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Women Can Do It!



Women
IN THE COMMUNICATION
INDUSTRY

BEIRUT DESIGN WEEK 2013

By Jad Haidar

When it comes to predicting man's future, the outlook, at least from a filmmaking perspective, usually is grim if not apocalyptic. On the other end of that fuzzy spectrum, technological evangelists paint a virtually more divergent view, one laden with promise and possibility appeasing our worst fears.

That may very well have been the overriding feeling the participants of Beirut Design Week 2013 were left with, privy to the second installation of an annual event originally conceived and orchestrated every June by the MENA Design Research Center cofounded by **Maya Karanouh** and **Doreen Toutikian**, which is incubated by TAGbrands, a regional branding and design agency.

The programme, that took a significant number of factors into consideration prior to execution, emphasised this

year on creative economies, intercultural exchanges, design in various disciplines, as well as entrepreneurship through exhibitions, conferences, workshops and open studios to showcase the works of local and international designers operating in Lebanon.

The MENA Design Research Center, focused on promoting a diverse understanding of design with the implementation of research and multidisciplinary projects in the region, afforded the public an opportunity to learn about all the new designers emerging onto the local scene. It also supported the grass-root industries by lending exposure to the talented young designers working in Beirut through a noticeably-collaborative crossover from larger companies looking to back and work alongside the local design community.



Maya Karanouh



Doreen Toutikian

The success, witnessed during last year's event, established a unique platform for designers of all fields in Lebanon, which this year the organisers built on in hope of transforming Beirut to the official Design Capital of the Middle East in the years to come.

By design, and purposely so, the event literally immersed everyone in a variety

of interactive experiences rather than ones habitual to traditional trade shows due to the scattered nature of the 80+ featured venues thereby necessitating the use of tools ranging from paper maps to geo-location based smartphone apps adding a modern twist reminiscent to an otherwise age-old treasure-hunting quest.

STAR ATTRACTIONS

For people pursuing other vocations, the word 'design' habitually conjures up industries related to fashion, furniture, jewelry and architecture in their traditional forms. However, the events the public was privy to this year expanded the term to conclude with that which today is still considered, improbable. Following, are examples of how design is being incorporated to (re)create and at times solve social as well as technical problems in a creative fashion.

Contrary to the habitual shopping experience most are accustomed to, walking into a store and choosing what tickles our fancy is no longer considered engaging enough. As a result, the various outlets continuously



redesign their showrooms to maintain a certain freshness in hope of keeping the buyers in the store long enough to make a sale.

Pushing the envelope, Architect Grace Rihan, specialising in the restoration of archeological sites decided to blend some of those acquired skills with her true passion, namely design. The result was '**atelier G**', an underground loft space in Achrafieh housing unique creations of art objects, clothing and accessories. What sets this space apart from others is the fully-immersive experience the visitors are privy to. When choosing from the available clothing items on display, the potential buyer is ushered onto a sort of catwalk where a professional photographer snaps away picture after picture. When the shoot is over, the '*customer*' turned model views these to determine what fits best. Therein lays the added value as the person taking part in this buying mechanism gets to experience, through this space, what it really feels like to be in the limelight and not just another faceless customer. (*ateliernet*)

On a different note, design studio '**Made for Brands**' revealed its new space in Achrafieh during BDW 13 with an open-house cocktail, dreamy tunes and numerous wall animations

explaining the range of services offered. Though the idea of utilising space in such a manner is not new, it nonetheless is to Lebanon. The setup is designed to make full use of the multi-functional space which by day is a venue for holding brainstorming sessions and meetings, yet come night, the same space becomes one for projection screenings, lectures and exhibitions. Walking in, one is automatically tempted to explore the boundaries between design, storytelling, and engagement constituting a great way to literally see the brand design process in all its stages. (*mfbstudio.com*)

Magali Wehrung, Founder of '**Hopla**', a Parisian food-design studio baffled the participants with



atelier G





Hopla

a colorfully-designed presentation using different food types to bring any dining experience to the next level. Her approach to an otherwise unseemly mechanical function central to sustenance was transformed to a visually mouth-watering exhibition of the senses. This interdisciplinary designer's speciality is in creating

thematic banquets and food imagery, a process which at times requires the collaboration of graphic designers and artists. The end result habitually showcases such well-designed foods which at times look too good to eat! (hop-la.com)



'Hopla'

Tackling a more esthetically-pleasing yet equally-functional design problem, Architect Rima Khatib, went on to study industrial design and resolved to pursuing her passion by focusing on furniture creation. Her recent collection, which falls under the 'designart' category is entitled, '**A Game of Hide and Seek**', and is appropriately-laden with pleasant surprises. The reasoning behind the work centers around optimising the use of space so as to enjoy the home objects we own. With that in mind, the pieces are comprised of a mix between the industrial and the handmade. The example you see before you, which originally is a coat hanger, also functions as a small table hidden within the fabric as well as a lamp. The redesign, disguises what most of us agree is a functional though esthetically unpleasing piece of furniture into an artwork that is a joy to behold.

Using design for the betterment of society by revitalising an untapped workforce was an idea concocted by Sarah Beydoun, Creative Director and Founder of '**Sarah's Bag**', one of the first Lebanese designers to bring Middle Eastern pop culture into the mainstream. Along the way, she managed to reinvigorate the region's rich traditions of craftsmanship, embroidery and textile making in a colourful fashion. Her atelier, which opened in 2000, brings together her love of design and fashion with her desire to empower and work with underprivileged women. Her line of handmade handbags and accessories is designed around



A Game of Hide and Seek

the skills of prisoners and ex-prisoners she has personally trained and worked with for the past thirteen years. The initiative is one example of successful social entrepreneurship for regional brands. (sarahsbag.com)



Sarah's Bag

Though the tools may have some similarities, the way these are applied varies. **'T+HUIS'**, a design for social impact studio from the Netherlands employs co-creation techniques for the purpose of community-building projects. It is an organisation whose mission is to apply design thinking in the social field by researching and developing new approaches, strategies and systems for children and their neighbourhoods to fully realise their potential. This



T+HUIS

approach empowers students to be an integral part of a multi-disciplinary team, creating a learning community that reaches out to people.

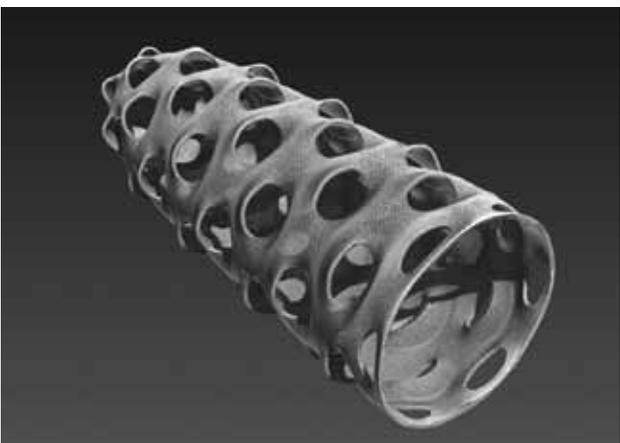
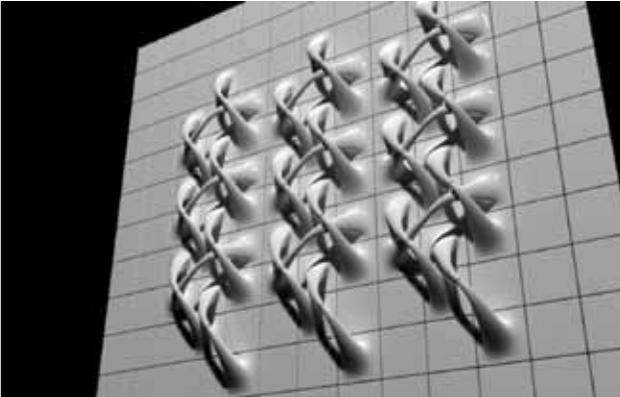
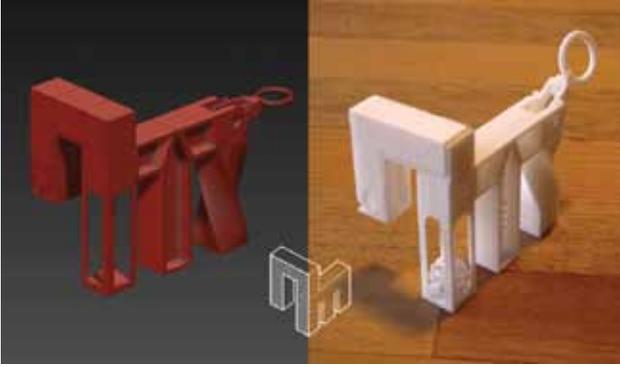
Combining design and social work creates a unique position in the changing field of collaborations between local governments, social organisations and educational institutions. The strategies employed facilitate the process of developing a dialogue and collaboration to support the children in their development. (*t-huis.info*)

Yet one of the most strikingly hair-raising examples of design

went to **'Architettura Sonora'**, a company dedicated to the creation of multi-sensory landscapes. Hosted by Vladimir Djurovic Landscape Architecture, the mountainous Broummana villa was the venue where the integration of specialised and immersive audio systems accentuated through the distinctively-shaped Tuscany handmade products came to life. The directional properties of the sound modules not only reshape the experience but also enhance the space of any architecture, creating otherworldly spatial involvements! (*architetturasonora.com/AS*)

Architettura Sonora





RapidManufactory

While on the subject of country firsts, **RapidManufactory**, founded and run by Architect Guillaume Crédoz is one of the first 3D printing service shops in the Middle-East which opened last March. The Bakery, as the studio is called, is a research and creation lab, centered on helping designers, architects, and engineers to transform their ideas into reality. With smaller less expensive machines, desktop manufacturing, and the development of services, e-manufacturing, a larger public is getting access to the potential of fabricating complex and durable objects, which will eventually lead to a design revolution the beginning of which will hopefully be Lebanon. (rapidmanufactory.com)

Entertaining the notion of the improbable through 3D printing, the barriers between the real and the virtual, are continuously blending more so based on the solutions developed by teams of middle school children ages 8-10. The project entitled '**City X**' sees students in six countries solving real-world issues like pollution,

transportation, water shortages, sanitation and health to name a few within a relatable story-like context. The programme that is working to bring design thinking and 3D technologies into schools around the world is sponsored by 3D Systems, a company which in 2014 hopes to send the first 3D Zero Gravity Printer to the International Space Station. Though this may not sound impressive to some, the device however will be printing 30 percent of the station's spare parts thereby cutting both cost and transfer times. On top of that, the printer may also be used, believe it or not, to print pizza and other types of foods for astronauts! (cityxproject.com) (3dsystems.com)

What comes next, pertaining to space-age products, a term humans use to describe what could in theory be created, is something called '**Bioculture**', a pioneering and unique consultancy focused on bringing emergent biomaterials, biodesign and biomanufacture to future consumer products. The London-based company was founded and run by



City X



Biocouture



Fashion Visionary Suzanne Lee in partnership with key material innovators and global brands in an attempt to explore how our bio-designed future will look, feel and function. One example is the grown shoe which is currently on display in Paris as part of the EDF exhibition 'Alive/En Vie'. Another is the clothing project which thus far has received worldwide media attention and featured in many design books and journals, most recently in William Myers 2012 book 'Biodesign: nature, science, creativity'. Lee who also is the author of the groundbreaking book 'Fashioning The Future: tomorrow's wardrobe' speaks and consults internationally and is a 2012 TED Senior Fellow. To illustrate, she held a workshop introducing the process as well as discussed the different applications the participants of various vocations can use in their own work. (suzanne-lee.com) (biocouture.co.uk)

IN CONCLUSION

BDW 13 also featured a staggering number of 100+ events which included: official collection launches, film screenings, workshops, round-table discussions, seminars, open studios, photography exhibitions, a poster competition, and a silent auction in addition to the official launch party of AIGA's Middle East chapter, the largest professional association for design in the world.

Though it would have been physically impossible to attend all events this year's programme had to offer, those who did find the time were left in awe as the week-long happening not only brought new life to Beirut, but for the first time in a long time presented us with a forward-looking platform introducing design tools that could ultimately be used to change our lives replacing hopelessness with notions of the perceptibly (im) probable! ■