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COOPER HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN DESIGN MUSEUM TO PRESENT 1.8 MILLION YEARS OF INNOVATION IN THE SPECIAL EXHIBITION “TOOLS: EXTENDING OUR REACH”

ON VIEW DEC. 12–MAY 25, 2015

DEC. 9, 2014

As the inaugural exhibition in its versatile new 6,000-square-foot Barbara and Morton Mandel Design Gallery, which has been created as part of the transformation of the historic Carnegie Mansion, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum will present “Tools: Extending Our Reach.” Bringing together some 175 objects that range in date from a Paleolithic hand chopper made from volcanic rock to a live feed of the Sun transmitted by an orbiting satellite, “Tools” will be on view at Cooper Hewitt from Dec. 12 through May 25, 2015.

Caroline Baumann, Director of Cooper Hewitt, said, “This exhibition and the major publication that accompanies it are the culmination of a cross-disciplinary collaboration among the staff of Cooper Hewitt and 9 Smithsonian museums and research centers. We feel privileged to be able to open our transformed home with an exhibition developed through such an exceptional effort, because it offers an equally exceptional opportunity to our visitors. Through these objects of design assembled from encyclopedic collections, we are able to encounter moments of discovery and surprise, and better appreciate the common humanity that connects us across diverse cultures, time periods and places.”

According to Cara McCarty, Cooper Hewitt’s Curatorial Director, “‘Tools: Extending Our Reach’ is not a traditional survey of the history of tools, or a hierarchy of the ‘best’ designs from around the world, but an exploration of the very intimate relationship between human beings and the instruments we invent and employ. Informing most tools are the limitations and desires of the human body. Many tools are extensions of our physical selves, efficient surrogates filling in where humans lack capacity. They are the first evidence of human design, going back to Paleolithic times; and today, more than ever, they are opening up worlds to us, including those we cannot yet travel to physically.”

With an exhibition design by Thinc, “Tools” is organized by Cara McCarty and Deputy Curatorial Director and Head of Textiles Matilda McQuaid in seven sections: Work, Communicate, Survive, Measure, Make, Observe and Toolboxes. Within these sections, visitors will see how some tools break into our lives as radical innovations, while many others have remained almost unchanged in form and function for centuries. Objects on view will range from throwing knives from central Africa to a Swiss Army knife; a Mesopotamian cuneiform tablet (ca. 2000-1595 BCE) to a Tellatouch Braille typewriter; Eskimo snow goggles carved from mammoth-fossil ivory to an artificial heart; a Micronesian stick navigational chart to a WWII escape map; a 3D printer that can operate in zero gravity to a tiny “robobee” that can be used to help pollinate flowers or for covert surveillance. Also



included in the exhibition is a large-scale installation *Controller of the Universe* (2007), by artist Damián Ortega, comprising a frozen “explosion” of hundreds of hand tools suspended in the gallery, which visitors can walk through.

Objects in “Tools: Extending Our Reach” have been selected from the collections of Cooper Hewitt; Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery; Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics; National Air and Space Museum; National Museum of Natural History; National Museum of African Art; National Museum of American History; National Museum of the American Indian; Smithsonian American Art Museum; and Smithsonian Libraries. “Tools” also incorporates numerous objects exhibited through the courtesy of private lenders.

“Tools: Extending Our Reach” is accompanied by a catalog of the same title published by Cooper Hewitt. The catalog features more than 200 color illustrations and a range of scholarly essays.

“Tools: Extending Our Reach” is made possible by major support from GE. Generous support is also provided by Newell Rubbermaid, Dorit and Avi Reichental, and Esme Usdan. Additional funding is provided by the August Heckscher Exhibition Fund, Facebook, the Ehrenkranz Fund, and Smithsonian Institution funds from the Grand Challenges Consortia.

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, please 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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