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Capability town

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CAPABILITY TOWN



Patricia Moore is one of the world's most accomplished industrial designers. As SUMMER CAO reports, the American polymath uses socially conscious creativity to improve the lives of those who might otherwise be neglected.

Patricia Moore instantly captured the audience's attention when she walked onto the stage at HKDI this spring to address HKDI students and staff on the topic of how good health and sensitive design goes hand in hand. Now in her 60s, Moore looks young and fashionable and has a charm that many Hollywood stars would envy. She is blessed with a warm and soothing smile, the kind that is often worn by citizens of the world who have seen too much in their lives to be perturbed by daily trivialities.

But it is her melodious voice that

seems able to grip people from the moment she starts to speak. They become transfixed, like children listening to a favourite bedtime fable, although the story Moore tells in her lecture is more troubling, focusing on how we design our cities for a narrow range of citizens without thinking of how our towns can be built to enhance capability for all.

These qualities of care and engagement have served Moore well since her 20s, when she decided to devote herself to the needs of the elders. As a young designer, Moore was a prodigy who worked with Raymond Lowey, the father of American industrial design. Moore was constantly told to design for

people under the age of 40, and that their typical consumer was a Caucasian man who has one wife and 2.3 children. Nonplused by the company's tenets, she asked Lowey if she could be given time each week to study how to design for older people.

"I wanted to design for people who saw with their fingertips to read Braille, who heard with their eyes because they read lips, who didn't put one foot in front of the other to walk but rather used wheeled conveyances," Moore said during her session for the HKDI DESIS Lab for Social Design Research. "I wanted to understand how life was for all the consumers

PICTURES PATRICIA MOORE and HKDI



OPPOSITE MOORE AT HKDI CAMPUS
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE
MOORE GIVING A LECTURE TO
HKDI STUDENTS; PARTICIPANTS AT
THE "WHAT THE HEALTH" CITIZEN
WORKSHOP

who are ignored."

Carrying this "eccentric" goal to her heart, Moore decided to become an elder. From 1979 to 1982, she dressed up as an elderly woman wearing her grandmother's clothes, uncomfortable shoes to increase difficulty in walking, plugs for her ears to distort her hearing, and thick glasses that significantly distorted her vision.

Disguised in prosthetics and movie makeup, Moore travelled to 116 cities in the U.S. and Canada, where she lived as an 80-year-old. "My arms and legs were bound with bandages," she recalled. "I couldn't walk fast or climb stairs easily. When I boarded buses, men would often just pick me up and push me inside because they were tired of waiting for me to do it by myself."

Moore created 9 different perso-

nas with different levels of income and health so she could explore how society treats those who are considered "too old, too weak, too frail, too unimportant or too much trouble." She was dismayed at some of the treatment she received.

"It still haunts me how cruel and mean people can be," Moore said. "When I was crossing the streets and wasn't going fast enough, taxi drivers would say 'hurry up you old bag!'" Beside verbal abuse, she was mugged and beaten on two occasions, which left her with permanent injuries and made her unable to have children.

Moore's determination to design for vulnerable members of society was inspired by the heart-wrenching story of her grandma. She believes her grandma, who suffered arthritis, died with a broken heart because there were no means to

compensate for her incapacity and she felt worthless.

"I remember the day that my grandmother was cooking for the family and couldn't open the refrigerator door," she recounted. "I saw her go to that refrigerator and reach for the door and then I heard a sound. It was a crying pain but she was quiet about it because she didn't want to frighten me. Then I saw her take her hand and put it under her arm and then I saw the door to her bedroom close."

Her grandma never finished cooking the meal, and one year later she was dead. "She no longer felt she was contributing to the family and this was enough to make her simply fade away," Moore said.

The childhood memory of her grandmother's demise remains vivid and was something she occasionally thought about when she entered

BELOW/LEFT MOORE WITH A STUDENT AT THE WHAT THE HEALTH WORKSHOP
 RIGHT/ MOORE AS AN 85-YEAR-OLD ELDER
 OPPOSITE PAGE ABOVE THE LAUNCH OF THE DESIGNAGE HK CLUB AT SENIOR EXPO 2014
 OPPOSITE PAGE BELOW SCENES FROM THE SENIOR EXPO 2014



the product design industry. Then one day it struck her that she had become the kind of designer who made products like the refrigerator that had frustrated her grandmother. She embarked upon a graduate degree in psychology and social gerontology before returning to design with a fresh and more empathetic perspective.

"All of us want the same valuable things in life," she said. "We want pride in ourselves because when you have pride in what you can be, you can share with others. This then gives us the design agenda of our time inclusivity."

After this revelation, Moore has sought to create designs that include all people as equals. "No matter what their circumstances, they should feel welcome in their daily lives, feel a part of a whole, and know their place in their community. They shouldn't feel lost in the crowd, but rather, they should recognise they are acknowledged, loved, understood and cared about."

Moore's humane approach toward

design has made a difference to the lives of many, and won her wide acclaim. She has been recognised by ID Magazine as one of the "40 Most Socially Conscious Designers" in the world. She was also selected as one of the "100 Most Important Women in America" and one of "50 Americans Defining the New Millennium."

Moore has demonstrated the inclusiveness of her beliefs in many arenas. When she was asked to visit the USSR during the Cold War, she participated in a two-year project that was part of the "détente and rapprochement" period. She designed consumer products for a country that had few, having directed so much of its creativity and treasure to producing a nuclear arsenal that could match that of the USA.

"I learned that by design we were making the Soviet people happier by improving the quality of their life," she said. "Imagine how wonderful it is you were making peace by design. Design is so powerful. Maybe we need to use design

initiatives in our current diplomacy with Putin."

With this level of belief and enthusiasm for design, and care for every potential end-user, Moore visited HKDI in March as the mentor of HKDI DESIS Lab for an initiative called "What the Health", to remind students of their responsibilities as future designers and encouraging them to use design to make a difference. Inspired by Moore's vision of ageing and design, in July HKDI DESIS Lab launched the DesignAge HK Club.

"Over 200 seniors have joined this program after experimenting various design activities such as 'Design your Bag', 'Design your Meal' and 'Design your Death Diamond'," says Dr Yanki Lee, Director of the lab. "They will work closely with our students in the coming year in a series of design studies."

It is hoped that by working closely with the elders, students will undergo a series of transformations that are critical to shaping the future practice of business and design.

As Moore has rightly pointed out, understanding is of paramount importance. "If people were raised without having elders in their family and without understanding the needs of the elders, they are unlikely to care for them," Moore said.

"Nobody should be called disabled or handicapped. You don't design for a disability but for someone's capacity. This is a change in thinking that allows us to see people, not patients. You must focus on giving them compensatory tools by means of which they can do all things they want to do. It's a matter of design that will make people more able." Further debate on this subject will be part of the 1st Open Design Forum at HKDI in November 2014, where Moore will be one of the keynote speakers. ©



PICTURES PATRICIA MOORE and HKDI