

# WHAT DESIGN CAN DO

## PRESS RELEASE

### Hope, resilience and people power take centre stage at What Design Can Do's tenth edition in Amsterdam

*What Design Can Do Live marks a major milestone with a sold-out festival at the Internationaal Theater Amsterdam*

Amsterdam, 7 June 2022 — **Back where it all began: On 3 June 2022, What Design Can Do (WDCD) made a triumphant return to Amsterdam with the long-awaited tenth edition of its annual festival. A sold-out crowd of nearly a thousand creative activists and innovators gathered at the Internationaal Theater Amsterdam to explore how design can help us reshape our lives in the face of a planetary crisis. Leading the conversation with a potent mix of urgency and optimism were a dozen of the world's finest changemakers, including graphic designer Eddie Opara, architect Marwa al-Sabouni and filmmaker Josh Fox. Though their perspectives were diverse, one message rang clear: in turbulent times, creativity can offer us a powerful and hopeful way forward.**

#### DESIGN THAT MOVES THE NEEDLE

The festival was opened with a warm welcome by moderators **Ikenna Azuike** and **Saskia van Stein**. Rousing performances by the **Marmoucha Orchestra** and **DJ Mark the Machine** set the tone for a festive but challenging day of talks and workshops. Award-winning photojournalist **Kadir van Lohuizen** was first to take the yellow stage, demonstrating how visual storytelling can help people understand the human costs of climate change, from rising sea levels in Kiribati to mounting landfills in New York City. The morning also saw a thought-provoking talk by emerging designer **Amber Jae Slooten**, who shared her vision of an alternative fashion industry built on digital garments and powered by a generation of "new creators."

Crowd-favourites **Maria Conejo** and **Zoe Mendelson** wrapped up the first half of the day with a joyful presentation about the mission behind Pussypedia, a beautifully-illustrated guide to women's health that shows how information design can move the needle on critical issues like gender equality. Adding a different point of view to the mix was climate advisor **Yvo de Boer**, who used his time on stage to discuss how creative strategies can generate political action. As he sees it, it is not always a lack of will that stands in the way of societal change, but also a lack of imagination.

#### CALLING FOR COMMUNITY

Besides showing examples of *what* design can do for society's problems, speakers also laid out a blueprint for *how*: looking at the kinds of processes that we must adopt if we want to deepen our impact as creatives. "Part of my belief as a designer is that community is everything," said **Adebayo Oke-Lawal**, the creative rebel making Nigerian fashion more inclusive. His was one of many talks that stressed the social responsibility of design, reminding us that the best solutions are those which are deeply embedded in their local contexts. One of Mexico's most prolific architects, **Enrique Norten**, built on this idea by exploring how good urban design is about building connective tissue between people and the places they live in. "Every day our cities are becoming more and more populated," he noted. "So my question is: How can we weave together a new social fabric of the city that is more just and equitable?"

In the second half of the day, speakers dove deeper into why social justice is not an add-on but a prerequisite to climate action. Cultural landscapes expert **Julia Watson** delivered one of the day's most eye-opening talks, exploring what we can learn (and unlearn) about resilience from Indigenous communities around the world. Syrian author and architect **Marwa al-Sabouni** followed this up with a powerful reflection on how the design of our streets and buildings can affect our sense of shared prosperity, safety and belonging. "All cities today struggle with crises, whether it's a housing crisis, the environmental crisis, or a crisis of violence," she explained. Moving forward, she invites architects to "break the cycle" by daring to question the belief systems that got us here in the first place.

This interest in the way we *practice* design rather than its outcome was also clear during the afternoon's series of breakout sessions. Many focused especially on how we can better take care of ourselves and each other in the effort to

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build a more active, diverse and inclusive industry. In the workshops **Gender, Design and Power** and **Decolonising Design**, festival-goers joined activists from the Netherlands and beyond for an open conversation about how to recognise and dismantle systems of oppression in our daily lives. During the **Circular Design Jam** and **Pitch Podium**, young innovators and creatives came together to explore how to make a regenerative future not just accessible – but attractive – to people from all walks of life.

## 'I LIVE IN HOPE'

The festival reached its conclusion with a spirited talk by graphic designer **Eddie Opara** and a searing performance by Oscar-nominated filmmaker **Josh Fox**. Both underlined the galvanising role that creativity plays in a time of what seems like insurmountable challenges. For Opara, a Black designer who grew up in 1970s London and now leads one of the most influential agencies in New York City, it provided a tool for addressing injustices and for "living in hope." For Fox, who is known for his unflinching documentaries on social and environmental justice, it is a way to alchemise despair into energy for the climate movement. Without it, we would be standing still in the face of our most urgent problems. Fox made quick proof of it that day, bringing the crowd to their feet with a spellbinding piece about healing, humanity and our relationship with nature.

On this note, the curtains closed on an extraordinary tenth edition of WDCD Live in Amsterdam. All visitors, volunteers and crew then joined the speakers on stage to raise a glass together during the afterparty co-hosted by Dutch design organisations **BNO** and **ADCN**. There was a sense of camaraderie in the room as the crowd talked over the day's takeaways. As one visitor put it, it's clear we're facing an uphill battle. "Still," he said, "I keep being surprised by the power, resilience and creativity of people who are working to find solutions to break the status quo."

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## FOR THE EDITORS

For photos and additional materials on the programme and speakers, view our [press kit](#). More information about What Design Can Do is available at our [press webpage](#).

With press enquiries, please contact our Communications Manager Alison Pasquariello at [alison@whatdesigncando.com](mailto:alison@whatdesigncando.com).

## ABOUT WHAT DESIGN CAN DO

What Design Can Do (WDCD) is an international platform that advocates for design as a tool for social change. Since 2011, WDCD has undertaken numerous activities to promote the role of designers in addressing the world's most pressing societal and environmental issues. To date, WDCD has hosted 15 successful conferences in Amsterdam, São Paulo, and México City. In 2016 WDCD launched an ambitious design challenge programme that engages the creative community with urgent societal issues such as the wellbeing of refugees and climate change.

For more information, visit [www.whatdesigncando.com](http://www.whatdesigncando.com)