

2 E 91ST STREET
NEW YORK NY 10128

COOPERHEWITT.ORG

MEDIA ONLY

HANNAH HOLDEN
212.849.3251
HOLDENH@SI.EDU

LAURIE BOHLK
212.849.8420
BOHLKL@SI.EDU

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COOPER HEWITT PRESENTS “TABLESCAPES: DESIGNS FOR DINING”

ON VIEW OCT. 5–APRIL 14, 2019



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Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum presents “Tablescapes: Designs for Dining,” an exhibition that offers a creative timeline of dining experiences through three distinct installations. At the center of the exhibition is Cooper Hewitt’s *surtout de table*, a magnificent, newly conserved treasure from the museum’s expansive collection of over 210,000 design objects that once ornamented the tables of French nobility at the turn of the 19th century. The exhibition also spotlights the work of the underrecognized but influential textile designer Marguerita Mergentime, active in the 1920s and ’30s, whose work has not received a dedicated museum presentation in 75 years. Pivoting to address 21st-century concerns, the exhibition debuts experimental and collaborative products commissioned from National Design Award-winning designers Joe Doucet and Mary Ping. “Tablescapes” is on view Oct. 5 through April 14, 2019.

“Tablescapes’ shows how taste and social values are expressed through style, materials and motifs,” said Caroline Baumann, director of the museum. “From awe-inspiring grandeur to vernacular wit to an emphasis on sustainability, the exhibition provokes a spirited conversation around design’s role in the evolution of a universal ritual.”

SURTOUT DE TABLE

On view for the first time in 30 years, Cooper Hewitt’s *surtout de table* was created in Paris around 1805 by Pierre-Philippe Thomire, a French sculptor renowned for creating gilt-bronze objects for the politically and socially powerful. It is believed that Napoleon gave this example as a wedding present to his stepson, Eugène de Beauharnais, whom he often designated to host diplomatic dinners in Paris and Italy.

When placed at the center of a long table, the mirrored *plateau* and gilt-bronze surfaces of the *surtout de table* would have reflected the flames of expensive candles. As part of the exhibition’s digital experience, visitors may manipulate an image of the object to view the *surtout de table* under various lighting conditions. This technology, known as “Reflection Transformation Imaging,” facilitated the extensive conservation treatment of the *surtout*

de table. As documented in an accompanying gallery video, Cooper Hewitt’s conservators worked in collaboration with external specialists to restore the surface of the *surtout de table*, dulled by corrosion, to its original golden lustre. Additionally, the conservators treated the deteriorating silver-leaf backing of the mirrored *plateau*, making the *surtout de table* reflective once again.

To contextualize the *surtout de table*, it is presented with related objects, including a late 18th-century Italian drawing for a *surtout de table* design inspired by the ruins of Pompeii and a fire-gilt and blackened bronze clock made by Antoine-Andre Ravrio (French, 1759–1814) with ornaments in the form of a woman playing piano, said to represent Empress Josephine, the mother of Eugène de Beauharnais, at her fashionable residence Malmaison.

MARGUERITA MERGENTIME

Marguerita Mergentime (American, 1894-1941) began her design career in New York City in the 1920s, where she made dress fabrics and bath and beach accessories. She belonged to a circle of modernist designers that included Donald Deskey, Gilbert Rohde, Frederick Kiesler and Itonka Karasz.

In 1934, Mergentime debuted her first designs for home linens at the Industrial Arts Exposition at Rockefeller Center. She quickly gained recognition for her bright, modernist textile designs, which retailed at desirable department stores and were highlighted in popular magazines as essential accessories for the hostess seeking to vivify informal dining. Each of the eight napkins in the set *Wish Fulfillment* (1939) stimulated cocktail hour conversation with a depiction of a mystical or pseudoscientific conduit to the future—for instance, dream books or graphology—accompanied by predictions of wealth, success and happiness. Stylish and imbued with typographical interest, the tablecloth *Food Quiz* (1939) brought humorous, lighthearted debate to the table with conversation sparkers such as, “Do you dish the dirt before you dish the soup?”

Further illuminating Mergentime’s sensibility, the adjacent Spoon Family Gallery is dedicated to archival materials and the hanging *Americana* (1939), which entertained visitors at the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco by uniting the names of 360 iconic American phrases, organizations, foods, points of interest and people.

JOE DOUCET AND MARY PING

For this exhibition, Cooper Hewitt commissioned Joe Doucet (American, born 1970), recipient of the 2017 National Design Award for Product Design, and Mary Ping (American, born 1978), recipient of the 2017 National Design Award for Fashion Design and founder of the studio Slow and Steady Wins the Race, to envision the future of dining. The designers address a near future in which users approach dining with greater speed and efficiency, and live in cities that are increasingly more densely populated.

The Concentric and Decentric Tables and Seating, designed by Ping and the New York-based architectural firm Bureau V, can fold to seat a small group or expand to accommodate

a gathering of up to nine people. Appropriately for a future of increasing material scarcity, its terrazzo-patterned surface is made not from stone, but from recycled food packaging.

Presented on the amoeba-shaped eating surfaces of Ping's table, Doucet designed multifunctional servingware that can be used to cook, serve and store food and a set of cutlery designed for users who dine on a variety of international cuisines. Doucet fabricated the designs using 3D printing to allow for greater customization.

"Tablescapes: Designs for Dining" is made possible by Anonymous. Conservation of the *surtout de table* is made possible by the Smithsonian Women's Committee. In-kind support is provided by Shapeways and The Abadi Group.

Pure+Applied designed the exhibition.

ABOUT COOPER HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN DESIGN MUSEUM

Cooper Hewitt is America's design museum. Inclusive, innovative and experimental, the museum's dynamic exhibitions, education programs, master's program, publications and online resources inspire, educate and empower people through design. An integral part of the Smithsonian Institution—the world's largest museum and research complex—Cooper Hewitt is located on New York City's Museum Mile in the historic, landmark Carnegie Mansion. Steward of one of the world's most diverse and comprehensive design collections—over 210,000 objects that range from an ancient Egyptian faience cup dating to about 1100 BCE to contemporary 3D-printed objects and digital code—Cooper Hewitt welcomes everyone to discover the importance of design and its power to change the world. Cooper Hewitt knits digital into experiences to enhance ideas, extend reach beyond museum walls, and enable greater access, personalization, experimentation and connection. In 2018, the London Design Biennale awarded a medal to Cooper Hewitt for its presentation "Face Values," an immersive installation that explores the pervasive but often hidden role of facial-detection technology in contemporary society.

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 Arthur Ross Terrace and Garden, accessible without an admissions ticket, opens at 8 a.m., Monday through Friday. The Tarallucci e Vino café is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The museum is closed on Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. Public transit routes include the Lexington Avenue 4, 5 and 6 subways (86th or 96th Street stations), the Second Avenue Q subway (96th Street station), and the Fifth and Madison Avenue buses. Adult admission, \$16 in advance via tickets.cooperhewitt.org, \$18 at door; seniors, \$10 in advance via tickets.cooperhewitt.org, \$12 at door; students, \$7 in advance via tickets.cooperhewitt.org, \$9 at door. 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.



COOPER HEWITT

For further information, call (212) 849-8400, visit Cooper Hewitt's website at www.cooperhewitt.org and follow the museum on www.twitter.com/cooperhewitt, www.facebook.com/cooperhewitt and www.instagram.com/cooperhewitt.

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