

A positive future

Esquire's resident design expert **CYRIL ZAMMIT** on why the future is positive



THE FUTURE IS NOT A PLACE THAT WE ARE GOING TOWARDS, BUT ONE WE ARE CREATING ALL THE TIME

The past few years have seen us rejigging the way we interact physically and digitally. Case in point was last month's Venice Art Biennale where its artistic director, Cecilia Alemani, pulled off the challenging task of compiling a roster of artists remotely without being able to properly visit them and discover their work.

But in-person meetings and events are very much back en vogue. After the successful Expo2020 in Dubai, the design world moved on to Venice... then Milan... and then Basel, signifying that international art and design pilgrimages have well and truly (re)started again.

So what did the hiatus teach us? Have we learnt how to be kinder to the planet (and ourselves) without taking the same decisions that led us to wide-spread 'fair fatigue' affecting our mental health, output, and decision-making?

As it becomes a regular occurrence, Dubai led the way on this with the recently opened Museum of the Future bringing a fresh and distinctive message: a positive future.

"The future is not a place that we are going towards, but one we are creating all the time," said the museum's creative director, Brendan McGetrick, stressing the important (and serious) message to the thousands who have already visited it, that there is room for a future where imagination and positive thinking can

overtake the current prevalence of fear and anxiety.

One way to do this is via connectivity. A lot is made of the fear of an over-controlled life, but a lot of new products and solutions on the market benefit hugely from being ever-connected online, and the growing bank of data can be used to enhance an evolving user experience. Our new world is not only made by robots and AI but by an extremely complex but fascinating combination of talented people (creatives, developers, investors, researchers etc.) now able to reach specific audiences, through a screen.

If we add behavioral elements to the existing mountain of data that is available today, we can get a much more detailed view of our economy. Which makes me ask the question: are we witnessing a deep reboot in traditional Design Thinking? Perhaps one where transformational and service design is more in demand?

Few months ago, I wrote about how the most important trend the design world needs to consider is 'creative pragmatism', as it allows a combination of bold idea and realistic execution, because there always exists the uncertainty about what could come next.

For me the talk of a "Positive Future" comes from being able to integrate modularity as a norm. We are no longer a compact group of humans all moving in the same direction due to a collection of strong beliefs—we have developed to be smart and versatile, and aware of who we really are and what we aim for.

'Design' was defined more than 100 years ago as a 'solution to a problem.' Today that remains true, and arguably it remains the key to a bright (and hopefully greener) future. And if we can now program beneficial tasks to be automated, let's do it systematically. At very least, it will free our brain to concentrate on other topics. ☺

Cyril Zammit is design consultant and design expert based in Dubai. Follow him @cyrilzam; cyrilzammit.com