

## **For the Future of Graphic Design in China**

By Zhu E

### **Conception**

The quality of the design exhibitions is to be manifested through the in-depth study of their content and the clear expression of their objectives

### **Motivation**

After “Build Built – Kengo Kuma in China 2008” – a show that fully explored and presented the architect Kengo Kuma, I began to work with my team on another project on Kenya Hara and his era. The final result of our three years of preparation is “Designing Design – Kenya Hara in China 2011”.

We have spent so much time and energy on this project, with the objective to redefine the role of graphic design in the 21st century by exploring and dissecting Kenya Hara. Named “Designing Design”, a phrase originally derived from Kenya Hara’s idea of reviving the new graphic design, the exhibition tells the stories of nearly 40 Japanese designers in confronting the technological, artistic and cultural changes in the new century.

For a long time, people have tended to relate graphic design to poster design. There is nothing wrong about it, but we also have to see the world we are living in has changed so much that both people’s needs and the social environment are different now. In this sense it should be our responsibility to find out what must be done to keep the graphic design evolving.

One of the problems we are now facing is how to turn the research on graphic design into a force to drive the social development – we should create a mechanism to help them grow happily together. Only through self-driven evolution could graphic designers continue to meet the changing social demands. It appears we are changing, but the fact is our society just changes much more quickly. It is under such context that I have been trying for so many years to make people believe the necessity of synchronizing the rate of two changes by publishing books and organizing exhibitions. In recent years, the Tokyo-based Japanese designer Kenya Hara has re-defined graphic design and acted out the new ideas. His achievements are unquestionably valuable to us, and this becomes the original motivation of “Designing Design”.

### **Background**

Japan, as one of our neighbors in Asia, is well-known for its advanced science and technology, prosperous market, thriving handicraft industry and flourishing international business – all these can be attributed to the nation’s emphasis on educating the youth and encouraging economic development. The richness and diversity of its culture can also be seen many areas ranging from film, music, comic and animation, to architecture and design.

Design in Japan has its own way of evolution. One of the most prominent features is its effort on maintaining the social order by exploring the culture and educating the people. Because the Japanese people hold the culture in high regard, they have, both in form and in content, created unique characteristics with rich artistic influence in literature, arts, and design along with the geographic, climate and cultural changes, particularly through the wide participation of the mass. In today's world of design, Japan plays an unquestionably important role.

Kenya Hara is a paragon of the emerging Japanese designers following the older generation represented by Ikko Tanaka; the new design concept in Japan initiated and led by Kenya Hara has penetrated into a great many sub-branches such as books, packaging, web, interaction, industrial and interior design. Deeper understanding of a model designer and the cultural aspects of his time should not only be read from writings, but more from real products, the ideal “speaker” of Japan's culture of design.

### **Content**

It is not rare that design exhibition focuses on only one or two designers and their works as constrained by its objective and depth of research. We hardly see any show that cover all categories of design industry, go deep into the culture of design in Japan, and showcase in both forms of products and texts. Thus, we are proud to present “Designing Design” from 12 June to 15 July 2011 at Beijing Center for the Arts at Ch'ien Men 23, to give a comprehensive display of Kenya Hara and his era, and the fruitful results got on their way of exploring the culture.

The exhibition consists of three sections: 1) “Exhibitions of the Exhibition”, through object display, epitomizes the pearls of the seven shows curated by Kenya Hara on the ultimate endeavor to explore the possibility of “the nature of things” with his Japanese colleagues. 2) “As artistic director of MUJI” is a vivid narrative on the design practices by Kenya Hara through the perfect integration of his distinctive Japanese esthetics into corporate development. It gives a clear clue of how Kenya Hara has applied and adapted his ideas of design in corporate growth. 3) “Multiphase of Design” serves as a retrospective count of Kenya Hara's creative adventures with a full display of his packaging, logo, book and poster design, some of which are from projects he participated in China.

### **Objective**

The objective of the exhibition is to probe “the potential capacity of graphic design”. The world is fast changing, so does design industry. From a macro scope, I think graphic design should, on its own initiative, create opportunities to get involved in the future with broader horizon. Therefore, I invite Kenya Hara and other Japanese designers to gather at the very heart of Beijing to discuss “designing design”.

My wishes on the exhibition are to plant a seed for the future, and welcome Zen back home. I also want to create a method of developing intellectual resources to better deal with information and means

of communication. And last but not least, I hope the exhibition will bring inspiration to the future of design.

Finally, I would love to bring my deep gratitude and thanks to all the organizations from China and Japan that have given generous support and contributions to the exhibition.