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COOPER HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN DESIGN MUSEUM PRESENTS THE GUEST-CURATED EXHIBITION “MAIRA KALMAN SELECTS”

ON VIEW DEC. 12–JUNE 14, 2015

DEC. 9, 2014

Surprising, whimsical, melancholy, eye-opening and utterly idiosyncratic, an ensemble of objects chosen and arranged by the renowned author, artist and designer Maira Kalman will fill the newly renovated Marks Gallery of Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, in the exhibition “Maira Kalman Selects,” on view from Dec. 12 through June 14, 2015.

Continuing a series in which the museum invites guest curators to create installations drawn from the astonishing collections of Cooper Hewitt, “Maira Kalman Selects” will be the first exhibition shown in the former Music Room of the historic Carnegie Mansion. In a departure from tradition, however, the exhibition will mingle objects from Cooper Hewitt and other Smithsonian collections with pieces from Maira Kalman’s personal collection—such as a wooden ladder, a velvet armchair, and a pair of formal trousers once worn by conductor Arturo Toscanini—to suggest the moments of a life’s journey, from birth through death.

Caroline Baumann, Director of Cooper Hewitt, said, “Maira Kalman is not only one of the most beloved authors and illustrators of our day but also one of the most beloved New Yorkers. It has been a delight, and a continual revelation, to see her pick out objects that are always unexpected and always somehow just right. “Maira Kalman Selects” is sure to be a favorite with our visitors, giving them a different perspective on one of the major themes of all of our inaugural exhibitions: design as a humane practice that touches all of us.”

On the creation of her exhibition, Maira Kalman said, “Like a shopper in some great, mad department store that housed many centuries’ worth of objects, I browsed and inspected Cooper Hewitt’s collections for a year or so. The pieces that I chose were based on one thing only—a gasp of delight. Isn’t that the only way to curate a life? To live among things that make you gasp with delight? In the installation I have assembled, there are places to sit and things to look at or not look at. There is a piano, and music will be played in the room. And it has something (or everything) to do with life and death. And time. Always time.”

Among the 40 objects on view will be stockings, shoes, hats, teapots, illustrated books (including vintage editions of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Winnie the Pooh* from the Smithsonian Libraries), the Gerrit Rietfeld Zig Zag chair (ca. 1934), porcelain figures of ballet dancers, a Queen Victoria memorial handkerchief, samples of calligraphy, two 19th-century samplers, and from the National Museum of American History, the funeral pall of President Abraham Lincoln and Lincoln’s gold pocket watch. Recorded sounds of the ticking pocket watch, which a master watchmaker repaired and briefly returned to working order, will be heard in the gallery.

In the spirit of the original use of the gallery, Maira Kalman has collaborated with renowned composer Nico Muhly on site-specific music for the exhibition. The six-movement chamber piece “Object Songs” was inspired by five objects in the collection, including a 19th-century silver spoon, a calligraphic engraving by Jan van de Velde I, a pair of slippers, and a sampler featuring the expression “Love Unites Us,” as well as the room itself. A recording of the ticking of Lincoln’s pocket watch provides the musical framework for the piece, with the watch’s rigid and methodical marking of time contrasting with the lyrics “take your time,” echoing the exhibition’s theme of life and death. Recordings will play periodically in the gallery throughout the run of the exhibition.

Two new books by Maira Kalman are being published concurrent with the exhibition. *My Favorite Things*, published by HarperCollins, serves as the exhibition catalog, offering a poignant, witty and highly personal meditation on the importance of objects, both quotidian and unusual, through more than fifty original paintings and Maira Kalman’s signature handwritten prose. A pictorial index provides photographs of the objects selected for the exhibition and a short description of each. For children and adults alike, Maira Kalman provides a joyful romp through the collection in a new ABC book, *Ah-Ha to Zig-Zag: 31 Objects from Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum*. Published by Cooper Hewitt and distributed by Skira/Rizzoli, *Ah-Ha to Zig-Zag* brings design objects to life in Maira Kalman’s inimitable style, while offering an introduction to the way that “Everything is design.”

“Maira Kalman Selects” is made possible by the Marks Family Foundation Endowment Fund.

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 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, call (212) 849-8400, visit Cooper Hewitt’s website at www.cooperhewitt.org and follow us on www.twitter.com/cooperhewitt, www.facebook.com/cooperhewitt and www.instagram.com/cooperhewitt.

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