

The Thinking Piece "Obscure solutions" - New design contemporaries in Japan

Exhibition at Milan Design Week
Venue: DROPCITY, Milano Centrale Station Area
Dates: April 17 (Mon) - April 23 (Sun)



Founded by design journalist Takahiro Tsuchida and the designers of the design studio we+, Hokuto Ando and Toshiya Hayashi, The Thinking Piece is a platform that invites designers to participate in addressing various social issues and provides a venue for the dissemination of their ideas and work. In spring 2023, The Thinking Piece is participating in the Milan Design Week as an exhibitor.

Following the exhibition held in Tokyo in April 2022, the second installation of The Thinking Piece exhibition is scheduled to be held overseas, in Milan, as a group exhibition of five designers: we+, TAKT PROJECT, Sae Honda, Satomi Minoshima, and Takuto Ohta. With the theme of proposing "Obscure solutions" to often-invisible social issues, the designers present their own thoughts through their work to trigger revisiting of the realities of our world.

Many of today's social problems are difficult to understand because of the complex interplay of diverse factors. Solutions conceived for one purpose may worsen the situation or cause other problems. These problems lead to a sense of powerlessness, and the existence of the problem itself tends to be placed outside of people's awareness. The exhibition explores the potential of understanding the role of designers in such situations as providing "more ambiguous" solutions (which The Thinking Piece refers to as "Obscure solutions" in this context) to these obscure problems.

The five designers participating in this exhibition bring their unique perspectives to the table by presenting their "thinking pieces" to address challenges like waste disposal, changes in the living environment, the predominantly vision-oriented perception, the relationship between nature and artifacts, and the challenges inherent in the field of design.

Exhibition Outline

[Dates]

April 17 (Mon) – April 23 (Sun), 10:00 – 18:00

*Some areas of DROPCITY will be open from April 15.

[Venue]

DROPCITY / Via Sammartini 48, 20125 Milan

[Participating Designers]

we+, TAKT PROJECT, Sae Honda, Satomi Minoshima, Takuto Ohta

[Exhibition Hosting Team]

Takahiro Tsuchida, Hokuto Ando (we+), Toshiya Hayashi (we+), and Satoshi Yoshiizumi (TAKT PROJECT)

[Curation]

Takahiro Tsuchida

[Graphic Design]

Junya Maejima

[Coordination]

Yukiko Kanamori, Hiroko Goda

[Special Thanks]

ISN Co., Ltd, HAKUTEN

[Press]

HOW INC.

[Website]

www.thethinkingpiece.com

[Instagram]

[@thethinkingpiece](https://www.instagram.com/thethinkingpiece/) (<https://www.instagram.com/thethinkingpiece/>)

The Thinking Piece

Launched in spring 2022 by design journalist Takahiro Tsuchida and the we+ design studio founders Hokuto Ando and Toshiya Hayashi, The Thinking Piece is a non-profit platform that calls on designers to address diverse social issues and provides a venue for disseminating their ideas and work. In 2022, an exhibition held in Tokyo showcased and sold the works of nineteen designers from Japan and abroad to donate the proceeds to humanitarian aid organizations in support of Ukraine. The organization received the Japanese Social Design Project Award at EDIDA 2023.

DROPCITY <https://www.dropcity.org>

The area is undergoing redevelopment along Via Sammartini on the west side of Milano Centrale Station, scheduled for completion in 2024. After the redevelopment, it will open as a facility with exhibition galleries, laboratories, production workshops, offices, libraries, and other functions. Many exhibitions will be held during this year's Milan Design Week, and with the opening of the Dimore Centrale in the neighborhood last year, the presence of the area itself has also been growing.

Designers

we+

<https://weplus.jp/>

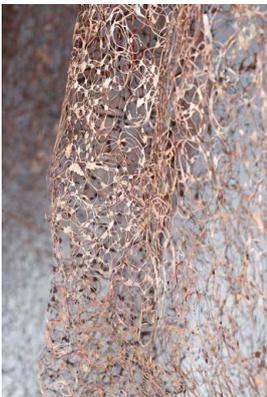


we+ is a contemporary design studio founded in 2013 by Toshiya Hayashi and Hokuto Ando, that gives form to new perspectives and values using methods based on research and experimentation. The studio explores the possibilities of alternative design that establishes a close coexistence with the natural and social environment around us, and incorporates a diversity of values that are often forgotten in today's society, where convenience and rationality are sought. They present self-initiated projects that have emerged from their daily research, both in Japan and abroad. With the knowledge gained from these projects, they participate in a wide range of corporate and organizational projects. Received many awards, including Dezeen Awards 2022 / Emerging Design Studio of the Year Public Vote(UK), Wallpaper* Design Awards 2022 / Best Elements of Surprise(UK), EDIDA 2019 / Young Designer of the Year Nominee(Italy). The work is in the collection of Vitra Design Museum, Germany.



“Urban Origin”

Human activities have had geological effects on Earth and are now known as the Anthropocene. Mining has developed worldwide without regard to natural cycles, and manufacturing processes have become very complex. As a result, understanding an overall picture of resource extraction, manufacturing, and disposal is extremely difficult, and people have yet to find a way out of the current situation.



“Urban Origin” is the research project that attempts to reframe the relationship between humans and materials, which has become inadequate and too complex. By considering Tokyo as the origin of used materials including copper wire, styrofoam and debris, the project returns to the starting point of the relationship between humans and materials - “using vernacular materials and treating them simply with our own hands” - and explores completely different values for them.

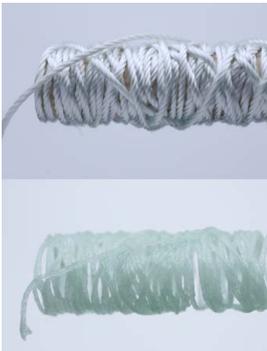
TAKT PROJECT

www.taktproject.com

Photo by Tsujii Shotaro

Established in 2013, TAKT PROJECT is a design studio based in Tokyo and Sendai, led by Satoshi Yoshiizumi. The studio has been carrying out self-driven research projects —to destabilize existing frameworks— and the results have been mostly invited and often presented independently to museums as well as design exhibitions both domestically and internationally, including Milan Design Week, Design Miami/, Museum of Decorative Arts Paris (Musée des Arts Décoratifs), and the M+ museum in Hong Kong, 21_21 DESIGN SIGHT in Tokyo. Based on the research results, the studio realizes diverse projects to create 'envisioned possibilities' in collaboration with various clients.

Received many domestic and international awards, including DesignMiami/ Swarovski Designers of the Future Award 2017(Switzerland), Dezeen Awards(UK) Emerging Designers of the year 2019, FRAME AWARDS 2022(Nederland). Also, Their three works have been collected in Hong Kong M+.

**“Homage to SHIRO KURAMATA: Unexplainable”**

Designs solve existing problems.

Designs uncover latent problems and solve them as well.

In today's world, with social issues piled up, the role of design is gaining even more attention.

It defines a problem and provides a solution. It's a design that is explainable in words.

However, that makes us think there is another side of design when looking back at its origin.

Something unforgettable from the moment you see it without knowing why. Something that grabs your mind and makes you stop.

Such a heart-moving moment cannot be explained immediately. However, it is precisely this experience that cultivates people's minds and continues to deeply influence their actions. And we believe that design has always emphasized the existence of indescribable values. In contemporary society, where social issues are piling up, transparency is increasingly required, and it is extremely important to be explainable in a way that everyone can understand. That is why we must continue to shed light on the unique role of design. We must continue to hold on to it. Ultimately, if there is momentum in society, where something indescribable is not considered important, that should be one of the significant social issues.

This work pays homage to Shiro Kuramata, the pioneer of Japanese contemporary design.

His designs always exist beyond languages. They are dreams, phantoms that invite people to the outside of the ordinary and go deeply into their hearts.

“Begin the Beguine” (1985) is a work by Kuramata created to pay homage to Joseph Hoffmann, in which steel rods was wrapped around a chair, and then the chair was burned away, leaving only steel rods. While steel rods is replaced with fiberglass, the act of burning is employed for this work. The string of glass fiber, wrapped around a chair, becomes a phantom of glass in the shape of a shining chair after the whole is burnt. This is an homage to Kuramata using glass, a material that symbolizes him.

Through this work, we would like to reconsider social issues and the underlying value of design.



Sae Honda

<https://www.saehonda.com/>



Sae Honda is a Japanese designer / jewellery artist based in Japan. She graduated from Musashino Art University in Tokyo in 2010, and later studied at Gerrit Rietveld Academie from 2013 to 2016. After completing her studies, she has been internationally showcasing self-initiated works as well as commissioned work. Questioning the existing value system with her poetic approach, she explores alternative aesthetics this modern life has to offer. Through her practice she formulates fresh perspectives and values, a result of careful observation of the current world where the border between nature and artifact is becoming more and more obscure. Some of her works are included in the permanent collection of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and Museum Arnhem.

'Cryptid'

Artificial faux materials generally tend to be worth less than the real ones, but faux fur calls for a renewed focus on its value from an animal welfare perspective. However the problem has to do with the fact that most faux fur is made from synthetic fibres derived from petroleum. This project started with field research into the production of faux fur, a material with such complex aspects. The field research took place in the town of Koyaguchi, Japan, one of the world's largest faux fur producers. The production process of faux fur in Koyaguchi is said to involve about 70 steps and is filled with a lot of craftsmanship. Witnessing this craft makes you feel the pure and precious relationship with nature in human manufacturing.



Inspired by the wide variety of colours, patterns and textures of real animal fur, humans have celebrated the beauty of nature through their reproduction. Such a valuable relationship with nature in human manufacturing should not become synonymous with a negative aspect of mass consumption. "Cryptid" is a new form of fur crafted with this in mind. Using the felting technique, the faux fur scraps discarded by manufacturers and sewing factories are assembled by hand, one by one, without sewing, but letting the furs intertwined.

Satomi Minoshima <https://www.satominoshima.com/>



Satomi Minoshima is a Japanese designer driven by a passion for exploring the possibilities of different materials and colors. She seeks to understand the singular context surrounding specific colors and materials leading to a new interpretation and perspective of their creation process. By always honoring the tangibility of the object, Minoshima’s design approach combines material-based research and a genuine and poetic narrative to bring her concepts to life.

She holds degrees from Musashino Art University in Tokyo (2014) and Design Academy Eindhoven (2019) and has exhibited her work internationally. Currently based in the Netherlands, she was recently recognized with Raising Talent Awards Japan from Maison & Objet in 2022.



‘Inflatable Leather’

With the evolution of technology, the lifestyle of modern people has become “nomadized”. As people constantly move between cities, products need to be thinner, lighter, and smaller. Our living spaces reflect the same trend. Residential spaces in densely populated urban areas are becoming smaller, and there is a constant flux of tenants. How can we move around lightly with a lot of belongings in this nomadic society?

Inflatable products that can be adjusted in volume might be a solution for this problem, but in many cases, they are used for short-term, ad hoc purposes. Research was therefore done to create an inflatable product that can be kept in use for a long time.

“Inflatable Leather” is a series of inflatable stools.

The inner rubber tubes are covered with genuine leather. A light, flexible, and inflatable material and natural leather with a long life and rich texture—when combined, these two different materials complement each other. And the leather is expected to become even more attractive over time.

Takuto Ota

<https://www.deco-designcomplex.com/>

Takuto Ohta was born in France in 1993. He graduated from Musashino Art University in 2017 and completed a master's degree from Tokyo University of the Arts in 2022. He re-exposes the senses that may have been lost as a result of negative effects related to the development of culture and civilization, and he expresses them in words and forms. Currently, he is focusing on the relationship between things with the keywords, "decomposition" and "production," which are the roots of life activities and manufacturing. He believes that he doesn't need to stick to specific areas or categorize his works. He tries to think in a fluid and pluralistic way during the process.

Comité Colbert Award Exhibition, Geidai Museum, Tokyo (2019&2022) / ADF Milano Salone Exhibition, Tortona37, Italy (2020) / 'Take Your Time', Tongyeong Triennale, Korea (2022).

**'Afterglow'**

To my mind, objects are created on the premise that they are accompanied by vision. However, I want to think more deeply about the relationship between objects and people through sound. When we close our eyes, we lose the ability to recognize the existence of objects around us. "Afterglow" is a device that generates sounds with specific characteristics. Using the properties of metal, you will hear sounds that diverge slightly from your visual expectations of objects. It builds a new bond between objects and people, where the afterglow of their interaction spreads and remains in the space.

**Curator****Takahiro Tsuchida**

<https://www.instagram.com/tt0/>



Design journalist. Takahiro Tsuchida was born in Japan in 1970 and has been working freelance since 2001. His work focuses on diverse areas of design, from products and interiors to social systems, and he has contributed to Japanese magazines and websites such as Casa BRUTUS, Axis and Elle Decor through interviews and research in Japan and abroad. He is a part-time lecturer at Tokyo University of the Arts and Kuwasawa Design School. He is also the author of Contemporary Design Interviews (2021), in which he gives his own interpretation of the current design scene through interviews with 100 emerging designers from around the world. In 2023, he is the guest director of the exhibition "The Original" at 21_21 design sight in Tokyo.

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