

YOUR

CASE

MY

CASE

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375  
MADE IN  
CHINA





YOUR CASE MY CASE CROSS CULTURAL DESIGN WORKSHOPS

### DESIGN THINKING AIRLINES BOARDING PASS BAGGAGE ALLOWANCE — 23 KG

2 HOURS to exchange views on design practice Focus on HOW you design Discussion through OBJECTS

**BEFORE CHECK-IN** (max. 50 words)

**MINDSET** (max. 50 words)

**PACKING LIST** (max. 50 words)

**ROAD TOOLS** (max. 50 words)

**EXTRAS**

*Handwritten notes in Chinese and English are visible throughout the form.*





# ATTENTION ATTENTION

This year, we redesigned – no pun intended – the longstanding collaboration between the Netherlands and Beijing Design Week, that started as early as 2011. Instead of presenting Dutch Design in a static exhibition, we opted for a series of Sino-Dutch encounters between professionals in the fields of art, design and architecture. In fact, you could call these encounters 'parasites', building on other initiatives that took place during Beijing Design Week.

Therefore, we thank all partners that helped bring Dutch designers to Beijing: Wopke Schaafstal, 751D.Park, Marlies Bolhoven from the Dutch Design Week, Aidan Walker from Design China Beijing. For their contribution to this publication we owe gratitude to Priscilla Baxter, John van de Water, Henny van Nistelrooy, Diana Guzijan, Céline Lamée and the designers from Lava Beijing.

YOUR CASE MY CASE takes objects as a starting point for passionate discussions about design processes, and about cross-cultural differences and similarities. Obviously, the magnitude of these questions exceeds the format of a series of workshops. The mysteries of cross-cultural collaboration stayed partly hidden. Nevertheless, the talks that took place in various locations in Beijing in September 2019 immediately generated a number of surprising conclusions. This publication lays them down. Not as definitive, scientific results, but in the same spirit as the workshops: a discursive means to an end.

This end has been and stays the same, over the years: connecting Chinese and Dutch designers, with the aim to learn from each other. Design often makes the difference, this truth has been proven sufficiently. That is why we believe that discussions about how we work help us to enhance both Chinese and Dutch design.

Wim Geerts  
Ambassador of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to China  
Beijing, October 2019

Thirteen suitcases with a maximum of 23 kilograms, packed by designers. Filled with objects that give insight in their way of working. Objects to be used in discussions on the role and practice of a designer. Objects to be used in the exchange of views between designers working in different cultures. Objects to be selected to carry those discussions and exchanges into this publication.

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## START THINKING BEFORE PACKING

A short introduction on the working environment of the participants and their mindset on design, and working in China.

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## CROSSING BORDERS

Two cases in two suitcases. Only one suitcase can be taken across the cultural border. One suitcase that carries the outcomes of the dialogue through a couple of objects.

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\* Three Dutch designers with extensive China experience share their experiences.



# START THINKING BEFORE PACKING

A short introduction on the working environment of the participants and their mindset on design, and working in China.

## ATELIER NL

Atelier NL develops products that showcase the richness of the earth and the value of local raw materials. Each earthly element tells a different story and yields a different product. Atelier NL's work is based on a passionate and unique research methodology that analyses the hidden narratives of the earth and all that it produces. Atelier NL speaks to the graceful subtleties of the natural world by reshaping raw earth elements into tangible, everyday objects.

On a deeper level, the work of Nadine Sterk and Lonny van Ryswyck calls for an expanded valuation of local sourcing and production. Their research-based projects aim to reveal and inspire while opening the eyes of the general public and industry specialists alike.

[www.ateliernl.com](http://www.ateliernl.com)



ZandGlas + ClayService © Blickfänger

Polderlunch © Paul Scala



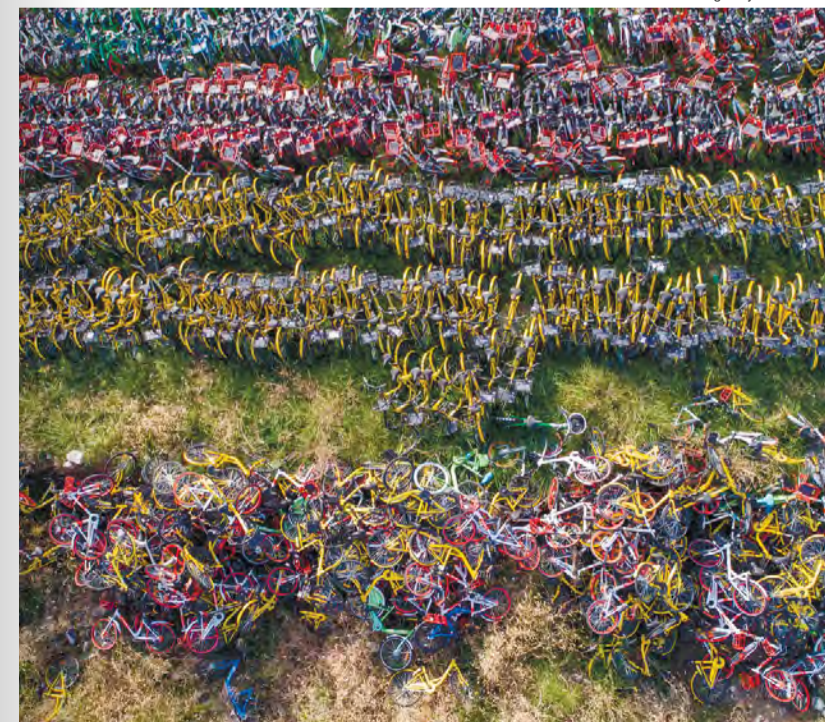
## WENG XINYU

WENG Xinyu (翁昕煜) was born in Taizhou (台州), China. After studying product design at Bauhaus University Weimar, he founded YUUE design studio in 2015, together with his partner Tao Haiyue.

The focus of Weng's design practice is to understand the relationship between mankind and its creations. He is interested to use design as an expression to reflect on social problems. He also seeks inspiration by comparing cultures and re-discovering traditions and legacies before our age.

[www.yuuedesign.com](http://www.yuuedesign.com)

Shared bike graveyard © Netease







Frank in Wan Chai, Hong Kong

## FRANK HAVERMANS

As an artist and designer Frank Havermans creates strategic site specific interventions, as well in commissioned as self initiated. His work derives from a combined fascination for architecture, urban dynamics, constructions, gravity and tangibility.

[www.frankhavermans.nl](http://www.frankhavermans.nl)



Small models GCA study



René de Wit

“In China I can’t plan everything and regulate in advance. For a Dutch person that is not easy. It demands the utmost of my improvisation and adaptability skills. That’s also exactly the reason why I like to come and work here. I have to think about every step I do and that keeps me sharp.”

## BAO WEI

Bao Wei is the principal architect of BWAO, a practice established in Beijing in 2013. Before his practice he worked for Machado and Silvetti Associates for four years after graduating with distinction from Harvard GSD, already holding a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Tsinghua University. His practice in Beijing involves mainly renovation and interior projects that intertwine with a rich urban and cultural context.

[www.b-a-o.cn](http://www.b-a-o.cn)

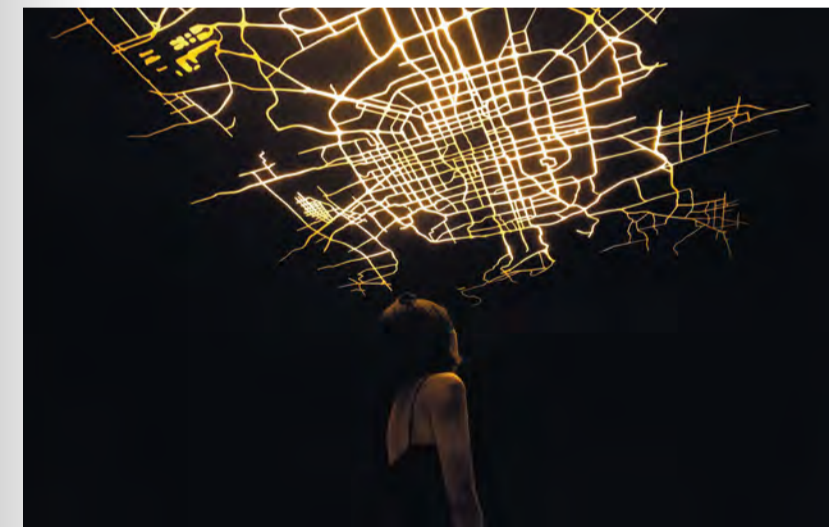


“A good design is the most *responsible* gift an architect can offer to the city, which can be explained on three levels. *Responsible* for the designer-self means the constant quest for truth in design, consciously and critically in a context of the discourse. *Responsible* for the client means the humble attitude and carefulness towards all the resources and requirements provided by the project. *Responsible* for the users means the compassion to create spaces for people whose bodies can relate to and hearts can feel for.”

## VOUW

The Amsterdam based design studio VOUW was founded by Mingus Vogel and Justus Bruns. The duo has set itself the goal of translating their joint technological knowledge into physical installations and products. The relationship between people and technology is central here, and VOUW hopes to make people aware of the present and the future.

[www.vouw.com](http://www.vouw.com)



ABOVE Studio VOUW,  
BELOW City Gazing Beijing

“Working in China always gives us new perspectives on our own design company. All businesses owners we spoke to in China don’t have a why - a mission statement or vision for their company. ‘Just make good products’, a friend with a product design studio in Beijing told us. In the West we ponder for days, weeks or even months about the reason why a company exists. But this is wasted time, where you could also do some actual work. You know your own why by heart, you know what is good and you’ll always work towards that.”

## HELEN HU

Professor Hu Xueqin - or Helen Hu - works as Associate Professor and Master’s Tutor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. She is the deputy director of the Centre for Urban Visual Culture and the director of the Creative Communication Research Centre. She is the founder of the Designforeland Gallery and a well-know curator.



Design Foreland Gallery

“Can designers do something meaningful for society in the current era of growing population, rampant consumerism and increasing scarcity of earth resources? Can design be used as a strategy and tool to help improve our natural environment, transform our urban space and enhance people’s lives? If our design has some benefits in these areas, even a very small point, I consider that as a success.”



**LULU LI**

Lulu Li is a Beijing-based graphic designer. A graduate of Fine Arts from both Shandong University and Chelsea College of Art and Design in London, Lulu works “with any parameters of any given situation”. She is active in fields of design, art, interaction design, research, curatorial practice, and entrepreneurship. Her concept-heavy work makes use of everyday items that act as a catalyst to trigger, intervene or evoke a series of reactions, chain reactions or to change the readings of everyday life.

www.lululi.co  
www.thelightningbabe.com  
wwdidelidi.com



Gerald Van Der Kaap "Beyond Index -Trailer #04" Installation view @ Club Solo, Breda, 2017. Photo: Peter Cox

project Twin Flowers



**GERALD VAN DER KAAP**

Gerald van der Kaap is an Amsterdam-based photographer, artist, curator who is regarded as one of the true pioneers of the use of new media in art. An unclassifiable artist who participated in the key moments of post-70s art without ever fully pausing for very long in any one of them. He uses photography to access the entire field of media in the era of its digital reproducibility: (digital) photography, video, television, books, parties, electronic music, internet, mobile phones, and now film.

www.geraldvanderkaap.com



Still from BEYOND INDEX (Fang jumps into the void)

“Working in China is a constant battle and requires great courage and bravery.

It constantly involves both scientific and shamanistic methods because the elephant is in the room but you have to find it:

- facial recognition
- mood interpretation...
- speech pattern analysis...
- mind reading...
- semantic decoding,
- astrological insights...
- read between the lines,
- psychology profiling...
- second guessing...
- educational persuasion...
- motivational speeches...
- over the table procedures and under the table manoeuvring,
- front stage performances and pulling the strings behind the scenes

And then in a later stage it is an endless twisting and turning, trying to scratch the itchy spot.

Sometimes the time frame is indefinitely long, other times the deadline is so tight, it could be used to hang someone with..”



Still from GIF The Lightning Babe



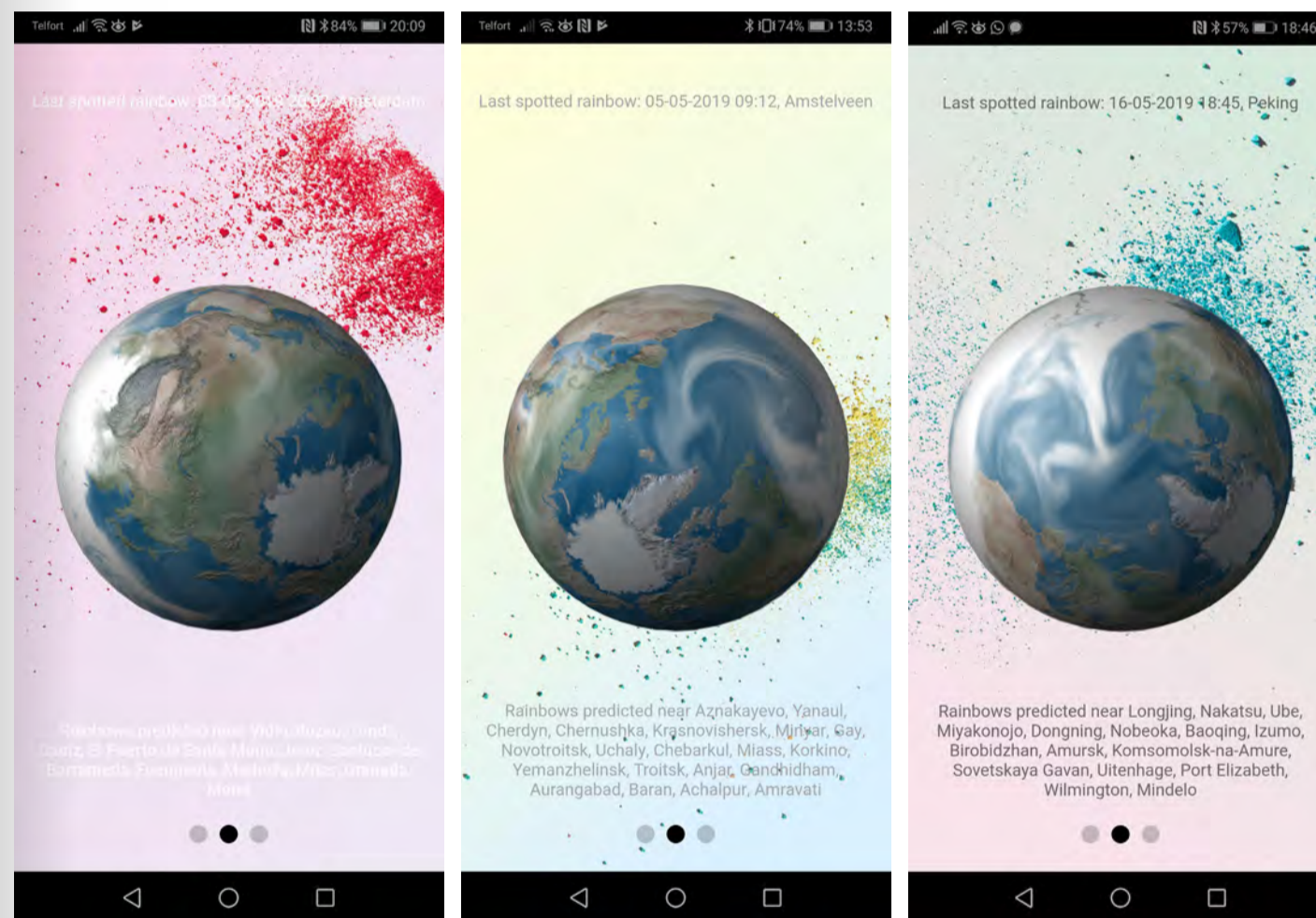
Pink Pony Express

**PINK PONY EXPRESS (+JULIEN MCHARDY)**

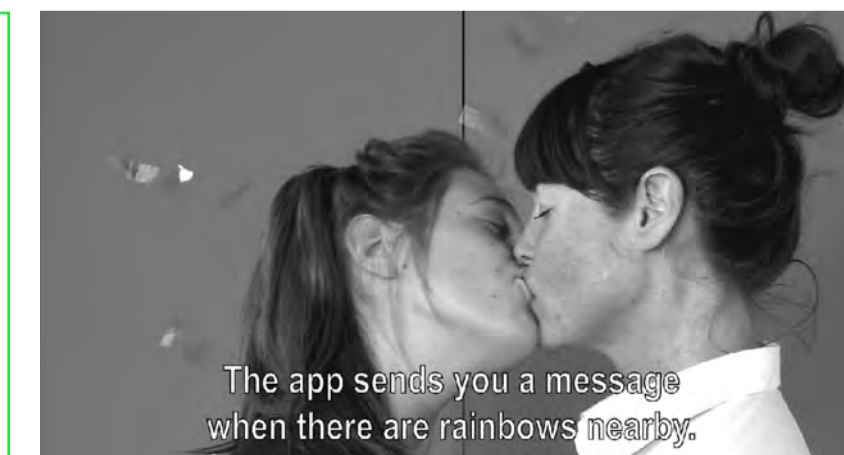
Pink Pony Express is a design collective, based in Amsterdam. Their projects are based on locations where there is friction – usually between the government and local citizens. Following a period of long-term research that includes living and working on these locations, they make images that help redefine the situation, and create a shift in the current perspective. Their work is realized in public space.

www.pinkponyexpress.nl

“We are a collective that designs projects in public space. Our work often explores contested topics, without portraying them explicitly. This allows us to shed new light on, and sometimes subvert, sensitive issues. In China, pushing the envelope in this way can be risky – and while we, as westerners, are relatively safe – our collaborators aren't.”



Screenshots app Calhong



Still from Crowdfunding for Raduga



**SMOGWARE**

Every day, maybe unknowingly, we breathe fine dust, with negative impacts on our health. Architect Iris de Keith and designer Annemarie Piscaer found a way to harvest this dust to use it for ceramic glazing, creating new porcelain tableware. The 'smogware' with colourful glazing created from the captured dust makes the (poor) air quality visible, even tangible. As a tool for heightening awareness of air quality.

[www.ser-vies.nl](http://www.ser-vies.nl)



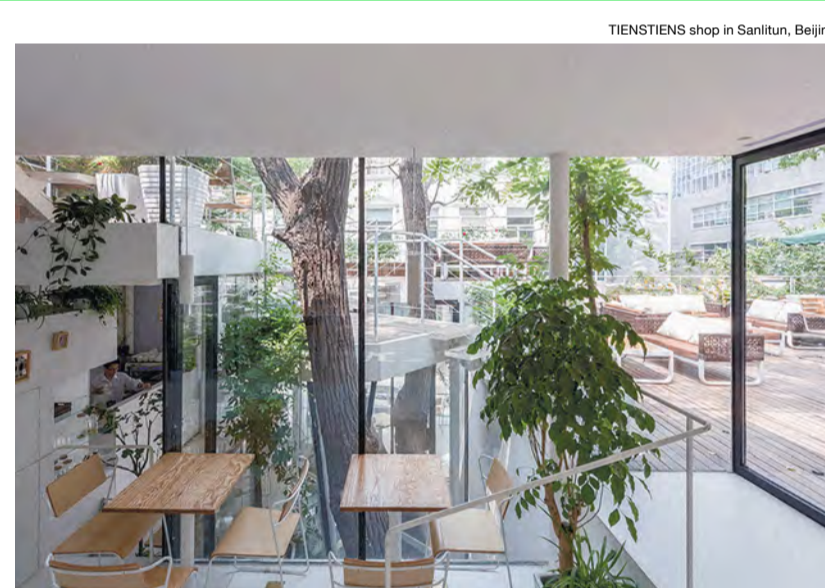
Smogware still life



Dust from different places



The Judge



TIENSTIENS shop in Sanlitun, Beijing

**TIENSTIENS**

In January 2015, the three founders discovered an empty spot in Sanlitun. Right then one of the founders, Ian Wang, knew that the future success of TIENSTIENS lay in the hands of architecture, so he invited his good friend Hua Li from Trace Architecture Office. Together they designed and built this light and peaceful dessert palace. Where art and food go hand in hand.

official WeChat account  
TIENSTIENS 将将

"Since the Smogware project is all about air quality, using ceramics as a medium, the choice to involve China is obvious. In many cities the concentration of air pollution exceeds significantly the limits advised by the WHO, affecting millions of citizens. This urge combined with the centuries-old expertise in ceramics brings us to China.

The essence of the Smogware project is told in an universal language – a harmful and somehow distant phenomenon is made visible and tangible in a daily but beautiful object – and therefore it doesn't need any translation. Other components of the projects do need a translation, are more complex to translate. How to reach as much impact as possible? To understand that question, exchange and mutual understanding is needed. In that process we believe the more the context is different, the more we learn, and the more spot on the concept evolves...towards an awareness of clean air as our common concern."



Shangwei Plugin House-Huang family



PAO Office in Beijing

**PAO**

People's Architecture Office (PAO) is an international practice with offices based in Beijing, China and Boston, USA. Founded in 2010 by James Shen, He Zhe, and Zang Feng, the firm is a multi-disciplinary studio focused on social impact through design particularly in the areas of housing, urban regeneration, innovative learning environments, and creative workspace design.

[www.peoples-architecture.com](http://www.peoples-architecture.com)

"Architectural theory and concepts are important in any country or region. However, in the case of working within China more importance is placed on implementation and pragmatic feasibility. Therefore, PAO focuses on the design of adaptable systems that can easily change and be customised according to a client or a situation's needs, as opposed to too strong of an adherence to concept or a singular design that is not customisable. Thinking about project implementation throughout the design process is also what makes our approach more different."

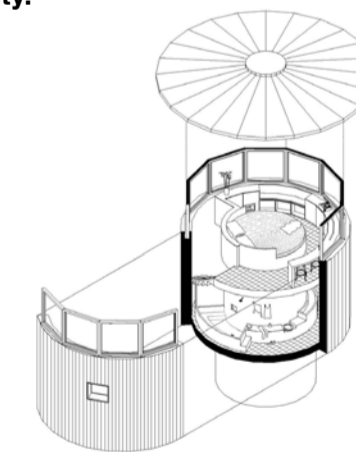


Office Space&Matter in Amsterdam

**SPACE & MATTER**

By origin, Space&Matter is an architecture office, but we do much more than just designing buildings... Aside from designing at all scales, we create urban development strategies; make online platforms; and even initiate new business ventures. Everything we do is always focused on improving the built environment and promoting a cohesive society.

[www.spaceandmatter.nl](http://www.spaceandmatter.nl)



Technical drawing SWEETS project

"Working in China is intriguing, energizing and exhausting at the same time. I love being there and feeling the drive and energy. One literally feels a nation in development. However, the so-called 'Speed-of-China' is difficult to manage. Designing Architecture and Developing good Concepts takes time and consideration. Time is a friend as well as an enemy in China. We are currently developing our office strategy to adapt to the speed of China while enabling ourselves to be considerate in what we do and why we do it... We learn a lot about our Dutch way of working when starting to work abroad, in this case: China."



# CROSSING BORDERS

Two cases in two suitcases. Only one suitcase can be taken across the cultural border. One suitcase that carries the outcomes of the dialogue through a couple of objects.



# RECONNECTING

Every object has been preceded by a chain of thoughts, ideas, choices, people, hands, beliefs. And by communicating this chain they become storytellers, they let designers use these objects as a new language to express their beliefs.

On stage a heavy suitcase with, until now, carefully packed ceramics. After unpacking, samples, whole cups and pieces of cups, wellis (rubber boots), small exhibits, bits of clay and bottles of sand become visible. An atelier on wheels.

Next to it, a dark grey canvas bag containing ten-odd objects, a laptop, a sketchbook, a pen. Almost a minimalistic mobile studio.

Living and working in a shrinking world increases choices. Only when comparisons are available can one step back and view one's own cultural context. In an unknown context we notice the small details more than we would in our own.

AtelierNL and Weng Xinyu develop products that go beyond its sheer function. Their products tell a story, and by doing so invite the user to see things from a different perspective.



[black bag]  
Research tool  
In the case of Weng Xinyu, 2019

**WENG XINYU:** Most of my projects start with travelling, hence the bag. While becoming an international citizen, I got a new understanding of my hometown and see my original identity from a different perspective. I now see things that are overlooked by local people.

**ATELIER NL:** It is wonderful to travel and to be amazed by the strange things that are completely normal in other cultures. It becomes even better if you can take this open way of looking back home again. During my study I needed to travel before I could really appreciate my own country. When I came back I started to dig in my own backyard, noticing things I hadn't noticed before.

**ATELIER NL:** We are field workers. When we start a new project, one of the first things we do is to go over to the project area. We take our boots, buckets and shovels and explore the soil, find what's in there. And while we are there we meet new people, which opens up a complete different level, giving us different perspectives on the area.



[boots and shovel]  
Research tools  
In the case of Atelier NL, 2019





[glass vase]  
Object to start a conversation  
In the case of Atelier NL, 2019

**ATELIER NL:** We have to make mistakes, do crazy experiments, we cannot think things through, you need to have something, an object to start a conversation. I don't think failures exist, they all have a beauty of their own, and they all teach you a lesson.

**WENG XINYU:** Mistakes are the mother of succes. You don't reach succes at once, mistakes happen most of the time. We call them mistakes, while they are just one of the many steps with an unexpected outcome.



[tofu box]  
Reconnection with life's basics  
In the case of Weng Xinyu, 2019

**WENG XINYU:** Very few people know how tofu is made, although it is a much used ingredient in the Chinese kitchen. I believe humanity in the future will be more and more detached from basic technologies, basic knowledge of surviving in the world. I don't think that is a good thing.

**ATELIER NL:** What I like about it is that it's about making your own food and going back to your roots. To be able to connect with people through design, the object has to attract them, by being functional, useful and good looking. And this box does that.



[table]  
Awareness product  
In the case of Weng Xinyu, transported separately, 2019

**WENG XINYU:** Why do we really need mass production? How can we, designers prevent losing control over the effects of mass production? My first goal is to raise awareness, the second to turn the waste into other products, for example by looking into cooperation with the manufacturer of the original product.

**ATELIER NL:** One approach would be how to make money out of it. Making money requires an efficient way of working, often resulting in something that is close to the existing. I think the approach of raising awareness and starting to understand what the problem is, is much more interesting. It is about looking at an object in a completely different way and then seeing possibilities and opportunities.

**WENG XINYU:** Design is about iterations and lots of repetitions. Through these repetitions, a designer is able to compare the outcomes and choose the best of them. This is a job only a designer can do. It is important that we do this research, to create a library for people to use.



[tiles]  
Library of soils  
In the case of Atelier NL, 2019



[rough clay]  
Self harvested material  
In the case of Atelier NL, 2019

**ATELIER NL:** A farmer cannot force the process of harvesting, it takes time. The crops need maintenance, effort, water. Design projects are the same, they take time. In our rushed world we tend to forget this, but it is so important.



# A HEALTHY BALANCE OF CONFUSION

by Céline Lamée  
Founder of Lava Beijing

## Living in China for the past seven years has changed my mind about many things.

It has changed my mind about the importance of building good relations. It has changed my mind about hospitality. I can be left feeling embarrassed when Dutch friends come over. How they squabble over the bill for a 10-people lunch (which is something like 20 euros). It has changed my idea about distances: the ease, speed and comfort with which you can travel all over China. After this I can never take anyone in Holland seriously when they talk about having a friend in Nijmegen, that is so, so far away. It has changed my mind about planning. On top of being Dutch I come from a very plannery family, that loves to know what is going to happen at least a week in advance.

Living in China has changed my mind about many things. But not about design.

I still feel as strongly about design as I did in art school, in Arnhem. I know Dutch Design is explained in many different ways by different people, for different purposes. For me personally, good design comes down to this:

Having a clear concept; a good story, that can be explained and understood easily. Distilling a topic down to its core. And being stubborn. Not just giving the client what they ask for, but thinking for myself.

And these are exactly the things I look for when hiring new people at my studio. And what I teach my students at Beijing's second biggest art school.

So, design doesn't change, but the stuff around it does.

In our Beijing graphic design studio we do a lot of things differently from how they were done at Lava Amsterdam, where I used to work. Negotiating, planning, the way we do meetings and presentations, the way we try to convince clients of our ideas. To have an objective dialogue about design isn't always as self-evident as it is in Holland. And things like who the client is and what the briefing itself can change during the assignment as well. That's why in all of this we adjust to the local customs, but this does not change the core of how we design.

As for studio demographics, I always make sure the balance in our studio is half Chinese, half international.

To keep a healthy balance of confusion. To generate an atmosphere of challenge and questioning and make sure Lava is never fully submerged in any one culture.

### STORYTELLING

I want to say something about how we won this pitch for the China Film Awards, or in Chinese the 金鸡奖 *Jin Ji Jiang*, Golden Rooster Awards. They are like the mainland Chinese equivalent of the Oscars and this year, they will be held in Xiamen. We'll make their visual identity, poster, website, all event items. It is, I think, our biggest and most prestigious project in China so far, or at least, it will be the most visible. And one of the reasons I think we won this pitch is because of the way we told the story of the design.

We named our submission *dà-làng-táo-sha-shī-jàn-jin* 大浪淘沙始见金 which means something like 'if you keep searching in the sand for long enough, eventually you will find gold'.

In a series of visuals you see Xiamen features, aspects of the local culture and elements of film, all made up out of gold dust. I think we won the pitch because we gave them a very clear story for our design that the leaders could easily fit into their own story for the event: that of Xiamen as a city — transforming itself from a working port to a glamorous place, comparable to Cannes. And this elevating feel can be fitted by their leaders into the story of the China Dream.

### STUBBORNNESS

An example for being stubborn comes from last year. When we were asked to make the Visual Identity for an art exhibition in Shenzhen called 现在的未来不是将来 *The Imagined Future is Not the Future*. The guy we worked with told us we could make whatever we wanted, no need to hold back.

We proposed a black and white poster with type moving in all directions. About how perspective changes with every step you take. The client didn't like it on the basis of black and white referring to funerals in China. I found this comment unimaginative. Yes, it is also black and white, but apart from that, it's also just very different. But okay, I've learned that after one comment like that, there's no use in trying to get this idea through anyway.

But we at Lava really liked the initial design and we weren't ready to let it go. So we made it into a calendar, to give to our clients for new year. A calendar in which each day has a different perspective. Funnily enough the client in Shenzhen loved the idea as well, and invited us to be a part of the Future art show. We showed all days of our calendar and took over the space around with big perspective type. Which became a spot where lots of selfies were taken.

### SIMPLIFY

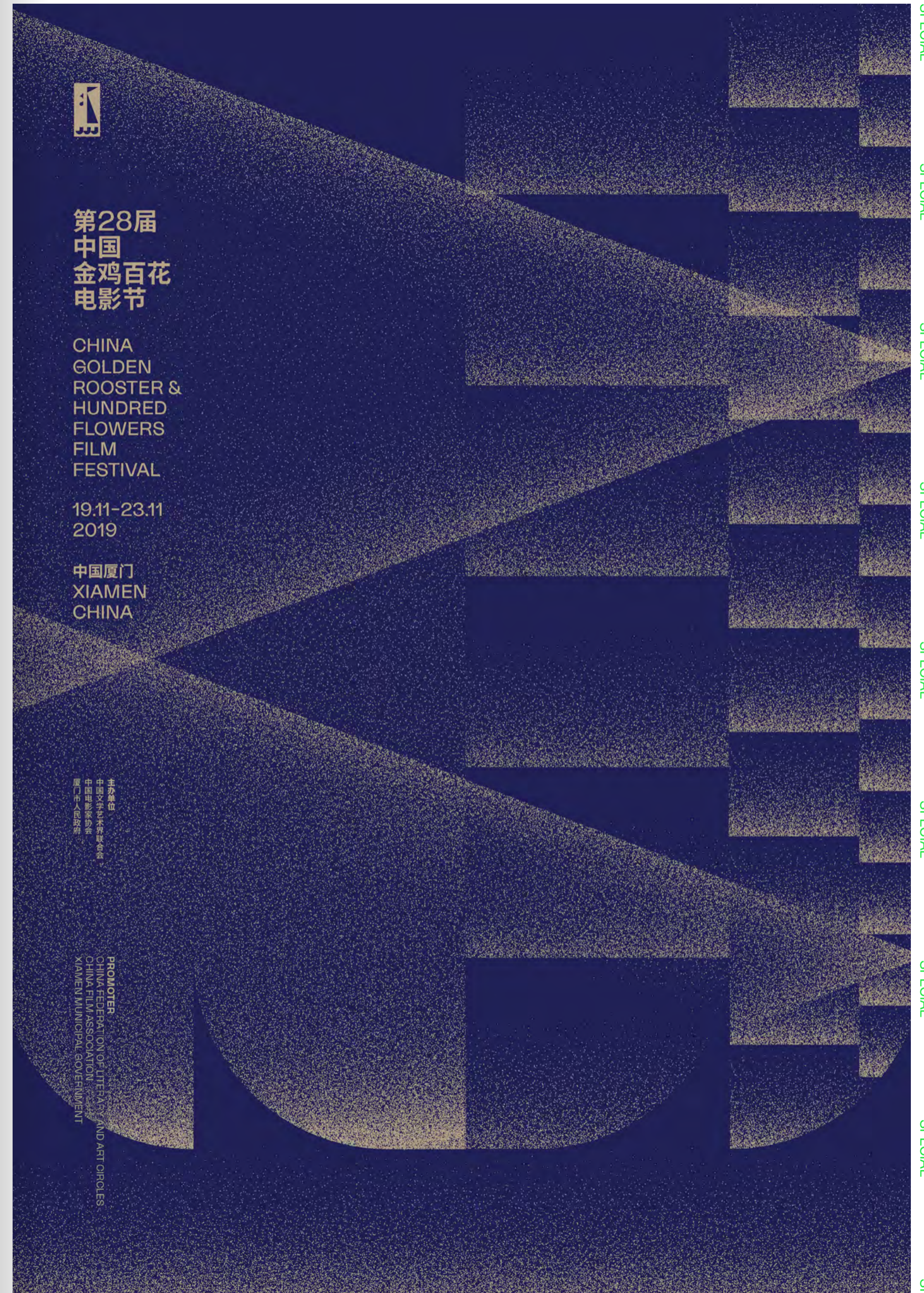
Back to the Golden Rooster. After we won the pitch some minor adjustments had to be made. Normal. For example, the character 国 *Guo* (which means country) cannot appear to be cut, and the color scheme looked too similar to the Golden Horse, the film awards in Taipei. For political reasons, it was essential that the poster of the mainland Film Awards was differentiated. The local elements we'd won the pitch with had to be less prominent. Instead, more focus on film in general, an homage to the history of film making in China, yet a positive message to the young generation of film makers. Then there was this competition called nationally on Weibo for the public to design its own Golden Rooster poster! In two days hundreds of designs poured in. And the next time we met the Film Association, they asked if we could also add in some of the submissions in our design. So now our briefing had become quite a shopping list.

Time to simplify. What was the one thing about these China Film Awards that all these parties couldn't deny? The Rooster. So we made it all about the Rooster, both in writing and visually. We took this new version to a last minute Sunday morning meeting in Suzhou. We had only been told to get ourselves over to Suzhou on Saturday night. An hour before the last flight. I was quite far from home myself, and there was no way I would make it. Luckily my two colleagues dropped everything and ran, design files in hand.

In this meeting all decision makers were together, the China Film Association, Xiamen government and CCTV, no one could argue against this proposal.

With one last, radical, change of color, the rooster finally won the day.

www.lavabeijing.com



A sketch proposal for Golden Rooster poster



# THE RIGHT MINDSET

**BAO WEI:** The drawings in my laptop might be more of an end result than the building itself. I realised when I went to see the great buildings of ancient China, and got really disappointed. Most of them have been built recently. I then learned that the buildings have been built over and over again, because they were ruined by natural disasters, wars. And I realised that what essentially lasts is the idea. In the end the intangible heritage is stronger than the physical shape of it.



[laptop]  
Carrier of ideas  
In the case of Bao Wei, 2019



[models]  
Design tool  
In the case of Frank Havermans, 2019

**FRANK HAVERMANS:** The models for me are the most important part of the whole process. I see them as the visualisation of my thoughts, they are what my mind has created, and the conclusion of my design process. Only once I have sold a model, and have regretted it ever since. I decided never to let go of a model again.

Two tables. A small, neat backpack and a large bulky suitcase. The owner of the backpack unpacks eight objects. A laptop. A mobile phone. A roll of tracing paper. A fineliner. A car key. A digital tape measure. A photo camera. And a dark blue jacket with gold buttons. Everything Bao Wei needs to practice his profession as an architect. When the large suitcase opens another world is revealed. Different pieces of cardboard, sketch material, glue residues, models, books, steel pieces, tools. The world of Frank Havermans.

They laugh when they look at each other's tables. Although they both build in public space, there is a world of difference between them. And not only in the content of the two suitcases. It is the soloist who masters his instrument versus the conductor who leads the orchestra. Frank Havermans sits somewhere between a designer and an artist. He studied Architectural Design at a Dutch art academy and kept an artist's freedom of thinking and making, in an applied form. He designs and builds installations in public spaces, not intended only for functional use, but even more to challenge the observer's view.

Bao Wei always works on assignment and with the client. Without chemistry, no working together. Before the specifications are even discussed, there must be a click, a good conversation and both wanting to work with each other. After that, it is a matter of meeting the requirements with a building, through a continuous dialogue. As long as the chemistry is good they'll find a solution. After all, they have the same purpose: a building that fulfils the user's needs.

Frank Havermans has a different relationship with his client. After getting the assignment, he returns to his studio and he begins to draw. Only when he has come to a conclusion in the form of a design, does he go back to the client, in the hope that the client will appreciate it. It's a big risk, because a client can say no, although so far that has never happened.

Studio Frank Havermans was founded in 1999. It took him ten years to build up a clients base, a period in which he initiated projects himself for little or no money, with the purpose of gaining experience. His work got noticed, he won a prize, people remembered him and came back, sometimes only years later. Nowadays

he has enough work, requests come in through his website or Facebook, and he still doesn't need to do any direct acquisition.

Bao Wei founded his design studio BWAO six years ago. Customers approach him mainly through word of mouth. A successful project for an influential customer gave him a number of follow-ups in both Beijing and further afield.

The most efficient way to get to clients in China, is to find a representative or a good friend. Someone who knows what's going on and can introduce a designer's work at the right time to the right people. An intermediate? In The Netherlands both the designer and his work can speak for themselves. It is easy to approach the right person, initiative is even appreciated.

While this is not a fixed rule, in general the relationship between people is more important in China. And getting an assignment depends on having a good relationship with the right people.

**FRANK HAVERMANS:** Even when I do small buildings, I want to build them myself. By doing everything myself I am totally in control. I design it, I build it. The final product is one hundred percent what I aimed for.

**BAO WEI:** The role of an architect is different, he is more like a conductor, responsible for the whole symphony. It takes a lot of time to find the right people for the orchestra, the carpenter, the contractor, the builder. And then the workmen start to build. Once they start I forget about my drawings, and work together with them. As long as it doesn't interfere with my ideas and design, I let them do what they want and learn from them.



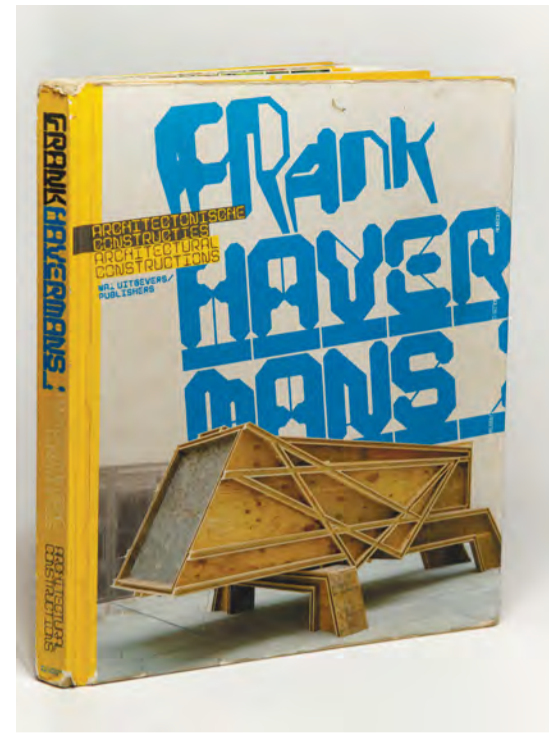
[saw]  
Building tool  
In the case of Frank Havermans, 2019



**FRANK HAVERMANS:** For me the project starts when I go to the site. I have to be there, observe it, and then everything starts. I put down a couple of sketches, put down measurements, and start thinking. I don't use a lot of paper, I just make a couple of notes. The real design process starts with making models.



[Model leftovers]  
Start of design process  
In the case of Frank Havermans, 2019



[book]  
Definition of a design philosophy  
In the case of Frank Havermans, 2019

**BAO WEI:** This is him.

**FRANK HAVERMANS:** The purpose of my work is to challenge the viewer. It doesn't have to be very practical. If the final work is better than the model, I feel satisfied. I don't care too much about what other people say, success is within myself. Of course the more people are happy about it, the better it is, but it is not a requirement.

**BAO WEI:** A building is very different, as function comes first. I visited one of my projects yesterday and asked the cleaning lady what she thought of the building. She didn't know I was the architect. She said, I really like this building because of the many cabinets. They are so handy to hide my cleaning stuff in. It was very satisfying for me to hear that. That's one side of a successful project. The second is the client's appreciation. And the third is myself. I know what the project does and does not do, and what my own requirements are.



[tracing paper]  
Communication tool  
In the case of Bao Wei, 2019

**BAO WEI:** When a client presents a problem, I start to react to that, by creating a story. And I use tracing paper to communicate this story, as you can lay it over any information, which helps in the communication.







# DESIGN

# APPROACH



[practical notes]  
Workshop tool  
In the case of Helen Hu, 2019

**VOUW:** When we started to address the problem of loneliness, we took a step back and came up with more generic questions. What can we do to bring people together? And we start drawing. Set up two slides, where they meet at the bottom. A cage to put people in. A prison, they must say hi when they're in a cell together.

**CAFA STUDENT:** The biggest difference is that the Dutch method is a little bit more crazy. We usually go the normal way, we are presented with a problem, we solve the problem by thinking of a solution. The Dutch method is more fun, but also very difficult to link with the real design.

In both China and the Netherlands designers use design to address social issues. How to start a project in which such an issue is addressed? And how does a solution relate to its specific context?

In Amsterdam, VOUW developed a bench for public spaces. The bench prevents loneliness by giving users no other choice than to sit next to each other. Research shows that in most cases a conversation, even with a stranger, gives positive feelings or happiness. The bench lowers the threshold to start a conversation and by doing so, answers the government's question: how to make squares in the Amsterdam region more dynamic?

At the same time, in Beijing, CAFA students developed an app, in which elderly are linked to youngsters, who receive payment for cooking a meal, giving personal care or emergency assistance. The app is an answer to the question of Alipay: how to induce the elderly to spend more?

For China, Amsterdam's Chairwave may not be the best solution, as people generally stand and sit very close to each other, often without getting their eyes off the screen. Neither does the app have a great chance of success in the Netherlands. Apart from a difference in standards and values, the design and scale of our digital financial traffic is not comparable with China. A solution is context-dependent.

Nevertheless, the men of VOUW and Professor Hu come together again for the second year in a row because they learn from each other's way of working.

VOUW applies a specific design methodology to reach a finished product. Instead of considering the problem as a whole, the problem is broken down into many subproblems. Then, for each subproblem, a multitude of solutions is generated, after which the solutions are combined into a holistic solution.

During a workshop in 2018, this method was used by Chinese students to design a mascot for the Winter Olympic Games. Through the Delftse Methode, they looked at the problem with different eyes. A mascot not only represents China, but should also be enthusiastic, connect people, bring pleasure, create memories. The students were immersed in a 'crazy' way of working, and came up with surprising solutions.

China brings VOUW speed. Not only in developing, but also in thinking. The Netherlands give professor Hu and her students the possibility of having more fun, a widening of solutions by digging deeper into the problem.

*Work hard, but don't forget to have fun* was the preliminary conclusion of the exchange so far.

What does the next step look like?



[cardboard prototype]  
Sketching tools  
In the case of VOUW, 2019

**VOUW:** Once we get to the ideation phase, we start building very simple, physical models. These help us to explore the possibilities and challenges of an idea very quickly. We still call this a sketch. A cardboard sketch.

**HELEN HU:** My main direction is brand and communication design. Usually we use the computer and sketching software in the ideation phase. But recently we have started doing products, and use this ultralight Chinese children's clay for modelling.



[Chinese modelling clay]  
Sketching tools  
In the case of Helen Hu, 2019



**HELEN HU:** When I was a child, China was still very poor. The most beautiful thing that children could get in touch with at that time were all the different kinds of colourful candy paper. I remembered that I would keep the wrappings and keep them between the pages of a book. Today, in retrospect, it is that love of beautiful things that was the first seed of my career as a designer.



[box of candies]  
Daily motivation  
In the case of Helen Hu, 2019



[laptop]  
Research and design tool  
In the case of Helen Hu, 2019

**HELEN HU:** The first thing I do when I start an assignment is to understand the market. I go online, see what's already there. I go further from there.

**VOUW:** In Holland we are trained to start with the concept, a strong message and idea. In China we have experienced that sometimes it is okay to just start, and see what happens.



[white plexiglas model]  
Improved prototype part  
In the case of VOUW, 2019

**VOUW:** When you look at a city from an airplane, you feel humble and great at the same time. So we developed City Gazing, to recreate this feeling while you're on the ground. We started with an installation in Amsterdam, then made an improved version for Singapore and an even better one for Beijing. One of the things we learned here is that the why isn't always the most important question.

**HELEN HU:** In China we just do it (laughing).

**VOUW:** They are hearing aid batteries, especially appreciated by my wife and my business partner. The last time we were in China I didn't bring enough, so people had to shout at me.



[hearing aid batteries]  
Communication tool  
In the case of VOUW, 2019



John van de Water moved to China in 2004 with the intention to put into practice the internationally recognised ideas of NEXT architects, the Dutch firm in which he is a partner. After five years in China, he wrote the book *You Can't Change China, China Changes You*, a personal account of his quest for an authentic architecture. Are western design skills able to evolve in a cultural context as radically different as that of China?

**In your book you say that design begins with finding space. Space to create. How did that space change since 2009?**

The essential thinking behind how to create or how to design as an architect is definitely the same. It is all about finding space to create. So the search of *how* to find space and how to create *better* space is the same. Still I feel that space itself as a concept and the space for an architect to create in China has changed over the years. Things like the complexity of projects, the market, in short, the state of our architectural profession has evolved. As a result it is increasingly less evident to build and there's an increased responsibility for architects to intellectually invest more, to find new space. I believe this quest for *new space* is a result of the overlap of two things: my compounded experience in China and the development and new challenges China is confronted with.

**You described your way of working as "The combination of the frame of reference we brought with us to China and the continuously developing insights formed the base of our 'design methodology' in China. We worked from the smallest common denominator and looked for the right balance between objectivity and subjectivity. [the potential] was hidden in the shift of the nature of our working method. Interacting with Chinese colleagues was elementary."**

That description is still valid. The intriguing thing of me being a western architect in China is that I'm Dutch, but don't feel like doing anything Dutch. To *'undutch'* yourself is an elementary question you need to pay attention to as a designer. You need to transcend your frame of reference, and find common ground within the Chinese

context to start working from. Finding common ground far away from your own frame of reference is a tricky thing, because you start to do all kind of things that you cannot control. And you need to design with all kind of constraints you don't understand. This requires to question not only your own *'dutchness'*, like in my case, but also your own design process.

I think that *'undutching'* is an ongoing process. Because of our Chinese partner, I feel I'm able to better understand Chinese judgements, value systems and cultural associations. This allows me to expand my own frame of reference. For an architect it's a liberating condition to work in an increasingly growing and larger world.

**So the more you understand one side, the less you understand the other, like communicating vessels?**

In a sense, for me it does work that way. The more I seem to understand in China is balanced by questioning obvious Dutch things. I am very conscious that I can never understand China completely, so I'm always shifting somewhere between China and Holland. The intriguing thing is, how to exploit being there and how to create something new from it, not Dutch, nor Chinese. That's what I find interesting in a design process or in creating a project for China. You're able to combine things that from a Dutch perspective are probably illogical, to create a design that from a Chinese perspective is still foreign. The space to create for the next coming years is in the translation of the common denominator into a design.

**How does this common denominator work in practice?**

In our Beijing office we call this serendipity. For instance, in the Changsha lucky knot bridge we were talking about the experience we wanted to create. Our site was still empty, no buildings, or no even public urban space, it was a bridge into nothing.

So instead of a connection we tried to create a space in itself, a bridge as public space in itself. We discussed about the Möbius band, a western concept, of a relationship with no beginning and no end and started sketching and modelling. And all of a sudden the Chinese colleagues associated the idea with a lucky knot, a Chinese concept. We never wanted to build a lucky knot as a shape, it was the outcome of two different thinkings meeting in the middle. At that moment in the design process we all thought: this is it.

**There seems to be a notion that cross cultural design always has a positive outcome, which would imply that from the moment you arrived, every project would be successful. From your book I know it's not that simple. What was the tipping point for you to start adding value as a western architect working in China?**

The whole topic of cross cultural design has intrigued me since the first moment I landed in China. Cross cultural design is not a goal in itself, it is a way to create potential meaning your project could give to people. It

relates to my belief that an architect doesn't give meaning to a building, only people can give meaning to the building.

So the first tipping point is when you have actually built something, and you see it and it has a totally different association to Chinese people than to your own. In the book there is this example of a design we made for a small building. In our design we talked about the dialogue between being both a public and a private space in the same time. Something we found interesting because in Chinese cities the concept of public and private is completely different from what we know in Holland. To blur these boundaries we had opened up the whole building towards the street. The client looked at it and said 'I really like your design because it looks like a mouse that is eating gold!' It was then that I understood that the meaning she gave to the building was different from mine, and in the same time we could appreciate it both, although for different reasons. The different perception, associations and significances didn't bite each other, on the contrary, I feel they added multiple layers of meaning to the building.

Over the years we have tried to grasp significances and associations better, to try to have more influence on the results. And I realised rather than *'crossing a culture'* now I'm much more interested in the overlap between cultures. By working from the common denominator, there is no such thing as *'this is related to my culture and that to yours'*. You transcend the origin, and can start creating something completely new based on two cultures.

**A cultural morph?**

A cultural overlap.



Changsha Lucky Knot Bridge



© Julien Lanoo





[hangers]  
The way a network works  
In the case of Gerald van der Kaap, 2019

It's about networks.

**GERALD VAN DER KAAP:** [holding one hanger, clips a second one to it]. You make a connection and from that connection you build your network. This is mostly how it's done. You go from one connection to the next. You don't skip. And then one thing links to the other [while adding objects from both cases].

I was camping in Italy, my phone rang, a producer called me: Do you want to make a movie? Let me think about it, and then later I said yes. He had my number and just before the phone call, that same producer had made a documentary about me.

**LULU LI:** The Twin Flowers project started with a friend texting me. He said: Do you want to join a meeting now? How long is it? I asked. I don't know, he answered. So I went to the Chao hotel, where everybody was drinking whiskey and chain smoking. It was the first of three marathon meetings. And very slowly we got a project out of these painful meetings.

We're watching the beginning, the end and a third fragment in the middle of the movie *Beyond Index* by Gerald van der Kaap. The sound is not very good, the room too bright, a lightrail's shadow on the screen too dark. The audience didn't notice this during the presentation of Lulu Li, in which about sixty slides followed each other at manic speed, referring to projects ranging from short animations to philosophy of science.

Before the film fragments, Gerald van der Kaap calmly talks about his first encounter with China. To get a proper camera, he worked for three weeks in a harbour, where he got his first *crossover China thing*. From a big Chinese ship people were waving at him, as they were not allowed on shore. He went on board, and drank tea, without talking. It was a good feeling, that stuck in his mind, just like the wish to make a movie.

Many years later, in 2014, Gerald van der Kaap went to Xiamen to make a movie. *"Beyond Index* is an experimental feature film about art students, the colour blue, artist Yves Klein, air pollution and

neo-colonialism. The copying of art by the students in the film is a reference to the Renaissance principle of *translatio, imitatio* and *aemulatio*. How do we deal with examples? Or how could we deal with them? And perhaps, therefore, how does China deal with examples? The film is also the report of a strange kind of workshop, in which a group of art students seeks their own identity."

Around the same time, Lulu Li returned from London to jump onto China's high-speed development train. With her London experience, in just a couple of years she built up a dazzling oeuvre in graphic design, multi-media products, artificial intelligence and philosophy of technology. For her any medium is just another tool to tell stories, and subject to market opportunities.

When they unpack their suitcases a very colourful collection of objects, books, posters, peppers, old and new works, clothes enters the stage. A couple of those will be discussed, the majority won't.

Although Gerald van der Kaap and Lulu Li share a medium they work in, they do not speak the same language. Discussions tend to get stuck, their design views do not find much resonance in the other. Sometimes that's just the way it is.



[plastic sculpture]  
Role models  
In the case of Lulu Li, 2019

**LULU LI:** Reacting on images of women I was seeing in commercial media, I realised I didn't agree with them. I was a young woman trying to find out what that meant, and I couldn't find a role model. So I designed one, a role model to support myself.

I draw inspiration from the sixties and seventies, my mum's generation that felt much more liberated and equal than the time I was living in.



[duct tape]  
A quick fix  
In the case of Lulu Li, 2019

**LULU LI:** Always good to have with you. A quick fix for Chinese projects.





[red pepper]  
Daily motivation  
In the case of Lulu Li, 2019

LULU LI: Eating a raw pepper a day keeps me going.



[magazine]  
BLIND, vol. 1, nr. 1  
In the case of Gerald van der Kaap, 2019

1989. Art magazine. Editor and publisher of *Blind*, the continuation of *Zien* (=seeing), self-published.

**GERALD VAN DER KAAP:** I wanted to be a filmmaker, but the film academy didn't want me. So I went to an art academy, they did want me. But we don't do film making anymore, we do photography. And we do audiovisual things. So I became a photographer. And then I said to the teachers, this is an art academy, so we should do art photography. They wanted us to make documentary photography, and advertisement photography. I wanted to do art photography, but there was not really such thing in Holland.

If I'm not asked to do something, then I do it myself. If something doesn't happen, I will make it happen. So I started to make a magazine.







# IMMERSION

It started with a pair of running shoes, ten years ago in a rough neighbourhood in Detroit. And with the will to change Detroit's image. Not for outsiders, but for Detroit's residents. Running shoes were the first step to get a feel of the context. Curiosity was the second. And a non-defined image of design a third step. Pink Pony Express met a group of local pastors, to tell them about this idea and include them in its activities. Pink Pony Express' idea: spread positivity through and about Detroit by swapping religious words for the word 'Detroit'. For example, instead of 'God is Love', the message became 'Detroit is Love'.

Pink Pony Express travels to places where there is a conflict and uses social design to change the perspective of this conflict, initiate conversations, and, where possible, initiate a solution. They don't do this as outsiders, but as part of the community in which they intervene. By living and working within a community for a period of time, together with the people of the community, objects are created that bear stories. Objects carrying topics of discussion.

Some of those objects are presented during this workshop, held within the embassy. Objects that invite the audience to exchange views on the specific content of the projects, and social design in general.

Homosexuality. Colonisation. Ignoring history. Brexit. Relationship between countries. Within the walls of the embassy the audience feels free to exchange personal views on these sometimes sensitive topics.

After the workshop the participants and staff of the Dutch Embassy are invited to ma la tang, a common type of Chinese street food, that is especially popular in Beijing. A simple concept, in which some thirty ingredients are displayed varying from mushrooms and tofu to fish and meat skewers, leafy vegetables and noodles. Brightly coloured plastic baskets invite everyone to gather ingredients and stand in line for the large soup pot in which the broth is already simmering for a few hours.

For the first time, Chinese food is served at the embassy. The relationships between the Chinese and Western staff changes for a moment. Chinese culture on Dutch grounds in Beijing. Explanations on how to prepare ma la tang, a meal and stories start to flow.

While Mr Gao is cooking the ma la tang, many pictures are made of him with his extraordinary customers. He might consider a catering business at a time when street food is disappearing from the streets of Beijing.

For medical reasons the intended partner He Xiaopei could not attend the workshop, the audience has taken her place as Pink Pony Express' workshop partner



[soup pot]  
Story carrier  
In the case of Pink Pony Express, 2019

**PINK PONY EXPRESS:** Mr Gao a.k.a. The Soup Man was one of the first people we met in Beijing, while he was making his soup at the end of the hutong we were staying in. While we were looking at him and his customers, it felt as an installation in public space. He was a sort of hub for this network of people, spread around the neighbourhood. And we were happy to see this street foods still existed.

Although we mostly try to unravel friction, sometimes we like to create friction. When we picked up that there had never been Chinese street food cooked inside the embassy, we remembered Mr Gao and invited him to make his soup for all of us today.



[shoe]  
Design tool  
In the case of Pink Pony Express, 2019

**PERSON IN THE AUDIENCE:** I have been curious for the whole last hour. What is the story of the shoe?

**PINK PONY EXPRESS:** he shoe is a relic from the founding journey to Detroit. The first thing we did after we arrived is to go for a long run through the neighbourhood. When four white women start running through a rough neighbourhood in a driving city, something starts to happen. It became part of our method. We breach the space, and begin to engage with the site. It is a way of putting ourselves in the space, make ourselves visible. When we make ourselves into a public spectacle it is easier to integrate later. At the same time, we get the feel for the place, a first impression, explore the boundaries and unwritten rules of the community we want to work with.

**PERSON IN AUDIENCE:** Too often we use labels to define a community, which can never cover the whole community, it becomes just a common fact. Your sneaker method is really cool and for me it shows the way you work.

**PINK PONY EXPRESS:** The table is an adaptation of a piece by Enzo Mari, who addressed the definition of design through an early example of open source design. He created a collection of simple furniture that everybody could make. By doing this he allowed people to think with their hands about the conditions of production of the stuff they use. How is stuff made? How do we live with it? What does it mean to live in a world where stuff is made this way?

When we needed tables for our studio, we decided to use one of his models. Product design can be a tool for social design too. This table and the way Mari thought about it, carries qualities that lie within other projects we did.

**PERSON IN THE AUDIENCE:** What is your original consideration to start a project?

**PINK PONY EXPRESS:** How actual is the question? Who is it for and why? Our work has to be published by the press. For that to happen, it has to relate to a topic that affects a wide range of people or function as a metaphor for something that affects a large range of people. And can we get it funded? Who's interested? How long do I have to leave my kids at home?



[table]  
Design philosophy  
In the case of Pink Pony Express, 2019





[White and blue house]  
Design object  
In the case of Pink Pony Express, 2019

**PERSON IN THE AUDIENCE:** How do you adapt your design process to different cultures?

**PINK PONY EXPRESS:** We adopt the language of a place, use the vernacular of the place to talk to people, attract them to our projects. In most of our projects we work together on objects, which gives us a common anchor point. Making things together creates a connection, that allows us to engage with people in a way that maybe would be impossible through conversation. It is possible to make something together without being able to talk to each other.



[sash]  
Story carrier  
In the case of Pink Pony Express, 2019

**PERSON IN THE AUDIENCE:** Through your projects you give people the chance to participate, you give them a voice that otherwise would not be heard.

**PINK PONY EXPRESS:** That's partly due to the power of objects. Everybody can react to an object, engage to it in a particular place. And once the engagement is made into an object, it can travel and carry the story. This sash is one of the objects we made during a project in St Eustatius, in which we addressed the relationship between St Eustatius and The Netherlands. After the project the sash travelled to The Netherlands and contributed to a discussion on the same topic. And now we are discussing it here in Beijing.



[peach]  
Interpretation tool  
In the case of Pink Pony Express, 2019

**PINK PONY EXPRESS:** The last time we were in China, we met several members of the LGBT community. We are intrigued by the different languages that are used to discuss topics subversively. For example the peach emoji has a certain meaning within the gay community.

**PERSON IN THE AUDIENCE:** Traditional Chinese culture uses the peach as a symbol for a long life. Grandparents get a plate of peaches for their birthday.

**PINK PONY EXPRESS:** A peach, or any other symbol, can have different meanings in different communities. Do you think that's a problem?

**PERSON IN THE AUDIENCE:** I think China is such a huge country, with so many different people, divided in different communities. I guess throughout these communities meanings can change.

**PINK PONY EXPRESS:** We think so too. At the moment we are looking at internet slang, design that happens through the interaction between people who use a platform and those who moderate it.



The Indigo blue sofa has shapes reminiscent of a rounded trapezoid. On the table there's tableware with serpentine shapes in the same colour blue. On the wall a pair of overlying rugs, that turn out to be one single rug, knotted in different heights. A number of sturdy folding chairs are in the window, the bright colours of the fabric give each seat its own character. They all belong to Noord.

Henny van Nistelrooij has been living and working in Beijing since 2012. He is the founder and director Studio HVN, a design studio working on interiors and interior products. In 2018 he set up the interior design brand Noord.

With Noord he reinterprets elements of Chinese culture, which he translates to products that fit into a modern living environment. "This culture is incredibly rich, and at the same time there is little known about it in the west. At our art academies, the history of art and culture is mostly about the Greeks, Romans and whatever else happened in Europe. Very little attention is given to Chinese history and culture. What I knew about China was mainly what I read in the newspapers, and that's usually about politics. When I came here I saw new, unfamiliar objects, using a different design language, with a different motivation, other materials and techniques. I found and keep finding things that give me the opportunity to do something totally different from what I did before."

One of the first products he gave a new interpretation is the Chinese folding chair, a 马扎 — mazha. The folding chair has a long history in China and goes back more than 2000 years. Like many other furniture in China, the chair has adapted to the developments in society. From simple chair used by the army, through richly ornamented chairs with refined details to the chair in the current, most basic form.

Even before he knew of the history, Henny van Nistelrooij was attracted to these chairs he saw in the streets. "They are very useful, the fabric is interesting. I bought some of those chairs, pulled them apart, started painting the wood and with ropes I found on the market I made new weavings."

During the Beijing Design Week 2014, visitors of the Joy Luck Pie Club took a seat on the redesigned mazhas. The menu includes apple pie, peach pie and tea. At the end of the week, all forty chairs were sold.

"The local market is increasingly interested in its own culture. And that gives me an extra reason to want to understand this culture better, and not to pour out my luggage as a foreigner bringing good design."

The attention for the new folding chair shows the appreciation for his approach. The locals find it interesting that someone from abroad is paying so much attention to a chair that you can find everywhere on the street and with a price of 10 rmb is as good as worthless. "People take another look at the chair, think back of their grandparents who had one or of their childhood in which they sat on a mazha. Then it turns out that there is already a very strong bond. I give a new form to this binding, develop a product that people want to put down in a modern interior."

In Europe he also looked at crafts as a designer. "I was intrigued by products made before the Industrialisation in Europe. For me, those products have a very natural character, they are made in a clever way, formed by basics and limitations. I was looking for a reevaluation of these products, wondering how these products could have a value in a modern context." Back then the cultural element did not play a role. "In the Netherlands I had no other context to compare my own with, then something just is what it is."

In 2005 he moved to London and studied at the Royal College of Art. "My fellow students were from all around the world, they looked at things from different perspectives, they got in because of different qualities than those I associated with design, being educated within a Dutch Design philosophy. I came across people who hated Dutch Design, including teachers. In London, I began to understand that different types of designers in different contexts need different qualities." An eye opener.

However, after six years of London, he found himself again in a closed context, the bubble of the Royal College of Art, a little isolated from society. "Only when I left London, I realised that we were all more or less doing the same thing."

2012. The move to Beijing. "I had developed myself to an expressive,

conceptual designer, one of my teachers was an artist. When I arrived here I had no network in which I could have that kind of conversations. Instead I found myself among people with very different backgrounds, far away from the art and design scenes."

It turned out to be both an opportunity and a reality check. What is the role of a designer? How do you want to position yourself? What gives you satisfaction? What are your talents and qualities? "I realised that I wanted to reach a larger group of people. Communicate through a product."

Back to the first product, the Mazha. While Henny van Nistelrooij was working on the physical appearance of the chair, its smart folding mechanism and the simplicity of the materials, he discovered that the history of the chair created new meaning, like adding a second layer to the product.

Curiosity about the culture leads to visual elements that, with history tell a story.

"Here I look at the local culture as an outsider. I make new connections, distinguish myself from designers who work within their own context. By doing things differently you pop out and can reach people. It is as simple as that that simple."



Hanfu sofa and Mazha chair for Noord



# TWO STORIES COMING

**TIENSTIENS:** The Judge and the RTM85 are both equally strong, they have an identity that looks tough, seems tough. By taking away the visual contrast, the contrast in meaning becomes even stronger.

**PERSON IN THE AUDIENCE:** Their negativity is a perfect match, a match that opens up a whole new series of possibilities. Their names sound almost like a secret code.



[brown dessert on brown plate]  
Contrast in content  
In the cases of Smogware and Tienstiens, 2019

The dark brown pudding shines. There is a bright red feather on a pin, like those that are sometimes used to fix insects for preservation. The dessert bears the name 'the Judge' and sits on a plate that has the same black-brown colour. Although the two almost blend in color and shape, their stories couldn't be more opposite.

We came to Tienstiens' roof top terrace in central Beijing to connect these two products and their stories.

The brown-black plate belongs to Smogware, a tableware set consisting of six parts in five different colours. Each colour is determined by the amount of fine dust that a person breathes over a period of time. Like all the other parts of the tableware, the glazed surface is equal to 230 cm<sup>2</sup> and contains the amount of dust a person in Rotterdam breathes in throughout his 85 years of life. Tableware as a curious matrix of data.

A cup coloured with fine dust, do you dare to drink from it? One of the participants in the workshop looks doubtfully at the cup, then after a few seconds, sighs and with the remark 'Oh well, I breathe it in every day' takes a sip of water.

The desserts made by Tienstiens are more than the compound of the ingredients. They are storytellers, sculptures, connectors. Eating a dessert is an experience. It takes you into the world of art and through the history of food.

The story of Smogware is told through scientific data. The beautiful tableware attracts first, then makes you aware of the world we are living in and some problems we are facing.

The bittersweet confrontation between indulgence and awareness asks for a new story.

# TOGETHER



[sugar and dust on brown plate]  
Basic materials  
In the cases of Smogware and Tienstiens, 2019

**TIENSTIENS:** Some people in China have a bad understanding of sugar. It is seen as being bad for your health. We want to express that sugars can be healing as well, for your mind. When combined with air pollution though, the role of sugar changes. The sweet sugar on the plate covers the dust, the bad air pollution. It is this bitter sweet contrast that I find very interesting.

**SMOGWARE:** This pale green colour has been on our mind for a while, because the way it is made adds another layer to the story. It is a special technique, when you fire the ceramic you take out the oxygen. Without oxygen in the kiln, the tile turns from yellow to green. It shows the process of oxidation. We love this playing with air and its link to the story of air pollution. We love the poetry in this tile. For some reason this was too difficult in the Netherlands, but this colour being so well known in China gives us another reason to take a look at possibilities again.

**TIENSTIENS:** It might be possible to have this colour in the desserts as well. Start the story with a matching colour and by doing so, invite people to have a second look at what's beneath the colour, what's beneath the surface.



[Celadon tile and dessert shapers]  
The color or oxidation  
In the cases of Smogware and Tienstiens, 2019





[ant on cloth]  
Collective at work  
In the cases of Smogware and TienSTiens, 2019

**SMOGWARE:** This represents working together. Not only for the cleaning itself, but really working together. I breathe the dust that comes with the wind from far away, and so do you. My air, your air, it is all the same. We are all human, we have to take care of each other, take responsibility together.

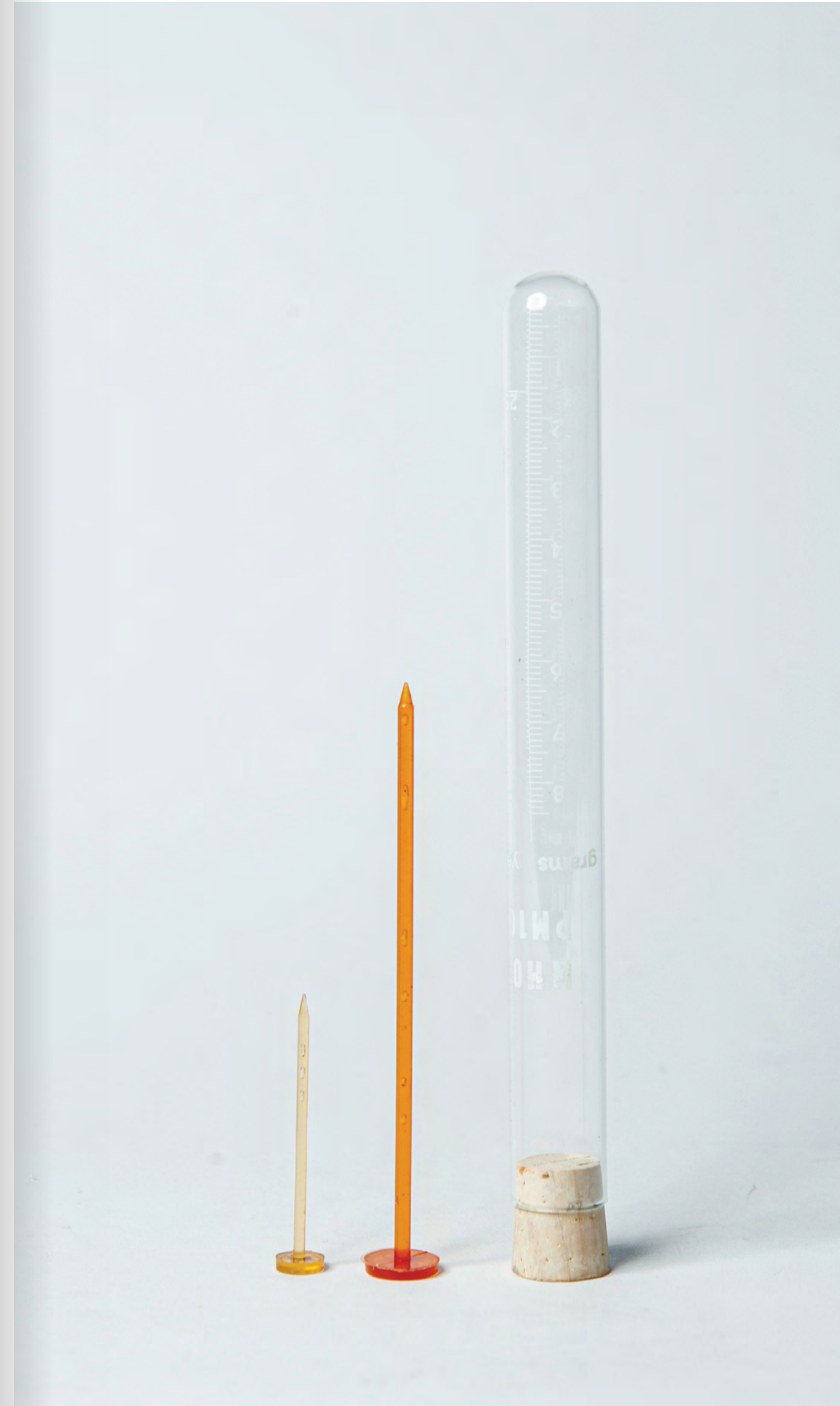
That is why I like this ant, and this cloth that represents dust. Both so small, but when in big quantities both so powerful. We have to work together, I can learn from you with your ancient knowledge of China, your knowledge of storytelling. You can learn from me and my different perspective. We love to learn. And we love to cooperate.

**TIENSTIENS:** These insects live in the trees on this terrace. We treat our desserts as specimens as well. Just like these insects, they become part of our world.

**PERSON IN AUDIENCE:** Together with the tiles that show the influence of the seasons on dust, like geological data, these specimens start to tell a story about life, the circle of life, and all of us being part of the same story.



[insects with tiles]  
Circle of life  
In the cases of Smogware and TienSTiens, 2019



[pins and test tube]  
Presentation tools  
In the cases of Smogware and TienSTiens, 2019

**SMOGWARE:** The tube is a reference to how we work. The pins are a reference to how you work. We use scientific data as a reference, you use art, museology as your reference. We both use the aesthetics to tell a story. Different referentials, same methodology.







# ACCEPTING THE SYSTEM VS

# QUESTIONING THE SYSTEM



[white model]  
Plug-in house  
In the case of People's Architecture Office, 2019

**PAO:** The essence of our work comes from a problem within society, a social issue. We approach this issue from a design perspective and look for ways how design can solve this issue. Once we have found the solution, we look for ways to commercialise it and find a way to scale it up. And by doing so, we solve the problem, or at least reduce the problem.



[6 3D printed houses]  
A new system  
In the case of Space&Matter, 2019

**SPACE&MATTER:** Another kind of plug-in that answers the question: how to make architecture affordable for normal people? We created an architecture supermarket. We asked multiple architects to design various affordable family houses and we put them in an online platform. We acquire a plot of land, people visit the platform and choose a house, and together we build a street.

**PAO:** 在中国不太行。(laughter)

Two architects in two different countries have a similar mission. Solving a social problem by applying architecture. How to deal with the existing system?

Twenty eight bridge guard's houses are sold in Amsterdam, as the bridge guards will be replaced by technology. The locks are controlled remotely. A young architect and an entrepreneur see a chance in this, they invest time and energy to develop a plan and make an appointment with the relevant official. Who sends him to an even more relevant official. And the rest is history. The first fifteen hotel rooms of the SWEETS hotel are in use, the remaining thirteen are under development. Space&Matter kept the twenty eight bridge houses as a collective, and gave every single one of them a strong individual character. It will become their signature.

Dutch society is highly individualised, and at the same time a need for collectivity to solve certain issues is felt. Space&Matter doesn't only creates architectural solutions, it also creates collectives. And within the collective, enough space for individual choices. The collective offers the advantages and thus the possibility for the desired differentiation. An important part of their

working method is bringing together all stakeholders to jointly develop a new system as part of the solution.

The audience of the workshop agrees unanimously. This is impossible in China. Stakeholders don't sit together at the table, they are organised in a fixed pattern. Within this framework only a very experienced operator knows which buttons to push.

People's Architecture Office therefore has a different working method. They do not develop a new system, but speak of a plug-in society. Small interventions in the existing system allow the system to persist, and sometimes even changing it a bit by the outcomes of these interventions. Critical pragmatism.

The Courtyard House Plugin is aimed at run down properties in traditional hutong areas. These areas might have historic value, but they are not places where a lot of people would want to live. People's Architecture Office applies urban acupuncture, a minimal renovation with minimal social disruption. Within two hours a prefab, a well-insulated home with a standalone waste and sewage unit can be plugged into the existing structure. Upgrading living standards does not require tearing anything down. And micro

investment by many individuals can be just as, or even more, effective than massive investment from a few people.

When Space&Matter was asked to build an eco-village in China, they started by talking about the ecosystem's design. The Chinese client stopped him, he wanted to talk about buildings. According to Space&Matter this was a healthy conflict. The audience disagrees with laughter. The goals are different, and achieving them requires continuous compromise from the architect. While following the client you try to do what you want to do. Critical pragmatism, follow, steer, follow, steer. Not an easy skill to master.

The two move in different directions. Space&Matter moves from the individual towards a collective while retaining freedom. People's Architecture office moves from the collective to the individual with the emergence of freedom and personal expression. Within these movements they look into possibilities to merge their two philosophies into a new way of working on a shared vision.



[drill]  
Design tool  
In the case of People's Architecture Office, 2019

**PAO:** The drill represents our methodology in terms of concrete hands-on work. That is how we start designing, how we start our projects. We work with the materials, make prototypes, test, see what works and what does not. We go through the trial and error circle over and over again. Within one year the plug in house was developed.

**SPACE&MATTER:** What we share is a strong system thinking. We are different in the outcome of the system thinking. Where PAO's outcome is towards the product making, ours is more towards to design processes.





[5 candies, green-red-yellow-black-red]  
Acquisition material  
In the case of Space&Matter, 2019

**SPACE&MATTER:** We offered the local government sweets, and a plan. Once the local government saw the potential, we started developing the project together.

**PAO:** In China a plan is not enough. You need to present a project with all stakeholders, including secured finances.



[folder Schoon Schip]  
A sustainable community  
In the case of Space&Matter, 2019

**SPACE&MATTER:** Schoonschip Amsterdam is a unique residential area. It is floating, sustainable, circular and, maybe most important, initiated by a group of enthusiast people with a shared dream. We developed this dream into a smart urban plan and gave all residents the possibility to realise their own home within this plan.

**PAO:** In China land is owned by the government, and people cannot freely decide what goes on the land. The start of the Courtyard House Plugin was actually initiated by the government, which was a good thing initially. Further on it became too difficult, as the policies changed and other methods for redevelopment were applied. Therefore we decided to move to a more commercial phase and develop a stand-alone product that anyone could buy. The market in China however is too difficult in terms of regulation, people are not willing to take the risk of investing. In the end we moved this project to the United States.



[red magnetic game]  
Freedom within a system  
In the case of People's Architecture Office, 2019

**PAO:** Our methodology is focused on working with existing systems. This way we have a faster outcome and it is easier to connect to society. And by using the existing systems to plug in our solutions, connecting this solution to the society or client comes within reach.

**SPACE&MATTER:** I think sometimes we have to put in place an entire new system to make what we want to make. So we already want what we want to make, like affordable housing with a high level of expression of individuality. Within the current system this can never be affordable. To standardise the product, move towards mass production of an individual product and introduce other values than purely economic ones, we need a different system.



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Every single object in this paper was selected by its owner, packed in a suitcase and transported to a stage in Beijing. Every single object tells a story, about how things are made. They all belong to the histories of design processes that have a product as outcome. Processes which we usually do not see, as we mostly focus on the final products. Those histories though are worth telling, as they give new layers of meaning to a product.

You might want to reread certain parts. Browse through the websites of the makers. Take another look at the things you are surrounded with. Think about the context they were created in.

In the meantime the stories left by the objects in Beijing, continue traveling. They have been photographed and collected in this paper, which in turn was printed in Beijing and packed in a suitcase for its first destination, the Dutch Design Week in Eindhoven.

After that, we will start thinking about the next stop.



Kingdom of the Netherlands

## COLOPHON

**YOUR CASE MY CASE**  
was initiated and executed by  
the Embassy of the Netherlands  
in China

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