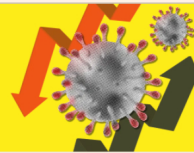


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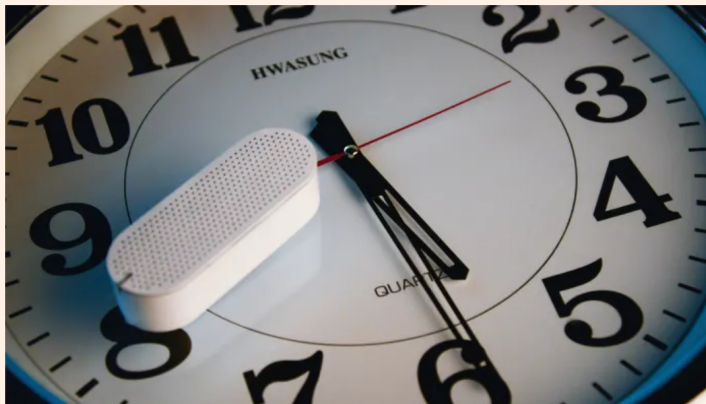
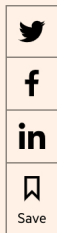
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50 ways to change the world

From scented clocks to cushions that need nurturing, the inaugural Global Grad Show reveals a range of thought-provoking projects from the world's best design schools



'Scent Clock', which emits different scents at different times of day, designed by a team at KAIST, South Korea

Serena Tarling OCTOBER 23 2015



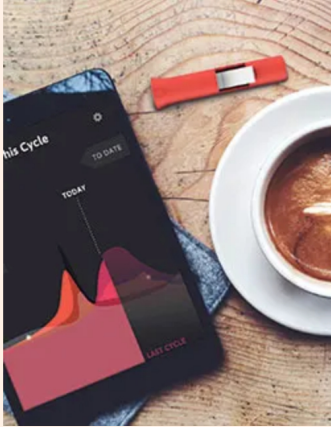
Fast-forward 15 or 20 years. What will the world around us be made up of? Will we have sofas that talk to us, or “ghost cushions” that we can console by embracing if they are in a low mood? Will we have telephones or toasters powered by smiles and hugs? Will the way we bury the dead change into something more ecologically friendly?

These are just some of the preoccupations of the students taking part in the Global Grad Show at Dubai Design Week. Brendan McGetrick, curator of the exhibition, invited design schools and colleges across the world to show the best of their graduates' work. Fifty participants were shortlisted from 10 different colleges, ranging from the UK's Royal College of Art to Hong Kong Polytechnic, South Korea's KAIST and the Pratt Institute design school in New York. “We thought it would be good to bring the schools to Dubai, as it wants to buttress its design community and is investing in education,” says McGetrick.

Nurturing young or new talent is certainly a focus for existing design fairs, from the New Designers fair in London and SaloneSatellite in Milan to ICF studio in NYC. So what's

distinctive about the Global Grad Show in Dubai? For many graduates, these established fairs are an opportunity to launch their products on the market, scope out trends and build much-needed business acumen. The Global Grad Show has looked to attract a broad international range of participants and also to focus on the function of a design, rather than its aesthetic appeal.

“I tried to choose exhibits and projects I felt opened up new possibilities and addressed desires or needs not being addressed now,” McGetrick says. “So many projects are prototypical and not especially beautiful. [But] creatively and intellectually they are beautiful.”



'Simi', a hormone-monitoring tool for women, designed by Allison Rowe of London's Royal College of Art

Although social media such as Instagram, Pinterest and Twitter are broadening designers' access to what others are doing around the world, students rarely come into contact with their counterparts at universities over such a wide geographical spread. But certain common threads ran through their project proposals, says McGetrick. For this reason, rather than display them by institution, he has arranged them in seven themed sections: Home, Play, Energy, Work, Construction,

Health and Memory.

“You can see a certain set of interests and visions of the future recurring in the Netherlands, UK, America, Japan and Korea,” McGetrick says. “But they interpret it differently; like the smart home and the idea that you have gadgets you communicate with and [which] increasingly understand you and coach you. I think the students respond to different social conditions: in the case of one project, the designers responded to a dramatic demographic tendency toward solitary living in Japan.” It's predicted that by 2030, almost 40 per cent of Japanese households will be single-occupant, he adds. “And in the case of 'Slow Clock', the designer was responding to the frenetic pace and congested living of Hong Kong, using behaviour-tracking almost to enforce relaxation and reflection.”



'Connoisseur' coffee grinder, designed by Julian Bowerman of Hong Kong Polytechnic

Another thread that McGetrick observes is an interest in design for the elderly, while other projects are concerned with trying to undo, or relieve, the consequences of sedentary office work. “The tracking technologies coming from European schools tended to

focus more on work applications. especially on monitoring the

effects of stress and of prolonged periods of sitting,” he says.

Yue Jiang, an RCA graduate in Innovation Design Engineering, has developed one such project. She created a system called “Ulink” to help relieve stress in offices.



'Steppa', designed by the RCA's Chunao Weng, encourages office workers to stay fit

“What brought me to this project was the fact that most office workers worked for long hours and they were not aware of their health problems, especially mental-health issues,” says Yue. After experimenting with biomedical sensing technology, she developed a

system that combined sensing devices with a task-management platform. “It helps to better allocate tasks and encourage workload-sharing based on real-time measurement of individual and group stress,” she explains.

Similarly, RCA graduate Chunhao Weng developed Steppa, a shoe insole and desktop device that recognises and celebrates small sprints of activity throughout your day. Unlike most wearable tech, which amasses data and gives directives back to the user to address bad habits, this system seeks to incentivise activity by highlighting achievements. “By understanding when the user is sitting, standing, walking away and coming back to the seat and doing simple exercise (jumping up and down or even squats), the system creates feedback from the different movements through a desktop drive reflecting how many ‘good’ habits have been done,” says Weng. He describes it as using more of a carrot approach than too much stick. “My device can be seen as watering a plant to keep it alive,” he adds.



Another project, “Flex”, by National University of Singapore graduate Kevin Chiam Yong Sheng, is concerned with improving mobility. He has created a cane with an end that “blossoms” on contact with the ground. In so doing, it increases the surface contact and makes the cane more stable. He describes his project as seeking “to redefine the modern walking cane for the elderly, [which is] often seen as sterile and impersonal”. It promotes greater ease and fluency of movement than the ordinary walking stick or crutch.

Olivia Hwayoung Kim, a graduate from Pratt Institute in New York’s Brooklyn, has focused on



'The Flex', by Kevin Chiam Yong Sheng of the National University of Singapore, is a cane that 'blossoms' on contact with the ground

developing a system called “Sik-sa” to enable cross-cultural communication through dining. By researching various cultural approaches to dining, including American and Korean, she has designed culturally specific

tableware, place-settings and etiquette guidelines to make it easier for people to experiment with new cuisines. This includes directions such as, “Do not use fork to eat but to push food on to spoon” in the case of Thai dining; and with American, “After tasting, ask someone close to pass the pepper and salt.”

A team of graduates from Japan’s Keio University reimagines the smart home in a human-centred way. Where smart homes typically promote interconnectivity between technological gadgets and thus limit human engagement, this project uses the same technology to build human interaction.



The 'Ar vag' folding boat by Thibault Penven of ECAL, Switzerland

It is called “Ghost in the House”. Specifically, the students wanted to tackle a fundamental human problem — loneliness — by creating emotionally intelligent, interactive furniture. So they have created a mat, sofa and cushion that can talk to

you. Unlike a normal robot, the furniture reacts more emotionally — enquiring why the person hasn’t eaten breakfast, or why they have come back late, by collecting user life logs. Users hug the cushion when it gets cross to improve its “mood”.

“‘Ghost’ can behave like humans,” says Akihiko Takashima, one of the designers. “It means sometimes it is useful but sometimes noisy.” As the acclaimed British furniture designer Ilse Crawford recently observed, “The more virtual our lives become, the more we crave the physical.”

All these projects have a notable common focus — that of improving people’s quality of life. Rather than trying to develop products that make things happen more efficiently, these graduates are promoting wellbeing and creating a more intuitive relationship between human beings and objects.



Some of the most prestigious design programmes across the world, such as Pratt and the RCA, incorporate opportunities to work abroad, and emphasise the importance of collaborating with other designers. This close network is one of the reasons it has been possible to establish the

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'Sit', by Ecal graduate Katarzyna Kempa, encourages good sitting habits

Dubai fair. But what are the main advantages for international students taking part in this fair rather than any other?

"To my knowledge, this is the first time an exhibition of this configuration has been organised with such prestigious schools presenting their work at the same time," says Alexis Georgacopoulos, director of Swiss design school Ecal. "I think for our students, and also for the public, it's very interesting to see the different ways to approach design today as well as the philosophy behind each school, even if I believe that talent has no boundaries."

Schools of thought



As the sprawling new d3 design district is unveiled in Dubai, attention is being focused on nurturing young designers within the United Arab Emirates and attracting a design community to bring it to life, **writes Serena Tarling**. To that end, the Dubai Design & Fashion Council commissioned two studies, one capturing the design landscape across the Middle East and north Africa and the other looking at the region's design education

provision and workforce.

"We analysed the whole design education landscape, regionally and internally, to get a better understanding of what is required and enable strategic decision-making for the education offering in the region," says Nez Gebreel, CEO of the DDFC.



'Sik-sa' culturally specific tableware designed by Olivia Hwayoung Kim of New York's Pratt Institute

As design courses close in other parts of the world, including in the UK, a renewed impetus on tackling this problem is welcome. The insights from the study helped lay the foundations of the Dubai School of Design, due to open by 2020. Their aim? "To cultivate a skilled workforce and meet the needs of the growing design industry in the region."

Twenty-five-year-old designer and architect Sawson al-Bahar studied architecture at the

American University of Sharjah. She says that a number of universities in the region currently have strong design programmes, such as Zayed University and Sharjah University, but there is currently no dedicated design institute and only a limited range of

courses in furniture and product design.

While there are other initiatives and award programmes, such as the Tashkeel Design Programme in Dubai, which provides residencies, studio facilities and professional workshops, there are very few spaces for young and emerging designers to practise and exhibit their work.

“In our experience, studio spaces and workshops that provide tools to young designers post-graduation are still a little bit lacking,” says al-Bahar. “There are a few such spaces in Dubai and Sharjah. Tools for carpentry and fabrication are not as available to designers as other graphics and art equipment. When we need something made, we have to work with local carpenters and other fabricators within industrial areas, who are not used to making such objects.”

Al-Bahar is hopeful, however, that with the new focus on design in the region, things will start to change.

“It will be interesting to see how the new design district will impact the art and design scene within the UAE. We would presume that many companies will open and relocate to the new design hub.”

Serena Tarling is a commissioning editor on FT House & Home

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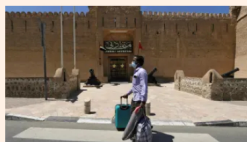
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