Cooper-Hewitt Announces Acquisition of Planetary Application and Source Code
First Digital Code in Cooper-Hewitt's Collection

The Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum today announced the acquisition of the iPad music application Planetary, developed by Bloom Studio Inc., along with the underlying source code, which will be freely released to enable developers to build upon and incorporate it into other software design. Released in 2011, Planetary uses the visual metaphor of celestial bodies to represent the relationship between artists (stars), albums (planets) and tracks/songs (moons). Today's announcement coincides with Neptune at Opposition, when the planet will be at its closest to the Earth for the year, and also at its brightest.

Planetary represents an important branch of interactive data visualization, which was a first in the consumer marketplace. The software forms a relationship between the visualization of the data and the formal properties of the solar system. The brightness and position of stars and planets vary according to frequency of playback. In version 2.0 of the software, additional celestial occurrences such as eclipses and solar flares were added. The application has been downloaded more than 3.5 million times.

"As the first work of digital code in Cooper-Hewitt's collection, Planetary signals the museum's increased engagement with software and algorithmic design," said Caroline Baumann, director of the museum. "The application reflects the unique personality and listening patterns of the user through the clever metaphor of the solar system. The additional gift of the Planetary source code provides Cooper-Hewitt with the opportunity to lead the museum field in collecting this type of 'living object.'"

Through the acquisition of Planetary's source code, the museum can reveal the underlying design decisions made through its creation and evolution. Further, anyone can now look at, download and play with the source code that makes the application. The code can be replicated, modified and transported to other hardware platforms and devices in order to preserve the richness and novelty of the software interfaces that were developed. This is especially important in the digital era, as the application would depreciate without the engineering resources to keep it updated.

"The release of the source code allows us to test open sourcing as a new model for long-term software preservation," said Sebastian Chan, Cooper-Hewitt's director of digital and emerging media. "It also allows the museum to consider programming languages as 'materials,' and future researchers to undertake new forms of design research, software and critical code studies."

"We're excited to share Planetary with future generations of designers, and we'd like to thank Cooper-Hewitt for making the bold decision to add software to their design collection," said Tom Carden and Ben Cerveny of Bloom. "By acquiring not just the finished app, but also opening up the source code and design assets that power it, Cooper-Hewitt is taking a pragmatic and forward-thinking approach to software acquisition."

About the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum

Founded in 1897, Cooper-Hewitt is the only museum in the nation devoted exclusively to historic and contemporary design. The museum presents compelling perspectives on the impact of design on daily life through active educational programs, exhibitions and publications.

Cooper-Hewitt's collection is international in scope and contains more than 217,000 objects spanning 30 centuries in four curatorial departments—Drawings, Prints and Graphic Design, Product Design and Decorative Arts, Textiles and Wallcoverings—and the National Design Library.

The museum's main facility, housed in the Carnegie Mansion, is undergoing renovation as part of a $64 million capital campaign that includes enlarged and enhanced facilities for exhibitions, collections display, education programming and the National Design Library, and an increased endowment. During the renovation, Cooper-Hewitt's usual schedule of exhibitions, education programs and events take place at various off-site locations. The renovated facility will reopen in fall 2014.

About Bloom Studio

Bloom Studio, which was based in San Francisco from 2011 to 2012, served as a creative design studio dedicated to promoting new types of visual discovery experiences. Bloom's applications, including Planetary, Biologic, Fizz and Cartagram, helped users to explore and navigate their lives as experienced through online and social services. The applications provided playful, visually compelling views on personally relevant information from services like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and iTunes. The studio was founded by principals Ben Cerveny, Tom Carden and Jesper Anderson. Robert Hodgin joined later as creative director.

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Note to media: To download the source code and learn more about the acquisition, visit http://www.cooperhewitt.org/planetary.