

# WILLI SMITH: STREET COUTURE

MARCH 13, 2020 – OCTOBER 25, 2020



**COOPER  
HEWITT**



Smithsonian Design Museum



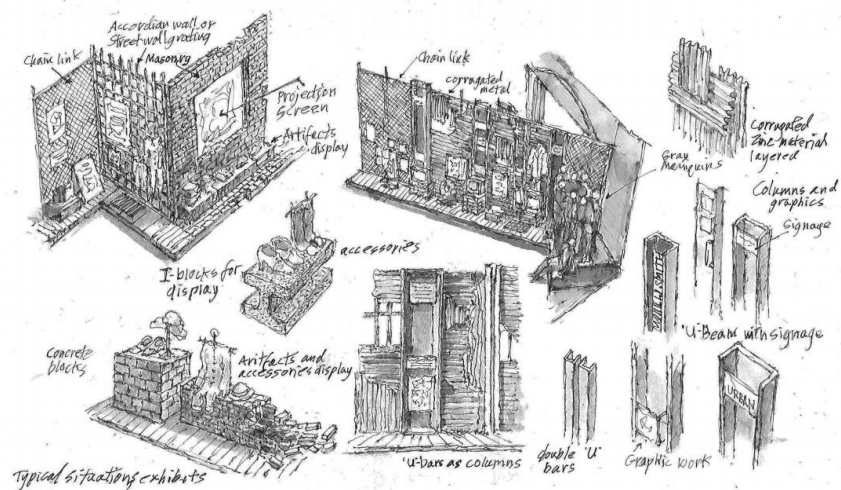
WilliWear Fall 1985 Presentation, 1985, Courtesy of Fashion Institute of Technology | SUNY, FIT Library Special Collections and College Archives, New York, NY, USA; © Peter Gould

# CELEBRATING WILLI SMITH

***Willi Smith: Street Couture*** will be the first museum survey of African American designer Willi Smith (1948–1987). Smith was a pioneer of streetwear fashion, heralded as “the most successful black designer in history” by the *New York Daily News* before his sudden death in 1987 of AIDS-related complications.

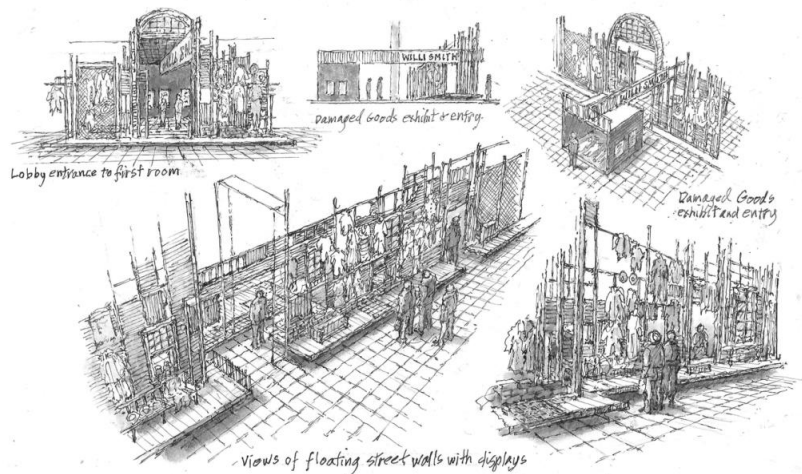
Featuring the most influential projects of Smith’s career—including collaborations with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, Keith Haring, Nam June Paik, Dan Friedman, and Dianne McIntyre—the exhibition will illustrate Smith’s use of fashion for creative exchange and breaking down cultural and social boundaries. His work will be revealed as a catalyst for today’s repositioning of fashion—from an exclusive discipline reinforcing class, race, and gender divides, toward an industry that encourages inclusivity, accessibility, and progressive cross-disciplinary collaborations.





# EXHIBITION EXPERIENCE

*Willi Smith: Street Couture* will present an amalgamation of Smith's work, characterizing his abilities as a multifaceted artist. On view will be more than 200 objects, including photography, video, design drawings, garments, patterns, ephemera, and showroom architecture, most of which have not been seen in more than 30 years. Exhibition design by **SITE** architects will recreate the original WilliWear showroom and stores within the museum's galleries, allowing elements of the street such as chain-link fencing and cinder blocks to serve as the framework of the exhibition.





## MONOGRAPH

Cooper Hewitt and **Rizzoli** will co-publish a 228-page hardcover book designed by **poly-mode**, a design studio dedicated to helping organizations embrace cultural diversity and community involvement. The publication will feature more than 300 rare photographs and essays by 48 contributors across fashion, art, and cultural sectors to explore topics such as the emergence of street style in the United States, the history of collaborative practice, the downtown New York art scene of the 1970s–80s, the relationship between fashion, marketing, and race, and the impact of black and black queer communities.



Classroom visit by Cooper Hewitt educators

## EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Education programs will illuminate key exhibition themes in an effort to extend the impact and learning opportunities of *Willi Smith: Street Couture*. In addition to curator and docent-led tours, programming may include film screenings as well as talks and lectures with Smith's collaborators, educators/academics, and art/fashion industry professionals. Exhibitions are also accompanied by hands-on workshops led by working designers; curriculum-based activities for students and educators; professional development programs; online tools; and more.





# DUAL-CITY SYMPOSIUM

## FASHION AND RACE: INFLUENCE AND IMPACT

Cooper Hewitt and the **National Museum of African American History and Culture** are co-organizing a dual-city symposium focusing on the relationship between fashion and race. The conferences, taking place April 2020, are separated into two complementary themes: Influence (to take place in DC) and Impact (to take place in NYC). A broad spectrum of groups and individuals will be represented, including academia, government, design professionals, fashion and dress enthusiasts, the corporate fashion community, and the general public.



Top: National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC  
Bottom: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York City



Smithsonian

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SEARCH
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OPEN CALL
EXHIBITION
ARCHIVE SITE

# WILLI SMITH COMMUNITY ARCHIVE

On the occasion of *Willi Smith: Street Couture*, the first-ever exhibition devoted to American designer Willi Smith (1948–1987), Cooper Hewitt is creating a digital community archive, powered by Cargo, dedicated to the pioneering streetwear designer and the artists, designers, and performers with whom he collaborated to break down social, cultural, and economic boundaries. We want to restore and preserve Willi Smith's place in the fashion canon. To that end, we seek your personal photographs, anecdotes, ephemera, and garments.

Help us rewrite fashion history. Review the terms and conditions and submission guidelines below. Email your completed questionnaire to [willismith@si.edu](mailto:willismith@si.edu)

SHARE NOW

# DIGITAL COMMUNITY ARCHIVE

*Willi Smith: Street Couture* was built through the memories and contributions of Smith's friends and collaborators. Cooper Hewitt is extending this call for participation to the wider community, requesting Willi Smith and WilliWear photographs, anecdotes, ephemera, and garments. The digital community archive will capture and celebrate Smith's widespread impact across social, cultural, and economic boundaries.



# WHO WE ARE

At Cooper Hewitt, we educate, inspire, and empower people through design. Through innovative exhibitions, education programs, thought leadership, and more, we create opportunities for everyone to discover the importance of design and its power to change the world. Housed in the historic Carnegie Mansion on Museum Mile in New York City, Cooper Hewitt is part of the Smithsonian Institution—the world's largest museum, education, and research complex.





# COOPER HEWITT AT A GLANCE

## Our visitors

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**59%**

millennials

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**47%**

involved in design

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**210,000+ objects**

spanning thirty centuries digitized  
on [cooperhewitt.org](https://cooperhewitt.org)

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**35%**

New Yorkers

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**24%**

international

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**30,000 participants**

in our 2018 education programming

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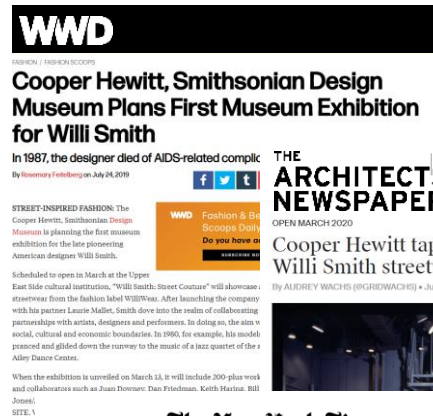
**100** Cooper Hewitt staff who bring it all to life

# PRESS BUZZ

Press and marketing for Cooper Hewitt exhibitions and events make millions of impressions each year. Current exhibitions have been featured in the Washington Post and the cover of the Arts section of the New York Times, among other notable publications. *Willi Smith: Street Couture* has received advance coverage by Vogue, Women's Wear Daily, Architect's Newspaper, PIN-UP Magazine, and more.

**"WILLI SMITH WAS AHEAD OF HIS TIME AND COOPER HEWITT'S RETROSPECTIVE WILL PROVE IT."**

—VOGUE MAGAZINE



## THE ARCHITECTS' NEWSPAPER

Cooper Hewitt taps James Wines for Willi Smith streetwear show

By AUDREY WACHS (RUGLIEWACHS) • July 25, 2019



## The New York Times

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Glimpsing Our Post-Consumption Future at the Cooper Hewitt

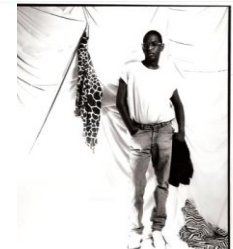
The Design Triennial envisions the possibilities for algae, yeast and other nonpolluting materials. Will they help save the planet?



## VOGUE

RUNWAY

Willi Smith Was Ahead of His Time and the Cooper Hewitt's Upcoming Retrospective Will Prove It



## The Washington Post

Science

N.Y. exhibition engages with our environment in innovative, groundbreaking ways

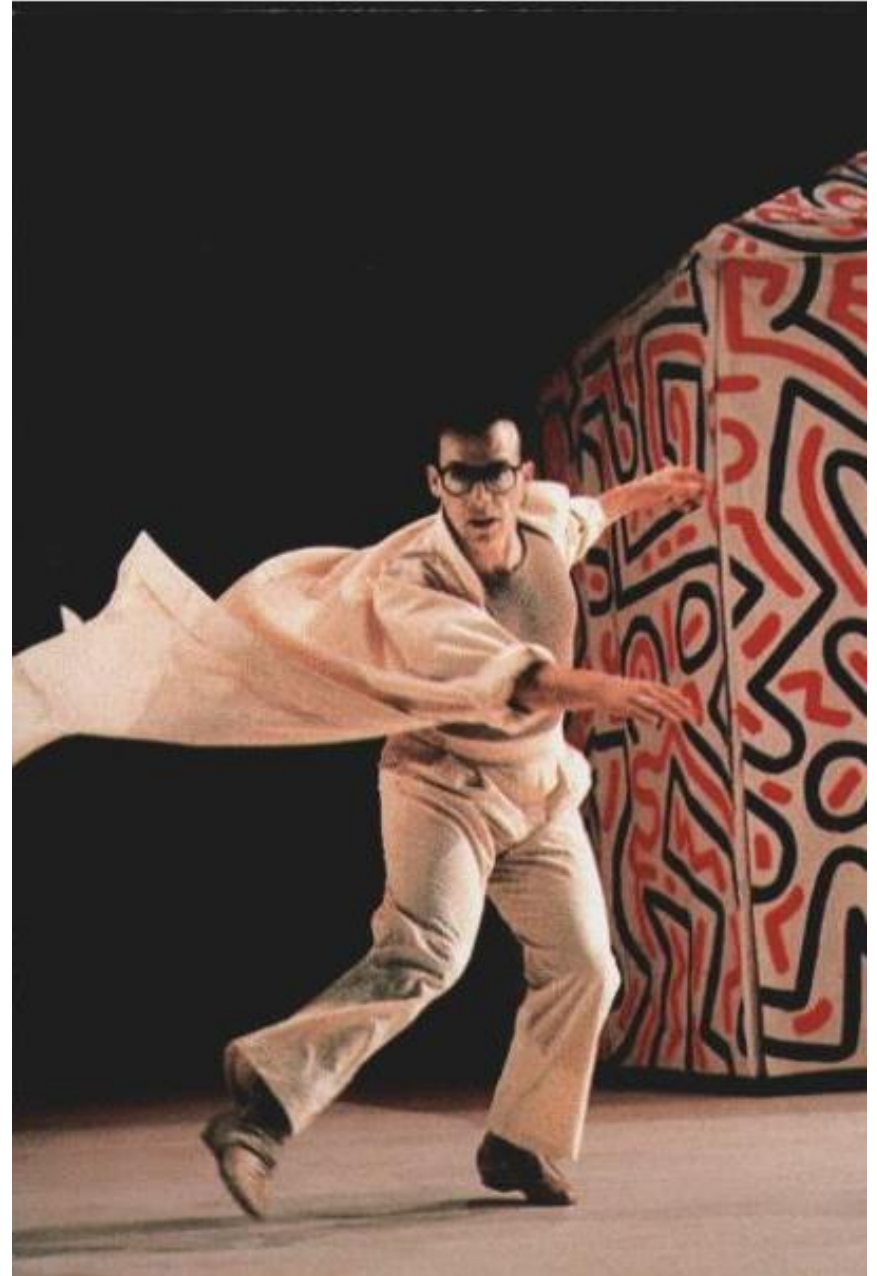




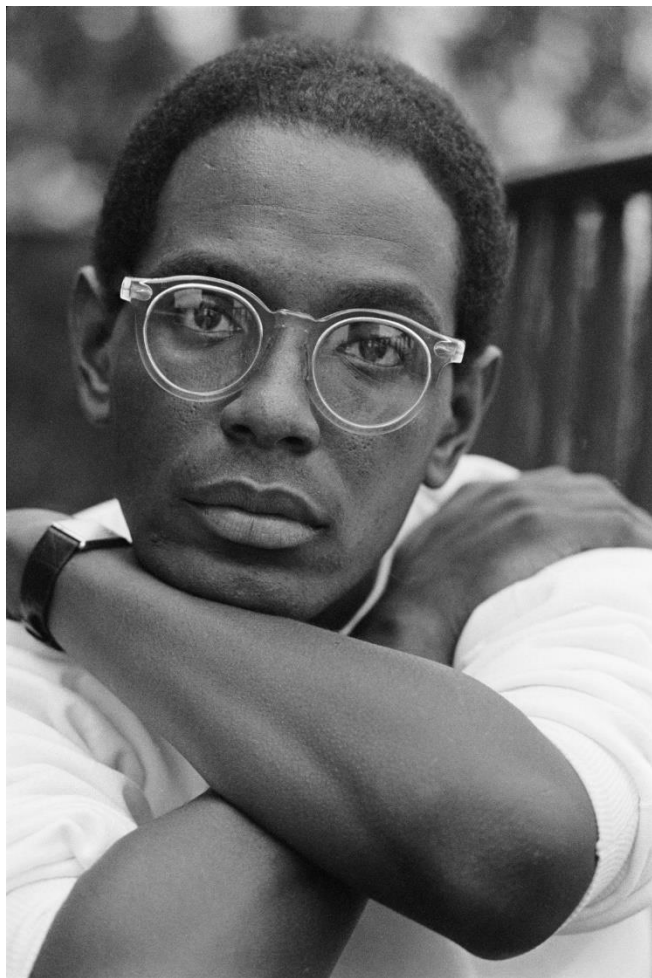
# PARTNERSHIPS

Willi Smith championed inclusive fashion across race, class, and gender. **Join us to celebrate his legacy and his impact.**

Cooper Hewitt offers customized benefits that provide opportunities to achieve specific corporate and marketing objectives. We work closely with our partners to ensure mission alignment, access to resources, brand visibility, and more.



Arnie Zane in "Secret Pastures" at Brooklyn Academy of Music, Choreographed by Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, Music composed by Peter Gordon, Set designed by Keith Haring, Costumes designed by Willi Smith, Photographed by Tom Caravaglia, 1984. Tom Caravaglia/BAM Archives.



# THANK YOU

To discuss partnership opportunities, please contact:  
Cooper Hewitt Director's Office | [CHDevelopment@si.edu](mailto:CHDevelopment@si.edu)

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