

Robo-chefs and fashion-bots on show in Tokyo

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Eager Co. showed off a curvaceous female-shaped humanoid made of layers of cardboard, billed as the first eco-friendly robot. The International Robot Exhibition kicked off this week, showing off the latest whirring and buzzing inventions from 192 companies and 64 organisations from at home and abroad.

Forget the Transformers and Astroboy: Japan's latest robots don't save the world -- they cook snacks, play with your kids, model clothes, and search for disaster victims.

In a nation that takes its humanoids seriously, the International Robot Exhibition kicked off this week, showing off the latest whirring and

buzzing inventions from 192 companies and 64 organisations from at home and abroad.

Many of the cutting-edge machines on show are eye-popping, but industrial robot "Motoman" also put on a mouth-watering performance, deftly flipping a Japanese savoury pancake called okonomiyaki on a sizzling hotplate.

"It is delicious. Please enjoy," said the human-size creation of Yaskawa Electric Corp. in a robotic voice.

For pure dexterity, an artificial hand called the "H-type" was hard to beat -- a [robotic hand](#) with a sufficiently deft touch to handle a piece of pound cake without dropping a single crumb.

"This robot hand can pick up food without crushing it, which has been a hurdle for metal arms," said Jun Honda of robot developer Denso Wave.

Denso used small air pumps and a smooth silicon skin for the artificial limb, co-developed with software maker Squsse, and says the device may one day be used to help the sick and elderly.

"It could be used to serve food for people who need care," Honda said.

Also aimed at helping people is the snake-shaped "Active Scope Camera", which uses robotic technology to slither serpent-style through the rubble of a disaster zone to take and transmit live video images.

Tohoku University and the International Rescue System Institute jointly developed the instrument, which propels itself forward with thousands of tiny devices called cilia that resemble the legs on a centipede.

Elsewhere, Eager Co. showed off a curvaceous female-shaped [humanoid](#)

made of layers of cardboard, billed as the first eco-friendly robot.

The maker hopes the figure, with its soundless, smooth and almost seductive movements could find a job as a display window mannequin -- or even on a theatre stage.

"We want to apply this very light-weight robot as a new advertising medium," said Eager's Tsuyoshi Yamashita. "The smooth movements of the robot would help female customers feel safe and have an affinity with the machine."

A robot of the cuter variety is Ropid, 38 centimetres (15 inches) tall, with huge round eyes and boxy arms and legs -- more at home in a toy department than on a factory floor.

Unlike the super-advanced industrial robots elsewhere in the exhibition, this one keeps things simple. It can stand up, walk, run and jump -- but in a loveable way, its creator hopes.

"The challenge is to design a [robot](#) in a way to make you believe that you can communicate with it," said its creator, Tomotaka Takahashi. "With his quick actions, he looks like he's really alive."

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