

# COOPER HEWITT

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## COOPER HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN DESIGN MUSEUM PRESENTS THE EXHIBITION “BEAUTIFUL USERS”

ON VIEW DEC. 12–APRIL 26, 2015

DEC. 9, 2014

A fundamental change in design thinking that has affected the daily lives of people everywhere will be the subject of the exhibition “Beautiful Users,” on view from Dec. 12 through April 26, 2015 in the new first-floor Design Process Galleries of Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

Approximately 120 objects drawn from Cooper Hewitt’s collection and a variety of private lenders will introduce visitors to the practical and ethical concept of “user-centered design,” tracing how it has evolved from the mid-20th century work of Henry Dreyfuss (who coined the phrase “designing for people”) to today’s interactive culture of makers and hackers, and the shift toward designing *with* people.

“Cooper Hewitt is home to the Dreyfuss Archive and organized the first monographic exhibition about his career,” said Caroline Baumann, Director of Cooper Hewitt. “With ‘Beautiful Users,’ we now present his ideas and achievements within a much broader context. We also inaugurate the Design Process Galleries that have been created through the transformation of our historic building, the Carnegie Mansion. ‘Beautiful Users’ is the first in a series of temporary exhibitions in these galleries, where we will offer our visitors a range of experiences, from narrative displays about historical and contemporary design to hands-on making, doing and learning activities.”

“Isn’t all design centered around users?” asks Ellen Lupton, Senior Curator of Contemporary Design at Cooper Hewitt. “No. Sometimes things look the way they do because that’s the cheapest and fastest way to make them, sometimes because that’s how the designer or client chose to express a personal vision or creative impulse, sometimes because that’s how things have always been. Amid such competing motivations, organizing the design process around users is a vital vein of contemporary practice. Compelled by this powerful ethical outlook, human-centered design strives to enhance the lives of stakeholders and to discover surprising solutions.”

“Beautiful Users” will explore the ways in which designers over the past half-century have worked to suit their creations to human anatomy and behavior. In telling this story, the exhibition will trace a steady expansion in the approach that designers have taken toward the body—from assuming a normative, one-size-fits-all model to addressing a range of sizes, shapes and abilities—and a concurrent expansion in the end product of design, which now encompasses not only objects but also experiences, services and systems.

Among the objects in the exhibition will be examples of the Humanscale measurement system developed by Niels Diffrient and Alvin R. Tilley, which aids in design for children, the elderly, the differently abled and people of diverse height; and ergonomically designed objects ranging from Dreyfuss's Princess telephone and Honeywell Round thermostat to Amos Winter's Leveraged Freedom wheelchair. Hacking and open-source design will be explored through Diller Scofidio + Renfro's Roomba Cam, which repurposes the household gadget for surveillance purposes, and Jesse Howard's Transparent Tools project, which offers open-source instructions for assembling appliances from a universal library of salvageable and 3D-printable parts.

A bin of touch samples of various types of handles (labeled "Please Handle") and multiple prototypes of design objects will show how designers refine their work through learning how people will use it. Visitors will be able to experience design in relation to their own bodies through *Gesture Match*, a new Cooper Hewitt commission, conceived, designed and produced by Local Projects. This interactive experience invites visitors to use physical gestures to discover design objects sampled from Cooper Hewitt's historic collection. The theme of designing for users continues in Cooper Hewitt's new Process Lab, a hands-on activity gallery that features objects and prototypes designed by Boym Studio, Scott Summit, MAP Projects, and others.

"Beautiful Users" is dedicated to the memory of Bill Moggridge, a pioneer of human-centered design who designed the first laptop computer (the Grid Compass, included in the exhibition) and who was the director of Cooper Hewitt from 2010 to 2012.

The exhibition design for "Beautiful Users" is by Diller Scofidio + Renfro. Exhibition graphics are designed by Pentagram. An illustrated catalogue of the exhibition, written by Ellen Lupton with contributions by Thomas Carpentier and Tiffany Lambert, is published by Princeton Architectural Press and Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

"Beautiful Users" is made possible by major support from the Adobe Foundation and Amita and Purnendu Chatterjee. Generous support is also provided by Dorit and Avi Reichental. Additional funding is provided by the August Heckscher Exhibition Fund, the Ehrenkranz Fund, the Bill Moggridge Memorial Fund, The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, Deborah Buck, May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, Inc. and IDEO.

## **ABOUT COOPER HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN DESIGN MUSEUM**

Founded in 1897, Cooper Hewitt is the only museum in the nation devoted exclusively to historic and contemporary design. The museum educates, inspires and empowers people through design, presenting compelling educational programs, exhibitions and publications. International in scope and possessing one of the most diverse and comprehensive collections of design works in existence, the museum's rich holdings range from Egypt's Late Period/New Kingdom (1100 B.C.) to the present day and total more than 210,000 objects.

Cooper Hewitt is located at 2 East 91st Street at Fifth Avenue in New York City. Hours are Sunday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. The café and garden open prior to the museum – Sunday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturday, 7:30

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a.m. to 9 p.m. The museum is closed on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Public transit routes include the Lexington Avenue 4, 5 and 6 subways (86th or 96th Street stations) and the Fifth and Madison Avenue buses. Adult admission, \$18; seniors, \$12; students, \$9. Cooper Hewitt members and children younger than age 18 are admitted free. Pay What You Wish, every Saturday, 6 to 9 p.m. The museum is fully accessible.

For further information, please call (212) 849-8400, visit Cooper Hewitt's website at [www.cooperhewitt.org](http://www.cooperhewitt.org) and follow us on [www.twitter.com/cooperhewitt](http://www.twitter.com/cooperhewitt), [www.facebook.com/cooperhewitt](http://www.facebook.com/cooperhewitt) and [www.instagram.com/cooperhewitt](http://www.instagram.com/cooperhewitt).

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