



# SELECTS INTO+D

## SPENDING PERANZA

WORKS FROM THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

JUNE 9, 2017–JANUARY 7, 2018

**WHEN COOPER HEWITT FIRST TAPPED ME TO GUEST CURATE AN EXHIBITION, I WAS IMMERSSED IN EXPLORING MY PERSONAL AND MUSICAL REVELATIONS ABOUT DEVOLVING WHILE EVOLVING, IN EMILY'S D+EVOLUTION, AN ALBUM AND LIVE PERFORMANCE PROJECT.**

I didn't see how design had anything to do with music or performance. But, after a few days, I began to wonder: could d+evolution be one expression of wider creative processes?

I decided to propose d+evolution as the theme for my exhibition. The curators asked me "what is that?"

As I've come to understand it, d+evolution is the true nature of transformation. When a structure or identity is broken down or rendered obsolete, a contrapuntal growth process emerges, evolving itself via the fragments or openings created by degeneration, or devolution.

Throughout my work on *Emily's D+Evolution* I got to know the d+evolution process intimately. Instead of developing the album and live performance from the structure of my musical studies, I decided to work as instinctively as possible. I let anything in my immediate environment, emotions, or circumstances inform the project's development.

I allowed the structures of my musical

training to partially dissolve into the urgency of my immediate experiencing of this universe. As I listened to much of the music I love—jazz, classical, avant-garde, rap, musica popular do Brasil, funk, and folk—I realized that each genre emerged due to the breaking down and cross influence of tiered traditions.

Devotees of a musical style or culture may state claims about what differentiates their true form from the rest. But, any recognizable distinct genre is merely a snapshot of sound and style in transition. Musical convention—it seems—is in a constant state of flux.

I wondered if design aesthetics in objects, prints, and textiles might reveal a history of disparate traditions colliding and evolving.

With the guidance of Cooper Hewitt's curatorial team, I started digging through the collection to find out. I selected nearly fifty objects from the collections of Cooper Hewitt and the Smithsonian Design Library—

encompassing drawings, prints, textiles, jewelry, and furniture. Studying the history of these objects, I've learned that design does not progress in a straight line. Design grows in response to the same essential forces of breaking down and building up that inform all innovation. All of these objects reflect a juncture in design where previously held values, forms, and relationships broke down as their new iterations emerged.



COOPER HEWITT

Smithsonian Design Museum

I'm still a musician. I wondered what musical object could be used to embody at once the whole creative process of d+evolution. I needed something that would model the whole concept immediately and physically. Planos, which you will see in multiple incarnations throughout this exhibit, serve as the wellspring for many musical traditions. Once the exclusive privilege of the wealthy, today many perfectly usable pianos find themselves casually discarded. I flashed on the work of my old friend and musical colleague Megan McGeorge of Portland, Oregon. Through her non-profit, Piano, Push, Play, Megan salvages as many pianos as she can. She recycles them each summer by placing them in the public spaces in her hometown, where people of all ages and walks of life delight in the opportunity to play them.

I wanted to express my sincere gratitude to the staff of Cooper Hewitt for their warm support throughout. I'm still a musician. I wondered who would know how to take apart those unwanted pianos, and help me reimagine their elements to frame the eight concepts of this exhibition. Megan suggested Robert Petty from ZGF Architects' Portland, Oregon office. Together he and I conceived the piano-piece designs, made by ZGF, which now accompany each group of objects featured in *Esperanza Spalding Selects*.

Oh, and about the music featured in the gallery of *Esperanza Spalding Selects*?

I'm still a musician! I still wanted to emphasize that the eternal process of devolution and evolution works in a continuous loop, with no real beginning or ending. Form continuously flows into form.

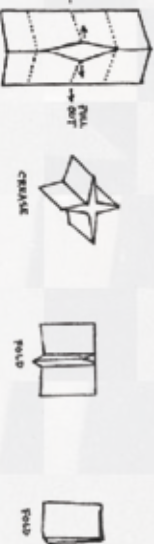
So I turned to another old friend and musical colleague, Leonardo Genovese. He and I recorded four sections of music: a classic performance drawn from the sheet music I selected from the Smithsonian Design Library's collection, an improvised interpretation of the same song, a variation for bass and voice, and a re-arrangement of all three of these recordings electronically sequenced into a new composition. These pieces are played in a continuous loop.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the staff of Cooper Hewitt for their warm support throughout.

And to you, dear visitor! May the eternal process of devolution and evolution inspire your life too.

Love,  
Esperanza Emily Spalding

**D-EVOLVE THIS POSTER INTO A BROCHURE!**



13 Textile, Fan, 1985; Designed by Theo Maas (Dutch). Manufactured by Visco (Helmond, Netherlands). Wax-resist printed cotton: 548.6 x 120 cm (18 ft. x 47 1/4 in.). Gift of Visco, 2015-1-8.

14 Book, *Les choses de Paul Poiret* (Paul Poiret's Things), 1911. Designed by Paul Poiret (French, 1879-1944); Illustrated by Georges Legue (French, 1887-1971). Book with lithographic plates: 26.5 x 34.5 x 2 cm (14 3/8 x 13 9/16 x 13/16 in.). Collection of Smithsonian Libraries, Cooper Hewitt, G1513.G59 1911.

15 Textile, Bliette, ca. 1912. Designed by Eliza Martine (Paris, France) for Paul Poiret (French, 1879-1944); Screen-printed cotton and linen: 146 x 76 cm (57 1/2 x 29 15/16 in.). Gift of Louise Dushkin, 1984-136-1.

16 Textile, Chan Chan, 1964. Designed by Eliza Wilcox (English, active 1960s); Produced by Jack Lenor Larsen Incorporated (New York, New York, USA). Tie-dyed cotton: 158.8 x 134.6 cm (5 ft. 2 1/2 in. x 53 in.). Cowtan and Tout Larsen Archive Collection. Gift of Longhouse Reserve, 2016-32-5.

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**Esperanza Spalding Selects is the fifteenth exhibition in the Nancy and Edwin Marks Collection Gallery series devoted to showcasing the museum's collections. In the Selects series, designers, writers, and cultural figures are invited to explore and respond to Cooper Hewitt's collection. Esperanza Spalding is a musician, composer, and four-time Grammy Award winner.**

**Esperanza Spalding Selects is made possible by the Marks Family Foundation Endowment Fund. In-kind support for the site-specific installation is provided by ZGF Architects. Plano provided by Steinway & Sons.**

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Photography: Matt Flynn © Smithsonian Institution; Cover (front & back): "God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse," illustrated by Aaron Douglas and "Fan," designed by Theo Maas. Design: Yo-E Pyou; Printed in USA on 100% post-consumer waste stock

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Indian Tribes of North America the style of "Mintosh, a Creek chief," say, Western Africa and the diaspora.

### D+EVOLVING DESIGN TECHNOLOGIES

The presumption that evolution means "more advanced" is not always true. These diverse textiles carry a common message:

impressions of plants and animals, Poiret turned the drawings into popular drapery, carpet, and wallcover- designs. Kenyan artisans return to their own tradition of utilizing drum beats to guide the accuracy of their pleating and binding of the fabric before it is dyed to create this modern textile's pattern.

### EVOLVING PERSPECTIVES

The progression of these designs documents our expanding cultural awareness: the devolution of patently racist images opens the door to an evolving kinder awareness of our common realities. This group features sheet music cover designs used to market American popular music in the early 20th century. Representations of the people depicted on these covers illustrate degenerate and evolving views toward the indigenous, North African, or African American traditions that influenced each song. For example, "Quit Cryin' the Blues" features a weeping Sambo caricature of an African American man. "Solitude," from 1934, displays an elegant photo of composer Duke Ellington. The artist who sketched the play- ers surrounding Ellington focused on their roles in the orchestra rather than their racial identity. Fifteen years later, "Sugar Blues" carries the picture of a smiling, elegantly dressed European-American. Music and design integration often precedes societal integration, though our progress seldom travels in a straight line. People buying this sheet music may have perceived themselves as separate or superior to caricatures portrayed on these covers, yet they welcomed the culturally mixed songs into their homes and playing hands.



01 Sheet Music, *Quit Cryin' the Blues: Fox Trot*, 1931. Designed by Hop Haley Studio (Los Angeles, California). US (Composed by Felix Lewis). Lithograph on paper: 26.5 x 18 cm (10 7/16 x 7 1/16 in.). Collection of Smithsonian Libraries, Cooper Hewitt, M1366.E44 S65 1934.

02 Sheet Music, *Solitude*, 1934. Composed by Duke Ellington (American, 1899-1974). Lithograph on paper: 26 x 18 cm (10 1/4 x 7 1/16 in.). Collection of Smithsonian Libraries, Cooper Hewitt, M1366.E44 S65 1934.

03 Ring, ca. 1985. Designed by Ed Wiener (American, 1918-1991). Case gold: 4.5 x 3.8 x 3.7 cm (1 3/4 x 1 1/2 x 1 1/16 in.). Gift of M. and M. Kelley Rollings, 1992-15-1.

04 Ties, "Amichir," 2007. Designed by Fernando Campana (Brazilian, b. 1961) and Humberto Campana (Brazilian, b. 1963). Wicker, iron, found objects (plastic, rubber): 102.5 x 96.5 x 88 cm (40 3/8 x 38 x 35 1/8 in.). Commissioned from the designers by Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, 2007-46-1.

### FUNCTIONAL/DECORATIVE

Pairs of objects demonstrate new decorative designs evolving—emerging from the aesthetics of purely functional parts, equipment, or tools. As an example, the unusual design of this American goldring descends from the African pattern and form of a utilitarian object: a simple Ashanti bronze weight. The designer of a poster produced for the Wiener Werkstätte referenced collections of 19th-century *katagami* (pattern paper), a tool created by Japanese craftsmen to print patterns on silk.



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10 Book, *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*, 1927; Written by James Weldon Johnson (American, 1871-1938); Illustrated by Aaron Douglas (American, 1899-1979). Book with lithographic plates: 20 x 18 cm (7 7/8 x 7 1/16 in.). Collection of Smithsonian Libraries, Cooper Hewitt, P58515.02225 G6.

11 Book cover, *Jazz* (Chicago, 1985); Designed by Carin Goldberg (American, b. 1963) for Doubleday (New York, New York, USA); Written by Phyllis Rose (American, b. 1942). Lithograph on paper: 24.1 x 19.5 cm (9 1/2 x 7 11/16 in.). Gift of Steven Heller, 1996-74-104.

12 Journal, *Wendingen*; en sieren (versions/maandblad voor bouwen en sieren) (Universal/Upheaval), Vol. 9 No. 5, 1928. Designed by Johan Frederik Espelhart (Dutch, 1873-1940). Design Director: Hendrikus Theodorus Wipoldeld (Dutch, 1885-1967). Lithograph on paper: 34 x 34 cm

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### BEYOND FUNCTIONALITY

The function of these familiar objects has devolved. These designs have evolved to serve a purpose beyond their form. John De Cesare transmuted the way the music of Wagner's "Die Walküre" made him feel—drawing a "non-functional" score that invites the viewer to feel it too. The designers who created this chair from a collection of discarded objects produced an intriguing design while reminding us that nothing need be wasted.



### DEVOLVE TO EVOLVE

These pieces developed from deconstructed materials intended for a wholly different function. Tooled leather wallcover- ings made in Hol- land were used as screens in Japan. The wallcoverings were then cut up further, devolving into this purse.



### SACRED ↔ SECULAR

These items intended for secular use draw from the aesthetics of religious imagery. Symbols from secular life illuminate our understanding of religion. This majestic robe from Nigeria displays embroidery patterned after calligraphy styles found in the Holy Koran. This poster, advertising a rock and roll concert in an implicitly secular club, draws inspiration from iconic portraiture of Jesus.



05 Drawing, Study, 1404, "The Magic Fire-Scene," Richard Wagner, July 19, 1867; Designed by John De Cesare (American, b. 1890-1972). Color pencil, graphite on cream wove paper: 70 x 48.6 cm (27 9/16 x 19 1/8 in.). Gift of the estate of John De Cesare, 1982-25-65.

06 Purse (kin-chiku) with Pendant (kiesaku) and Cord Fastener (Japan and the Netherlands (bathe)), ca. 1750. Stamped, silvered, and varnished Dutch leather, covered ivory, enamel and brass: 21.5 x 10.5 x 2.5 cm (8 7/16 x 4 1/8 x 1 in.). Gift of Emano and Sarah Hewitt, 1951-46-73.

07 Neckline Stone (Nekken), ca. 1990. Made by Verena Steier-Tutis (Swiss, b. 1943). Metal wire, plastic, foil: 27 x 58.2 x 4.5 cm (10 7/8 x 22 15/16 x 1 3/4 in.). Museum purchase through bequest of Richard Greenleaf in memory of his mother Adeline Emma Greenleaf, 1999-26-1.

08 Robe (Nigeria), ca. 1900. Silk and cotton, embroidered with silk: 287 x 129 x 5 cm (9 ft. 5 in. x 5 ft. 1 in. x 1 ft. 5 in.). Museum purchase through gift of Paul F. Winter and from General Acquisitions Endowment Fund, 2015-17-1.

09 Poster, *Noises of East Harlem/Delany's Bonnie*