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The crafting of design minds

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The cache of graduate projects from ECAL/ University of Art and Design Lausanne on display at HKDI reveals a wide-eyed curiosity that is characteristic of the renowned Swiss school's energetic approach to design education. RIK GLAUERT reports.

Qiyun Deng's cutlery *Graft* asks some big questions. Her carefully formed forks, knives and spoons subtly yet impeccably mimic the shape, colour and texture of fruit and vegetables. Created from biodegradable materials, Deng uses these pieces to interrogate humanity's relationship with consumption, sustainability and nature. This kind of investigation and the intriguing way it is executed is typical of an ECAL graduation project.

In the centre of Lausanne, an ancient city noted for its cathedral, market squares and bridges, ECAL's campus occupies 2 hectares of dynamic real estate where 600 design minds are carefully cultivated.

Nestled on the northern shores of Lake Geneva, the school lies in the shadows of the Jura Mountains. Yet despite its rural idyll and the storied history of its setting, ECAL is an institute that has its eyes firmly fixed on the future.

At the centre of the school is a remit to look forward, to question, to revolutionise. ECAL asks only one thing of its students – endless curiosity. In return for an open mind, the school promises to forge neophyte creatives into fully functioning art and design professionals. The grand vision is that a student's time at ECAL will equip them with a full set of tools to tackle the contemporary challenges of the art and design industry. It is with this promise that ECAL welcomes students to complete foundation courses, bachelor degrees, masters and advanced studies in disciplines ranging from fine arts to media and



OPPOSITE *LUCIOLE* BY CESARE BIZZOTTO AND MOISES HERNANDEZ IN COLLABORATION WITH BACCARAT
 ABOVE *VENDOME* BY JOSEPHINE CHOQUET AND QIYUN DENG IN COLLABORATION WITH BACCARAT
 LEFT *GRAFT* BY QIYUN DENG

IMAGE BY MILO KELLER

IMAGES ECAL

« REINVENT YOURSELF,
INNOVATE, CREATE
NEW MODELS. »



curricula and programmes that ECAL offers. In the work completed by students, Georgacopoulos explains “there can also be lightness and even humour in the initial idea and on the context which balances off a bit with a more serious – we could call it ‘Swiss’ – technical background.”

Perfectly encapsulating balance of playful ingenuity with a technical prowess is Mugi Yamamoto’s inkjet printer. Perched atop a tall stack of plain A4 white paper, once activated Yamamoto’s machine deftly begins consuming the blank paper beneath, printing on it, before piling the finished articles neatly above. The device eliminates bulky paper trays and endless acts of refilling reignite and reinvigorate the conventions of a printer.

Deng’s cutlery and Yamamoto’s printer are just two of the projects presented by ECAL at HKDI. Together the examples paint a picture of the core elements of ECAL’s unique dynamism. Each piece portrays a brash creativity and a strong desire to push the forefront of their field. The exhibition provides a well-designed bridge between Hong Kong and Switzerland and is homage to the power of international connectivity. ©



OPPOSITE FROM LEFT FULL TURN, A DEVICE FOR THREE-DIMENSIONAL DISPLAY BY BENJAMIN MUZZIN; DILLY BAG BY GULLAUME RENAUDIN ABOVE BRICK VASE BY AURELIE MATHIEU AND PHILIPPE KARRER IN COLLABORATION WITH BACCARAT BELOW STACK INKJET PRINTER BY MUGI YAMAMOTO

ECAL Diplomas - Best emerging designers from Switzerland
Exhibition period: 28 Nov 2014 - 28 Feb 2015
Venue: Experience Centre, HKDI

interaction design, from film studies to industrial design.

According to Alexis Georgacopoulos, Director of ECAL, ECAL’s mantra encourages every student to “reinvent yourself, innovate, create new models” – making a fresh attitude central to the school’s ethos. This sense of innovation, vitality and regeneration permeates the infrastructure of the school. ECAL’s striking post-modern architecture promises regeneration amidst an ancient metropolis. Wandering around these vibrant learning and research spaces, one is struck by an abundance of fresh faces. The majority of ECAL’s staff are close to the students’ age – “they have a lot of energy to give and the students can relate to them easily.”

This approach is fundamental in an industry that is constantly evolving. We inhabit an Internet age where immediate communication defines all aspects of personal and professional life. Creatives can no longer confine themselves to working alone diligently in a studio. For a designer or artist to flourish (or even survive) in the 21st century, effective communication is essential. Online, students will need to promote new designs and projects through websites, blogs, and social media. Offline, presentations at exhibitions and conferences will be

essential in promoting their designs.

These skills may be taught in the classroom but they need honing in the field. This is ECAL’s forte; “we are very much in contact with the industry, companies and institutions so the students get to know from an early stage what it is to work with partners.” These links also mean that students’ visibility on the design scene is developed from day one.

The 21st century savvy design minds of the future don’t just need to be communicative, they need to be international. This internationalism is weaved into the fabric of the institution with students and staff hailing from over 40 different countries. Design projects, visits, forums and exchanges that ECAL partakes in are scattered across the globe.

ECAL’s reach may stretch around the globe but the institution has not forgotten its obligations to Switzerland. Their vision is a globalisation firmly rooted in local ties, which is why they are working with prestigious local brands such as Vacheron Constantin and Nestlé alongside other international institutions.

This play of national and international is also used to evoke a sense of design identity across the different



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