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Design/
Miami/

Design Does Good

The design community responds to the global pandemic with online initiatives that demonstrate its resilience and generosity

By Anna Carnick
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Carnick, Anna. "Design Does Good," *Design Miami*, July 26, 2020.

In these intense times, when so much feels uncertain, some things are—thankfully—clearer than ever: Design is a powerful tool, and the global design community is incredibly tenacious. Myriad institutions, businesses, and individuals have responded to the new pandemic-era landscape with both ingenuity and generosity.

In addition to crucial on-the-ground responses—pivots to create urgently needed PPE, respirators, social distancing cues, and the like—a number of online initiatives have offered support and much-needed inspiration. And though the approaches have varied, cumulatively, these efforts demonstrate design’s potential to connect and affect—and remind us why we’re so much stronger together.

Here are a few of our favorite rise-to-the-occasion, digital do-good moments from the past few months.

Design Emergency



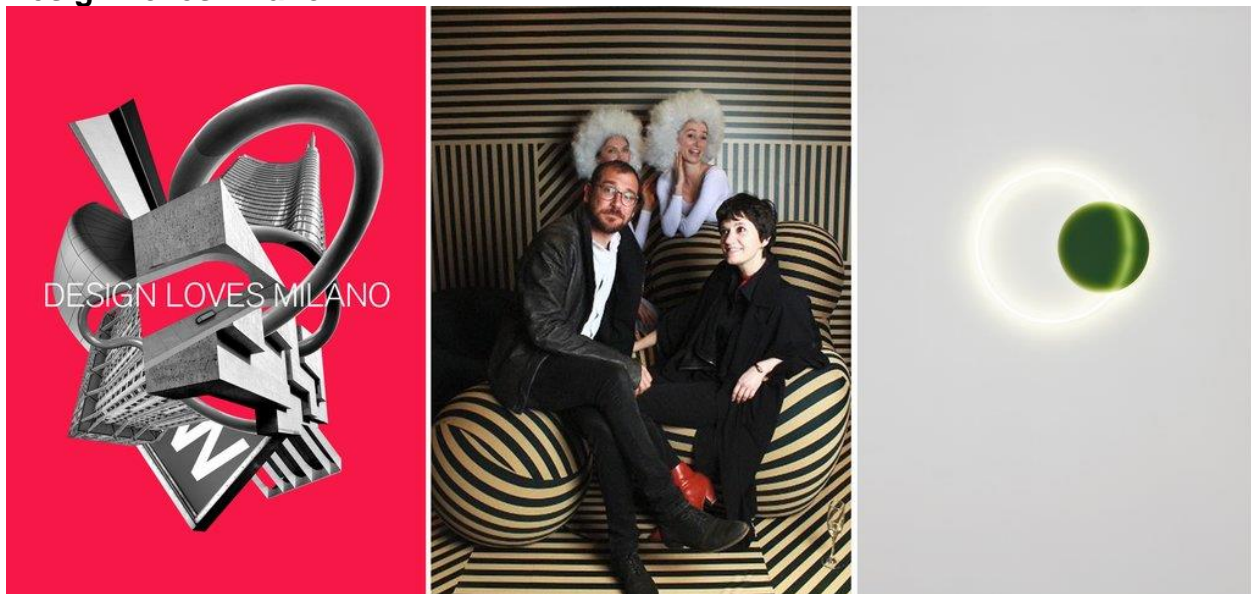
Design Emergency on Instagram. The project’s visual identity was designed by Studio Frith. Images courtesy of Alice Rawsthorn and Paola Antonelli

Design critic Alice Rawsthorn and MoMA senior curator Paola Antonelli have launched Design Emergency, an online collaboration investigating design’s impact on the coronavirus crisis. Through weekly Instagram Live conversations and daily IG posts, the duo spotlights key players and innovative solutions from the global design response to Covid-19.

Describing the motivation behind the series, Rawsthorn tells us, “Paola and I believe that design has been one of our most powerful tools in the Covid-19 crisis. The ingenuity, resourcefulness, and generosity of designers and their collaborators worldwide has produced innovations that have helped to protect us from the pandemic, to improve its treatment, and to prepare for the radical changes it will bring to our lives in the future. By exploring these coups in Design Emergency, we hope to persuade other people to see design as we do.”

Further, Rawsthorn says, “The design response to Covid-19 has demonstrated the extraordinary diversity of design and its efficiency in addressing urgent social, political, and ecological problems. I feel proud and deeply moved by the incredible achievements of designers and their collaborators at this deeply difficult, often terrifying time. Their innovations have provided sorely needed flashes of progress and optimism throughout the pandemic.”

Design Loves Milano



From left: Design Loves Milano illustration by Milanese artist Alvino; Auction organizers Francesco Mainardi and Annalisa Rosso, aka Mr. Lawrence; Voie Light by Sabine Marcelis, a lot from the online charity auction. All images courtesy of Mr. Lawrence; Voie Light photo © Sabine Marcelis

May’s Design Loves Milano online charity auction brought the international design community together to raise funds for Milan’s Luigi Sacco Hospital. Spearheaded by Milan-based creative agency Mr. Lawrence in coordination with CAMBI auction house, the event raised a whopping €120,000 in just one day. Lots for sale included contemporary and historical design pieces from a star-studded roster of over 100 contributors, such as Nilufar, Victor Hunt, Salon 94 Design, Side Gallery, and The Future Perfect, among others.

According to Mr. Lawrence cofounder Annalisa Rosso, “During the first days of the emergency here in Milan, when Salone was just postponed and all was unclear, we got dozens of calls from friends and colleagues all over the world asking if we were fine and safe and, more than that, how they could support Milan. The charity auction idea was a natural consequence. The goal was to be helpful not only for Milan, but also beyond: That’s why we decided to dedicate the money to Ospedale Sacco, which is on the front lines of COVID-19 scientific research.”

Pointing to the generous response from designers and dealers around the world, Rosso says, “We have this incredible feeling of being part of a loving community, a family, ready to support with no hesitation. As Dutch design studio Odd Matter said, ‘[We’re] here for the love.’ And that’s why we love the design world.”

Virtual Design Festival



Marcus Fairs, Dezeen founder & editor-in-chief; VDF’s launch movie featured contributions from design luminaries from around the globe. Images courtesy of Dezeen

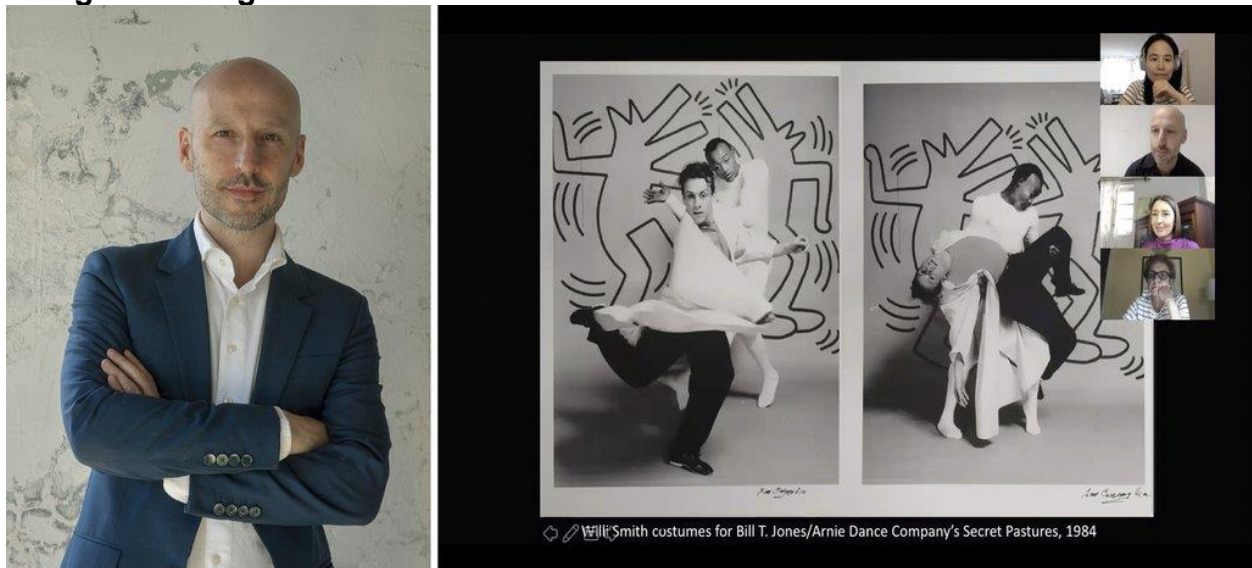
When the design calendar was suddenly wiped clean a few months back, Dezeen boldly stepped up to offer “the world’s first online design festival.” The result, Virtual Design Festival, has featured fresh daily programming that ranges from live interviews and online talks to product launches, exhibitions, movies, and beyond.

As Dezeen founder and editor-in-chief Marcus Fairs tells us, “I hope Virtual Design Festival will be remembered as something that brought the global design community together at a very difficult time and showed how we can adapt and pull through.”

Asked to describe how the experience has made him feel about the design community, Fairs replies, “It has been very moving to see how the pandemic has affected absolutely everyone in the community—and to see that there is no single template for how people respond or cope with the situation. But I think the two qualities that have shone through from almost everyone we’ve spoken to as part of VDF are their warmth and honesty. When we collected video messages for the VDF launch movie, the responses included pragmatism, philosophy, fear, hope... a bit of everything. The responses were raw,

unfiltered, and honest. It reminded me that the design community is full of wonderful human beings.” VDF continues through July 10th.

Design in Dialogue



From left: Portrait of host Glenn Adamson; Screen capture from a Design in Dialogue episode featuring Cooper Hewitt curator Alexandra Cunningham Cameron on the new exhibition Willi Smith: Street Couture. Images courtesy of Glenn Adamson and Friedman Benda

Amid the recent explosion of creative online content, one definitive standout is Design in Dialogue, an online interview series produced by New York gallery Friedman Benda and hosted by design curator and historian Glenn Adamson. Each week, Adamson welcomes some of today’s most interesting voices—critics, curators, makers, and more—to discuss their work and inspiration. Guests have included, among others, Misha Kahn, Zoë Ryan, Alexandra Cunningham Cameron, Faye Toogood, Libby Sellers, and Design Miami’s own Aric Chen.

Explaining the rationale behind the series, gallerist Marc Benda says, “The idea was to share the cumulative knowledge and dialogue that we are privy to and are now able to share with the world thanks to technology. It will continue after lockdown. The idea is to build a library of testimonies of our field, a collage of all the prisms that make up this incredible field we work in, and to do it through the people that make up its diversity of thought, of creation, of manifestation of ideas.”

Objects to Mark Time

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From left: Gallerist Sarah Myerscough, portrait by John Spinks, courtesy of Sarah Myerscough Gallery; Marc Ricourt's Scorched Vessel (2020), courtesy of the artist; Marlène Huissoud's Cocoon Cabinet #2 (2018), courtesy of the artist and Sarah Myerscough Gallery

Sarah Myerscough Gallery, a London outpost known for championing artists and makers who marry craft tradition with contemporary invention, launched Objects to Mark Time, a design collection and fundraiser to support the UK's National Health Service. The gallery invited artists and makers—including Maisie Broadhead, Marlène Huissoud, Marc Ricourt, Peter Marigold, Egeværk, and others—to create new objects that memorialize a personal response to the crisis and, in turn, inspire others. A percentage of all sales go to support staff at the ITU/Critical Care unit at the Whittington Hospital.

Sharing the motivation behind the poetic collection, Myerscough says, “In my own home, objets d’art are treasured not only for their inherent beauty, but, more importantly, because they are imbued with memory—of time and place, emotion or philosophies, from the artist that made them to the person that collects them. Given with love, and perhaps grief, but mainly to mark time. So this project seems a natural step to take; an object to mark this momentous point in our history—poignant, relevant and worthwhile.”

#CombatCovid: PSAs in NYC



Together Apart 2020 by Debbie Millman; New York Loves You 2020 by Eden Rodriguez; Heroes 2020 by Masashi Kawamura & Whatever Inc. All #COMBATCOVID campaign images courtesy of Poster House

Following its closure in early March, New York’s Poster House decided the best way to carry on its mission—to educate and serve its community—was to launch a PSA poster campaign. So the museum joined forces with Print Magazine to create #CombatCovid, a citywide public art project spreading messages of hope, public safety, and gratitude to frontline workers. The series features posters created and donated by some of today’s most respected graphic designers, including Paula Scher, Maira Kalman, Mirko Ilić, Milton Glaser, Debbie Millman, and others.

As of this writing, the posters have been shared on nearly 1800 screens and billboards inside and around NYC—and some even as far as Boston and Chicago—thanks to support from Time Square Arts, For Freedoms, LinkNYC, Silvercast, JC Decaux, and Pearl Media. And the project has garnered attention online as well, inspiring a ton of shares and likes beyond its physical manifestations.

Expressing her gratitude for the design community’s generosity, Knight says, “Designers have donated their time, worked on quick schedules, updated their assets to accommodate different specs as more and more advertisers want to get involved. They have created beautiful, poignant, and funny pieces. I am truly wowed by their creativity and savvy. This was a complicated process with a lot of moving pieces, and they were all so gracious.”

Perhaps the biggest takeaway for Knight? “In the nonprofit world, people always talk about going back to your mission, which seems obvious, but it is the best guiding light—especially in a moment of crisis. If you can do, do.”

#architecturefromhome



Architecture from home, children's activities at home during Covid-19 lockdown. Photo © Foster + Partners

Finally, remember the little ones! A number of institutions have, wonderfully, offered up engaging activities for kids at home during recent months, but one of our favorites comes from renowned British architecture studio Foster + Partners. The studio has launched a series of creative activities to educate and inspire children during lockdown. The firm's [#architecturefromhome](#) campaign includes fun challenges like Make a Paper Skyscraper, Drawing Trees, and Create Your Own City, among other inspiring projects.

Katy Harris, Senior Partner and Head of Communications, shares: “Getting the next generation to think about designing for a better built environment is our goal, and the response has been absolutely fantastic—and frankly a bit overwhelming! We’ve received emails from Canada, Spain, Italy, and even as far as Australia and Cambodia—all sharing creations with us. We are glad to be able to brighten someone’s day or kindle their creativity in some ways. Stay tuned for many more fun activities!” ♦