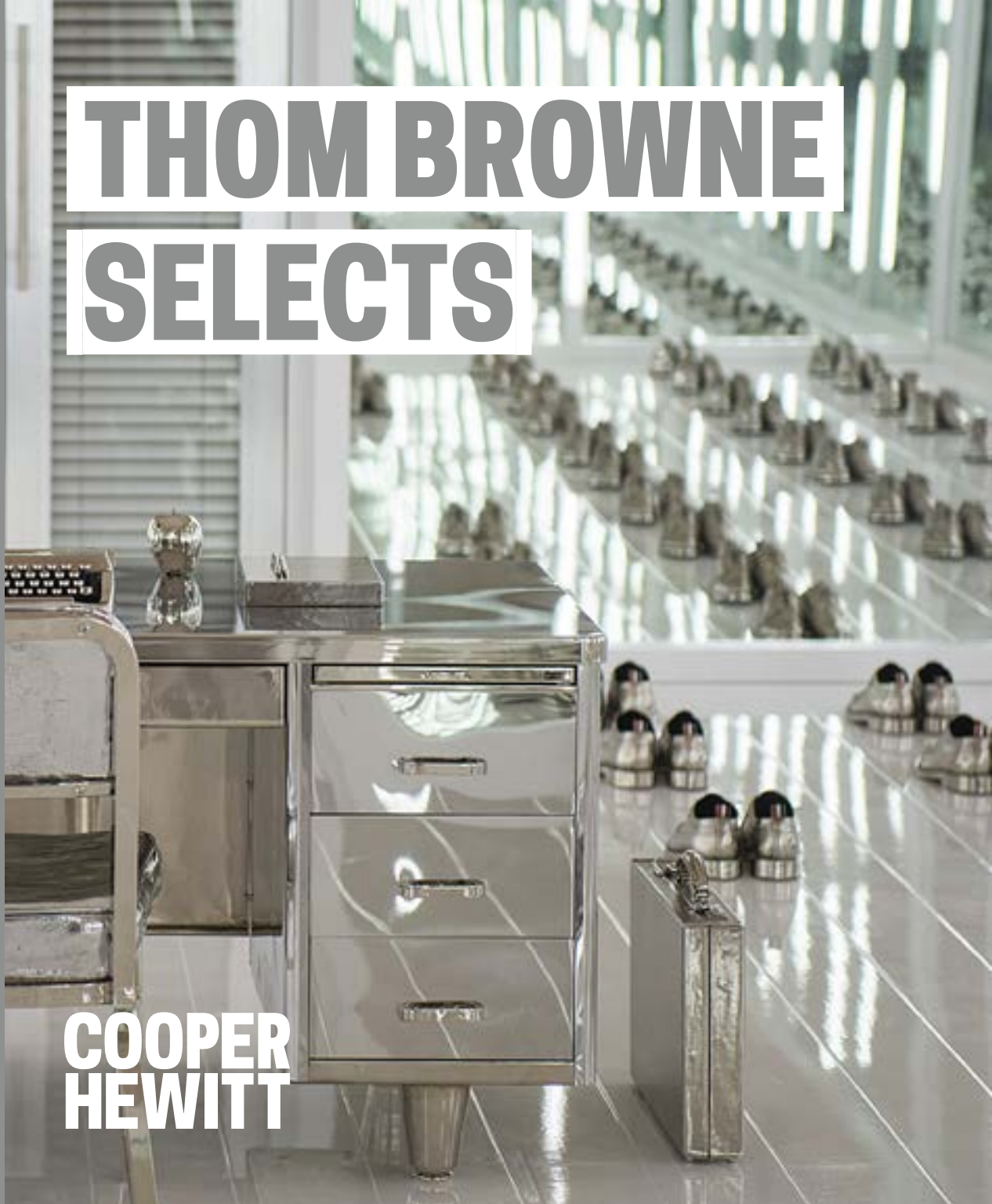
WORKS FROM THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

THOM BROWNE SELECTS



COOPER HEWITT

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THOM BROWNE SELECTS

#ThomBrowneSelects

Thom Browne Selects is made possible by the Marks Family Foundation Endowment Fund. Generous support for the site-specific installation provided by Thom Browne International. Installation wallpaper generously provided by Osborne & Little.

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Thom Browne Selects is the thirteenth exhibition in the Nancy and Edwin Marks Collection Gallery series devoted to showcasing the museum's collections. Fashion designer and 2012 National Design Award winner Thom Browne is known for his focus on superior craftsmanship and a fresh re-examination of fashion with provocative ideas like uniformity as a means of expressing individuality. Browne's immersive installation of holographic wallcovering, mirrors, and frames from the collection—some more than three hundred years old—invites visitors to reflect physically and mentally, while admiring what they see.

***Matilda McQuaid**, Deputy Director of Curatorial and Head of Textiles sat down with Thom Browne to discuss his design process and the exhibition.*

(Detail) Officeman 2, Aug.–Oct. 2015 at Le Bon Marché, Paris, France.

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A CONVERSATION WITH THOM BROWNE

MATILDA MCQUAID Talk about your design process and how you design a collection from beginning to end.

THOM BROWNE It starts with a general idea—whether this develops from approaching the collection within the context of fashion silhouettes or approaching it from a film reference or outside reference other than the clothes. If I start with the clothing, I think about how I want to change the proportion of something starting from a very classic idea. It continues with my conceptual sketches, which I use to remind myself how I want to play with proportion. Next, I move into more specific, workable sketches—which I develop with my design team—then right into pattern making and toile and actual samples and, finally the collection. I then work that collection into a specific story, a narrative that sets the direction for the show.

The other scenario starts with a concept like a sensibility or timeperiod or a specific movie, book, or art reference that I try to translate nonliterally into a collection. The difference here is at the start. Instead of working immediately with proportion, I work the story into the collection, then the conceptual and working sketches, pattern making, actual collection, and the show. In the first scenario, the story may come later in the process.

MM Talk about this with regard to your women's ready-to-wear (RTW) spring 2016 collection.

TB The very initial idea came from the *China: Through the Looking Glass* exhibition at the Met [2015, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City]—the Asian inspiration—but to me the influence had more to do with Japan, which is known for its craftsmanship and quality. I wanted to emphasize the idea of a uniform being individual and unique. When I thought of uniforms, I thought of the Japanese schoolgirl, but I also thought about American schoolgirls, the Midwest, the Dust Bowl as represented in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and of these girls being a mix of East and West. There's not a specific intellectual idea behind the collection, but it's more about putting a visual presentation in front of people.

MM The juxtaposition of uniformity and individuality reminds me of the installation you presented at New York Fashion Week Men's in July 2015, in which models stood on the perimeter of a mirrored room. At first glance, they looked the same, uniform. But you soon realized the subtle differences in what they were wearing.

TB That's exactly what I was trying to express with the individuality in the uniform, and then, with the men's show, multiplying it by infinity by putting them all in a mirrored "box."

Installation for New York Fashion Week Men's, July 2015.

(Detail) Officeman 2, Aug.–Oct. 2015 at Le Bon Marché, Paris, France.

MM What do you want people to feel or to experience after they leave your show or while wearing your clothes?

TB For people who wear the clothing, I want them to appreciate the quality of how the clothing is made—the tailoring and stitching. It is one of the things that I take very seriously. As conceptual as the collections can be, the thought and care that go into how the clothing is made are what I want people to see. I would never jerry-rig something just for shock value, which I think happens a lot in conceptual design. When people wear the clothing or come to the fashion shows, I want them to experience something that they haven't seen before, and know that there is real thought behind the collection, the concept of the presentation, and the show. It's not just a show for the sake of presenting a show.

What's also important to me—in regard to the specific world that I design within—is that I want to have a lifelong body of work, which has collections that build upon one another, as opposed to something completely different every season. I would rather start from the beginning and see the idea become more developed each year, and in twenty or thirty years see a beautiful arc between where I started and ended. They are all beautifully and organically built upon each other. Not many people have done this well, but when you see people who have, their process is common sense.

MM If you could project yourself into the future and look back on your work, what would be the narrative, or what would connect everything together?

TB It would be the specific idea of uniformity—meaning twenty years from now I could show the spring 2016 collection and it would look just as relevant. Uniformity in the fashion world is almost a four-letter word, especially for women, who don't want to wear the same thing every day. In actuality, it would be so refreshing and simplify things. If it's beautifully made and fits really well, there's nothing boring about that. It's just beautiful.

It's similar to when I first reintroduced the gray suit in spring 2004. The idea of a suit didn't seem to have a forward outlook to young-minded people. There is an aversion to uniformity, but in reality, people walking down the street are on the whole wearing the same

style—whatever the trend is dictating—as opposed to thinking about their individuality. It's ironic that they think "uniformity" is not liberating enough.

MM The only other person I've known who has taken this idea and applied it to clothing is artist Andrea Zittel. In 1991 she created *A–Z Six Month Uniforms*, designing and making one "perfect" dress for each season and wearing it every day for six months. It must have been relieving not to have to worry about one very routine thing we do in our lives, which is dressing ourselves every day. She explained that dreaming up the next season's dress also relieved the monotony that may have occurred from wearing the same dress for six months. Installations of her *Uniforms* in art galleries, like your performances, help to underscore how liberating a uniform can be.

TB A performance of forty guys sitting behind a desk [Thom Browne Fall/Winter 2009–10 show, Pitti Uomo 75, at the Istituto di Scienze Militari Aeronautiche, Florence, Italy] can be a strong concept, but if you do that over and over again, then that uniformity becomes boring. Subtly different nuances make it more interesting. That is the reason I do my shows and make them entertaining for people—because it makes that uniformity more interesting every season.

MM Talk about the idea of reflection. What do you want people to see in themselves when they see their reflections wearing your clothes?

TB I want people to see themselves and not the clothing, and to see the confident side of themselves and appreciate their individuality. The clothes should just enhance the person. That is what's behind *Thom Browne Selects,* with all the reflective surfaces—mirrors, mirrored walls and floors, and silver-plated shoes and desk. It is the idea of making the true individual stand out by looking at one's reflection and appreciating it. At the same time, everybody feels that they are part of this installation, as opposed to just viewing an installation at a museum.

Also, integrating objects—a briefcase or coat stand—that I feel are banal to most people, and then silver plating them, elevates them to a level where they can be presented with the museum's collection.

(top and bottom) Thom Browne Spring 2013 show at the Maison de la Chimie, Paris, France, July 2012.

MM Is there anything else that you want visitors to experience in your fashion shows and this exhibition?

TB Sometimes it's as simple as people enjoying themselves and not taking themselves so seriously. Enjoy it. Maybe not like it! These are important reactions to have when you see design.

When journalists come to my shows and ask questions, they interpret my ideas in ways that make me wish I were as intelligent as they are, because my references are so much more sophomoric than theirs! If they want to read into it or intellectualize it, then that's great. The worst thing would be for them to say, "I kind of liked it," or, "I kind of didn't." I'd rather that they say, "I loved it," or, "I hated it."

MM Talk about how architecture and product design have influenced your work.

TB Architecture is one of the more important areas that has influenced me. It's not always specifically midcentury, as I admire the work of sixteenth-century Italian architect Andrea Palladio. But the Lever House and the Seagram Building in New York are two of my favorite buildings in the world. They represent architecture that, at the time, had a specific point of view and did not play into what everyone else was doing. Their very clean, geometric forms have more meaning for me than the amazingly curved buildings prevalent today. I loved the original World Trade Center towers because they were perfect rectangles. The edges were sharp and strong. Inspiration from this type of architecture translates into why I like tailoring: its strong edges and a look that seems uncomfortable in its strict form.

MM What is the equivalent of your classic gray suit in architecture?

TB I would say the Lever House or Philip Johnson's Glass House.

MM Do your designs have an American or universal sensibility?

TB It's definitely universal. I'm very proud to be an American designer, and I think there are a lot of American references in my collections, such as to East Coast prep

or sports. I approach the collections I show in New York in the exact same way as those I show in Europe, and I wouldn't change anything just because of where I am. In that way, my approach is universal.

But I am very proud to be an American designer showing collections in Europe, and that they are received positively and considered at the same level as European or Asian designers, who have historically been the fashion leaders. In that regard, I do raise our flag, because it's important for me to also elevate the level and perception of American design in Europe.

MM Besides tailoring, in what other areas does the hand play a role in your work?

TB In regard to how things are made, I believe that machines can now replicate what the hand does, but they can't replicate the beauty of handwork's imperfection. Perfection is not as interesting as imperfection. It's like a wrinkled shirt or unpolished shoes or trousers not the right length—those little things are imperfect, but with self-confidence you make them your own.

MM What advice would you give design students today?

TB If you're going into design, you should be in it only because you want to design things that are provocative or new. Be true to yourself and have the confidence to design according to what you think and not what other people are trying to tell you.

MM Do you have any other thoughts about your exhibition at Cooper Hewitt?

TB Just what an honor it is for me to create this installation at the Smithsonian Design Museum. And I'm overwhelmingly proud of winning the National Design Award from Cooper Hewitt, which you never think of being able to win when you go into design. And when museums approach you about an exhibition and ask you, "Would you be interested?" I think to myself, "Who says no to something like that?"

overleaf: Officeman 2, Aug.–Oct. 2015 at Le Bon Marché, Paris, France.

THOM BROWNE SELECTS CHECKLIST

DESK AND CHAIR WITH APPLE, BRIEFCASE, COAT STAND, DESK LAMP, PAPER, PENCIL, RULER, SCISSORS, STAPLER, AND TYPEWRITER, USA, 2015; Desk: nickel-plated steel; 76.2 × 152.4 × 76.2 cm (30 × 60 × 30 in.); Chair: nickel-plated steel, aluminum; 81.3 × 50.8 × 50.8 cm (32 × 20 × 20 in.); Apple: nickel-plated apple; Briefcase: nickel-plated leather; 10 × 60 × 40 cm (3 15/16 × 23 5/8 × 15 3/4 in.); Coat stand: nickel-plated stainless steel; 175 × 37 cm (5 ft. 8 7/8 in. × 14 9/16 in.); Desk lamp: nickel-plated stainless steel, glass; (base height × diam., shade diam.): 55 × 13 cm, 15 cm (21 5/8 × 5 1/8 in., 5 7/8 in.); Paper: nickel-plated paper; Pencil: nickel-plated wood, graphite; Ruler: nickel-plated wood; Scissors: nickel-plated stainless steel; Stapler: nickel-plated stainless steel; Typewriter: nickel-plated metal, plastic; 10.2 × 30.5 × 35.6 cm (4 × 12 × 14 in.); Courtesy of Thom Browne

SIXTY PAIRS OF WINGTIP BROGUES, 2015; Designed by Thom Browne (American, b. 1965); Nickel-plated leather; Courtesy of Thom Browne

FRAME, Italy, 1720–80; Carved and gilt pine; 31.5 × 25.5 × 3.3 cm (12 3/8 × 10 1/16 × 1 5/16 in.); Gift of Samuel P. Avery; 1903-1-47

FRAME, France, ca. 1800; Cast and gilt bronze; 8.9 × 12.7 × 0.3 cm (3 1/2 × 5 × 1/8 in.); Gift of Jacob H. Schiff; 1904-20-101

FRAME, France, ca. 1745; Cast and fire-gilt bronze; 15.2 × 16.5 x 2.3 cm (6 × 6 1/2 × 7/8 in.); Purchased for the Museum by the Advisory Council; 1910-30-34

FRAME, France, ca. 1820; Cast and blackened bronze; 29 × 8 × 1 cm (11 7/16 × 3 1/8 × 3/8 in.); Gift of Jacob H. Schiff; 1904-20-82

FRAME, Italy or Germany, ca. 1850; Painted and gilt pine; 25 × 20 × 2.6 cm (9 13/16 × 7 7/8 × 1 in.); Gift of Mrs. James O. Green and Eleanor and Sarah Hewitt; 1921-17-18

FRAME, France, ca. 1780; Cast and gilt bronze; 22 × 11.7 × 0.5 cm (8 11/16 × 4 5/8 × 3/16 in.); Gift of Jacob H. Schiff; 1904-20-100

FRAME, probably Italy, ca. 1740; Repoussé and applied silver; 26.6 × 19.1 × 3 cm (10 ½ × 7 ½ × 1 3/16 in.); Gift of unknown donor; n-a-864

FRAME, France, 1905–10; Designed by Hector Guimard (French, 1867–1942); Partly gilt carved fruitwood (pear); 105 × 75.2 × 2.3 cm (41 5/16 × 29 5/8 × 7/8 in.); Gift of Mme. Hector Guimard; 1956-76-10

FRAME, Italy, mid-18th century; Cast and gilt bronze, cast iron; 47.5 × 32 × 5.5 cm (18 11/16 × 12 5/8 × 2 3/16 in.); Gift of Sarah Cooper Hewitt; 1931-66-160

FRAME, France, ca. 1760; Cast and gilt bronze; 13.3 × 15.6 × 0.6 cm (5 ¼ × 6 1/8 × ¼ in.); Purchased for the Museum by the Advisory Council; 1909-25-59

FRAME, France, 1905–10; Designed by Hector Guimard (French, 1867–1942); Partly gilt carved fruitwood (pear); 58 × 48 × 6 cm (22 13/16 × 18 7/8 × 2 5/16 in.); Gift of Mme. Hector Guimard; 1956-76-8

PAIR OF FRAMES, France, ca. 1745; Cast and gilt bronze; 22 × 22 × 1.2 cm (8 11/16 × 8 11/16 × ½ in.); Purchased for the Museum by the Advisory Council; 1910-30-11-a,b

FRAME, France or Italy, 1710–30; Cast and fire-gilt bronze; 25.4 × 16.5 × 2.5 cm (10 × 6 ½ × 1 in.); Purchased for the Museum by the Advisory Council; 1910-30-33

FRAME, France, 1905–10; Designed by Hector Guimard (French, 1867–1942); Partly gilt carved fruitwood (pear); 60.5 × 47 × 4 cm (23 13/16 × 18 ½ × 1 3/16 in.); Gift of Mme. Hector Guimard; 1956-76-9

FRAME, New York, NY, USA and Italy, late 19th–early 20th century; Carved, molded, and gilt gessoed and wood; 51 × 45.5 × 5.5 cm (20 1/16 × 17 15/16 × 2 3/16 in.); Gift of Henry Heydenryk Jr.; 1969-118-1

FRAME, France, 1909; Designed by Hector Guimard (French, 1867–1942); Silvered cast brass, woven silk velvet on board, plate glass; 34.3 × 14.7 × 2.5 cm (13 ½ × 5 13⁄16 × 1 in.); Gift of Mme. Hector Guimard; 1956-76-7-a/c

FRAME, France, 1907; Designed by Hector Guimard (French, 1867–1942); Silvered cast brass, plate glass; 26.8 × 16.8 × 4 cm (10 9⁄16 × 6 5⁄8 × 1 9⁄16 in.); Gift of Mme. Hector Guimard; 1956-76-6-a/c

MIRROR, England, mid- to late 19th century; Stamped and chased repoussé cast silver, mirrored plate glass, velvet-covered backing; 31 × 21.3 × 3.8 cm (12 3⁄16 × 8 3⁄8 × 1 ½ in.); Gift of Mrs. Clarence Webster; 1914-45-1

FRAME, ca. 1887; Manufactured by Elkington & Co. (Birmingham, England); Silver-plated electroformed copper; 33.5 × 25.5 × 2 cm (13 3⁄16 × 10 1⁄16 × 13⁄16 in.); Gift of Ronal Fritz; 1980-49-1

"DIEPPE" MIRROR, Dieppe, France, mid-19th century; Carved bone, velvet-covered wood, mirrored plate glass; 81.3 × 50.8 x 6 cm (32 × 20 x 2 3⁄8 in.); Gift of Ira Howard Levy and Stanley Gurell; 1991-154-1

MIRROR, England, ca. 1790; Japanned wood, mirrored plate glass; 77 × 57.5 × 6 cm (30 5⁄16 × 22 5⁄8 × 2 3⁄8 in.); Bequest of Mrs. John Innes Kane; 1926-22-230

MIRROR, Turkey, mid-19th century; Repoussé and chased silver, mirrored plate glass; 31.1 × 2.1 cm (12 1⁄4 × 13⁄16 in.); Gift of Eleanor and Sarah Hewitt; 1931-64-12

MIRROR, Turkey, late 19th century; Repoussé and chased silver, mirrored plate glass; 30.5 × 39 × 2 cm (12 × 15 3⁄8 × 13⁄16 in.); Gift of Eleanor and Sarah Hewitt; 1931-64-14

FRAME, possibly Spain, 19th century?; Carved, gessoed, and gilt wood; 43.5 × 36.5 × 7 cm (17 1⁄8 × 14 3⁄8 × 2 3⁄4 in.); Gift of unknown donor; n-a-2176

MIRROR, Venice, Italy, 1730–60; Engraved and silvered glass, carved, gessoed, and gilt wood; 39.5 × 32 × 2.2 cm (15 9/16 × 12 5/8 × 7/8 in.); Gift of Eleanor and Sarah Hewitt; 1915-16-8-a

MIRROR, probably Venice, Italy, mid-17th–early 18th century; Engraved and silvered glass; 20.4 × 22 cm (8 1/16 × 8 11/16 in.); Gift of Eleanor Garnier Hewitt; 1907-18-4

MIRROR, Venice, Italy, 1730–60; Engraved and silvered glass, carved, gessoed, and gilt wood; 40 × 31.5 × 2.4 cm (15 3/4 × 12 3/8 × 15/16 in.); Gift of Eleanor and Sarah Hewitt; 1915-16-8-b

M**IRROR WITH CANDLE BRACKETS**, England, 1720–35; Walnut veneer on deal, carved, gessoed, and gilt deal, cast brass, mirrored plate glass; 118 × 67.5 × 6 cm (46 7/16 × 26 9/16 × 2 3/8 in.); Gift of Irwin Untermyer; 1950-112-2-a/c

MIRROR, Northern Italy, ca. 1760; Carved, gessoed, and gilt pine, mirrored plate, glass; 182.9 × 109.2 × 17.8 cm (6 ft. × 43 in. × 7 in.); Bequest of Mary Hayward Weir; 1968-158-4

MIRROR, ca. 1925; Designed by Edgar Brandt (French, 1880–1960); Cast and patinated bronze with beveled mirrored plate glass; 139.7 × 72 × 5 cm (55 × 28 3/8 × 1 15/16 in.); Gift of Stanley Siegel, from the Stanley Siegel Collection; 1975-32-1

FRAME, possibly France, 19th century; Cast, chased, patinated, and silvered brass and bronze, glass; 13.5 × 10.3 × 2 cm (5 5/16 × 4 1/16 × 13/16 in.); Gift of anonymous donor; 1929-1-7-a,b

PAIR OF MIRRORS, England, ca. 1890; Carved mahogany, mahogany veneer, mirrored plate glass; (a): 46 × 27.5 × 1.5 cm (18 1/8 × 10 13/16 × 9/16 in.); (b): 53.3 × 28 × 1.5 cm (21 × 11 × 9/16 in.); Bequest of Mary Hayward Weir; 1968-158-18-a,b

FRAME, Switzerland, 18th century; Carved, molded, and painted wood (probably fir); 44.5 × 40.5 × 4.5 cm (17 1/2 × 15 15/16 × 1 3/4 in.); Gift of the C. Helme and Alice B. Strater Collection; 1976-1-160

MIRROR, Germany, late 19th–early 20th century; Carved, gessoed, and gilt wood, mirrored plate glass, metal; 175.3 × 86.4 × 10.2 cm (5 ft. 9 in. × 34 in. × 4 in.); Gift of unknown donor; n-a-5062

MIRROR, ca. 1974; Designed and made by Jim Dine (American, b. 1935); Molded and gilt plaster on wood, mirrored plate glass; 130 × 78.5 × 7.5 cm (51 3⁄16 × 30 7⁄8 × 2 15⁄16 in.); Gift of Thomas Ettinghausen in memory of Richard Ettinghausen; 1990-169-1

MIRROR, England, ca. 1755; Carved mahogany, mahogany veneer, carved, gessoed, and gilt pine, mirrored silvered glass; 103 × 53.5 × 9.5 cm (40 9⁄16 × 21 1⁄16 × 3 3⁄4 in.); Gift of Neil Sellin; 1967-87-6-a,b

HAND MIRROR, China, 1890–1910; Repoussé and punched silver, mirrored glass, steel; 26.5 × 15.7 × 2.7 cm (10 7⁄16 × 6 3⁄16 × 1 1⁄16 in.); Gift of Fong Chow; 1996-109-2

HAND MIRROR, probably England, 1850–1900; Molded galvanized rubber, glass, gilt metal; 28.6 × 10.2 × 2.5 cm (11 1⁄4 × 4 × 1 in.); Gift of anonymous donor; 1992-60-1

HAND MIRROR, 1930–31; Made by Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna, Austria); Nickel-plated copper alloy; 28.8 × 15 × 1.1 cm (11 5⁄16 × 5 7⁄8 × 7⁄16 in.); Gift of Teresa Kilham; 1958-80-8

MIRROR, Netherlands, 1920–30; Designed by Carel Adolph Lion Cachet (Dutch, 1864–1945); Carved wood, mirrored plate glass; 85.5 × 78 × 8 cm (33 11⁄16 × 30 11⁄16 × 3 1⁄8 in.); Gift of Justin G. Schiller; 1994-66-56

MIRROR, probably Austria or Germany, ca. 1910; Cast brass, beveled mirrored plate glass; 30 × 22.5 × 3.8 cm (11 13⁄16 × 8 7⁄8 × 1 1⁄2 in.); Gift of Gerald G. Stiebel and Penelope Hunter-Stiebel; 2013-49-23

MIRROR FROM TRAVELING DRESSING TABLE SET, 1875; Retailed by Asprey & Son Co. (London, England); Tooled and gilded leather on wood, mirrored plate glass; 29 × 20.2 x 1.3 cm (11 7⁄16 × 7 15⁄16 x 1⁄2 in.); Gift of Danny J. H. Kauffman; 1984-133-1-d

MIRROR, England, ca. 1910; Carved, gessoed, and gilt deal, mirrored plate glass, metal; 188 × 94 × 12.7 cm (6 ft. 2 in. × 37 in. × 5 in.); Gift of unknown donor; n-a-5057

MIRROR, England, ca. 1910; Carved, gessoed, and gilt deal, mirrored plate glass, metal; 188 × 94 × 12.7 cm (6 ft. 2 in. × 37 in. × 5 in.); Gift of unknown donor; n-a-5058

MIRROR, probably France, late 19th–early 20th century; Gessoed, gilt, and carved wood, mirrored glass; 169 × 67 × 9 cm (5 ft. 6 9/16 in. × 26 3/8 in. × 3 9/16 in.); Gift of Irwin Untermyer; 1950-112-1

HAND MIRROR, 1938; Designed by Anton (Tommi) Parzinger (American, b. Germany, 1903–1981); Made by Peter Reimes (German, active USA, 1930–40); Engraved rolled silver, mirror glass; 27.9 × 15.5 × 0.8 cm (11 × 6 1/8 × 5/16 in.); Museum purchase from Walter R. Scholz Memorial Fund; 1998-21-1

PAIR OF MIRRORS, France, 19th century; Carved and gilt wood, mirrored plate glass; (a): 70.5 × 52.5 × 8 cm (27 3/4 × 20 11/16 × 3 1/8 in.); (b): 70 × 52.5 × 7 cm (27 9/16 × 20 11/16 × 2 3/4 in.); Bequest of Mary Hayward Weir; 1968-158-17-a,b

MIRROR, Ireland, late 18th–early 19th century; Cut glass, mirrored plate glass, metal, wood; 65 × 42.5 × 2.5 cm (25 9/16 × 16 3/4 × 1 in.); Bequest of Walter Phelps Warren; 1986-61-196

SIDEWALL, Rombico, 2010; Manufactured by Osborne & Little (London, England); Holographic foil on nonwoven ground, laser engraved; Gift of Osborne & Little; 2016-4-1

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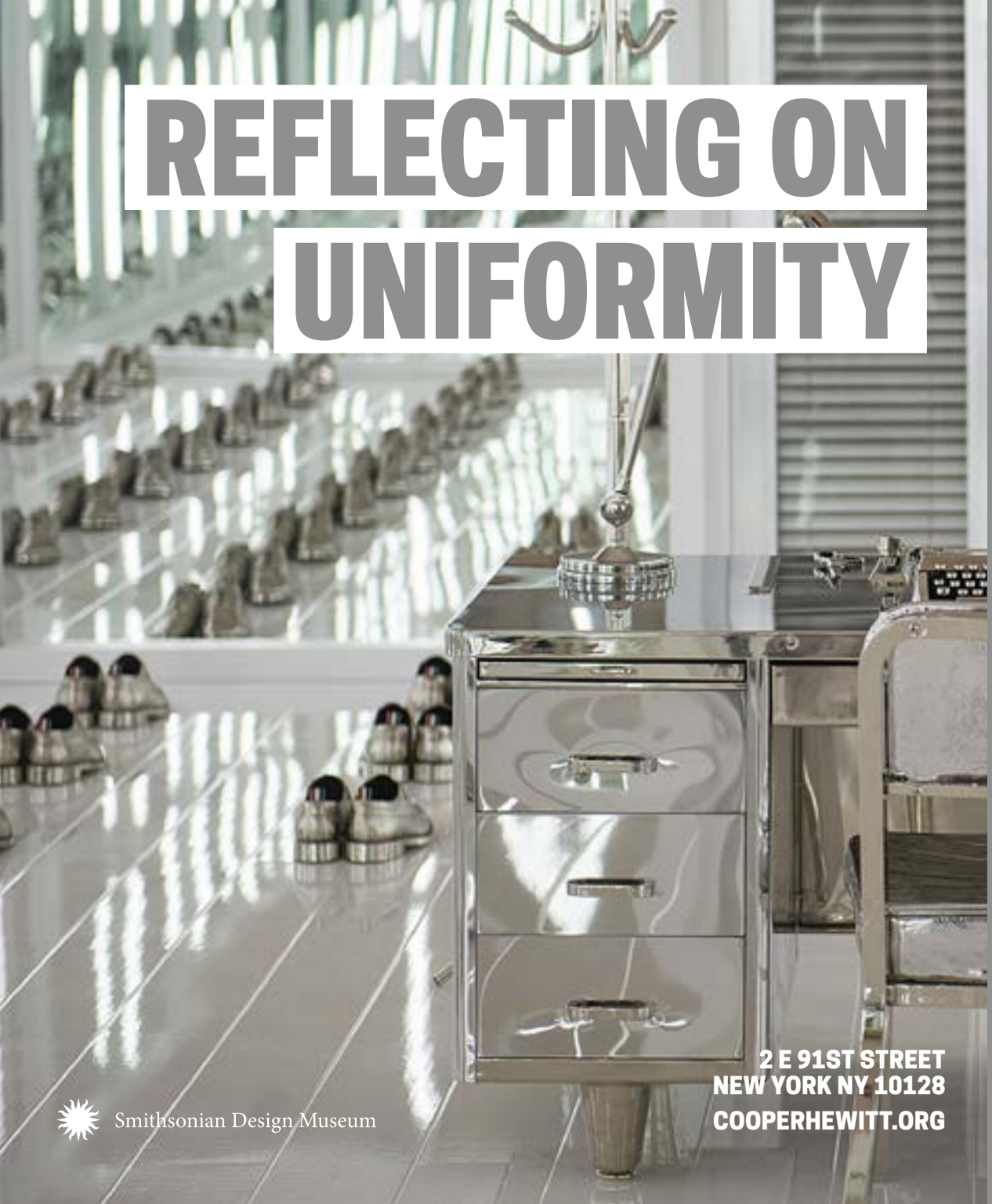

REFLECTING ON UNIFORMITY

Smithsonian Design Museum

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