

# WHEN A SCOOTER BECOMES ART

A show at the National Museum of China highlights modern Italian design, including the iconic Vespa. Lin Qi reports.

The 1953 romantic comedy *Roman Holiday* elevated Audrey Hepburn to international fame. It also brought worldwide attention to Vespa, a scooter designed in the late 1940s by Corradino D'Ascanio.

In the film, Hepburn and Gregory Peck rode a Vespa around the streets of Rome. Its appearance in movie posters gave a great boost to its sales.

The Vespa in the film, the oldest known model, fetched 191,000 euros (\$208,000) in an online auction in March.

Italian manufacturer Piaggio sold about one million Vespa scooters in the 1950s, and one is now on show at the National Museum of China as part of *Series Off Series*, an exhibition on modern Italian design running through July 25.

The scooter design shows how Italian designers managed to make a product that became an icon of modern life despite a shortage of raw materials after World War II.

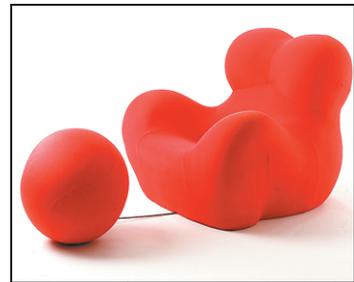
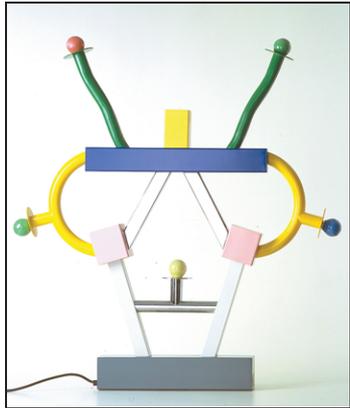
Vespa means "wasp" in Italian, and was named for the similar shape and sound it made. While cars remained a luxury, it fulfilled most people's need of an affordable vehicle for daily use.

Vespa is among some 200 Italian designs that are shown at *Series Off Series*. Other eye-catching objects include a Borsalino hat that was worn by Humphrey Bogart in the classic 1943 movie *Casablanca* and French creator Philippe Starck's unconventional citrus squeezers which resemble a squid.

"The exhibition navigates Italian creativity by displaying designs that are put into big and small-scale production for daily use and also items that were produced as limited editions," says Andrea Cancellato, director general of Triennale di Milano, which co-organized the exhibition.

A bulk of the works on show are from the collection of Triennale di Milano's design museum.

Ettore Francesco Sequi, the Italian ambassador to China, says the word "Italy" means design and to know "what is Italian



*Series Off Series* is an ongoing exhibition on modern Italian design at the National Museum of China. A Vespa scooter (top left) is one of the star exhibits. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

design", one needs to understand how the creative industry works in the country.

He says the objects at the exhibition show not only a combination of beauty and function but also a pursuit of high quality and energy saving; and they demonstrate that Italy's design industry holds dear to high standards through an emphasis on innovation and low cost.

A fine example: a Solar Bottle invented based on the solar water-disinfection system, an inexpensive method developed in the 1980s to purify water by using solar energy.

The container has a flat shape so that it is easy to transport. It can absorb ultraviolet and infrared rays from the sun, which destroy bacteria, viruses and worms in water. It provides a low-cost solution for people who only have biologically contaminated water to drink.

Italian designer Alberto Meda, 72, says he was motivated to create the bottle in 2000 during a business trip to Ethiopia. There, he saw an emergency situation in which some 1.2 million people had no potable drinking water.

It took Meda six years to find a purification method. He worked with Argentine industrial designer Francisco Gomez Paz to choose the ideal materials for the bottle.

Meda says it is the duty of a designer to impart to industry a consciousness of environmental repercussions, and the designer should also be involved in a company's strategy planning so that he can indicate a direction for sustainable growth.

Some other objects on show celebrate the core value of Italy's high artisanship, which Sequi says "shares similarities with China's cultural lineage and therefore will

have resonance among Chinese audiences".

The old Silk Road traders took delicate silk clothes woven by Chinese artisans to the Roman Empire and brought Roman-style glassware to China.

Italian architect and designer Andrea Branzi, whose vase design *Iceberg* is part of the current exhibition, says that unlike conventional manual work, contemporary artisanship is centered around "a strong interaction" between artisan-operators and advanced technologies.

He says an artisan today manages his work with sophisticated machines.

Italian art is familiar to visitors to the National Museum of China: The institution has held three exhibitions over the past five years introducing classic Italian art.

The current exhibition on modern Italian design meets China's ambition to boost its

own creative industry and to nurture more designers.

Cancellato says both China and Italy boast a long-standing history of artisanship and establishing colleges to cultivate designers, and she hopes to strengthen exchanges in the field.

She says Triennale di Milano's organizing committee toured Beijing, Chongqing, Chengdu and Guangzhou in January 2016 to promote the 21st edition of its international exhibition in March.

Cancellato says there are plans to exhibit more Chinese designs at the triennale's design museum in Milan. Right now, she adds, talks are in progress for touring the triennale to Shenzhen.

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## Company supplement

# Sinotruk supports construction projects around the world



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When Liu Yehui, a worker at China National Heavy Duty Truck Group, or Sinotruk, went to Bangladesh with his colleagues for the first time in 2011, he heard local people say that Chinese vehicles were of poor quality.

But today, the company has taken 70 percent of the engineering vehicles market in Bangladesh and Sinotruk is now regarded as a high-end brand.

Sinotruk's heavy-duty trucks have been sold to 96 countries and regions around the world. Last year, the company exported 32,600 vehicles, leading the industry for the 12th year. Among them, 11,688 vehicles were exported to 33 countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.

"The Belt and Road Initiative has become the best platform for Sinotruk's globalization process," said the company's chairman Ma Chunji. "Our products are China's national name card for its overseas infrastructure construction projects, and we are enjoying a growing reputation."

Founded in 1956 in Jinan, Shandong province, Sinotruk produced China's first ever heavy-duty truck. It has always paid attention to an internationalized development strategy, introducing overseas advanced technologies and experiences, and adding its own innovations.

It introduced a heavy-duty truck project from Steyr, Austria, in 1983, China's first company to import heavy-truck manufacturing technologies from abroad.

The company was listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in 2007.

In 2009, it launched a strategic partnership with leading German commercial vehicle brand Man Group, introducing its D08, D20 and D26 engine technologies, its medium and heavy-duty truck axle technologies, and its corresponding vehicle technologies to China.



Axles displayed by Sinotruk at an auto show in Shanghai attract international buyers. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

This allowed Man to purchase 25 percent of Sinotruk (Hong Kong) for 560 million euros (\$612 million).

"I can proudly say that the heavy-duty truck engines and other components produced by Sinotruk have world-class reliability and durability," said the company's general manager Cai Dong. "This is the reason why our products can enter the high-end markets in developed countries and regions."

Sinotruk has adopted a multiple-brand strategy in order to better participate in diverse market segments. It categorizes its products under four major sub-brands: Sitrak, Howo, Steyr and Hoham. These cover both high and low-end markets to meet the demands of different consumers.

Sinotruk now has more than 3,000 heavy-duty truck models in

nine series, a big increase on 78 models it offered in 2001.

Currently, about 30 percent of the company's products are sold overseas. The company estimates that number will grow to 50 percent by 2020.

"Sinotruk has a long way to go in terms of globalization," Ma said. "We want to compete with world giants and become one of the top manufacturers."

Africa is one of the company's focus markets. Sales in that region account for more than 30 percent of Sinotruk's total overseas sales. Its products are used in transportation, infrastructure construction and civil engineering.

The company signed a contract with a local industry leader in Nigeria in 2011 to export 1,500 vehicles. In 2014, it built an assembly factory in the country with a local partner to cover the western Africa market.

So far, 15 such assembly factories have been built in seven countries and regions along the Belt and Road, including Pakistan, Vietnam, Myanmar and Malaysia.

In Central Asia — an important region for the Belt and Road Initiative — Sinotruk has set up four representative offices and more than 10 sales centers, partnering with local vehicle retailers. They have so far sold 15,000 products.

"Our improving sales performance can be partially attributed to our improving product quality and partially thanks to the Belt and Road Initiative, which has brought more projects and investment opportunities," said Wang Li from Sinotruk's Pakistan office.

Lan Junjie, an executive from the company's overseas business sector, said that productivity cooperation, localized manufac-

turing, and capital and technology exportation have brought about win-win effects.

In many overseas markets, Sinotruk has employed local workers and sales personnel, and used trademarks and joint promotional campaigns with its partners to overcome challenges in terms of sales, legal frameworks and culture.

### Service provision

Liu Wei, deputy general manager of Sinotruk, said that establishing a brand in the overseas markets relies not only on high-quality products, but also high-quality after-sales services.

Over the past decade, the company has transformed itself from just a truck manufacturer to an exporter and international service provider. It has set up six regional headquarters, covering Southeast Asia, the Middle East, southern Africa, northern Africa, Central Asia and South America.

The company has more than 400 service centers, 300 warehouses and 1,000 retail offices in its overseas sales network, covering more than 100 countries and regions worldwide, with nearly 1,000 sales and service personnel.

Sinotruk has translated its product instructions, maintenance manuals, component directories and training textbooks into the languages of its market countries.

The overseas markets have provided strong support to Sinotruk's sales performance, but Sinotruk Chairman Ma Chunji has an even more ambitious plan for the company's global development.

"We will further expand the market, especially in developed countries and regions, in the future," he said. "We will build Sinotruk into an internationalized business vehicle manufacturer with a strong research and development capacity, sustainable profitability and annual revenue exceeding 100 billion yuan (\$14.49 billion) by the end of the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-20)."

“Our products are China's national name card for its overseas infrastructure construction projects, and we are enjoying a growing reputation.”

Ma Chunji, chairman of Sinotruk