

DESIGN JOURNAL



COOPER
HEWITT

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DIRECTOR'S LETTER



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NOVEMBER 2015

DEAR COOPER HEWITT FRIENDS,

Like design itself, Cooper Hewitt is dynamic, ever changing, and making a difference in lives every day. From our inspiring exhibitions and programs to our groundbreaking technologies and user-friendly digital resources, we celebrate the design process and engage directly with design's advancements. Not surprisingly, the more we succeed at breaking down the walls of the museum and creating new ways for the world to access our collection of over 210,000 objects and our wealth of knowledge, the greater and more global the response.

01 Leaders from across the globe are experiencing Cooper Hewitt. Most recently, the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Norway visited the museum to present this extraordinary textile, a surviving fragment of the original wallcovering Norway commissioned for the Security Council Chamber of the United Nations, as a gift to our permanent collection.

Recent honors bestowed on Cooper Hewitt include the 2015 Graphite Pencil for Digital/UX Interface & Navigation for Websites & Digital Design, *Fast Company's* 2015 Innovation by Design Award for Experience, and the 2015 Dibner Award for Excellence in Museum Exhibits.

In this issue of *Design Journal*, we celebrate recent milestones from education to renovation and turn our attention to future goals. I am proud to announce that our renovation achieved LEED Silver certification. Moreover, the Arthur Ross Terrace and Garden is now open and joins an illustrious list of elegantly designed enclosed gardens in New York City open to the public for all to enjoy.

On page 8, Margie Ruddick—2013 National Design Award winner and a pioneering landscape planner and designer—has written a moving description of our garden's evolution. A stunning contemporary landscape created by 2009 National Design Award winner Walter Hood, in collaboration with RAFT Landscape Architecture and Diller Scofidio + Renfro, the redesign beautifully honors the history of the Carnegie Mansion's original garden plans while welcoming more people and more uses. We are thrilled to have this cultural treasure to share again with our visitors (and opening at 8 a.m.).

02 Television host and ED Creative Director Ellen DeGeneres made a matching grant of \$100,000 to support Cooper Hewitt's nationwide launch of Design in the Classroom.

03 Overlooking the newly renovated Arthur Ross Terrace and Garden, with Herman Miller seating and Thomas Heatherwick Spun Chairs for all to enjoy.



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“IT IS THE MOMENT TO BE PART OF THE NEW COOPER HEWITT”

Having established ourselves as the nation's go-to physical and digital resource on design with the new Cooper Hewitt, we are moving quickly to the next momentous phase of influence. Design education has always been integral to our mission, and we are redoubling our efforts to expand the scope and reach of our programs. On page 12, our Master's Program in the History of Design and Curatorial Studies, which we offer jointly with Parsons The New School of Design, is the focus of "Inquiry, History, and Dialogue," by Associate Director Ethan Robey. Robey invites us into the seminar room to learn how our graduate students directly contribute to the advancement of design history and to the museum's shared body of knowledge.

At the National Design Awards gala, we announced our campaign to make our innovative educational program, Design in the Classroom, a national resource for design-based learning. Design in the Classroom teaches students K-12 that design is a key part of their everyday lives and that design thinking can be used to creatively solve problems. To our great excitement, ED creative director and television host Ellen DeGeneres, understanding the impact on our designers of the future, made a generous contribution of \$100,000 toward our \$500,000 goal for "nation domination." For more on this important initiative, go to page 6 for Cooper Hewitt educator Michelle Cheng's report on the impact of Design in the Classroom on the more than 80,000 students who have already benefited from this unique learning experience. We welcome your support to help us make Design in the Classroom available to every child in every school across the United States. You can find out more at cooperhewitt.org/designclassroom.

Here in the Carnegie Mansion, we have achieved our vision of a museum that seamlessly integrates the user's digital and physical interactions with our collection, giving visitors the tools to actively engage in design and deepen their understanding of the design process. We are constantly updating our technologies and we have now added over 650 of Pixar's preparatory designs for their classic films to our

digital tables and website for our installation *Pixar: The Design of Story*. On page 14, enjoy our fascinating interview with Pixar's Peter Sohn, director of Disney/Pixar's latest film, *The Good Dinosaur*. And don't miss the installation in our Process Lab for a revealing look at the collaborative design processes behind the beloved works of this pioneering animation studio.

Looking ahead to 2016, the highly anticipated *Beauty—Cooper Hewitt Design Triennial* opens in February. With over 250 works from the world's most exciting voices in the global design scene, the exhibition will offer a multisensory exploration of beauty in all its astonishing forms and surprising functions. In anticipation, our Triennial curators interviewed Kimberly Varella, designer of the exhibition catalog, and Calvin Tsao and Zack McKown, designers of the exhibition itself. Like the works in the Triennial, both the book and the installation will be unforgettable experiences. On page 10, find out how these designers both mirrored and extended the curators' vision for this not-to-be-missed exhibition.

Finally, I want to give a warm welcome to our newest trustees, Shelby Gans, San Francisco-based performing arts and design enthusiast, and Jon Kamen, founding Chairman and CEO of RadicalMedia. Our board is an indispensable source of inspiration and support, and I am thrilled that Shelby and Jon have joined the Cooper Hewitt family.

It is *the* moment to be part of the new Cooper Hewitt! I look forward to seeing you in the galleries and in the garden frequently and thank you for everything you do to help us share design's wonderful possibilities with the world.

Sincerely,

Caroline

Caroline Baumann
Director

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New Trustee, Shelby M. Gans.

05
New Trustee, Jon Kamen.

2015 NATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS GALA



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National Design Awards Gala celebration with David Stark décor and Design in the Classroom challenge kit bags designed by Todd Oldham on October 15, 2015.

02
Design Mind Award winner Rosanne Haggerty.

03
Representatives from Target, major sponsor of the National Design Awards. Front row, from L to R: Jeff Jones, Bernard Boudreaux, Todd Waterbury (Cooper Hewitt trustee), Scott Swartz. Back row, from L to R: Seth Zimmerman, Karen Deutsch, Greg Van Bellinger, Stephanie Grotta, Nadine Steklenski, Cynthia Dilliard.

04
John Edelman, CEO, Design Within Reach, National Design Awards sponsor, with wife Bonnie Edelman.

05
Beth Comstock, Cooper Hewitt Board President and Vice Chair, GE; Barbara A. Mandel, Cooper Hewitt Board Chair; David J. Skorton, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution; Caroline Baumann, Director, Cooper Hewitt.

06
Helena Hang, Angela Donhauser, Wang Huang, Gabriel Asfour, Marisa Tomei, Adi Gil, Lijia Wu (Hang, Huang, and Wu of Amazfit, National Design Award sponsor; Donhauser, Asfour, and Gil of threeASFOUR, Fashion Design Award winner).

07
Rob Wynne; Madeleine Rudin Johnson, Cooper Hewitt Trustee; Bruce Barnett; Tyler Barnett.

08
Representatives from Facebook, National Design Awards sponsor. From L to R: Erica Virtue, Brendon Manwaring, Jill Nussbaum, Jon Lax, Margaret Stewart, Anthony Roscoe, Leonardo De La Rocha, Christian Palino, Benjamin Dauer, Robyn Morris.

READY, SET, DESIGN!



01

“APPLYING DESIGN THINKING WITH GRADES K-12 HAS CREATED FEARLESS, CONFIDENT LEARNERS!”

—Todd Shaffer, Teaching Artist, Young Audiences of Louisiana

By **Michelle Cheng**
Professional Development Manager

A classroom full of first graders is buzzing with excitement. They are divided into small groups—or teams, to use design vernacular—and are about to begin their first Ready, Set, Design challenge, an activity created by Cooper Hewitt education team to introduce design thinking to young people. Today’s design challenge: how to carry books from classroom to classroom without using a backpack.

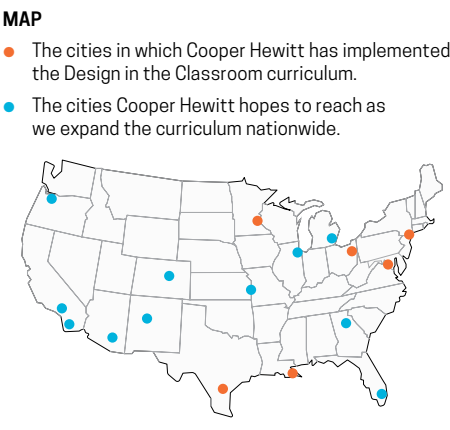
The energy in the room is palpable. The students ask questions, help one another build on ideas, and work together to test their solutions—all essential steps in the design process.

After brainstorming together, they have limited time to build a physical prototype using the simple materials they receive in their Design Challenge Kits: rubber bands, pipe cleaners, corrugated board, popsicle sticks, straws, and tape.

The teacher walks to the front of the room, and with a few claps of her hands, the class falls silent. The teams begin presenting their designs. Some are still covertly working on their prototypes, trying to make them look as good as possible. But the teacher reminds them that this is a prototype—a first draft—and it doesn’t have to look perfect. After the presentations, the students move on to the next part of their school day, but the discussion among team members continues: What else can we do to make our design even better?!

COOPER HEWITT’S COMMITMENT TO DESIGN EDUCATION

When Cooper Hewitt closed for its major renovation in 2011, we knew it was critical to continue to reach young minds across the five boroughs of New York City and share the educational benefits of design thinking with the next generation. To bring design-based learning directly to students, we created Design in the Classroom, a free educational program that introduces design thinking to students in grades K-12 through Cooper Hewitt’s groundbreaking Ready, Set, Design challenge. Design in the Classroom, which can be adapted for all grade levels, encourages students to think like designers and provides them with firsthand knowledge of design’s unique ability to encourage creative problem solving.

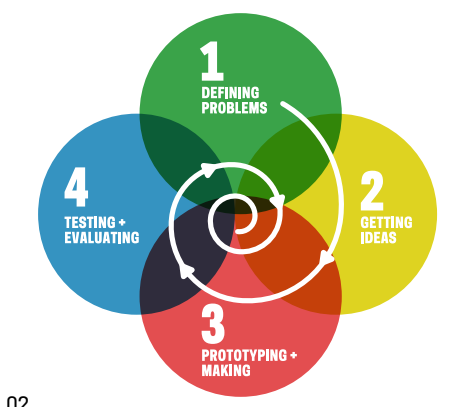


Active observation, collaboration, building prototypes, presentation, and critique—these are the same stages of the design process designers use every day to solve real-life problems. For students, design-based learning expands critical thinking skills, builds creative confidence, encourages diverse opinions and multiple perspectives, and builds the collaboration and communication skills needed to meet Common Core standards and 21st Century Skills in education.

To expand the scope and reach of Design in the Classroom, Cooper Hewitt brought the program to five pilot cities: San Antonio, Washington, DC, New Orleans, Minneapolis, and Cleveland. So far, Design in the Classroom has reached and inspired over 80,000 children. Our goal now is to extend this program nationwide and introduce every student in America to design-based learning.

TRAINING TEACHERS TO THINK LIKE DESIGNERS

Toward that end, Cooper Hewitt’s education department created a professional development workshop to train educators how to think and work like designers. Experiencing the design process, educators learn how to devise a solution in collaborative teams and how to adapt design thinking to teach different subjects, such as science, math, English, and history. For instance, a middle-school math teacher used the Ready, Set, Design challenge to give her students a real-world problem to solve: create a container to carry a certain amount of compost. Through the design challenge, the students explored the concepts of volume, area, and other aspects of geometry. For the rest of the geometry unit, the teacher found that students kept referring to the design challenge and the prototypes they



02

created. In fact, a recent study showed that high school students outperformed a control group on state standardized math and language arts tests after one year of design-education programming.

To achieve our national objective for Design in the Classroom, Cooper Hewitt educators will conduct regional trainings for teachers in select cities. As we expand our network of educators experienced in design-based learning, we will extend our mission to educate, inspire, and empower young people through design to reach the broadest and most diverse audience possible.

Being true to the design process means that there are always lessons to be learned. Using feedback from our program participants, Cooper Hewitt’s education team is working on ways to make deeper connections to the museum’s content and resources. In particular, we are exploring how to leverage our digital platforms to enhance students’ design-based learning experience. Throughout our development of Design in the Classroom’s pedagogy, we have practiced the principles of design thinking ourselves. Our reward has been the remarkable growth of Design in the Classroom’s impact and the enthusiastic response of its participants—our nation’s future designers.

DESIGN IN THE CLASSROOM (NYC) 2011-2014

**72,356 STUDENTS (70% TITLE ONE)
707 SCHOOLS IN ALL 5 BOROUGHS
2,914 WORKSHOPS**

DESIGN IN THE CLASSROOM (NATIONAL) 2013-2015

**6,256 STUDENTS
395 EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS**



03

DESIGN IN THE CLASSROOM MILESTONES

2004 Cooper Hewitt launches its Educator Resource Center website, a pioneering resource for online, downloadable design-education content. The site now hosts over 400 Standards and Common Core-aligned lesson plans, searchable by subject and grade level; curriculum guides; videos; links; and a message board.

2011 Cooper Hewitt closes for renovation and the museum’s education department introduces its groundbreaking Design in the Classroom workshop to reach New York City students directly in their schools while the museum is closed.

2013 Cooper Hewitt educators expand the reach of Design in the Classroom to five pilot cities: Washington, DC, New Orleans, San Antonio, Minneapolis, and Cleveland.

2015 Cooper Hewitt kicks off a new campaign initiative to take Design in the Classroom nationwide and ensure every child in every school is introduced to design and design thinking. ED creative director and television talk show host Ellen DeGeneres matched contributions of up to \$100,000 at the National Design Awards Gala to help Cooper Hewitt reach its \$500,000 goal.

DESIGN IN THE CLASSROOM is made possible in part by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York.

01 Third-grade students work on the Ready, Set, Design challenge using materials from the Design Challenge Kit.

02 This spiral diagram represents one way to look at the design process. Design thinking doesn’t follow a linear path. The phases of the process often overlap, occurring simultaneously and circling back on themselves. Spiral model, adapted from Barry Boehm, 1986, and Karl Ulrich, 2012.

03 K-12 educators presenting their prototype to a panel for feedback.

A JEWEL BOX FOR THE CITY



01

By **Margie Ruddick**

Cooper Hewitt's garden has always had an allure of privacy and inaccessibility. In contrast to Central Park, where anyone can flow into and through the landscape, moving seamlessly from one scene to the next, the garden at the Carnegie Mansion historically restricted its visitors to those directly involved in the mansion's life. In the 1970s, when Central Park was bare and dangerous, stripped of its understory and any semblance of a lawn, the mansion's garden was still green, many shrubs and the emerald rectangle of lawn intact.

Gardens that are visible from the street, but serving a private or institutional function, give something to the city that is invaluable—a borrowed landscape that can, because it is not readily accessible, be lush, richer, more fragile than a public space. In this era when large-scale parks have finally achieved the prominence they deserve as lifelines for the city, we can underestimate the importance of the small, bounded landscape to urban life.

These gardens are often glimpsed through fences or over walls. What is so precious about them, beyond their aesthetic appeal, is how you discover them—unique jewel boxes that open up over time as one grows to know the city. Gardens like the ones at St. Luke's in the West Village, Jefferson Market, or even Alan Sonfist's Time Landscape can be as powerful a presence to the person who passes them every day as they are to the people granted entry. The distinct world that is evoked in each one of these gardens fires the imagination.

The renovation of the Cooper Hewitt garden recognizes the landscape as a space worthy of as much attention, design thinking, and programmatic planning as the museum itself. Once the radical rethinking of the way the museum works was complete, it was time to open the back doors and join inside and outside.

What the renovation gives to the greater city is also invaluable. It continues a trend of intense attention to garden design as a high art. The most visible contemporary public space in New York, the High Line, is actually a bounded garden. The plantings by Piet Oudolf, which make the High Line what it is—a seemingly wild place secreted high up in the city—are as masterful as the plantings of esteemed landscape gardeners and architects Gertrude Jekyll (British, 1843–1932) and Beatrix Farrand (American, 1872–1959). It is a strolling garden of the highest order, so intentionally calibrated and maintained that the costs to build it and to maintain

it were and are many times higher than those of the average American park. And it is a wild success, earning back for the city the expense many times over.

The Cooper Hewitt garden renovation, designed by Walter Hood, principal of Hood Design Studio (Oakland, California) and 2009 National Design Award winner for Landscape Architecture, in collaboration with RAFT Landscape Architecture and Diller Scofidio + Renfro, does several things both to buttress the garden's singularity and to open it out to a bigger world. With the back wall becoming more porous, the garden welcomes more people, more uses, and more content. But while it shifts in scale and material to be more resilient to the many more visitors who will enjoy it, the design adheres to and even amplifies the historic Richard Schermerhorn Jr. 1901 scheme commissioned by Andrew Carnegie. Working with historians from the Smithsonian Institution and the Cultural Landscape Foundation, the designers traced the garden's history back to its roots. From the perennial plantings to the reimagined rockery referring to the geology of Carnegie Hill and the park, the renovation creatively engages the garden's past, and the larger landscape within which it sits. New plantings of cherry trees and rhododendron commune with Central Park's cherry allée and Rhododendron Mile. These glorious stretches of vibrant color, which run right by the museum, to some degree jump the fence and situate the garden in the grander context of the park.

The renovation of the Cooper Hewitt garden safeguards the garden's history while better responding both to the workings of the museum inside and to the natural realm outside the garden's historic fence and wall. And where once the people glimpsed at play through the fence were a select and maybe rarefied crowd, now seen inside the garden is anyone who has the time or inclination to spend a couple of hours experiencing the way in which absolutely every object or place in the world is a product of conscious design. Cooper Hewitt's investment in innovative design and the highest caliber of construction is a testament to the importance of the garden as an eloquent and layered place of discovery, as well as a green offering of respite to people who simply pass by every day.



02



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Margie Ruddick, winner of the 2013 National Design Award for Landscape Architecture is recognized for her pioneering, environmental approach to landscape design that integrates ecology, urban planning, and culture. Ruddick's Wild by Design will be published Fall 2016.

01 Garden view of the Carnegie Mansion shortly after Cooper Hewitt opened in 1976.

02 The Church of St. Luke's in the Fields, located in Greenwich Village, New York City, welcomes the public into its private walled gardens.

03 Plantings along the High Line—a public park elevated above Manhattan's West Side.

BEAUTY: A META-EXPLORATION

Cooper Hewitt's fifth survey of contemporary design is *Beauty—Cooper Hewitt Design Triennial* (February 12–August 21, 2016). Kimberly Varella designed the luscious pages of the book *Beauty* (December 2015), creating not just a document but an object of sensual delight. Tsao & McKown Architects crafted an extraordinary physical context for this exhibition. These interviews explore beauty with the designers who deliver the same.



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Kimberly Varella (American, b. 1970) founded her studio Content Object in Los Angeles in 2013. She has created a rich body of work for museums and cultural clients, including Hammer Museum, Arts at MIT, Pomona College Museum of Art, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. She earned her MFA in art from California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 1999 and her BFA in printmaking and new genres from San Francisco Art Institute in 1996.

— You are a graphic designer working in Los Angeles. How did you come to the field?

I think some would say that Los Angeles is the land of invention—I have certainly invented my own field. I have worked as an activist, artist, and designer for the past two decades. After CalArts, my boyfriend (now husband), his twin brother and his wife, and I (it was a family affair!) started a new publication, *The Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, which you could say was my very first book. That was such a pivotal moment for me where I could finally focus my entire practice and identity into one action—where my voice carried through in concept, form, theory, and aesthetics.

— Why do graphic designers love making books? Why endure?

At the end of designing a book, if it's a good one, I know this capsule will be filed in the Library of Congress, shelved in libraries, both public and private, and will live on to tell stories for generations ahead. (Plus I love working with artists, curators, historians, and editors and being a part of the process of hashing out good ideas.)

— Tell us about the unusual anatomy of *Beauty*.

I have taken the traditional vernacular of the book and made a series of metaphors through material choices. I accentuated the spine with pink threads that dramatize the Smyth-sewing process. The "heart" of the book is combined front and back matter inserted in the center of the book. This inversion of the traditional book sequence draws attention to the



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"guts" of the book. The copyright page stages a momentary gush (splattering of ink) that carries on throughout the "gutter" of the book. This bloodline of content carries through the veins (pink threads) and seeps through or nourishes the "body" of the book.

— We all knew the cover shouldn't feature a particular work from the exhibition. How did the final cover design come about?

In our first meeting I presented a mood board filled with different reflective materials, distorted type treatments, and schizophrenic page layouts. I was clearly trying to come to terms with the notion of beauty myself.

What manifested was our cover. The rainbow holographic foil creates a funhouse mirror—you see a reflection of yourself that changes depending on where you are standing. The "Beauty" type treatment started with Kris Sowersby's *Domaine Display*, then went through a series of laser printouts. I twisted, folded, and curved the paper to change the way the type reads, photographed the paper, and collaged it back together in Photoshop.

— What comes to mind when you hear the word "beauty"?

Coming from a conceptual art background, where content far out-favors form, I am almost allergic to the word "beauty." Post-structuralism would insist that beauty is a façade of cultural constructs used as forms of power keeping individuality in check. Likewise, the Bauhaus school taught that form should follow function and that all ornament and fluff should be eradicated.

The late David Ireland once said to me, "Your work is very beautiful . . . but beauty isn't everything." I probably spent too much time after that trying to uglify my work. Finally I realized that beauty is pleasure, and perhaps I need to have more fun. So happy to finally be making a book called *Beauty*!

— What is the most beautiful place you have visited?

Every place has its beauty, even if—especially if—it's ugly . . . because that makes it complex, and to me that is beautiful. Perhaps I have become a true Angeleno because I'm tempted to choose Los Angeles. Or maybe Detroit, where I was raised, has not left my DNA, because that is one of the most complex cities I've ever lived in.

— Most beautiful time of day?

I love dawn, though most of the time I don't get to see it. I noticed a lot of the designers interviewed for *Beauty* chose dawn or dusk. I think it has to do with the role of the designer and the task of transformation.

—INTERVIEW WITH ELLEN LUPTON

National Design Award winners (Interior Design, 2009) Calvin Tsao (American, b. Hong Kong, 1952) and Zack McKown (American, b. 1952) established Tsao & McKown Architects in 1985 in New York. The studio is celebrated for thoughtful work that spans scale, type, and culture—from the Suntec City 6-million-square-foot mixed-use development master plan in Singapore, to transparent lipstick tubes for Shu Uemura. Tsao and McKown each earned a masters of architecture degree from Harvard University.

— You and Zack established your architecture practice, Tsao & McKown, in 1985. What led you to pursue architecture?

Calvin Tsao: Our backgrounds are in different disciplines—Zack came from sociology and political science; I came from theater. Our common ground was an interest in people, and architecture became a means to situate them in their environments. Architecture is not an end product in itself. We approach architectural questions and solutions with a concern for the quality of our shared civilization, asking how to serve the human condition.

— We recently began working with you on *Beauty's* exhibition design. Tell us about your process. What do you hope to achieve with the design?



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Beauty is organized into seven themes. The primary challenge is to sequence these themes and works so that the show constructs a narrative and dynamic procession.

We began by looking at the relationships among the themes and objects, paying attention to how the designers speak to each other both in counterpoint and/or symphony. With the particularities of each piece, we considered scale, juxtaposition, distance, and proximity to the audience.

Just as we wanted the individual and collective voices of the works to be audible, we also sought to offer the audience relationships with each piece and more contextual views.

To achieve this, we identified a strategic *parti*—a context and structure for the show. The concept is to create a landscape of varied platforms and volumes that float in space and meander through the museum. All objects exist within this ribbon.

— Designing an exhibition for a space like the Carnegie Mansion is not without its impositions—domestically scaled rooms, ornate woodwork, separated floors (*Beauty* will be on the first and third floors). What are the challenges to presenting contemporary work in this context, and how can exhibition design help to resolve these?

Our design and curatorial concept also considers the historical character of the Carnegie Mansion. By congregating display volumes in the center of the spaces, we allow the exhibition to float in counterpart to the architectural envelope. The wood paneling and domestically sized spaces both contain and become part of *Beauty*.

To connect the first and third floors, we distribute exhibition materials in the halls, stairs, and elevators, creating sequences and bread crumbs that link the two components.

— Your concept for *Beauty* involves subtle manipulations of space and light. How will this translate in the exhibition? Space and light are critical to exhibition design—and architecture. Every object needs space to breathe within its collective context. Distance and light can achieve this sense of independence.

We are lucky that the windows bring ambient lighting into the galleries, but this can distract our ability to focus and cause undesirable backlighting. One virtue cannot neutralize another objective. Dimmed interior lighting, careful spotlighting, and scrim walls help balance the natural light with requirements for display.

— What comes to mind when you hear the word "beauty"?

"Beauty" is not definitive. To try to define it constricts our ability to comprehend the full impact and dimension that is beauty.

Zack and I are practitioners rather than theorists. We believe that the search for meaning and answers comes from search, iteration, and practice. Beauty is infinite; it's a pursuit that should never end. To find beauty is a revelation that you've captured a little bit of truth.

— What is the most beautiful place you've visited?

Everywhere is beautiful if you look.

— Most beautiful time of day?

Ditto! Every moment of the day.

—INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA LIPPS

01 Early cover development for *Beauty—Cooper Hewitt Design Triennial* in Kimberly Varella's studio.

02 *Beauty—Cooper Hewitt Design Triennial* final cover.

03 A worktable in Tsao & McKown's studio with exhibition object images and gallery maquettes.

INQUIRY, HISTORY, AND DIALOGUE

By **Ethan Robey**, Associate Director, Master's Program in the History of Design and Curatorial Studies

For first-year students in Cooper Hewitt's Master's Program in the History of Design and Curatorial Studies, Parsons The New School of Design, an interdisciplinary class known as Proseminar lays the foundation for their academic and professional success.

In their first semester, students in the museum's MA Program in the History of Design and Curatorial Studies take the Proseminar, which leads students through an in-depth exploration of decorative arts history and challenges their understanding of an object's cultural significance through robust discussion of critical theory. Each student is assigned an understudied object from the collection that serves as the focus of his or her research, ensuring that our graduate students are directly contributing to the advancement of design history and the museum's shared body of knowledge.

THE TOOLS OF OBJECT STUDY

Over the course of the semester, students learn the nuts and bolts of object study. They have seminars in working with primary sources, such as probate inventories, business records, and trade catalogs, as well as hands-on workshops with various types of objects themselves.

Curators from the museum's curatorial departments—wallcoverings; drawings, prints, and graphic design; textiles; and product design and decorative arts—conduct workshops on various types of objects. Hands-on skills such as these are fundamental for a critical understanding of objects, and in the Proseminar such practical training is complemented by an exploration of various methodologies of design and decorative arts history.



01

INVESTIGATING AN OBJECT'S CULTURAL VALUE

One of many methods the course introduces students to is material cultural research, wherein objects are understood as documents of the people who produced them. As historian Jules Prown puts it, objects are like historical events that are still happening. A student can consider the physical qualities of the object, its visceral presence in his or her own hands, and use that reaction to suggest what was important to the culture it came from. Contextual research then tests these hypotheses. Student Anna Rasche, working with a Victorian bracelet, for example, found it bulky and unwieldy, likely to catch on clothing, its high-relief decoration prone to collecting dirt. These properties, she reasoned, imply an owner schooled in bodily control, with a staff of servants to keep clothes and jewelry mended and clean.

Another avenue of study considers the role of buying and selling on an object's meaning. Cultural value is not necessarily inherent to any artifact; meanings can be attached by a system of advertising and marketing. Consumers, too, inject meaning into objects through what anthropologist Grant McCracken calls rituals of ownership, such as maintenance, display, and gift giving.

Proseminar students also read authors who explore effects of gender roles on design history. For example, since industrially manufactured consumer goods are more likely to be preserved than domestic handiwork—historically a woman's domain—the stories objects tell might seem to reinforce a male-centered image of a society. Design historians such as Cheryl Buckley caution the field against reinforcing these inherent biases.

All the practical exercises and methodological exploration support the students' object research. Thus the Proseminar contributes to the museum's efforts to interpret and share the Cooper Hewitt collection. Students write entries for the museum's popular *Object of the Day* blog on their research, and at the end of the course, final research papers are added to the respective objects' collection files. Parsons/Cooper Hewitt MA students carry what they learn in Proseminar to every class they take and into their professional careers.



02

CASE STUDIES



03

Huntley and Palmers Biscuit Tin (England), 1906

—Susan Teichman, Proseminar, Fall 2012

In studying this relatively humble biscuit tin, Teichman worked from contemporary advertisements and trade catalogs to determine the object's social status; it was marketed as a specialty item to be given as a Christmas gift. Teichman went on, then, to consider the object in terms of the growing industrialization of British manufactured objects. "The success of Huntley and Palmers," Teichman notes, "directly mirrors the expansion and success of the British Empire." The tins could keep products fresh when shipped to the four corners of the world, and the globe in particular could be a reminder of the expanse of the British Empire to every child who fancied a biscuit.

01 Barry R. Harwood, curator of decorative arts at the Brooklyn Museum, leads a Proseminar class on reading nineteenth-century ceramics.

02 Bracelet (France), ca. 1860; Attributed to Honore Severin Bourdoncle (French, 1823–1893); aluminum, gold, brass; Bequest of Raizel Halpin and Dora Jane Janson, in honor of their great friendship and shared love of antique jewelry; 2003-20-1.



04

Handbag Watch, ca. 1933

—Adriane Dalton, Proseminar, Fall 2012

This small watch from the 1930s is a product of the machine age in America, influenced by a fascination at the time for the smooth, unadorned contours of automobiles and airplanes. Through diligent primary source research, Dalton showed that advertisements in its day recommended the watch for a lady's handbag or as a gift for men or boys. Thus, Dalton posited, the functionalist style of consumer goods in the 1930s "allowed for these simplified objects to maintain their functions while untethering them from gender assignment."

03 Biscuit Tin, 1906; Produced by Huntley & Palmers, Ltd. (England); Manufactured by Huntley, Boorne & Stevens (England); tin, enamel decoration; Gift of Alvin and Eileen Preiss; 1990-93-1.

04 Handbag Watch, ca. 1933; Case designed by George Blow (American, 1897–1960) and Simon de Vaulchier (French, active New York, USA, 1893–1971); Manufactured by Westclox (La Salle, Illinois, USA); Bakelite, metal, glass, paper; Gift of Max Pine and Lois Mander; 2008-9-13.

DESIGNING STORY:

PIXAR'S PETER SOHN ON *THE GOOD DINOSAUR*

Peter Sohn joined Pixar Animation Studios in September 2000 and has worked in the art, story, and animation departments for the Academy Award-winning films *Finding Nemo* and *WALL•E*, as well as *The Incredibles*. Sohn made his directorial debut in 2009 with the Pixar short *Partly Cloudy*. Sohn's first feature-length film, *The Good Dinosaur*, opens this month (November 2015). Prior to Pixar, Sohn worked for Warner Bros. Studio and Disney TV. He grew up in New York, attended California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), and currently lives in the Bay Area.



01

Pamela Horn, *Cooper Hewitt's Head of Cross-Platform Publishing*, spoke with Peter about his process.

PH: What was your path from art school to director?

PS: I remember being very inspired by animation and that process. In high school, I tried to learn... about art and animation schools through people that I had met. Specifically, a professor from CalArts explained it this way: that if you want to get into animation there are two ways to go, there's the "buffet" and then there's the "one meal" style. He talked about East Coast schools as the "buffet"—where they will teach you all about the different types of animation and different ways to make that type of art. And the California schools, being the "one meal" style—that is just straight, classic feature animation.

At the time, all I wanted to learn about was just that feature animation process—how to make a film. And once I told him that, he said that I all I needed to do was draw, and study, and understand motion, and observe life. After talking to him all I did was fill sketchbooks and try to get into art school.

PH: I saw a video of you when I was at Pixar that involved the making of Russell, the little boy from *Up*. You were hoisting on your overloaded backpack and physically embodying the character of this loveable little Boy Scout. It looked like you were homing in on how to best create the most appealing and believable little boy.

PS: Yeah. That's correct. It's rarely just about the external form to start. It's always about the inside of the character. It's a really fun and kind of intense process. You start out just drawing funny

doodles and silly drawings, but then there is a line that you follow until you hit some sort of truth. You know it really is a gut thing where everyone agrees and says that feels right, that's the character.

PH: How long did it take to develop the Russell character through that process?

PS: It was several months for sure. In our art department there's an old tradition of everyone caricaturing one another in our meetings—one person becomes the focus and then everyone tries to capture that person's essence in not the most flattering way. When you're targeted, you're targeted. I remember telling those guys stories about growing up in New York, and as a kid, getting a Boy Scout pamphlet. We were joking around and they drew all of these caricatures of me. I'm a hefty guy and Asian American, and what they drew was essentially a giant



02

thumb with a Boy Scout hat!

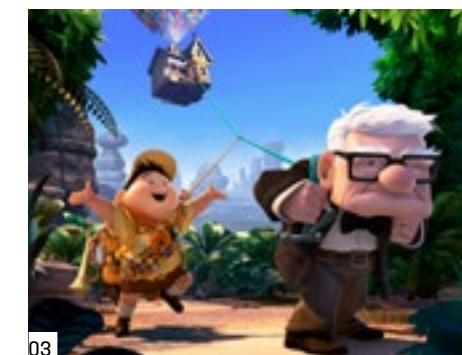
Ricky Nierva, *Up's* head designer, asked me to start doing some drawings using the caricature that'd been drawn of me. So, Russell became an Asian-American character. And I was very proud of him being an Asian American, and said I'd like to help out in whatever way I can.

There are many routes to how you explore character, but it obviously requires hours of drawing—poking at the eyes, poking at the shape, and then finding situations that the character would be in. Does he eat a lot? Does he carry stuff around? Is he a loner? Is he an extrovert? And I'd just explore character by drawing different poses and situations, using my learning from art school to quickly draw something as a way to capture a gesture, and some sort of energy. Then I said, okay, he's, like, an eight- to ten-year-old kid, and, if he was running, maybe he's got a kind of "stubby" run where he bounces. I used to know this kid at my dad's grocery store

and he would run around and he would just touch everything—every can or cereal box. What if he was like that? And what if he was really messy? And you show it to the directors and the team and they start talking about it, breaking it down, seeing what they connected to, or what they thought the story needed, and you would go from there. You start to fine-tune it until there was a design in 2-D that would need to be translated into a [character] sculpt or into the computer.

PH: Would you say your roles at Pixar leading up to and including *The Good Dinosaur* encompass animator, actor, and director?

PS: That's interesting, yeah. I love all parts of filmmaking. It's been a dream ever since I was a kid to work with all these people here. Look, when I was growing up in New York our neighborhood was pretty segregated—the Koreans stayed in one place, Puerto Ricans stayed in another place. My dad



03

had a grocery store on Burke Avenue near 241st Street in the Bronx. I feel as if I missed a great deal because of identifying with a group purely according to race. I judged myself by my skin color. But once I went to art school, I started to connect to a new kind of race—a new tribe—a kind of filmmaker and nerd tribe! I absolutely connected to them and from that point on, I considered myself part of the filmmaking race!

PH: Can you tell me about when you joined *The Good Dinosaur* team?

PS: Absolutely! Around 2009, I began working with one of Pixar's directors, Bob Peterson, helping with the film's art and story development, and some animation. It was Bob's amazing and simple idea of a boy and dog story, but flipping it where the dinosaur becomes the boy and the dog is the human boy. I helped him for several years developing that—it was so fun.

But the story got complicated and the film divided into two and a half different stories: a father and son story, a boy and dog story, and there was also a changing-of-the-world thing happening. There were a lot of great things about these directions—but there were really some tough story issues to figure out.

When I got asked to direct it, I just simplified it to honor what Bob's original idea was. Obviously, the boy and dog story is a very simple one, but trying to do that in a very sincere and emotional way was the trick.

01
The Good Dinosaur, 2015, Disney/Pixar

02
Russell from *Up*, 2009, Disney/Pixar

03
Russell and Carl from *Up*, 2009, Disney/Pixar



04



05

PH: Do you always approach a film first through characters or story?

PS: Not necessarily. You can start off with a world, you can start off with a character, or you can start off with a story.

In this instance, one of the first things that we started off with wasn't even a character per se; there was just a nugget. I remember drawing a giant, long-necked apatosaurus with his head on the ground plowing miles of farmland, and there was something interesting about a scenario where dinosaurs have evolved to farm and form an agrarian kind of community.

Then the question to ask was: *What if?* What if dinosaurs lived in a frontier world and they have to fend for themselves in this harsh wilderness? Digging deeper into the history of American farming led me to the theme of honest-to-God, hardworking families, and then I came right up against my own history.

My father worked very hard, and I understand that life of working in one place. A store and a farm are very different things, but I saw the connections between American farm life and my own family's experiences. So I started digging into that with the story crew and art department helping to flesh things out.

With a handle on some of the traits of the main character, I then asked, What is this story going to be about? What is this film going to be about? You hope some story lines work out, but if they don't you toss them. It's a volatile process looking to strike that emotional chord that sings, all with the goal of trying to support the characters' journey in the story. At certain points, it's about trusting your gut. That is one of the first pieces of advice one of the other directors gave me when I first started this gig. It was that you're not going to have all the answers. You think you will, but you won't—maybe not until three months before the film opens!

PH: There have been numerous kinds of dinosaur films over the years. How did you go about creating such a unique world with such an appealing dinosaur?

PS: I don't know if we've hit it... I'm almost done with this film, but the idea was to create a relationship that is unique and set the story in a world filled with dinosaurs that you haven't seen before. There are elements, of course, that we are exploiting that you have seen before. But that's just because there are fun things having to do with dinosaurs that I, as a filmgoer, enjoy and wanted to kind of exploit. But at the same time, I was trying to create a relationship that you have not seen before, set in a world you have not seen before. There's a photo-real quality to the natural world in our film that is very different from other Pixar films.

But the realism was done purposely to create a kind of threatening world because our characters are younger— younger than [characters in] other Pixar films for sure. As the characters' journey through this world, you have to believe that an animal can get hurt out there.

PH: So, Arlo [the dinosaur] is vulnerable?

PS: Exactly. That's right. How do you take a dinosaur and try to create human boyish attributes in him, so you can empathize with him when he does get lost in the woods. Well, when he is looking around with those eyes, they're fearful. And then, how to convey his efforts to connect to this dog that doesn't speak the same language? Again, I focused on the design of those eyes, so that he can communicate more with the eyebrows, the eyelids, and the pupils. All the anatomical work that the great animators do to communicate feelings without dialogue.

Pixar: The Design of Story is on view in Cooper Hewitt's Process Lab October 8, 2015–August 7, 2016.

04
The Good Dinosaur, 2015, Disney/Pixar

05
Concept art, The Good Dinosaur, 2015, Disney/Pixar

NEW ACQUISITIONS

CHAIR, 2013

WASHINGTON SKELETON CHAIR



Designed by David Adjaye
(English, b. Tanzania, 1966)

Manufactured by Knoll, Inc. (New York, USA)
Nickel-plated die-cast aluminum, steel
H × W × D: 82.6 × 45.7 × 51.4 cm
(32 ½ × 18 × 20 ¼ in.)

Gift of Knoll, Inc., 2015-11-1

Designed by architect David Adjaye for his first venture into furniture design, this chair is part of Adjaye's Washington collection. The name references the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture designed by Adjaye. The play between solid and void echoes Adjaye's use of bronze screens in the museum's façade to cast light and shadow into the structure.

POSTER, 2014

SALZHAUS



Designed by Felix Pfäffli
(Swiss, b. 1986)

For Salzhaus (Winterthur, Switzerland)
Offset lithograph on paper
128.1 × 89.9 cm (50 ¾ × 35 ½ in.)

Gift of Felix Pfäffli, 2014-30-1

Asked to design a poster for the music venue Salzhaus, Pfäffli used narrow geometric letterforms to distort, warp, and disassemble the text. Layered over each other, the letterforms read as a vibrant abstract composition as much as a linear rendering of the name of the music house.

POSTER, 2011

SPIRITED



Designed by Jianping He (Chinese, b. 1973)
with Tong Yang-Tze (Chinese, b. 1942)

Screenprint on paper
118.9 × 84.1 cm (46 ¾ × 33 ½ in.)

Gift of Jianping He, 2014-23-5

Asked by calligrapher Tong Yang-Tze to collaborate on a work of calligraphy on the subject of imitating nature, Jianping He was reminded of a quote of Albert Einstein: "Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better." He designed a Chinese character transformed into a unified whole through a web of thin lines extruding from the edges of the calligraphic element.

DRESS AND JACKET, 1939

DELPHOS DRESS AND JACKET



Designed by Mariano Fortuny
(Spanish, active Italy, 1871–1949)

Manufactured by Società Anonima Fortuny
(Venice, Italy)

Distributed by Elsie McNeil
(New York, New York, USA)

Dress: pleated silk; jacket: stencil-printed
silk velvet

Museum purchase from Members'
Acquisitions Funds of Cooper Hewitt,
Smithsonian Design Museum,
5858.1.2.2015

Fortuny's iconic Delphos dress was introduced around 1907 and produced with only minor variation until his death in 1949. His patented process included hand stitching and passing the cloth between heated rods to create irregular, undulating pleats. The jacket uses stenciled metallic pigments to replicate the look of ancient Persian and Islamic silks.

SIDEWALL, 2014

AURORA



Designed by Calico Wallpaper
(Brooklyn, New York, USA; founded 2013)
Digital print on linen-textured vinyl
243.8 × 132.1 cm (8 ft. × 52 in.)

Gift of Calico Wallpaper, 2015-24-2

Aurora combines new technology and traditional craft and was developed after researching the arts of fabric dying. The ombré or color blend effect was created by painting or dipping organic linen with a liquid suspension of organic mineral pigments. After the fabric dries it is captured with hi-resolution digital photography and enlarged in Photoshop to create a continuous non-repeating color blend.

VASE, CA. 1900

GRAND SEASCAPE WITH TREES VASE



Designed and made by Clément Massier
(French, 1845–1917)
Hand-painted and metallic-glazed thrown
earthenware

H × diam.: 50.8 × 27.3 cm (20 × 10 ¾ in.)

Museum purchase from Charles E.
Sampson Memorial Fund and through gift
of Barbara Munves, Dr. Barbra B. and
Mr. Hal F. Higginbotham, and Susan
Hermanos, 2015-10-2

The French ceramicist Massier's use of different suspension materials to vary the colors with firing, combined with his understanding of the properties of fire and metallic oxides and his painterly skills, resulted in this pictorial and ceramic masterpiece—one of his largest known pieces. Massier profoundly influenced Louis Comfort Tiffany, who admired and collected Massier's ceramics.

SIDEWALL, 2013

DRYWALL #1



Urs Fischer (Swiss, active USA, b. 1973)
Brooklyn, New York, USA

Inkjet print on nylon reinforced paper
243.8 × 121.9 cm (8 ft. × 48 in.)

Gift of Urs Fischer, 2014-37-1

Historically, wallpaper has copied materials deemed more luxe, such as exotic hardwoods or stone. During the twentieth century, wallpapers began imitating what were more common surfaces, typically as a money-saving measure. Used in the construction of most buildings, drywall is almost always covered by surfacing materials more appropriate to a finished interior. It is most unusual for wallpaper to imitate a lesser surfacing material—as Fischer represents in this wall covering.

DRAWING, CA. 2014

WORLD TRADE CENTER TRANSPORTATION HUB, NEW YORK, NY: SKETCH



Designed by Santiago Calatrava
(Spanish, b. 1951)

Watercolor and graphite on white wove paper
66.7 × 101.6 cm (26 ¼ × 40 in.)

Gift of Santiago Calatrava, 7007.1.2015

Shortly after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, Santiago Calatrava was commissioned to design a new transit hub to connect PATH trains from New Jersey to New York City's subway system. The steel and white marble structure is meant to evoke the wings of a dove—an international symbol for peace.

TEXTILE, 2009

TEXTILE



Designed by Marjo Penninx
Manufactured by Vlisco (Helmond, Netherlands)
Cotton, wax-resist printed on plain weave
91.4 × 120 cm (36 × 47 ¼ in.)

Gift of Vlisco, 2015-1-25

Wax prints—the vibrantly patterned cottons worn throughout Western Africa and the diaspora—are made by a resist process related to batik that gives unique effects like crackle and bubbles. Vlisco's dedication to the traditional wax-resist technique, along with consistently innovative designs, has made the company's "Real Dutch Wax" label a global status symbol.

DRAWING, CA. 2009

STEP UP ON FIFTH: SANTA MONICA, CA: SKETCH OF ELEVATION



Designed by Brooks + Scarpa
(Los Angeles, California, USA; originally founded
Pugh + Scarpa, 1991; renamed 2010)

Pen and black ink, colored pencil on tracing paper
30.8 × 46.4 cm (12 ¼ × 18 ¼ in.)

Gift of Brooks + Scarpa, 7006.1.2015

Step Up on Fifth is an affordable housing complex built to offer support services and rehabilitation for the local homeless and mentally disabled population in Santa Monica, California. Designed by National Design Award-winning architecture firm Brooks + Scarpa and completed in 2009, the building, comprised of nearly 75 percent recycled materials, integrates 46 studio apartments with ground-level commercial space.

VASE, 2011

BOTANICA IV (NEPENTHES VILLOSA) VASE



Designed by Andrea Trimarchi (Italian, b. 1983) and Simone Farresin (Italian, b. 1980), Studio Formafantasma (Amsterdam, Netherlands)

Molded *bois durci* (heated and stirred powdered sycamore and egg albumen), dewaxed shellac, beeswax, leather, mold-blown glass, ink on paper
H x W x D: 30.8 x 29.5 x 22.5 cm
(12 1/8 x 11 5/8 x 8 7/8 in.)

Museum purchase from General Acquisitions Endowment Fund, 6842.1.2014

Created by the Dutch studio Formafantasma, this honey-colored vase is part of a collection of vessels made from pre-industrial plastics. The collection was a result of the studio's study of plasticity derived entirely from natural sources. The combination of traditional materials pushed to new limits and the use of innovative techniques creates fresh forms and textures.

SIDEWALL, 2010

MAIDEN & MOONFLOWER



Designed by Kiki Smith (American, b. Germany, 1954)
Made by Studio Printworks (Hoboken, New Jersey, USA)

Screen-printed on paper
203.2 x 182.9 cm (6 ft. 8 in. x 6 ft.)

Gift of Studio Printworks, 2013-2-1

Originally created for an exhibition of the artist's work at the Museum Haus Esters in Germany in 2008, the sidewall pattern contains two similar scenes of a woman standing beneath a tree bough surrounded by a star-filled sky. It addresses the spiritual and eternal aspects of human nature and speaks of our solitary journey, all the while connected to nature.

CHAIR, 1912

PRATT HOUSE MODEL ROCKING CHAIR



Designed by Greene and Greene (Pasadena, California, USA; founded 1894)

Made by Peter Hall (American, b. Sweden, 1867-1939)

Joined and carved Honduras mahogany and ebony, leather upholstered slip-in seat cushion

H x W x D: 101.5 x 63.5 x 82 cm
(39 5/8 x 25 x 32 1/4 in.)

Museum purchase from Members' Acquisitions Fund of Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum and through gift in honor of Elizabeth Ainslie from Nancy Marks, Marilyn Friedman, Enid Morse, Lisa Roberts, Judy Francis Zankel, Jacqueline Fowler, Paul Herzan, Joseph Holtzman, and George R. Kravis II, 2015-9-1

This chair by architects Charles Greene and Henry Greene epitomizes the apex of American Arts and Crafts innovation. Designed to be part of a total ensemble of detailing and architecture in the Pratt House near Ojai, California, the chair is also a stand-alone object. It melds cultures while promoting Arts and Crafts' "honest" craftsmanship in maker Peter Hall's visible ebonized square dowels.

IRON, CA. 1946

SILVER STREAK IRON



Manufactured by Saunders Machine & Tool Corp. (Yonkers, New York, USA) and by Corning Glass Works (Corning, New York, USA)

Molded and emulsion-painted Pyrex glass, cast and nickel-plated steel, molded phenolic plastic resin, rubber, fabric (cord)

H x W x D: 13.8 x 9.8 x 23 cm
(5 1/4 x 3 7/8 x 9 1/4 in.)

Gift of George R. Kravis II, 2015-5-12

This model for the Silver Streak Iron was produced in response to metal shortages during World War II. Saunders Machine & Tool Corporation partnered with Corning Glass Works to develop an iron with a durable and heat-resistant shell and handle of Pyrex. The iron's streamlined form, ergonomic shape, and bright color reflect the mid-twentieth-century emphasis on Modern design for household products.

SIDEWALL, 2011

FLEXI MOTHER OF PEARL



Made by The Maya Romanoff Corporation (Chicago, Illinois, USA)

Inlaid capiz shells on nonwoven paper backing
30.5 x 61 cm (12 x 24 in.)

Gift of The Maya Romanoff Corporation, 7639.1a/j.2014

Flexi Mother of Pearl is produced using capiz shells, rapidly renewable and ecologically harvested. Thin layers of shell are applied in narrow strips and then given a transparent protective coating that allows the shell's natural iridescence to show through. The brilliance of the shells' luster and the candy-apple red coating present an unexpected and unusual luxe material.

TEXTILE, 1949

TEXTILE



Designed by Ruth Reeves (American, 1892-1966)

Commissioned by Dr. Harry S. Tschopik (American, 1915-1956)

Screen printed on linen plain weave
322.6 x 126.4 cm (10 ft. 7 in. x 49 3/4 in.)

Museum purchase from General Acquisitions Endowment Fund, 2015-19-5

Dr. Tschopik, an ethnologist at the American Museum of Natural History, and his wife, Marion, an archaeologist, commissioned Reeves to design this textile for their modernist home in Tarrytown, New York. She was inspired by their collection of Peruvian art and artifacts and drew on various elements of the Andean Baroque style.

ROBE, CA. 1900

HAUSA ROBE, NIGERIA



Hand-spun locally grown cotton, hand-spun *alaari* silk, plain weave, embroidered
287 x 129.5 cm (9 ft. 5 in. x 51 in.)

Museum purchase, 2015-17-1

The lavish use of costly hand-spun silk in Hausa prestige robes proclaimed the wearer's status, and the elaborate hand-embroidered silk designs on the front and back of the chest established his identification with Islam. The robe's fluid compositions drawn by Islamic scholars are based on calligraphic amulets, which are believed to impart protective power.

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Ready, Set, Design!

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Designing Story: Pixar's Peter Sohn on *The Good Dinosaur*

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New Acquisitions

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