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Design Research Society: 50 years of understanding design

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Design Research Society

50 years of understanding design

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In 1962, a conference was held at Imperial College London to discuss design methods and terminology. The conference covered everything from the advent of the ‘electronic digital computer’ that would aid the design process, to recognising talent in future designers. “Though I think it may well be possible to make a designer out of any intelligent man, I am fairly sure that it is a much more economical proposition to look for the people who are, as it were, potential designers waiting to be released,” wrote DG Christopherson, vice-chancellor of Durham University. This forward-thinking conference led to the formation of the Design Research Society (DRS) in 1966, for the ‘study of and research into the process of designing in all its many fields’.

Through its history, the Society has seen many major advances in the design world. A newsletter from 1968 talks of the formation of the UK’s new National Design Council (which became simply the Design Council) and the new computer-aided design possibilities, while an early 90s publication mentions environmental issues in design and the idea of electronic libraries and a worldwide network for design.

Fifty years after its foundation, the DRS is still going strong, providing a commitment to design across all disciplines. It has a worldwide network and is also a founding member of the International Association of Societies of Design Research (IASDR), an umbrella group of like-minded societies across the world that includes the Japanese Society for the Science of Design (JSSD) that was founded in 1953. The society produces regular publications, holds a conference every two years, presents awards for design studies and lifetime achievement and offers student bursaries to those working towards the publication of design research. This year it also offered

a series of special anniversary grants on the origins of design research.

In celebration of its 50th anniversary, this year’s conference, to be held in Brighton in the UK, will have a special significance. “We are planning a special and inclusive event that looks back on the history of design research, but most of all, looks forward to the future,” says a special message from Peter Lloyd, the General Chair for the conference and professor of design at the University of Brighton. The conference, which runs from June 27-30, poses three questions: How can design research help frame and address the societal problems that we face? How can design research be a creative and active force for rethinking ideas about design? And how can design research shape our lives in more responsible and open ways? These and many other subjects will be addressed and discussed in papers, workshops and seminars held during the event between industry professionals, academics and students. There is also a sustainable element to the conference, with the main dinner having a zero-waste theme in partnership with local sustainable restaurant Silo. We can only hope that this level of lively discussion on design is still happening in another 50 years.

For more information on the conference and the Design Research Society, visit www.drs2016.org

