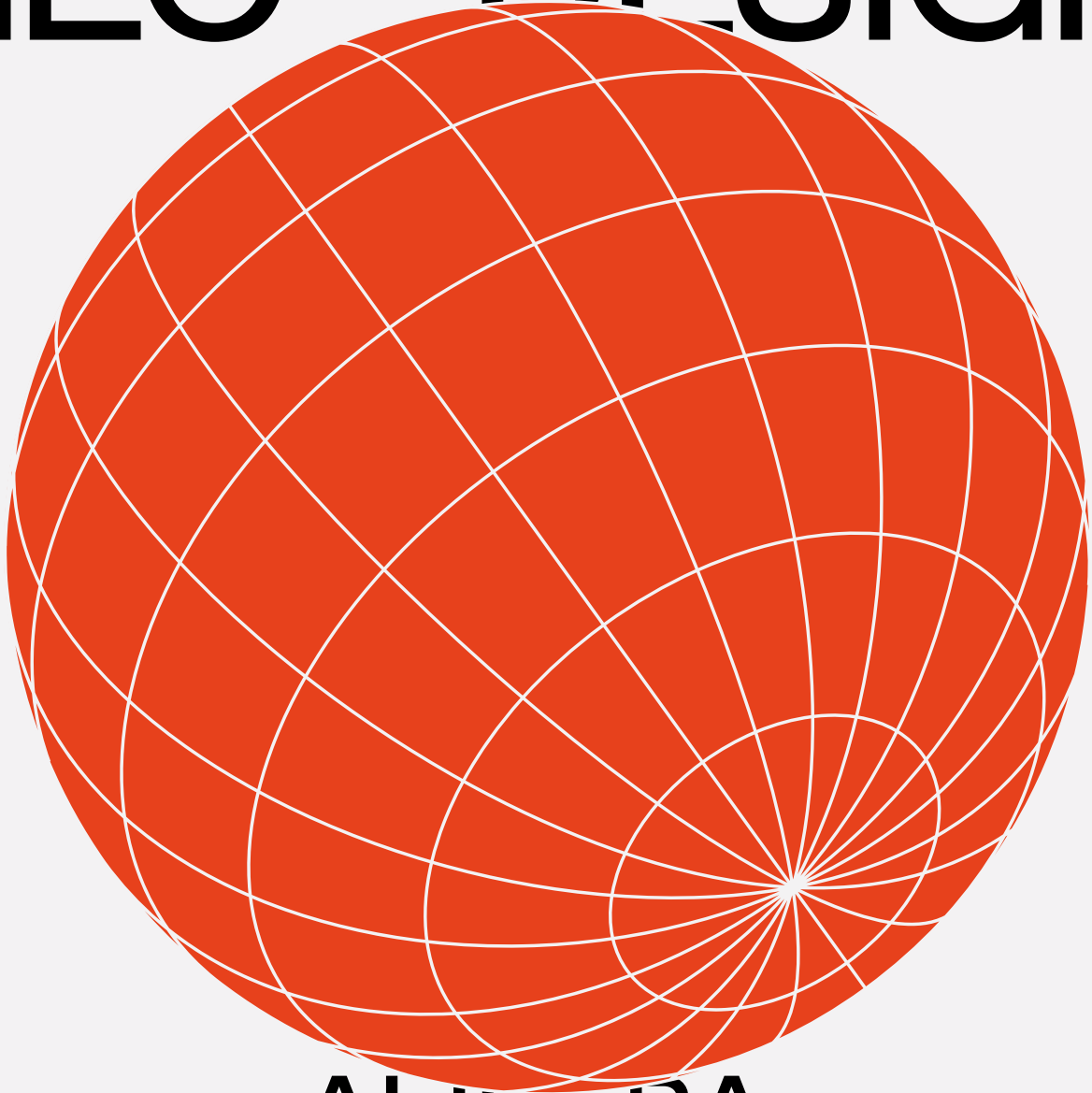


13. OCT — 11. NOV 2018

GEO—DESIGN:



ALIBABA.
FROM HERE
TO YOUR HOME
阿里巴巴集團

GEO DESIGN: ALIBABA. FROM HERE TO YOUR HOME

By Design Academy Eindhoven

13 October—11 November 2018
DDW opening: 20 October 2018 at 3 PM
at Van Abbemuseum

ALIBABA. FROM HERE TO YOUR HOME is a door into the e-commerce world of the Alibaba Group and the research design paradigms coexisting and interlocking within it. As the first Chinese platform to connect consumers directly with manufacturers, Alibaba and its multiple online marketplaces allow any scale or type of local business to become a part of the global online market. Over time, it has developed an intricate structure which oversees a range of services including banking, cloud storage, AI applications, chat systems and educational channels, all controlled by the same company.

The network that emerges from this platform reaches nearly half the world. Due to its global success, today Alibaba has become an Eastern giant, shaking and slowly re-shuffling the foundations of contemporary geopolitics and adding e-commerce as a key player in this new landscape. The complex global reach and internal structure of this company calls for us as designers to use it as a lens through which to advance the design questions of today that deserve a research approach which goes beyond the work of one individual.

The floor plan of the show follows a circular interconnected chain of extracted views from alibaba.com. The exhibition unpacks what happens before, during and after Alibaba reaches our homes as a shipped good or as an online experience. It addresses this theme from nine different angles, explored by nine design studios. Assembled together, they offer one possible portrait of an e-commerce network made up of several smaller players, mirroring the composition of how Alibaba works.

The designers entered the mechanism of this Chinese e-commerce website to think within its framework in order to understand and penetrate its multi-actor system and respond creatively to the present day. Alibaba. From here to your home is a reading of the encrypted machine that feeds one of the largest contemporary international networks. The exhibition brings unwritten design standards and actors into the museum space that have yet to be embedded into a Western vision of the design discipline.

GEO—DESIGN: ALIBABA. FROM HERE TO YOUR HOME is curated by Joseph Grima and Martina Muzi, and presents work by Arvid&Marie, Maxime Benvenuto, Allison Crank, Leif Czakei & Timm Donke, Jing He, Isabel Mager, Martina Muzi, Irene Stracuzzi, Alice Wong.

CUSTOM PRINTING 4 METER INFLATABLE GLOBE

Irene Stracuzzi

The Alibaba Group carries out services and operations in over 200 countries and the Chinese company's commitment to the creation of a global scale online marketplace is increasingly evident. Irene Stracuzzi is interested in the emerging vision of Alibaba's global structures, their geographical traces and revealing them through the discipline of information design.

Custom Printing 4 Meter Inflatable Globe is a representation of the global influence of the company through the visualisation of geographic information relating to its production, logistics network, e-commerce sales and cloud infrastructure. The data is gathered from AliResearch, a research institute established by Alibaba in 2007, which openly publishes online reports on the state of the company's e-commerce ecosystem. The inflatable globe represents the complex and often disconnected layers of Alibaba's hegemonic expansion, projecting them onto one surface. Growing Taobao Villages in China meet new Silk Roads, the names of best selling products acquire cartographical relevance and distant lands are joined by direct online trade routes. The production of the giant inflatable globe was commissioned to Singar Inflatables Co. Ltd., Yantai (China), through the Alibaba e-commerce platform.

DOUBLE 11

Alice Wong

Jack Ma, founder of Alibaba, is the wealthiest man in China and a contradictory global voice. His e-commerce platform, worth 36.5 billion USD, was developed and continues to grow through the image of Ma. Alice Wong is interested in tracing how values are active parts of social narratives and often commodified in contemporary online practices.

Wong has focused on the commodification of social values such as 'trust', which through the face and life story of Jack Ma, has become a successful corporate strategy.

Wong dug through online archives in order

to trace the history of 'Singles Day' — a Chinese holiday that has been successfully co-opted by Alibaba. Initially created to celebrate not being in a relationship, today the holiday is the largest shopping day on Earth. The astonishing amount spent on Singles Day highlights the cultural impact that the booming e-commerce industry has had on China's middle class. Double 11 unpacks the cultural impact of the Alibaba Group on Chinese society. In the short film Wong explores the ways in which traditional Chinese socio-political values and Western style consumerism coexist, and what this means for the highly contextual notion of trust.

THE BEST PART OF POSSIBILITIES ADVERTISING MADE BY A BOT

Allison Crank

Advertising seeks to transform products from virtual possibilities into a physical reality. The goal of advertising is, therefore, to produce consumers, not products. Marketing campaigns strategise to make certain goods a reality and competitor products virtual again, thus constantly changing the design landscape. Over the past year, the Alibaba Group has released two new softwares which use artificial intelligence to generate advertisements.

Allison Crank interviewed scientists at Alibaba's research center to gain insight into the making of this new technology: an "AI designer" which uses neural networks to create new designs for emotional, user-specific advertising. In doing so, Alibaba has become both designer and producer; a consumption machine, blurring the boundaries between virtual and real. But what lies behind these artificial campaigns and what does this virtual tool mean in terms of creating demand in a physical world? To answer these questions, Crank set out to create a similar tool framed around an experimental advertising campaign to sell Product "X." The slogans are generated entirely by a recurrent neural network bot, self-named, The Best Part of Possibilities, and trained on over a thousand American advertising slogans spanning the 20th and 21st centuries.

LIVE STREAMING

Jing He

Live streaming dominates social media in China. In 2016 there were already more than 200 social platforms supporting this format and among its diverse applications, live streaming has become one of the most efficient marketing tools in e-commerce. Jing He examines the industry structure and the marketing strategies behind China's live streaming industry. Through case studies, she focuses on how live streaming is used as an interactive medium for advertising, promoting and selling products, as well as how it has been combined with other e-commerce tools.

Between 20 and 21 October, two Chinese live streaming hosts, originating from different business backgrounds and industry sectors, will have a temporary live-streaming studio at the Vanabbe Museum. Erbi Chen (陈有病), is a KOL (Key Opinion Leader) and makes a living by creating advertising videos. Chen and her team have attracted 1.4 million followers with their entertaining product reviews. Qiong Ye Chuan Zi (琼贞川子), works for a fashion company. During her live stream videos she will try on 40 to 50 different outfits, interacting with customers for approximately four hours.

DIAMOND MODEL

Martina Muzi

Alibaba is a resourceful container for open IP products and unrecognised design crafts. These products grow through the e-platform from being local inventions, into global mediatic phenomena. In 10 days, with express mail from China, products arrive in western homes where cameras are ready to share the secrets they hold, online. YouTube channels are one of several indicators of the success of specific products. Two years ago, Martina Muzi spotted a new craft called 5D Diamond Painting in the corridors of China Markets in Shenzhen and by August of this year it had become a popular DIY craft mostly loved by Western women who order it from Alibaba.com.

Diamond Model is a research-based film about the system supporting emerging chinese designs, featuring 5D Diamond Painting as a case study. It opens with a

window onto a cluster of Chinese e-commerce villages in Zhejiang province, where the co-dependence of urban and rural, factory and market, online and offline, boss and workers, domestic and public, bodies and machines, services and roads, reveals a face of Alibaba which is not surfable through its online interface.

ALI-ATLAS

MAPPING ALIBABA DIPLOMACY

Studio Maxime Benvenuto

In a globalised world, borders have taken on new meanings. "We should not talk about made in China, made in America," says Jack Ma. "It's going to be made on the Internet." Maxime Benvenuto starts with the pretext that without the offline world, there is no medium through which the online can operate, as well as no one to enact it. Jack Ma has met with countless international political leaders and these encounters have been documented by numerous online news portals in the form of photographs and informative articles. Benvenuto scours the internet for these reports and is building an archive of what he calls Alibaba Diplomacy.

In Ali-Atlas, Benvenuto is trying to trace what these meetings are about. By presenting a selection of collected articles, personalities and themes, the atlas is a glimpse into the making of a networked global society. Jack Ma, according to Benvenuto, is employing the tools of traditional diplomacy to blur the boundaries between private companies and the nation state. The aim of this research is to look at how an online empire is re-shaping transnational geographies, giving rise to new socio-economic areas and redefining pre-existing ones.

E-HUSTLING EAST-AFRICA ONLINE WITH ALIBABARA Timm Donke and Leif Czakai

During a recent visit to Kenya, Jack Ma, CEO of the Alibaba group, told a group of young East African entrepreneurs that e-commerce is the future. If you are not there, you are nowhere. Timm Donke and Leif Czakai worked together with their friend Barbara Ahimbise, a Chinese language student living in Kampala to set up an online shoe-shop in central Uganda, and explore how the new Chinese e-commerce model can be incorporated in the Ugandan context.

Although mobile money is widely used in East Africa, it became clear that online commerce is neither trusted nor is it facilitated at an institutional level in Uganda. The government's controversial introduction of a social media tax, little faith in online payments and a lack of experience in using online-services are all contributing factors to this climate. In contrast, small unofficial shops or street-vendors, are a widespread and bustling business, however they are currently under threat of being evicted without an alternative solution. E-Hustling East-Africa asks whether online vending can become an alternative business platform for Ugandan street vendors and become a local online business melting pot able to regenerate itself by employing and adapting the Alibaba tool box.

HELLO FRIEND, E-COMMERCE AND ANALOGUE FORMS OF TRADE Isabel Mager

The Huanqiangbei Electronic Markets – Huaqiang meaning China Strong– are where many young people in China choose to embark the Chinese Dream, from the bottom up. The pace at which trade machinery rolls in Shenzhen reflects the speed at which the city has grown from a series of villages to a first tier Chinese metropolis. This process began 40 years ago, when the area now occupied by Shenzhen became China's first Special Economic Zone in 1978.

The Alibaba e-commerce platform has had a strong effect on Huaqiangbei, reducing the influx of foreign customers coming to shop

here, while business has shifted online, the result of which is visible in the market's vacant shop-fronts. Hello Friend, is a multimedia installation exhibiting fragments collected during a short-term stay in Shenzhen, including conversations with local businesses that trade in Huaqiangbei and on Alibaba. The smartphone was chosen as a case-study object through which to perceive multiple types of trade cycles in and around the Huaqiangbei Markets and it is the sole tool used in Isabel Mager's research.

ALIBABAUM SORTIUM and BUYER' S DESIRES Arvid&Marie

The Alibaba and Aliexpress search bars are the doors to the thousands items sold, by factories and resellers, to a world-wide customer network. Algorithms control when, how many times and in which order the searched products –i.e. dress, belt, suitcase, hat– appear on a visitor's screen. By looking at Alibaba and Aliexpress like naturalists, Arvid&Marie approached the two the digital platforms like ecosystems. They analysed several algorithms, narrowing in on the sorting algorithm and renaming it: Alibabaum Sortium.

In the process of exploring the power of the algorithm, Arvid&Marie were drawn to specific products whose physical existence is a source of doubt: it is unclear whether they occur as purchasable items or if their role is to entertain customers and keep them browsing through Alibaba's interface. Buyer's Desires are a collection of object simulations, in paper, of what Alibaba claims are its most desired products. This collection of Alibaba artifacts, printed on with the metadata that writes their existence into the digital world, can teach us about Alibaba's understanding of objects.

DESIGN ACADEMY EINDHOVEN

Emmasingel 14, 3rd floor
5611 AZ Eindhoven
The Netherlands

designacademy.nl

VAN ABBEMUSEUM

Bilderdijklaan 10
5611 NH Eindhoven
The Netherlands

vanabbemuseum.nl