



IN THE PUBLIC EYE

Business of Design Week has been attracting top creatives from around the world since 2002, but this year's event is noticeably different, writes *Christopher DeWolf*

Facades on the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront illuminated with animations by Kook Ewo and students from the Gobelins school in Paris

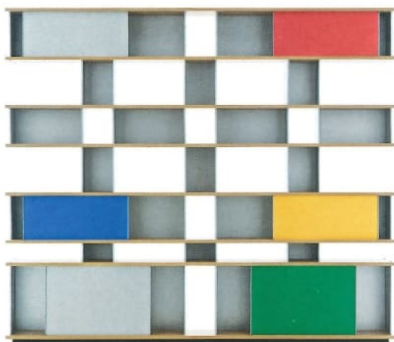


Ban Zhang with one of his sculptures

The Covid-19 pandemic saw Business of Design Week (BODW) scaled back, but in 2024 the annual design summit should surprise even those who won't be in attendance at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wan Chai. The next few weeks sees a whole host of design-related exhibitions and other happenings taking place in venues all over the city.

"This year, it's all about diversity," says Amy Chow Yuen-mei, project director of BODW in the City, a new wing within the mother ship. In previous years, BODW's public-facing programme was oriented more towards a design-savvy audience, but Chow says the Hong Kong Design Centre – which organises BODW – wanted to make it more accessible, with events taking place in a variety of retail locations, shopping malls and other spaces. "We want to reach the general public with venues you can see at street level."

All told, there will be 60-plus BODW in the City public events taking place from tomorrow until December 16, and some of them will be hard to miss. French motion graphics designer Kook Ewo has worked with students from the Gobelins school in Paris to bring a series of animations to the illuminated facades of the Empire Centre and Tsim Sha Tsui Centre on the Tsim Sha Tsui East harbourfront. The designs were conceived specifically with these two buildings in



Left:
Nuage Cabinet,
by Charlotte
Perriand

Right:
Bone Studio's
needle-felt
handicrafts
inspired by
Yau Ma Tei

mind, "so you might see a character walking and then leap across the street between them", says Chow.

Most of the events will be staged on a more intimate scale, though. In Cheung Sha Wan, non-profit art organisation ZLAB will be hosting an exhibition of geometric sculptures by designer Ban Zhang. In Central, Alfred Lam, of homeware store L's Where, is showcasing hand-painted and embroidered wallpaper. Just down the street, from December 12 to 16, high-end furniture shop Atelier A+ will host a 25-person tour of 12 pieces of furniture by some of the world's most acclaimed designers.

Highlights include Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Willow Chair, an Art Nouveau piece with a distinctive geometrically patterned back that has made it a symbol of early modernist design. There are also two pieces designed by pioneering French designer Charlotte Perriand, who was influenced by the years she spent in Japan during and after World War II. "I really admire her innovative approach to materials, influential collaboration with Le Corbusier and unwavering commitment to functional, accessible design," says Atelier A+ founder Anita Lin. Perriand's work spanned nearly 70 years and it "significantly shaped modern interior design, particularly in the realm of open-plan living spaces", she notes.

Perriand's Nuage Cabinet, which debuted in 1956 and is still produced by furniture brand Cassina, is a storage system inspired by traditional Japanese architecture, with sliding panels and modular components. The Mexique Table, designed in 1952, was created for student dormitories, reflecting Perriand's commitment to high-quality design for everyone.

Across the harbour, another exhibition highlights grass-roots Hong Kong vernacular. Design office Bone Studio has transformed Yau Ma Tei's buildings and cultural artefacts into a series of needle-felt handicrafts that will be exhibited in the Tung Nam Lou Art Hotel, where studio founder, Boni Chow, will also lead felting workshops. "My first visit to Yau Ma Tei's Temple Street was with my father, who took me to eat claypot rice, and it was also my first time experiencing face reading," she says.

But when she started to research Yau Ma Tei's architecture for her exhibition, she realised there was much about the neighbourhood she didn't know, and she was inspired to delve into its history as a fishing village that became Kowloon's trading hub after the peninsula was ceded to Britain in 1860. She notes that its name, which translates to "oil and jute ground", refers to how fishermen would lubricate their woven jute ropes with pine oil.

Chow says that representing Yau Mei Tei through needle-felt crafts, each piece of which is made with "about 150,000 hand stitches", is a way to bring the area's visual and material culture



PHOTOS: COURTESY BONE STUDIO AND ZOU-WAT



Zou-Mat's folding stool on a spinning and rolling base

"Many people still don't understand what design is"

to life. Among the design objects represented in felt are classic cha chaan teng-style teacups and street signs, along with architectural landmarks such as the Yau Ma Tei Theatre, the Gwo Laan fruit market and the 160-year-old Tin Hau Temple.

The Yau Ma Tei exhibition (until December 18) won't be the only event exploring the intersection of craft and design. Taiwanese brand Kamaro'an's homeware and handbags, made using the traditional weaving techniques of Taiwan's indigenous peoples, are on display at 52 Gage, a lifestyle shop in Central. A talk and workshop on December 13 explores their weaving art. At PMQ, local design and woodworking studio Zou-Mat has teamed up with multidisciplinary design practice Canalside Studio to explore motion through wood furniture. There's a rotating circular bench made of giant wooden ball bearings, a rocking chair that invites interaction between two people, and a classic folding stool attached to a rounded base that spins and rolls. "We decided to explore motion because we believe furniture and spatial design are integral to how we experience everyday life," says Jesse Lap Hang-hao, of Zou-Mat. "That we are not static and constantly evolve around objects and our environment."

It is an exhibition meant, above all, to be fun.

"We want to engage the public and not just talk about design in an auditorium," says Eric Yim Chi-ming, chairman of the Hong Kong Design Centre. But for the auditorium-inclined, the BODW Summit will feature 50 speakers and run from Wednesday to Friday. About a third of them are from France, this year's BODW partner country. Whereas last year's BODW Summit focused on ideas of circular design in partnership with the Netherlands, French designers offer experience in "craftsmanship, technology, innovation and the intersection of new and old", says Yim.

"We've been doing this since 2002 and when we select the partner country, we always try to look at their strengths and what it has to do with design," he says. France is known for venerable brands, especially in the luxury market, that have managed to survive for centuries. "In Hong Kong, we're dealing with a challenging retail market after Covid. So we wanted to see how the French are using design to address the issues we're facing."

Speakers from France include Thomas Jolly, artistic director of the 2024 Paris Olympics' opening and closing ceremonies; Hong Kong-born, Paris-based car designer Anthony Lo; Yannick Lintz, president of Musée Guimet, Europe's largest museum of Asian art; Printemps Group executive Emmanuel Suissa and luxury retail specialist Julia Capp. The event will also see talks by British designer Thomas Heatherwick, Japanese architect Kengo Kuma, Chinese fashion designer Guo Pei and Chinese architect Ma Yansong.

Some of the summit's speakers will also participate in BODW in the City, including French architect Nicola Delon, whose free performance *Asymmetry of BlaBlaBla* will take place at Jardine House in Central on December 7. Guided by Delon and artist Bonnefrite, participants are encouraged to explore social and environmental issues and the ways they can be solved. "Many people still don't understand what design is and how it can benefit us," says Amy Chow. "We want to show them, but in a more organic way." ■

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