills, such as those with Parkinson's disease, standard tableware does not allow them to easily scoop up the food, and handles for utensils and cups were often ill suited to people with lesser coordination. Her solution was to make the bowls with a gradient on one side so the food would collect, and incorporated right angled walls so the food was easier to scoop onto a spoon. Unsteady hands also meant that a significant amount of food was wasted, either falling off the utensil or pushed over the edge of a bowl, and drinks were commonly spilled or tipped over.



1

Challenges were overcome with easy grip utensils, non-slip bases for plates, bowls and cups, and a mug handle that goes all the way to the bottom to ease grip. As a finishing touch, the Eatwell ensemble comes with a tray which includes holes to fasten a napkin and help protect the eater from spilling food on their clothes or on the floor.

Reaching a point where she was happy with the design of the tableware set was only part of the journey, as bringing

the product to market posed another set of challenges. Negotiating with manufacturers, government agencies and customs brokers to ease the export of Eatwell all presented fresh challenges. To ease the path through government agency approval, Yao used food grade materials that were proven safe, and engaged a leading testing agency to confirm product safety. Further time was spent researching the conditions required to export the set, something complicated by every country and region having different standards that needed to be met. These steps not only require effort, but also funds to support the development. With the help of her partner, Yao started a crowd funding campaign on Indiegogo, which met its funding threshold and ensured the product could take the next step into scaled production.

Savvy crowd funders were not the only people impressed with Yao's design, as a pre-production version of set won first place at the 2014 Stanford Design Challenge from a field of 52 teams from 15 countries. By the end of 2015 Eatwell Assisted Tableware was on the market and was gaining attention, even

making Time Magazine's 2016 list for the "20 best inventions of the year." While acknowledgements and product success have been pleasing for Yao, her motivation lies on a deeper level. "Raising awareness and addressing the needs of people with impairments will allow them to maintain their dignity, retain as much independence as possible, and reduce the burden on their caretakers." While her grandmother passed before she could show her the design she had inspired, she takes comfort that it will help others suffering similar conditions.



Name: Eatwell Assistive Tableware
Location: Global
Contact: www.eatwellset.com

1. Sha Yao with her design inspiring grandmother
2. The bowl and spoon are angled just right for easy scooping

2





PLAYING WITH ESSENTIAL SKILLS —
**A TOY FOR
THE TWENTY-
FIRST CENTURY**

A toy originally designed to help the visually impaired navigate their way through unfamiliar territory, is being put into practice in the sighted community as a fun way to learn the foundational skills of empathy and thoughtful communication. The Empathy Toy is a collaborative puzzle game that can only be solved when players learn to understand each other, and it has something to teach us all.

Text by Steve Jarvis Photographs by Twenty One Toys

THEME
Empathy Toy

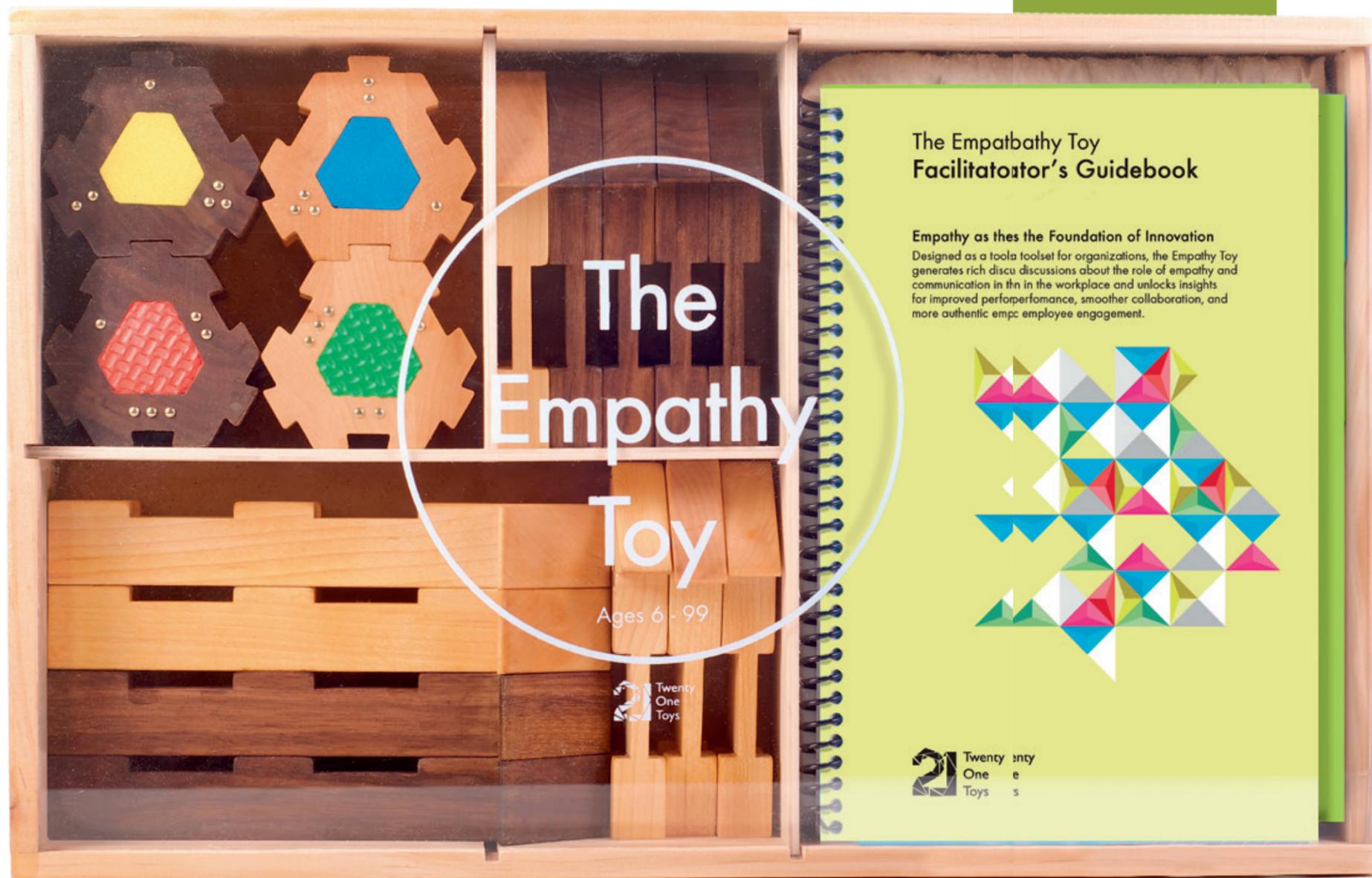
Creativity and interpersonal skills are looked to as a foundation to future-proofing students in an unknowable job market. But how do we go about learning a new skill set more suited to the demands of life in the twenty-first century?

Before entering school, children learn an important set of skills by playing with each other. As is life itself, play can be a messy, insensitive, rough and tumble activity. However, it is precisely this process that gives children a foundational understanding for how to interact with each other, and builds skills of communicating

what they want, and how to organize and participate. Ilana Ben-Ari, a Canadian toy designer, is convinced of the need to reintroduce play to schools to teach the soft skills necessary for children to succeed in the future. Her company Twenty One Toys is on a mission to do just this.

Ben-Ari created the Empathy Toy while studying design at university. It started out as a navigational aid for the visually impaired, and was built on a set of design principles. Going beyond the research literature, she spent time with people living with visual impairment, as well as with

their friends and family. "I immediately recognised that there is actually a huge social and emotional gap between the visually impaired community and the sighted community." Struck by how compromised the educational situation for visually impaired was, she decided to create a game that would help bridge the experience of students with sight and those without. Based on an orientation and mobility exercise called Where Am I? Where Am I Going? How Do I Get There? she developed a game that visually impaired students could play with sighted students to break down the barriers of communication.



There are no age limits on the benefits of playing this game.

From project to product

The toy she developed from her thesis project was well received, even winning a 'Best In Show' award at a national-level design competition, but her efforts to sell her work to a toy company failed to generate interest. Ben-Ari knew that what she had made could change education for the better, but if there was not a suitable company to sell her toy, she would have to create a company to do just that. In 2012, after quitting her day job, she founded Twenty One Toys. The goal was to prove her toy's educational merits, not just as a way to facilitate understanding and empathy between sighted and visually impaired, but to help anyone that wanted to heighten their sense of awareness, creativity, and empathy.

The game itself is quite straight forward. Two players are given identical sets of distinctively-shaped wooden blocks that can be fitted together in any one of hundreds of combinations. The task of the game is for one player to create a configuration using the distinctly shaped components, and then describe to the other player how to recreate that particular shape using their own components. The trick is, they have to do it blindfolded. "Playing the game well means having to imagine another player's position, and requires participants to work together in developing a common language to solve problems," explains Ben-Ari. "In the span of 5 to 10 minutes, you're

dealing with patience, frustration, but most importantly, how are you going to creatively communicate this abstract thing that you can only see with your hands so that another can recreate it."

The Empathy Toy is a crash course in refining the skills of socially and harmoniously interacting with people. It has proved effective in helping increase communication and for empathy building in education, including reducing racial discrimination incidents in schools. While it may have started life as being for children, it has found a valuable role in the adult world, and it is proving a useful tool with much wider application and deeper significance. The toy is helping to build better communication and teamwork, being used in job interviews as a condensed insight into a candidate's ability to work under pressure, deal with frustration, and assess people skills. It can now be found in hundreds of schools and businesses around the world helping teach group work, communication and leadership, and its players cover all levels of business from new entrants to CEOs.

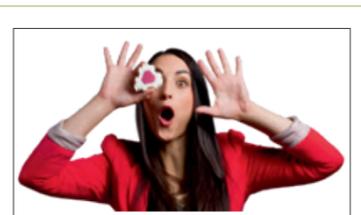


A better way to learn

Ben-Ari believes that play drives learning and that toys can be the new textbooks, fostering a style of learning that is far more suited to the demands of the 21st century. “The long-term vision is to create a toy-based curriculum. If we are going to be teaching creativity, innovation and social and emotional skills, that is something we can’t do with textbooks,” says Ben-Ari. Her company’s next toy, the Failure Toy, is an important step toward this goal, and promises to help players better understand the processes and importance of not succeeding at everything you do. Something we inevitably all have to deal with, and the more practice we get the better for our wellbeing.

It is not that often that a project originally designed to help disabled people, finds itself being enthusiastically taken up in the mainstream able-bodied market. Empathy Toy is one such product. One where success is not so much about completing the challenge,

but acquiring the skills you hone while explaining something you can’t see, to someone else who can’t see. While the saying “the blind leading the blind” evokes images of hopelessness, in the case of The Empathy Toy it is the blind bonding with the blind where the true power of the toy can be found. It is this type of human connection that is overwhelmingly positive and essential to creating a better society together.



Name: [The Empathy Toy](#)
 Location: [Canada](#)
 Contact: www.twentyonetoy.com



The sets for each player are identical except for colour.

PROFESSOR KEES DORST (UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY)

VALUES-BASED DESIGN AS A PATH TO ACTION

Modern life is burdened with so many problems that even when a project succeeds, it can leave one with a sense of rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. However, there is cause for optimism. As the preceding stories make clear, things get better when people get connected. Professor Kees Dorst helps us to understand this process and its importance.

Text by Steve Jarvis



Connecting community

(Photo by studio L)



Fighting isolation

(Photo by GoodGym)



Dignified eating

(Photo by Eatwell)

VALUES

As a bookend for this three-part investigation into Human-centred Design we talk to Professor Kees Dorst on the subject of designers anchoring their work at the value level, and the key role this form of 'deep design' can play in transforming societies. A leading figure in Design theory and its practical application, Dorst's Frame Innovation methodology offers one promising approach to dealing with the many complex and difficult to solve problems found in modern societies. At its core, Frame Innovation is a problem framing methodology. Dorst elaborates, "It is not about changing people's opinions about something, but more about bringing people to a level of common understanding of the deep issues, and helping them to imagine different ways of thinking about the problems being faced."

The critical steps in re-imagining social problems are exploring the values of those connected to the problem. "To get a good grasp at what are the core problems and core values involved we first need a rich understanding of the situation. People have to step away from their roles and preconceived ideas to get closer to the root causes of the problem, rather than just dealing with abstractions and the simplifications that hold the problem in place." For Kees, "the big question is not what action, but what values are we trying to achieve."

At every stage of design in the stories featured we see clear examples of these processes in action. In the first issue, Signed #22, the central role of studio-L, City Repair, and Waag is to provide a framework to bring groups of people together to communicate what

is important to them, and to help them build understanding and agreement on what actions should be taken. Further, all three of these stories identify project ownership as central to their work, spurring those directly affected by a problem to dictate the parameters of what should be done, and how it should be done. These are fundamental steps in identifying and building upon participants' values. People are drawn together by concerns such as isolation, alienation, or the need to cope with technological and social change. Such serious and complex problems may not be solvable, but participating in the social design process is a pathway to sharing deeply held values, and offers significant potential to make a positive contribution.

We need look no further than the activities highlighted in the subsequent issues, Signed #23 and #24, to see the

power of designing from deep human values come to the fore. Projects such as Bakery Simplicity and Life Café have the explicit objective of almost unconsciously bringing participants to a level of deep discussion of very personal matters and firmly held beliefs. In this sense, the baking process and the café's discussion artefacts are just tools that allow the act of value expression and deep reflection to take place. For other projects, such as GreenKayak's fostering appreciation of the environment, these deeper human values are something to be nurtured and spread from the act of participation. Likewise, with GoodGym, the act of giving, even if motivated by self-interest, generates enthusiasm for selflessly contributing to building community and overcoming social isolation.



Preserving heritage

(Photo by Waag)



Appreciating nature

(Photo by GreenKayak)



Remaking stereotypes

(Photo by Shared Portals)



Bridging communities

(Photo by Bakery Simplicity)

ACTION

The stories featured in these three issues are proving effective because they identify and creatively address the root causes of the problems they face. Whether it is a solo design effort, such as Eatwell, or community design efforts as with studio-L, listening, accepting, and putting people's primary concerns at the centre of all action is the common trait uniting the stories. This process of identifying what is important is the central building block for Dorst's Frame Innovation process, where the core

values and concerns of a problem's stakeholders are subsequently distilled into themes. In turn, these themes serve as the guiding points for re-thinking problems in a different context and creating a "new frame" of understanding or question to solve, that can then be applied to the original problem. Dorst notes, "Reframing issues gives people a chance to move forward, by acknowledging the reality of what needs to be done to meet the needs of the situation."

A pithy example of Frame Innovation can be found in the story of Street Debater, Signed #23, which identified the deep human values of restoring dignity and increasing social inclusion as the guiding principles to tackle homelessness and poverty. With Street Debater the conventional frame of 'beggars on the street being viewed with suspicion' is turned on its head, as engaging people in conversation becomes a job, even a public service, after being reframed. This answer was not reached overnight, but required

immersion in the situation—literally, Tomo Kihara became a street beggar, and rounds of iterative improvement to align the values and expectations of homeless people and those simply going about their daily business on the streets. In terms of Frame Innovation, the problem changed from how do we get people to give money to homeless, to how do we effectively engage passersby in meaningful conversations.

(Photo by Street Debater)



Reclaiming dignity

(Photo by Open Style Lab)



Feeling included

(Photo by Life Cafe)



Thoughtful reflection



Rekindling Neighbourliness

(Photo by Empathy Toy)

SIGNIFICANCE

Frame Innovation is like taking a holiday from understanding how we think a problem works, and it holds the possibility for such creative abstractions to generate fresh approaches to serious problems ailing society. But what can it tell us about driving deeper and more widespread social change? In his own work with the Designing Out Crime Research Centre, based in Sydney, Australia, Dorst has seen the weight of numbers of projects help to build a broad consensus for implementing positive social change. Commenting on Design's potential, he says, "What you need are really good projects, ones that reflect the reality of the problem being addressed. You need a lot of these projects, and they need to be based on a set of values that resonate with all the stakeholders."

Dorst is adamant that designing projects is a means to a destination, and not an end in itself. "To change the practices in an organisation you need to change the strategy in the organisation, and change the structure of the organisation if that is necessary, and you may want to change the way the whole sector functions." Realising such broad-based change is no easy task. "The problem is, the steps between strategy and practice don't work well, because strategy tends to be determined top down, and designers,

with all their insights and experience, are coming from the bottom up." Dorst argues that having "projects that show that things can be done differently, reinforced by a new underlying narrative are critical elements that can kick start a top-down rethink and usher in a fresh strategic vision.

The power of this argument was made clear with the case of City Repair, Signed #22, which started with a single neighbourhood coming together to paint their intersection as a way to reinvigorate neighbourly relations. While the ensuing years has seen it grow into a city-wide movement actively engaging citizens to build a people-friendly lived environment, its growth was as much orchestrated as it was organic. Persuasively putting their case to city government not only allowed City Repair to initially escape punishment for flouting city bylaws, they simultaneously created powerful allies that could smooth the path for the expansion of their activities and influence the direction of city planning and development. It is a profound development that could have only been hoped for in the earliest days of City Repair. In the words of co-founder Mark Lakeman, City Repair is not about, "building stuff, they are building relationships.....The process is the goal."

MESSAGE

When asked about the future of social design and how designers can adapt, Dorst responds:

"For effective social design, designers need to understand what is the social space, the space where you find and build on things in common. Even when people come from very different perspectives they may still have the same human values, so going to this value level builds commonality. If you don't deal with values, then you are basically stuck in negotiating competing interests, and you end up in a compromise between them. Sometimes this can be good enough, it can have solutions, but it is not changing things deeply."

Design is commonly understood as something you do as a project with defined and manageable goals. However, as Design is moving into more complex and social areas, its role will require thinking beyond just being about projects. Kees argues that "Projects don't change the world. It is about doing projects to create the evidence from which you can have these broader discussions. But this means you have to be able to function on a strategic level, and have the capacity to restructure the story that the sector tells itself about

how the sector functions, and basically attack the paradigm in the whole sector." Such profound changes take time, but building alliances between key stakeholders and connecting key projects on a foundation of shared values is a positive step in this direction.

Dorst leaves us with a caution for budding social designers. "Traditionally, design processes and projects are carried out in close collaboration with a client, who brings in a lot of the expertise and a lot of the knowledge. They also question your assumptions all the time, they are difficult, but that is their role. But in social design you often work for an indistinct client or "for society," so there is nobody having the role of injecting necessary knowledge, questioning assumptions or providing critical reflection. So often the bad social design projects you see have got that way because there were no processes in place to weed out naive assumptions and weaker ideas. Design needs to be much more respectful and sensitive to allow expertise from other fields to come in."

While aspiring designers are coming of age in an exciting time of boundless possibilities, it is also necessary to reflect on our responsibilities as designers. Dorst leaves us with a parting exhortation. "There is an

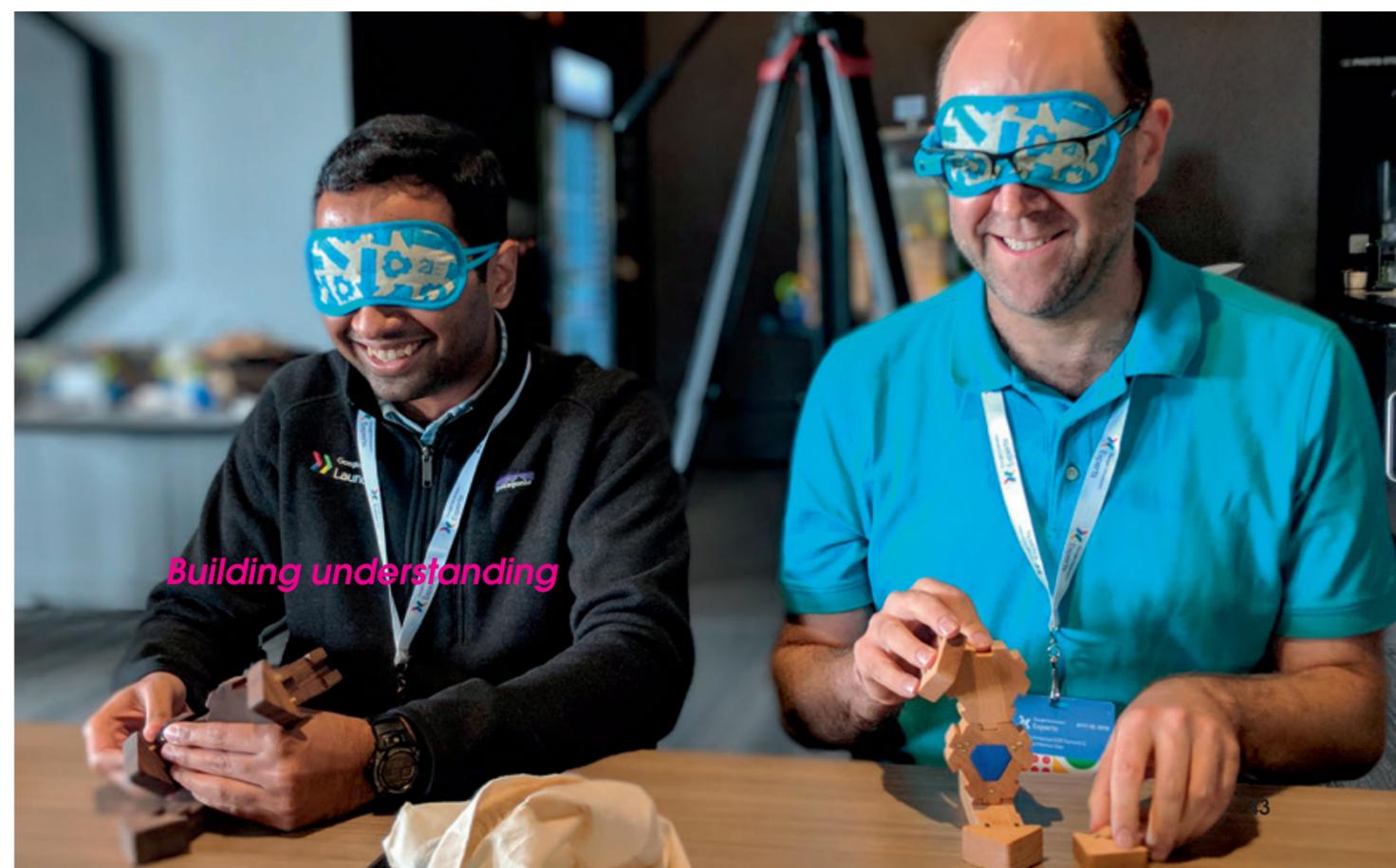
opportunity for Design to move into an important new role in societal change. But it is also a huge challenge to Design. We have to get this right. And we have no time to lose."

Kees Dorst



Kees Dorst is Professor of Design Innovation at the University of Technology Sydney's Faculty of Transdisciplinary Innovation. Author of multiple best-selling books and a leading thinker in developing the field of design, his work combines a deep philosophical understanding of the logic of design with hands-on practice. Building on extensive research into designerly ways of thinking, his body of work on paradigm shifts, framing and the nature and nurture of transdisciplinary practices is having a global impact.

(Photo by Empathy Toy)



Building understanding

DESIGN BY PEOPLE, FOR PEOPLE

Written by: Peter Wong Translation: Sunni Zhang

Yanki Lee, founding director of HKDI DESIS Lab for Social Design Research, returned on campus to speak at the Design Thinking lecture series. Titled *Design by People, for People*, the lecture zooms in on the relationship between design and human beings. With over 20 years of experience in design research and education, this is both a topic Dr. Lee has deeply explored, as well as what she believes to be the future direction for the field of design.

Lee began her training as a designer with the Interior Design program at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, followed by an MA in Architecture from the Royal College of Art. After her postgraduate degree, however, Lee did not further her studies in spatial design, nor did she begin working as a designer. Instead, she turned to design education and research at the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, which she

pursued for over a decade. During this time, Lee also earned a PhD in Design Participation from Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Throughout her career, Lee has focused on exploring the true meanings of design as a co-creative practice, and getting citizens involved in designing for their own living environment. For Lee: "My interest in how people interact with architecture is significantly higher than in architecture

itself. Ultimately, what I want to explore is the relationship between design and those that interact with it.

Conventionally, design practice leaves no room for human engagement. Even though the idea of designing for people was brought up with the emergence of 20th century Modernism, the conversation grew into few designer-led discussions lacking diversity. I

have always wanted to define clearly the relationship between design and people, and with years of research and practice, I propose *Design by People, for People*. It is a statement and a topic pointing straight to the future."

For those who know a thing or two about Lee's career, they will know that a big portion of her work addresses issues concerning the "elderly", and it started as early as when she began her research in design education in 2000. "At the time, I selected ageing as my research topic and older people as my main project partners, and went through a development process that can be summarised as 'design for them', 'with them' and 'by them'. For example, when I set a brief for my students to design a healthcare product for better walking, we invited some senior citizens as the future users during ideation and let my students practice 'designing with them'. We soon realised that these senior citizens were not designers after all, and we unavoidably were met with difficulties during communication. At the end of the day, we should not single-mindedly design with them just to advocate for an action that we consider as being politically right, but it is necessary to provide them with adequate background knowledge on design, introduce them to the basics of design, or even design tools for them to use during the process. It is all about making things easier for them to participate.

I did my doctoral design study at Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate during SARS outbreak, where I spent 18 months working on site for research and communicating with local residents. From there I learned that *design by people* is the way to go. The most effective and efficient way to solve issues faced by local community is to let themselves lead in the design process."

Professor Roger Coleman, the founding director at the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, played a major role in Lee's avid research in ageing and design. Professor Coleman's theory "*Design for Our Future Selves*" greatly influenced Yanki and even transformed her views on design, she says, "We will all grow old and become part of the ageing population of the future. Design should not only focus on changing the now, but also what's yet to come."

As Lee goes on about the older people

of the future, it is obvious that her focus extends beyond senior citizens and is essentially every single person in the society including "the others" outside of the design communities. With population ageing, there will be increase in the proportion of senior members. However, we should no longer think and act from the perspectives of designing for them or with them, but giving them the authority to lead and make decisions, and that is design by people.

In 2017, Lee co-founded social design collective and education charity, Enable Foundation with Ire Tsui, an expert in the media industry. The collective aims to inspire community creativity and promote "social design - design - future". It offers a platform for people of all age groups, industries and cultures, to come together and collaboratively brainstorm on possibilities of social innovation, letting citizens design for their own and future.

With this belief in mind, Enable Foundation created Social Innovation Design Labs (SI.DLab), a cross-generational and interdisciplinary programme facilitating co-creations between different individuals sharing similar value. Its first attempt is to address Hong Kong's population ageing issues in three innovative scopes, including *Fine Dying*, which invites the public to collaboratively design for faded matters in the urban culture; *Dementia Going*, which aims to bridge the gap between dementia patients and community living; and last but not least, *Productive Ageing*, an effective discussion on ageing creatively and with dignity in Hong Kong.

In the three years following Enable Foundation's establishment, Lee found it to be a great opportunity for her to continue to explore different possibilities of social innovation through engaging those outside of design communities. Through working and communicating with social work NGOs, Lee realised that staff within these organisations already possess a considerable amount of creative ideas, which she calls service innovation. Lee believes these services could be more holistically executed and even with their potentials maximised if design is incorporated in the process. In a way, the combination of service innovation and design produces social innovation.

With so much expertise in social design and design education, as well as being the founder of the HKDI DESIS Lab, Lee shares her insights on Design for Well Being, the research and education direction that HKDI has been actively promoting. "In my opinion, we first need to come to consensus on whose wellbeing we are addressing. From there, we can define our topic and operation methods. For an institution, it is possible to be more macroscopic with such a vague direction. For little and independent organisations like Enable Foundation, we need to accurately define and position ourselves before we begin any projects, so naturally we start with design research. We try to understand all factors relating to our topic, both internally and externally, and then we decide on how to begin with design to form the process and bring "the others" to co-create solution methodologies solutions for our future selves."



From left : Sunny Chow (COO of Enable Foundation), Ire Tsui and Yanki Lee (Co-Founders of Enable Foundation).



Domestic Data Streamers, a creative data firm founded by Barcelona native Pau Garcia, is driving changes in how people view and use data, both at home in Spain and abroad. Through interactive installations and exhibits, as well as innovative product designs, the studio is proving there's more to data than precise mathematics and unchallenged objectivity.

Written by Sunni Zhang

STORIES TO DRIVE CHANGE



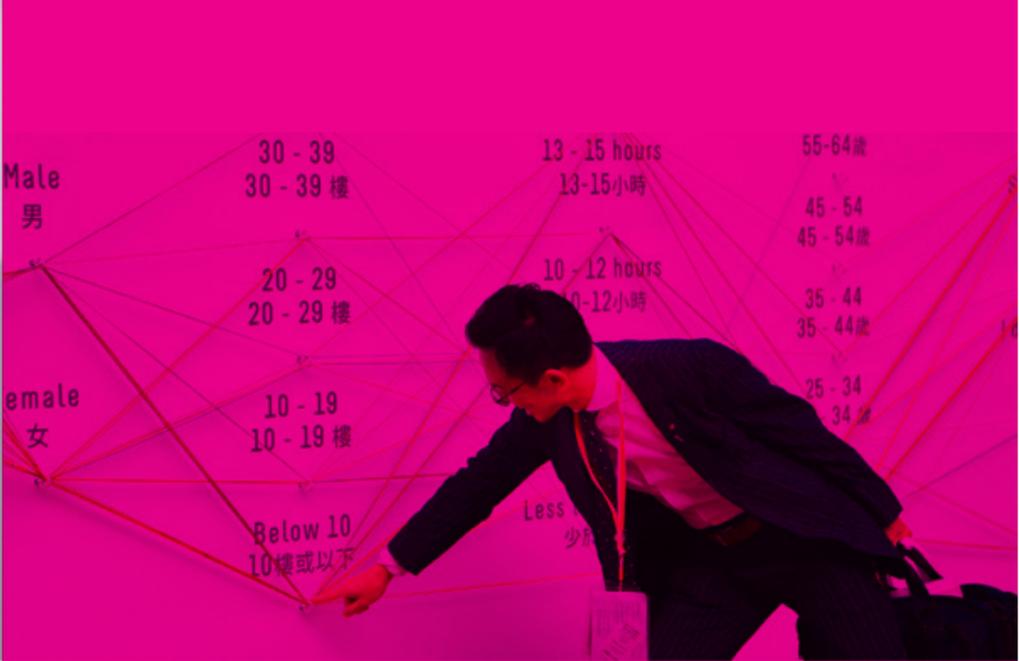
We now live in a world driven by data. If it still occurs to you that data resembles piles of cold hard information and numbers that only make sense for relentless analysts, meet Pau Garcia. Garcia leads Domestic Data Streamers, a studio aiming to transform our perceptions of data and how we interact with it. “We create participatory projects that build community and knowledge, communication campaigns that communicate, products that connect, and exhibitions that make people feel and think.” says Garcia. Currently, Domestic Data Streamers has worked on projects in more than 17 countries and with more than 130 collaborative partners.

“By itself raw data is nothing. I mean, it’s nothing important.” says Garcia, “The challenge of design is to activate data, to transform it into a narrative, a message.” Evidently, Domestic Data Streamers takes on that challenge. The studio’s installations use data as a starting point, and invite the public to participate and gain knowledge beyond readily visible information. “Design should make visible the insights and knowledge hidden behind numbers and trigger an action to improve, resolve or at least understand it.”

Garcia recognises the power of data in terms of its accuracy and efficiency, but he sees more potentials beyond

sole scientific applications. “The world is becoming a more complex, intricate and confusing place to live in. Numbers and data are key to understanding it, but they tend to detach the emotions that exist behind what they represent. I wanted to find a mix between the emotional side that arts have and the technical and pragmatic ways that I’d learnt in my design studies. Working with data in creative ways was the perfect way to integrate the most technical and empirical side with the explorative one.”

Empathy is a key element in Domestic Data Streamers’ works, but Garcia and his team are thinking ahead. “Design has always been human-centred, and



The global pandemic has put societies in turmoil and industries through uncertainty, but Garcia sees positive impacts during this unsettling time. He says, "People are more aware than ever that data can be manipulated, and that it needs the right context so that it is not misinterpreted or creating a false perception of reality. That is a good example of data literacy and I am happy to see that society is learning from its errors little by little."



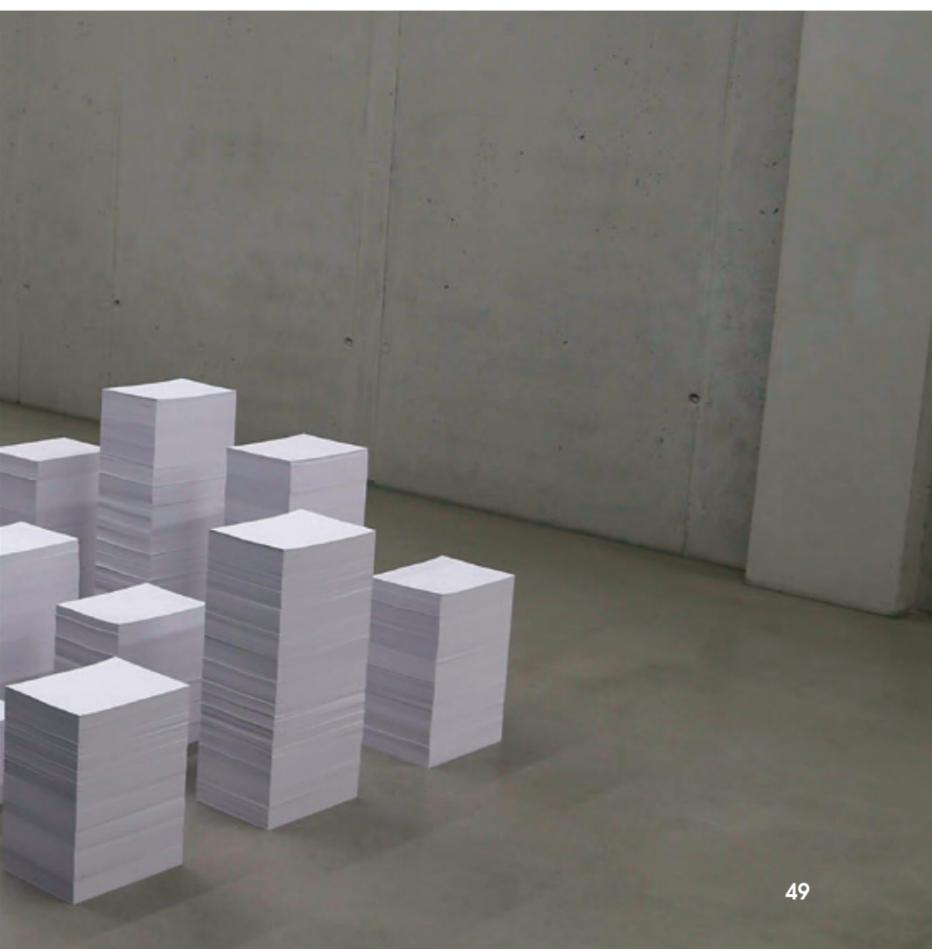
Pau Garcia, Founder of Domestic Data Streamers.

Having a physical and empirical experience with data-driven exhibits are a crucial part of Domestic Data Streamers' works, but with social distancing gradually becoming a new norm, the studio is also learning to adapt. The group had to cancel many of their planned projects or digitise them, foregoing the physical experience an installation brings. "You cannot pretend to have the same impact with a physical event, exhibition or show than with a digital one. We are three dimensional beings, we need this physicality in our lives to truly connect with ideas and people in a deeper way," admits Garcia, "I'm sure we will end up figuring out new ways to continue to interact physically with each other."

and visualisation. Data itself may be an observed and concentrated scientific fact, but that doesn't mean we need a merciless context to apply it. "Imagine for a moment that every number you see shows the emotions and human impact hidden behind it. Imagine they show what they truly mean: not explained from a cold and precise mathematical perspective, but from a close, messy and emotional human reality."

The process of adding, or rather, retrieving emotions to data, presents us with more possibilities in data utilisation

"To drive change, you need stories, not just a report."



if today we are moving towards an emotional-centred model it is because we are collectively starting to see the value in designing something that needs to have a deeper impact on human lives." Garcia explains, "Still, we believe we need to switch to an earth-centred design, understanding that we are just part of a bigger and more complex system that is the planet where we live in, with all the ecosystems and natural resources that it contains."

for the generations to come." To "make numbers roll with emotions", is what Garcia envisions Domestic Data Streamers to be exploring. "The world cannot be understood without numbers, but it will not be understood with numbers alone." The public may still perceive data as having nothing much to do with the daily life, playing with data, however, is hardly a new activity for many industries. Humans have been collecting and observing data long enough to know that it is prone to manipulation. Regarding this, Garcia raises his concerns, "Historically data was tended to use in very scientific or technical environments. Today we live in a post-truth world where data is used in a totally different way: sometimes it is truly used to inform but sometimes it is just twisted to mean the opposite. It is a double-edged sword and obviously people use it in their best interest."

This idea is of course embodied in Domestic Data Streamers' various projects. The creative studio has addressed both pressing issues and overlooked topics over the years, including universal challenges faced by the entire globe, childhood risks, and regional public health care. "We as designers need to understand that we hold a responsibility, that each design we do has an impact and will have heavy consequences on the long term



Miffy

Renowned cartoon character Miffy celebrates its 65th birthday this year. The iconic rabbit figure created by Dutch artist Dick Bruna has been bringing joy and inspirations to the world for over half a century. In light of the character's 65th anniversary, Mercis bv, managing firm for Bruna's creations, hosts the Miffy Fashion Design Project, inviting international fashion design students from Hong Kong, Nottingham, Milan, Mexico and Utrecht, to present their own interpretations on a modern Miffy's

fashion choices. The end result is a collection of 86 Miffy cuddly toys. These creative new outfits for Miffy becomes a part of the exhibition *Miffy, 65 years a source of inspiration* at the Centraal Museum Utrecht from 20 June to 20 September 2020. The top ten finalists can have their Miffy designs commercially produced and launched into the market. Two students from HKDI's Higher Diploma in Fashion Design became finalists in the design project, with their creations taking inspirations from the ancient Tang Dynasty

and film *2001: A Space Odyssey* respectively. The two aspiring designers also had the opportunity to attend the digital opening of the exhibition on 19 June 2020, where they shared their design concepts and insights during the creative process.



HONG KONG
DESIGN
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