

Exhibition setup

Echoes  
of Tomorrow  
at Milan  
Design Week  
2024

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Five years have passed since the installation of the Slovenian pavilion entitled *Thinking the Conditions of Our Time*, created under the organisation of the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, University of Ljubljana, gained high visibility during its presentation at the international event *XXII Triennale di Milano, Broken Nature: Design Takes on Human Survival*. Already on that occasion, the pioneering, courageous and ambitious installation foreshadowed in its own way the Academy's gradual opening up to the international space. Since then, hardly a semester has passed that is not marked by some form of international networking, cooperation or presentation in an international context.

In practice, this is manifested by a number of world-renowned experts involved in the teaching process (for example Masayo Awe, Andre Dekker, Marta Fernandez Guardado, Hörst Hörtnner, Gerald Kiska, Ivica Mitrović, Saskia van der Muijsenberg and Aleks Tatič). Moreover, we carry out a number of projects arising from international connections established with a wide range of foreign institutions, including the Kanazawa College of Art in Japan, the Joanneum Institute of the University of Applied Sciences in Graz and the Academy of Arts in Split. Our teachers, researchers and assistants actively lecture abroad. In the recent period alone, our Academy has been invited to deliver lectures at various institutions, including the Korean International Design School for Advanced Studies, Hongik University, the Italian School of Design – Polimi at the Politecnico di Milano, the Estonian Eesti Kunstiakadeemia in Tallinn, and the English faculty of Goldsmiths, University of London. This array of activities truly demonstrates our versatility and global reach.

The decision to participate once again at Milan Design Week (2024 edition), presenting ourselves as an internationally renowned teaching and research institution, is therefore both logical and necessary to further promote the Academy's positioning in the context of international activities. This is particularly significant as in 2024 the Academy of Fine Arts and Design and, by extension, the University of Ljubljana, celebrates the 40th anniversary of tertiary education in the field of design. Participation in Milan Design Week systematically solidifies and confirms our strong international presence, transparently communicates our pedagogical and research approaches and attracts international students, as well as proving and reaffirming our mission in the domestic environment, bolstering confidence that we are cultivating the best talent for the future.

The project for Milan Design Week, entitled *Echoes of Tomorrow*, was realised in two phases. During the academic year 2022/2023,

we conducted a research project involving our postgraduate Industrial Design students in collaboration with students from the department of Visual Communication Design. The aim of the project was to perform an in-depth examination of a wide variety of existing national and international exhibition installations. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to evaluate visitor comprehension and attention, whereas testing and measuring key elements of exhibition installations enabled us to prove or disprove premises about different information presentation approaches. Drawing on the results obtained during the first part of the project, a substantive and planning basis was prepared for the continuation of the project in the second phase, which consisted of finalising the concept and exhibition designing. (FIG. 29)

The designing of the exhibition took place in the academic year 2023/2024, with the participation of a diverse group of undergraduate and postgraduate students of Industrial Design and Visual Communication Design under the mentorship of professors from both design departments at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, University of Ljubljana. The process was experimental but nevertheless consistently based on the meticulous use of sustainable design tools. In 2023, we responded to a call for proposals issued by BASE Milano, a hybrid cultural centre, which, through the CASE public programme, invited the submission of projects fostering conviviality and coexistence in the era of environmental and social crises. For the purpose of the call, our concept was focused on a basic human need—water. In the light of the current environmental crisis, this issue is extremely topical, since, according to all known data, the rise in the average temperature of the Earth will have a significant impact on water ecosystems all across the globe, leading to a diminishing availability of clean and drinkable water for a growing part of the world's population.

In this context, the presentation project was built on the outstanding master's thesis co-authored by three Industrial Design students, Žan Girandon, Pia Groleger and Luka Pleskovič. The thesis titled *Planning Proposals and Solutions to Raise Awareness and Alleviate the Problem of Water Pollution in Local Communities with Their Own Water Catchment*<sup>①</sup> showcases the sum of knowledge that our students acquire during their five years of study at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, University of Ljubljana.

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For the article of the master's thesis, see pages 196–211.

Focusing on just a few of the milestones: with their in-depth research and highly innovative design, the authors initially excelled in an international competition, convincing the international jury of the 27th edition of the Biennial of Design (BIO27) and its curator, Jane Withers. Hence, the result of their master's research work was selected for the inclusion in the BIO27 Production Platform and the BIO27 exhibition *Super Vernaculars – Design for a Regenerative Future*. The exhibition was on display at the Museum of Architecture and Design in Ljubljana and open to a wider national and international audience from 29 May to 26 September 2022. Its central focus was the responses of local designer groups to global processes and design in local contexts. Since this breakthrough moment, the three designers—operating as a newly-formed association Pjorkkala—have become well established as a socially and environmentally engaged collective, focused on experimentation, exploration of natural materials and traditional skills, while thoughtfully combining these elements with contemporary production technologies.

The result of the master's thesis culminated in the product Dodola, which is based on a regenerative design that filters water using the principle of mechanical filtration through a porous ceramic matrix. The product is at the core of the exhibition installation in Milan. Drawing on the broader context of the thesis, the chosen installation plays with the concepts of echoes and reflections created by the movement of water. In order to create a playful effect, the reflections are captured in a lightweight, sustainability-based circular installation composed of textile screens. The play of shadows subtly invites visitors to interact with the pavilion and read it in a unique way. The circular design evokes the circulation of water and the interconnectedness of seemingly unrelated factors; the play of reflections and water sounds creates a meditative atmosphere, which immerses visitors, encouraging them to delve deeper into the content. The materiality of the pavilion combines the softness and absorbency of fabric with the reflectivity, strength and lightness of sheet metal. The exhibited product is a water “fountain” that forms the central island—the convergence and starting point of the pavilion, which aims to create a sense of mutual belonging. (FIG. 30)

The design of the pavilion was developed following approaches with low environmental impact. The modular design allows for transport with a smaller carbon footprint as well as extending the pavilion's life cycle. The pavilion can be reinstalled in a wide array of spatial settings with no need for major interventions. Accordingly, during the pavilion design phase, durable materials were deliberately selected to withstand installation

in exhibition spaces with high visitor traffic. At the end of the pavilion's life cycle, all exhibition elements will be suitable for reuse or recycling.

Finally, the realised installation demonstrates that the pedagogical approaches we adopt and the exceptional individuals we train permit us to effectively design and implement international projects, and to confidently establish a strong presence on the global design map. With the projects we design, we are able to operate sustainably, and with the content we research, we are already addressing the future today.

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