Design Can: two years on
New campaign survey asks: 'Are we any closer to equity in design?'

Launched to fight for an inclusive industry, Design Can celebrates their second birthday with a new campaign. Images by CHA CHAAN TENG.

In August 2019, Design Can launched, calling for meaningful change in the design, architecture, interiors and wider creative industries. All of these sectors vocally prize creative diversity and progressive thinking, yet at the time, each was dominated by people who are white, able-bodied and male.

Design Can's campaign was enthusiastically welcomed across the industry, and the last two years have seen seismic shifts in the global public consciousness due to the Black Lives Matter movement and the unequal impacts of Covid. As Design Can's second anniversary approaches, the campaign asks 'Has anything really changed? And if not, what's standing in the way?'

Design Can
Press release
11 August 2021

For further information, contact Sabine
Zetteler via sabine@zetteler.co.uk

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A call for change, a tool for changemakers

Design Can's founding mission was threefold: to raise awareness of the lack of inclusivity within the design industry; to incentivise action; and to provide resources, guidelines, introduction, information and encouragement to anyone prepared to make change.

The campaign called on anyone in a position of influence in design to step outside prevailing conventions, champion the underrepresented, to give space to new and different faces on panels and in exhibitions, to recruit from outside the same old networks, and to model the change they claimed to want to see.

> *"The events of last summer demanded a renewed consciousness of what change might consist of and the design industry's role within it. This need to embrace equity is urgent. While the shifting discourse is welcome, there is even more to be said for action. The time is now."*
> – Priya Khanchandani, writer, head of curatorial, Design Museum

Now, although the campaign has much to celebrate, with thousands of followers and subscribers, hundreds of resources on its website, a brilliant steering committee and a broad media profile across the creative world, the Design Can team know that there is still so much work to be done. To find out exactly how much, Design Can is asking everyone connected within the industry to complete its new What's Changed? survey and have their voice heard.

Design Can's survey will gather voices, insights and perspectives to push for greater change.
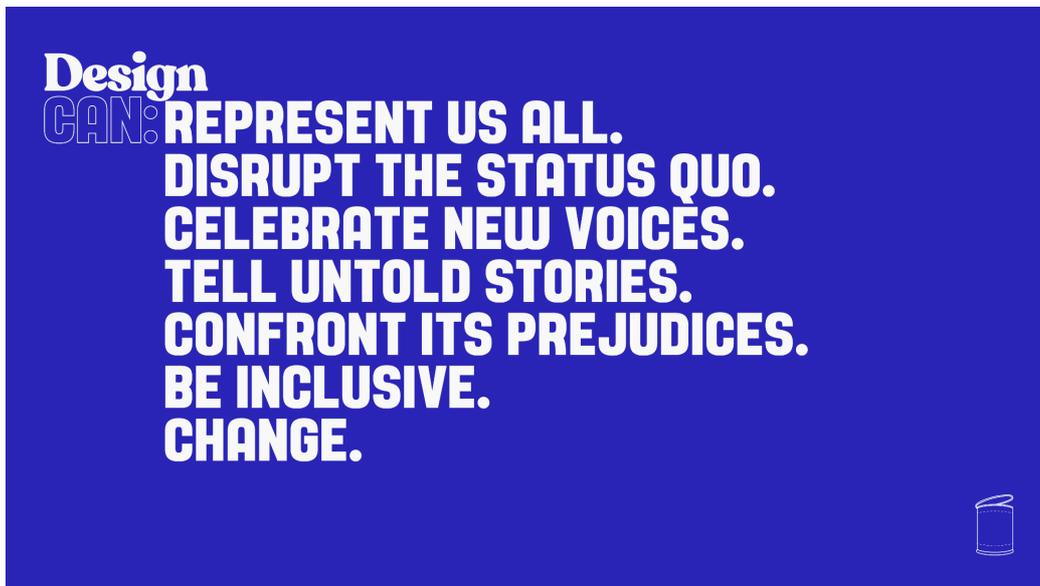
What's Changed?

The Design Can survey invites responses from every level of the industry, from top decision makers in the UK's leading creative institutions to students just starting out. It aims to gather multiple and diverse perspectives from across the spectrum to form an honest view of whether design has made genuine progress towards equity or whether it's just paying lip service to inclusion.

The results of the survey will identify any reasons for optimism and signs of definitive change, as well as determine what obstacles remain to be overcome if we are to achieve real and meaningful equity of opportunity and exposure. Through a combination of hard data and personal perspectives, it aims to generate a state-of-the-industry overview that can form the basis for a plan of meaningful action in future. The survey results will be published later this autumn.

> *"The atmosphere of summer 2020 definitely amplified the message and sentiment of Design Can. It seems the wider public are more aware of the day-to-day prejudices that still exist under the surface in British society, despite what certain baseless reports have stated since. This has made it easier to perceive the disparities in representation that exist within the creative sector. The awareness and acceptance of this are necessary early steps."*
> – Mac Collins, designer

Why now?

REPRESENT US ALL.
DISRUPT THE STATUS QUO.
CELEBRATE NEW VOICES.
TELL UNTOLD STORIES.
CONFRONT ITS PREJUDICES.
BE INCLUSIVE.
CHANGE.

Major moments have highlighted the issue of diversity and inclusion — but not enough has changed. GIF by Not Flat 3.

Momentum is building and the call for change is louder and more needed than ever, but is the appearance of progress masking what is really inertia? The protests triggered by the murder of George Floyd, the day of black squares on Instagram, the statements of solidarity and allyship that issued from many high profile institutions, both in design and other sectors… All of these conveyed an impression of action, but beyond the performance and posturing, is the world really any different?

> *"Data collection is a powerful tool in achieving accountability and moving beyond platitudes. By developing a clearer picture of what has been tangibly achieved and what challenges, we can continue the fight for equity within the design industry and beyond."*
> – Joseph Henry, designer, urbanist and co-host of Sound Advice

Through the survey, Design Can aims to separate the practical from the performative, and to establish how far we've come on the road to a fairer, more representative – and therefore stronger – industry.

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Join the conversation

Everyone connected with design, maker to media, is invited to share their views and complete the What's Changed survey from 12 August 2021 and through September.

Visit the survey to have your voice heard, and please share the link as widely as possible among friends and colleagues – the more people that contribute, the more meaningful the results.

Full survey is available here: https://niu4wxyyzyn.typeform.com/designcan2021

Notes to editors

For more information about Design Can and the 'What's Changed?' survey, please contact hello@design-can.com.

Design Can
Design Can is a campaign and tool to make the design industry inclusive. We're calling on designers, curators, editors, writers, filmmakers, event organisers – anyone and everyone who influences the design industry – to be allies. Find out what you can do. Join the campaign.

#DesignCan
design-can.com
instagram.com/_designcan_

Design Can steering committee
Mac Collins, furniture and object designer/maker
Yinka Ilori, artist and designer
Meneesha Kellay, curator of festivals at V&A
Priya Khanchandani, head of curatorial at the Design Museum
James Lee, consultant and member of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Advisory Group
Sarah Mann, head of programmes, growth and innovation at Design Council
Steph McLaren-Neckles, co-founder of Let's Be Brief
Ansel Neckles, co-founder of Let's Be Brief
Ella Ritchie, co-founder of Intoart
Sabine Zetteler, founder and director of Zetteler