SPRING/SUMMER 2017
DEAR COOPER HEWITT FRIENDS,

It’s my favorite time of year and an opportune moment to inject some optimism into our minds. This journal brims with optimism, from the vibrating cover celebrating design legend Ingo Maurer and his work full of dreaming and creativity to a slew of topics exploring the promise of design. Be sure to see Ingo’s LED wallpaper on display in our current exhibition on the first floor, Making | Breaking: New Arrivals, emphasizing breakthroughs in new technologies and techniques and in-depth process stories.

Design optimism is rooted in the discipline’s commitment to collaboration, experimentation, and, most importantly, innovation and progress. A dynamic learning laboratory, Cooper Hewitt harnesses the power of its educational resources—built on the strength of its world-class collection of over 210,000 design objects—to passionately engage audiences of all ages in design’s forward momentum.

Design’s catalytic energy is brilliantly showcased in The Jazz Age: American Style in the 1920s, on view through August 20 on the second floor and throughout the Barbara and Morton Mandel Design Gallery. A multi-disciplinary and multi-sensory exploration of the era in which American design ascended to the world stage, The Jazz Age is a bold installation of four hundred plus objects—nearly half from our own holdings—that celebrates the pulse and rich mixture of cultures and expressivity that brought a new beat to contemporary life. It also underscores how the creative awakening of American design further propelled the United States to a place of hope and economic opportunity. Coupled with Jeweled Splendors of the Art Deco Era: The Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan Collection, visitors cannot help but leave in awe of this fertile period.

For today’s young people, design expands academic and career horizons, boosts confidence, and promises a productive future. Thanks to the generous support of Target, Cooper Hewitt’s National High School Design Competition opens the doors for students to engage in design thinking and tackle real-life challenges. This year, our judges include Alice Waters, chef and owner of the groundbreaking restaurant Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California, and founder of the Edible Schoolyard Project (ESP), featured in this issue. A nationwide school program, ESP teaches children to become creative problem-solvers and fosters a lifelong appreciation for food’s ability to connect and sustain our communities.

We strive to welcome the broadest and most diverse audiences possible. We recently launched an exciting partnership with New York University’s Ability Project to transform the museum into a laboratory for the study of accessibility. Graduate students have been experimenting with our collection’s application program interface and interviewing our staff and visitors, while exploring the building top to bottom and developing exciting new solutions for fully integrating visitors with disabilities into the Cooper Hewitt experience. Claire Kearney-Volpe, an adjunct professor for the Ability Project, shares preliminary observations in this issue.

01 Dutch designer Joris Laarman visited Cooper Hewitt’s Barbara and Morton Mandel Design Gallery in preparation for the September 2017 opening of Joris Laarman Lab: Design in the Digital Age. Laarman (center) works with Cooper Hewitt curator Andrea Lipps on the installation. (See pg. 8 for more details.)

02 Fellow Trustees Scott Belsky (left) and Todd Waterbury join Director Caroline Baumann to welcome Margaret Gould Stewart (far right) to the Board of Trustees at 2017 TED Conference.

03
Optimism prevails at Cooper Hewitt through our exhibitions and our national programs. We are proud to announce the illustrious 2017 winners of our National Design Awards. Join us on October 19 for the gala celebration of these designers, design thinkers, and their problem-solving power. This year’s class of winners presents a tremendously positive vision of the future—one that places the common good at the forefront of design’s concerns—and demonstrates that opportunities for meaningful change are well within reach.

While at the annual TED conference, I was honored to co-host the Design Dinner with Trustee Todd Waterbury and at the same time welcome Margaret Gould Stewart to Cooper Hewitt’s Board (pictured, pg. 3). I also took the opportunity to recruit people from varied industries to share their thoughts on design and optimism for our Design Pulse feature. We are posting their thoughtful, fresh responses on Instagram. Follow #DesignOptimism to be inspired and join the conversation.

And finally, design optimism thrives in the latest incarnation in the Selects gallery with curator Esperanza Spalding’s provocative installation. Four-time Grammy Award winner, composer, bassist, and vocalist, Spalding thought deeply about the process of creation—in music, in design, in life—and embraced the challenge of using Cooper Hewitt’s extensive collection to tell individual stories as well as the collective story of continuous evolution and adaptation. Spalding recounts her personal discoveries along the way and shares the playlist currently inspiring her. Enjoy!

Be sure to join us in the Arthur Ross Terrace and Garden this summer for our Cocktails at Cooper Hewitt performance series. Dance, music, and design will make Thursday evening a magical experience for everyone—the full program is included here. I look forward to seeing you in the garden!
FOOD IS THE ONE CENTRAL THING ABOUT HUMAN EXPERIENCE THAT CAN OPEN UP BOTH OUR SENSES AND OUR CONSCIENCE TO OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD.
— ALICE WATERS

reputation as a gifted chef and champion of sustainable agriculture. She grounded her vision in her belief that the environment in which children learn communicates as much as the teacher or the material they are learning.

What if we designed a place to welcome exploration, indoors and outdoors? Spark connections to what kids already care about? Ignite curiosity about what’s new or unfamiliar? Reflect, through a place activates all five senses—explicitly and implicitly—our deepest respect for every child, from every background? What if the places where our kids learn were designed to be irresistibly delicious?

Edible Schoolyard gardens, kitchen classrooms, and cafeterias are designed to do just that. These spaces invite students to create their own personal, direct experiences with fresh, flavorful, and nutritious foods through the daily act of growing, preparing, and sharing what they’ve made. The medium of food leads students to discover for themselves the connections between academic subjects and the natural, human-made, and socially constructed world around them. We call this “edible education.”

Beneath this student-centered approach is an edible education philosophy and learning practice rooted in eight core principles:

1. Food is an ideal teacher;
2. Children learn by doing;
3. Children learn with all their senses;
4. Children thrive in nature;
5. Good food is a right, not a privilege;
6. Schools and sustainable farms support each other;
7. The cafeteria is the heart of the school; and
8. Beauty is a language of care.

As educators working with these principles, we design a lesson plan much the same way we design a kitchen classroom, a cafeteria space, the menu for lunch, or the landscape of the school garden. We are methodical about establishing rituals, routines, and contextual references or cues. We balance how to foster a student’s sense of independence and interdependence with their peers. In every instance, we want a student to enter the learning space and feel “this place was made for me,” and as often as possible leave feeling, “my friends and I have made an important mark here together.”

When preparing to teach any lesson, we interrogate it: Have we considered the quiet students? The visual learners? Those who learn best by thinking out loud? Those who come with lots of experience with mustard greens? Those with none? Throughout a class period, we ensure each student has plenty of opportunities to choose how they want to participate, or reflect upon how an ingredient tastes or appears or smells—and form an opinion of their own.

At this makes an Edible Schoolyard environment the ultimate design lab in which students collaborate to tackle a situation or problem—How to turn a set of ingredients into a recipe? How might the Aztecs have planted that crop? How to factor in the seasonal shifts in sunlight when siting a tomato bed?—assess potential outcomes, test their ideas, learn from their results, and incorporate what they learn the next time.

After twenty-two years of the Edible Schoolyard Project, we have seen these principles take root in tens of thousands of schools and communities, including founding programs in New York City, New Orleans, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Greensboro, North Carolina, and Lake Placid, New York, and in more than 6,350 programs that comprise the Edible Schoolyard Network at edibleschoolyard.org.

Each new incarnation of an Edible Schoolyard reinforces the transformational benefits of an edible education. Students of these programs carry with them the formative experiences they’ve had creating strong relationships with friends and teachers, as well as a lifelong love of the natural world. They came away from their schooling with a lasting appreciation of the interconnected web of the food system and their own place in it—how it affects their bodies, their families, their communities, and their world—and are determined to take action.
Cooper Hewitt has partnered with the New York University Ability Project to develop new ideas for broadening access to the museum. In 2016, Mayor Bill de Blasio and the New York City Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities presented the Ability Project with the ADA Sapolin Award for their “fearless and innovative approach to developing tools that will improve the lives of people with disabilities.”

The Ability Project builds relationships and designs solutions to eliminate barriers for underserved audiences. Established in 2013, the New York University Ability Project is an interdisciplinary research space dedicated to the intersection between disability and technology, with an aim to foster collaboration among individuals with disabilities, community organizations, and NYU students and faculty. A variety of students and professionals—engineers, designers, educators, speech and occupational therapists, and individuals with disabilities—work together to create opportunities for teaching, learning, and research. Students across three of NYU’s schools comprise the Ability Project whose majors range from occupational therapy and integrated digital media to interactive telecommunications. Classes in the basics of methodology in assistive technology, accessible design and development, research, prototyping, and user interaction/experience design for museums round out the program’s offerings. Among the Ability Project’s fundamental principles is that technology serves people best when they participate in its design. Participatory research ensures access to the critical knowledge of those living with disabilities while also offering opportunities for those without disabilities to better understand what life is like for their collaborators. Collaboration, rather than problem solving in silos, produces more creative results.

The Ability Project has developed several ventures in partnership with New York City advocacy groups and agencies. In 2015, the program partnered with AT&T to lead the ConnectAbility Challenge, a three-month technology challenge designed to spur innovation for people with physical, social, emotional, and cognitive disabilities. The competition, which coincided with the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, resulted in sixty-three proposals for software, wearable, and other technology solutions from developers in sixteen states and fifteen countries aimed at enhancing the lives of people with disabilities.
of people with disabilities.

For the Lavelle School for the Blind in the Bronx, the Ability Project joined with Bridging Education and Art Together (B.E.A.T.), whose groundbreaking program, Beat Rockers, works with blind and visually impaired students to develop confidence through music. In a semester-long course, Ability Project students were tasked with designing and developing accessible tech enhancements that come along with museum display accessibility solutions.

Using a museum as a laboratory in new territory for the program and applying the tenets of design thinking and process proved to be exciting and challenging. In the Ability Project’s partnership with Cooper Hewitt, the museum served as client and creative inspiration. Some of the challenges experienced for the first time by the students as both designers and visitors were the architectural constraints of a landmarked historical home and the requirements for responsive and user-centered design.

Collaborators looked at designs for the museum’s website and experimented with Cooper Hewitt’s collections application program interface to find ways for fully integrating visitors with disabilities into the Cooper Hewitt experience. In a comprehensive presentation, four groups each shared research, user testing analysis, and iterative prototyping designs. The parameters that the students offer real, scalable recommendations resulted in replicable work that considered cost, physical constraints, and multiplicity of audiences. The Cooper Hewitt partnership not only schooled the students in new ways of thinking about design but revealed design’s potential for enhancing and welcoming new audiences to the museum.

TESTING TACTILES
Creating visual surfaces and textures in the museum can enable people with visual impairments to become aware of installations around them. This technique is utilized throughout pedestrian avenues in New York City and around the world. Pictured below are the Ability Project prototype solutions for museum wayfinding.

01 The Accessible Icon Project, launched in 2010, created a new logo for the International Symbol of Access (1968). The revised design featuring a more dynamic figure aims to portray individuals with physical disabilities in a new light. accessibleicon.org

02 NYU students test out the viability of a tactile wayfinding prototype as part of an Ability Project class.

03 See above.

04 Markus Proell’s prize-winning project the KinesicMouse, from the AT&T/Ability Project Connect Ability Challenge. The KinesicMouse software allows for hands-free, facial expression-based control of a PC.

05 Wireframes of a mobile application that uses beacon technology to help museum visitors with visual impairments navigate the museum, as well as access audio descriptions of Cooper Hewitt’s collection. By Jenny Liang, Asher Freeman, and Lucas White.

06 The Accessible Icon Project, launched in 2010, created a new logo for the International Symbol of Access (1968). The revised design featuring a more dynamic figure aims to portray individuals with physical disabilities in a new light. accessibleicon.org

07 Students’ wireframes of an accessibility toolkit—an online tutorial to inform exhibition design.

08 Accessible musical interface designed with feedback from students at the Lavelle School for the Blind. By Ishaan Chaudhary, Kai-han Chang, Nicola Carpeggiani, Satish Muthukrishnan, and Yi Zhao.

09 Claire Kearney-Volpe (left) and Dr. Leona Golin (right) listen to a description with a touch tour of an exhibition by Cooper Hewitt curator Susan Brown.

10 Claire Kearney-Volpe is a Doctoral Fellow and Adjunct Professor for the NYU Ability Project. She works on a variety of human-centered assistive and rehabilitation technology projects and is active in the digital accessibility community.
Cooper Hewitt
National Design Awards
2017 Winners
HONORING EXCELLENCE, INNOVATION, AND LASTING ACHIEVEMENT IN AMERICAN DESIGN

Lifetime Achievement
HARTMUT ESSLINGER

Craig L. Wilkins is an architect, academic, and author recognized as one of the country’s leading scholars on African Americans in architecture. He is the former director of the Detroit Community Design Center and a lecturer at the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Both his creative practice and pedagogy are informed by the long, rich, yet relatively untold stories of people of color in both the physical and symbolic construction of America. At multiple levels across diverse platforms, his award-winning books, chapters, essays, and design interventions recover and present the rich social, cultural, political, historical, and aesthetic contributions of forgotten people and practitioners of color for professional and public engagement.

Jennifer Morla is the founder of San Francisco-based Morla Design, which has created design programs for Levi’s, Design Within Reach, and the Mexican Museum. A 2010 AGA Medalist, Morla’s work is in the permanent collections of SFMOMA and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and she has been the subject of solo exhibitions at SFMOMA and DOD in Japan.

Design Trust for Public Space

INTERACTION DESIGN
STAMEN DESIGN

Stamen Design is a San Francisco–based design and technology company. Founded by Eric Rodenbeck in 2001, Stamen’s clients include the Dalai Lama, the World Health Organization, MTV, and universities around the country. Other projects, such as Field Papers and Map Stack, have increased access to and participation in digital design worldwide.

SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE

In 2002, New York–based designer Mary Ping founded Slow and Steady Wins the Race, which uses design to comment on the cultural anthropology of modern fashion. Ping was inducted into the CFDA in 2007 and she has been the subject of solo exhibitions at SFMOMA and DDD in Japan.

DEBORAH BERKE PARTNERS

Deborah Berke Partners is a New York–based architecture and interior design practice led by partners Deborah Berke, Maitland Jones, Marc Leff, and senior principals Stephen Brockman and Caroline Wharton-Ewng. From visionary master plans to the focused details of interiors, Deborah Berke Partners works at all scales with transformative outcomes.

Susan S. Szenasy is publisher and editor in chief of Metropolis, which she has led for the past thirty-one years. A board member of the Council for Interior Design Accreditation, Landscape Architecture Foundation, and the NYC Center for Architecture Advisory Board, Szenasy also has received two IIDA Presidential Commendations and holds several honorary doctorates.

Honor Awards

Design Wind
CRAIG L. WILKINS

COMMUNICATION DESIGN
JENNIFER MORLA

ARCHITECTURE DESIGN
MASS DESIGN GROUP

Mass Design Group is a global design collaborative with a portfolio that spans the fields of design, research, advocacy, and training. Mass’s practice focuses on architecture’s relationship to health and behavior, and on designing the human and physical systems necessary for growth, dignity, and well-being.

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LEAD DESIGN FIRM
RATIO ARCHITECTS

The Butaro Hospital, designed by MASS Design Group in collaboration with MASS Design, is a model for the delivery of health care in Rwanda. It received the United Nations’ “Pro 文明奖” for its unique patient-centered design, which promotes social interaction and communal spaces.

Butaro Hospital: Mission Health Care for Rwanda
MASS DESIGN GROUP

As a team of architects and engineers, MASS Design is committed to creating environments that are both healing and efficient. The Butaro Hospital in Rwanda is a prime example of their work, as it is a model for the delivery of health care in Rwanda. It received the United Nations’ “Pro 文明奖” for its unique patient-centered design, which promotes social interaction and communal spaces.

INTERIOR DESIGN
DEBORAH BERKE PARTNERS

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Architects in North America


HARSHENI JOSO, a retro-futuristic motorcycle designed with the most advanced safety features in response to California DMV’s withdrawal of permits for high-powered motorcycles in 1985 (1985).

The 2017 National Design Awards Jury, comprised of a diverse group of designers and educators from around the nation, convened at Cooper Hewitt in the early spring to select the award winners.

MEET THE JURY

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

SURFACEDESIGN

Joe Doucet is a New York–based designer, entrepreneur, inventor, and creative director. His clients include BMW, Braun, Hugo Boss, Lexon, Moët & Chandon, and Target. Doucet holds more than fifty patents and his work has been exhibited globally, including in the London Design Museum and the Biennale International Design in Saint-Étienne.

Roderick Wyllie, Geoff di Girolamo, and James Lord.

Surfacedesign is a San Francisco–based landscape architecture and urban design firm. Founded in 2001, Surfacedesign creates dynamic parks, plazas, waterfronts, civic landscapes, and private gardens. Led by James A. Lord, Roderick Wyllie, and Geoff di Girolamo, Surfacedesign projects include the Smithsonian Master Plan, Auckland International Airport, Golden Gate Bridge 75th Anniversary Plaza, and IBM Plaza Honolulu.

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Cara McCarty

By Cara McCarty

DESIGNERS ARE OPTIMISTS:
A SNAPSHOT OF CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

Persistent advancements in materials and technologies, based increasingly on science as well as on the imagination of individuals, has produced a large body of work defined as contemporary design. Much of it has to do with the way things are made, often using new processes. We have mastered assembly-line mass production exemplified by such ubiquitous products as the white plastic chair available all over the world for only a few dollars, and micro-chips—the “brains” of our digital products—fabricated for pennies. Even low-cost cars are now technically excellent. With the definition of design extending far beyond chairs and cups and saucers to new notions of mobility and entire systems, four trends and challenges characterize our era: digital technologies, customization, environmental concerns, and well-being.

We have created an information-driven society where digital technologies have radically transformed the way we communicate, manufacture, live, and work. They have improved our daily lives, made many things easier—often more enjoyable—and they have changed how we design. We expect our products to do so much more for us. In fact, they have become so complex we no longer think in terms of isolated objects, but of systems, like mesh networking or autonomous vehicles that together with other modes of transportation, such as portable folding bicycles (fig. 1), are transforming mobility and our urban infrastructure. Designers, engineers, scientists, manufacturers, and the general public are sharing their expertise, their data, their findings, yielding multidisciplinary approaches to research and design. Not only are things being made in new ways, but their interdependence of various expertise and technologies have radically transformed the way we communicate, manufacture, live, and work. They have improved our daily lives, made many things easier—often more enjoyable—and they have changed how we design.

By Cara McCarty

Ndagallery.cooperhewitt.org is powered by The Corning Museum of Glass.

October 19, 2017
CELEBRATE THE 2017 NATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS
A gala benefit to support Cooper Hewitt in the museum’s spectacular Arthur Ross Terrace and Garden.

By Cara McCarty

Persistent advancements in materials and technologies, based increasingly on science as well as on the imagination of individuals, has produced a large body of work defined as contemporary design. Much of it has to do with the way things are made, often using new processes. We have mastered assembly-line mass production exemplified by such ubiquitous products as the white plastic chair available all over the world for only a few dollars, and micro-chips—the “brains” of our digital products—fabricated for pennies. Even low-cost cars are now technically excellent. With the definition of design extending far beyond chairs and cups and saucers to new notions of mobility and entire systems, four trends and challenges characterize our era: digital technologies, customization, environmental concerns, and well-being.

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usage and regulate temperatures. (fig 2)

Personalizing objects for self-expression, improvement, or for fun has been done for centuries, but recent strides in digital manufacturing technologies are also enabling us to customize products. A benefit of such customization is experimentation—varying a design merely with a change in software rather than the complete retooling of a production line (figs. 3-4). We can custom order a pair of Nike shoes from a “kit of parts” similar to when designers Charles and Ray Eames ordered a “kit of parts” originally planned. Undeniably, the most dramatic change for extreme conditions oftentimes are people with special needs, designers and manufacturers. For example, Jasper Morrison’s Alfi chair for Emeco, made of reclaimed wood fibers and polypropylene and responsibly-harvested ash wood (fig. 6), or, Benjamin Hubert (British, b. 1984), Layer Design: Kinematics Dress #4, 2015; Designed by Nervous System (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA); 3D-printed nylon, glass; Museum purchase from General Acquisitions Endowment Fund and through gift of MIT Media Lab, 2015-65-1-a-b-b-

A significant change in recent years is marked by the increased engagement of the user throughout the design process, particularly those with special needs or an extreme condition. Consequently, we’re becoming much better at understanding people with special needs and designing products that are adapted to individual uses. In fact, although the greatest beneficiaries of product customization are people with special needs, designing for extreme conditions oftentimes is more inclusive, such as curb cuts in sidewalks less benefitting a multitude of uses. Unlike one-size-fits-all manufacturing processes, 3D printing gives us more opportunities to improve comfort and adapt products to an individual’s body, shape, and size, including high-performance prosthetics such as wheelchairs or the UWMed Align Scoliosis brace. (fig. 5)

Thanks to science and digital technologies, we are adding metrics and efficiencies to design, optimizing performance, improving structural capabilities of buildings and products, and reducing material waste. Environmental and sustainability issues become the conscience and creative challenge of many designers and manufacturers. For example, Jasper Morrison’s Alfi chair for Emeco, made of reclaimed wood fibers and polypropylene and responsibly-harvested ash wood (fig. 6), or, Benjamin Hubert (British, b. 1984), Layer Design: Kinematics Dress #4, 2015; Designed by Nervous System (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA); 3D-printed nylon, glass; Museum purchase from General Acquisitions Endowment Fund and through gift of MIT Media Lab, 2015-65-1-a-b-b-

There is hope that the enlarged territory encompassed by design will include the many environments of neglect and poverty in our contemporary cities. We may find opportunities in the moral and economic pressure toward greater social equity in our economically advanced cities, through design, which are able to tackle situations that demand success in both physical and social dimensions. This expansion of design to play a role in the world’s poorest and largest urban centers requires a greater sense of scale and numbers. Already some of the world’s most deprived urban inhabitants have integrated into networks of self-help communities, collaborating with professional designers and harnessing their knowledge and skills to advance themselves. Designers are optimists. They are driven to make things better, to question, to innovate, to synthesize and create meaning-ful experiences that ultimately improve and enhance our quality of life. Often, they see possibilities where others don’t, and as a creative force they have enormous impact. In recent years, the public, too has become much more design savvy, self-reliant, and adaptable, demanding better-performing, smarter products that do more with less. This is a period of constant, dramatic, and dynamic change. As the digital, virtual, and material worlds increasingly co-mingle, unexpected designs and solutions will arise and designers will continue to push the boundaries of possibilities, imagination, and resourcefulness in their efforts to make a difference.
Design Pulse: Optimism

Cooper Hewitt looked to participants of this year’s TED Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, for perspectives on the way optimism is reflected in design today.

Design is inherently optimistic because it wants to create our best possible future. Globally, people are demanding cohesive and responsible design experiences, businesses have to adapt, and governments need to respond to deliver better programs. The promise of design that focuses on people’s needs—both functional and emotional—will lead to better outcomes for all. Areas of health and education are sectors in need of large-scale redesigns where, as designers, we can play a crucial and transformational role.

Yves Behar
Designer and Entrepreneur

Design is a secret superpower! “Selfcare is a revolutionary act” has always been a guidepost in our personal and professional lives. Many women, especially Black women, use the promise of self care as one reason to walk thirty minutes a day with GirlTrek and live their healthiest, most fulfilled lives. Now that’s design optimism in action!

SHERYL CONNELLY
Optimist and New York Times bestselling author of Start With Why & Leaders Eat Last

Design can be a secret superpower! “Selfcare is a revolutionary act” has always been a guidepost in our personal and professional lives. Many women, especially Black women, use the promise of self care as one reason to walk thirty minutes a day with GirlTrek and live their healthiest, most fulfilled lives. Now that’s design optimism in action!

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The most promising element of today’s design is the multidisciplinary approach to problem-solving. I love it when right brain experts and the left brain experts work side by side as equal partners.

GIRLTREK
Y. Morgan Dixon and Vanessa Garrison, Co-founders, GirlTrek

Designers have a social responsibility to use design to serve the people who would engage with it, not just those who pay for it. The best design doesn’t simply follow a trend, it must, when necessary, defy it. And in our modern, technology saturated, digitally connected world, that means using design to foster real, human interaction. Too many technologists seem to have abandoned their responsibility to do so. The designers I meet are proud to carry the torch.

RADHICA NAGPAL
Fred Kavli Professor of Computer Science School of Engineering and Applied Sciences Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering Harvard University

Design works in systems in the way systems work in nature—there is an interconnectedness within design systems and a collectiveness among the natural world that emanates optimism. It is inspiring to think collectively, and let our designs build off that inspiration.

Follow #DesignOptimism on Instagram to be inspired and join the conversation.

Poster, graphic by GIRLTREK

Inspirational Ideas, illustrated notes by Sheryl Connelly

Solidarity against Waste, illustration by Radhika Nagpal
Interview by Wendi Parson

ESPERANZA SPALDING: Storytelling through Objects and Music

WENDI PARSON: What does d+evolution mean to you and what has it meant to your project?

WP: When I began having conversations with the curators I wasn’t very good yet about speaking about this idea of d+evolution theory. Speaking and writing are not about speaking about this idea of d+evolution in action. I am better at relaying concepts through music and performance. Thain was gifted Cooper Hewitt’s hand book Making Design, and found an example that seemed to express the d+evolution concept in its process. The curators presented options too and once they explained the stories behind the various objects—the histories and materials—and based on those stories, I chose objects that made a compelling case for d+evolution in design.

WP: Are there any objects that stand out as truly exemplifying d+evolution more than others?

WP: Yes, I included it in a group theme called “Developing Technologies.” It’s a textile design that came from the design school L’Ecole Martine, Paul Poiret—a leading French fashion designer in the early 20th century—founded the school where young girls practiced frehand drawing. Encouraging them to sketch their innocent impressions of plants and animals, Poiret turned the drawings into popular textile, drapery, carpet, and wallpaper designs. I found it striking that the cutting edge of design for Poiret came from these untrained teenagers’ free-hand drawings of their natural surroundings. Un-evolved artistic ability of the famous scholar of design, and actually affecting the aesthetic evolution of the designs coming out of Poiret’s atelier is a very perfect example of d+evolution in action.

WP: Do you find your creative process intersecting or paralleling the design process?

ESPERANZA SPALDING: Intersecting and parallel. D+evolution is present. I admire design from a distance because I realize that at an art form I feel really far from it. The fact that I experience the world of design so far from my world of music is a good thing, and I think that’s part of what’s made for a really different exhibition.

WP: What is something that you learned about yourself or your creative process that stems from working on this exhibition?

WP: Yes, that I want to find an editor for everything I do. I like to think of editing as a deductive process. During my interactions shaping the exhibition and working on the text I have come to love the relationship between an editor and the content creator. And now I’m really hungry for that relationship in other aspects of my creative life. It was so humbling, challenging, and such a great force for improvement on the work that I initially developed. The process improved, clarified, and strengthened my writing and the exhibition groupings.

WP: If…? “And we try it and find out what happens when we allow unexpected elements or new elements together or take things apart. I’ve been experimenting with other mediums—inter-disciplinary work—basically, we’re just experimenting. I propose an idea to a painter, or set designer, or a dancer, and ask, “What if…?” And we try it and find out what happens after “what if?”

WP: What is next for you musically? Can you share a bit about what’s to come?

WP: I am working with [jazz saxophonist and composer] Wayne Shorter on an opera he has composed and he’s asked me to write the libretto, slated to premiere in 2019, if all goes well. I’m also in the writing process for a live-performance recording. This forthcoming project is about breaking down walls and finding out what happens when we allow protective barriers to fall. Being an avant-garde performer is definitely a kind of wall, a kind of protection. The challenge in preparing for this upcoming project: letting the wall come down, showing the process, and seeing what happens when you use sound as a wall-breaking tool. Much like my collaboration with Cooper Hewitt—I appreciated working with partners with an adventurous spirit, trying to make something happen that is a little bit out of the ordinary. I felt so grateful to have a chance to work with the team. It’s encouraging, and it’s been really challenging for everybody. For me too, and I’m just thankful.

ESPERANZA SPALDING’S PLAYLIST:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>ARTIST</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laugh Clown Laugh</td>
<td>Abbey Lincoln</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Good Time Fairies</td>
<td>Steve Coleman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining Pot</td>
<td>Hermeto Pascoal</td>
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<td>Edith and the Kingpin</td>
<td>Joni Mitchell</td>
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<td>Phantom Woman</td>
<td>Laura Mvula</td>
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<td>Pandora Awakened</td>
<td>Wayne Shorter</td>
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<td>Time Warp</td>
<td>Chick Corea</td>
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<td>You Know I Care</td>
<td>Duke Pearson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hoo Cakes</td>
<td>MF Doom</td>
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<tr>
<td>L’heure espagnole</td>
<td>Maurice Ravel</td>
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Bright Grid, Bright Angle, and Bright Cube are the second in a series of products designed by Scholten & Baijings in collaboration with Maharam. The essence of the Bright grouping lies in the inherent possibilities for combination and variation. The three textiles are designed to be used in tandem and to form new geometric relationships when combined.