

Kay Morgan - Fall 2016

CDMG 1111, D304

Professor Tanya Goetz

November 2 Field Trip – The Cooper Hewitt & Grand Central Station

“Cooper Hewitt educates, inspires, and empowers people through design by presenting exhibitions and educational programs . . .” Here is the stated mission of this branch of the historic Smithsonian. It rang true for me on our November 2 class field trip especially in the exhibits comprising “By The People: Designing a Better America.”

The Cooper Hewitt museum opened its doors almost a century and a quarter ago and it has sustained its relevance to design education, and now enhanced that value by incorporating cutting edge technology. Using digital pens and interactive surfaces throughout the space visitors may “play” with the collections and even take copies to their home computers! No velvet ropes or dour guards in these rooms. The custodians of the art here walk over to instruct or to encourage looking and touching using the dazzling little pen.

The technology on which this experience relies was developed through a series of collaborations. Starting with Diller Scofidio & Renfro, a New York group tasked with identifying technology to be adopted for the project, and later between the museum and GE, Sistelnetworks, MakeSimply and Undercurrent. Each of these firms contributed their specific expertise in sourcing electronics, or in designing electronic circuits, manufacturing management or in experience design.

THE EXHIBITS

Models and Prototypes

In kindergarten I loved miniatures. I was never shy if a grown up I was visiting owned something I coveted. Adults are pushovers, so these tiny treasures were often ceded to me. One of my favorites was a miniscule Coca Cola bottle made in the original green-tinted glass.

I am still fascinated by replicas especially when the details typical in the life size object are faithfully rendered in its tabletop version. I also like to consider the process involved in constructing them. The models and prototypes room at the Cooper Hewitt gave me a lot to contemplate.

My father was a bishop, so the Pulpit Model With Staircase (19th Century France) was familiar, and for those reasons, beautiful. Carved and inlaid with sections of oak, pear and walnut woods this

item was the best of the lot, but I appreciated every tiny model in this collection and walked around several times leaning forward frequently to scrutinize them from different angles.

PULPIT MODEL WITH STAIRCASE



https://images.collection.cooperhewitt.org/105742_7423475cf64e8923_b.jpg

Energizing the Everyday

A print—Interlace Pattern with White Medallion—caught my eye among the items in the Drawings, Prints and Graphic Design collection. The print on off-white paper is made from a woodcut, by Albrecht Dürer. Its intricacy and reminded me of mandalas. The details are symmetrically organized, not random. I appreciated that here although I often prefer asymmetry and clean lines. One can almost see Dürer bent over this work for hours at a time, incising its delicate curlicues and I imagine his satisfaction when the woodcut was complete. Pattern's like Dürer's, which he created in the early 1500's, are still common motifs in textiles, especially lace, and also in architectural and interior design. I am very keen about those design disciplines.

PRINT, INTERLACE PATTERN WITH WHITE MEDALLION

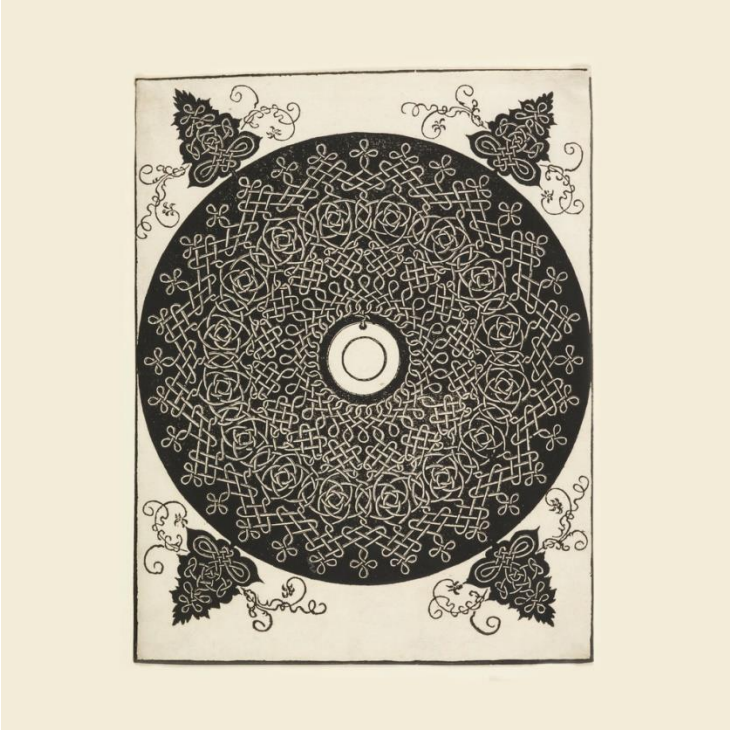


IMAGE SOURCE: <https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/visits/fpm4/109953643/>

Many items that drew my attention incorporated curves or wavy lines, but there were exceptions. The 1946 Stereo Cabinet and a desk from the same year emerged as favorites too, being Mid Century Modern, and also reminiscent of Scandinavian furniture popular a decade or two later. Although there wasn't a curve in sight these two furniture pieces were appealing. They're from the same designer, George Nelson & Associates, and both were made by the Herman Miller Company with contemporary materials: wood and wood veneers, leather, steel, glass, molded plastic, and aluminum ..

4743 STEREO CABINET, DESIGNED 1946	4658 DESK, 1946
	
<p>IMAGE S SOURCE: https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/visits/fpm4/109953687 AND 420573053/</p>	

The Immersion Room

The immersion room might be the highlight of the interactive features at the Cooper Hewitt. When our field trip disbanded I went back to that room (and others) where I ran into a grade school class and their teachers. The kids were fascinated by the wallpaper patterns thrown onto the walls but even more by their own designs projected from the electronic table—I lent them my digital pen so they could have the full experience—and I watched their expressions reflecting the colors and light off the table as they crowded around it.

By the People: Designing a Better America.

The most exciting part of the Cooper Hewitt display, by far, was on the third floor. An information graphic on the walls in the stairwell provided the transition from the decorative artistry on the lower floors to the socially transformative projects housed on floor three. The information in the stairwell shows that many New Yorkers devote more of their earnings to housing than is recommended because of high rent in many neighborhoods. This mural presents statistics showing that other urban areas around the country have the same challenge.

I spent the longest time on the 3rd floor lingering, especially, at the following stations: Rapido Rapid Recovery Housing; Greenprint; Probation Resource Hubs; Designing Justice, Designing Spaces; Cross-Border Community Station and Building Dignity. Another attention grabber on this floor was the video installation running two stories simultaneously—one examining how municipal budget cuts in Chicago cuts imposed transportation hardships on one of its neighborhood and the other camera listening in as grassroots organizers discuss results of their strategies for feeding poor neighbors in their community.

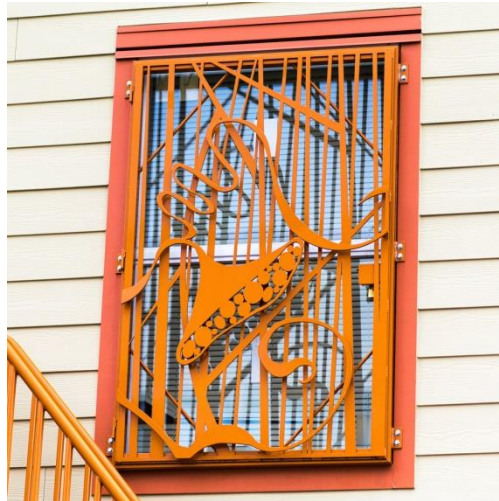
VIDEO INSTALLATION – BY THE PEOPLE, DESIGNING A BETTER AMERICA



IMAGE SOURCE: http://www.metropolismag.com/Point-of-View/November-2016/At-Cooper-Hewitt-Socially-Responsible-Design-Takes-Center-Stage/bythepeople_1-2-2.jpg

Building Dignity focused on “how design can help survivors rebuild a sense of dignity”. It is the joint effort of architects and a support group for survivors of domestic violence from Washington State. Their product is a design think tank and resource of design concepts for developing safe housing units for this population. The playful window guard below is one example of their results.

BUILDING DIGNITY



These emergency shelter security window grilles were designed by architect Jennifer Weddermann for YWCA Pierce County in Tacoma, Washington

IMAGE SOURCE: . http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/design-projects-tackling-poverty_us_57f7f910e4b0e655eab4038f

Rapido, Rapido Recovery Housing proposes small, easily, and cheaply erected buildings for disadvantaged communities especially when natural disasters create an urgent need for shelter. The designer is bcWORKSHOP. On its website bcWORKSHOP claims: “ The success of our work is contingent upon reaching those residents not typically sought out by the design and planning community “. they engage with local communities by building bridges through collaboration on design projects, education outreach and by using social media. Other organizations involved in the creation of Rapido, Rapido Recovery Housing were: Texas Low Income Housing Information Services, Texas A&M University, Community Resource Corporation of Brownsville, ARISE and LUPE two community based vehicles, also in Texas. ARISE and La Unión Del Pueblo Entero (LUPE) were founded to aid low income groups and to educate them to organize, and participate effectively in political and social events that affect their lives.

RAPIDO RECOVERY HOUSING



IMAGE SOURCE: <https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/visits/fpm4/109956061/>

Greenprint featured urban landscape redesign in Pittsburgh by Studio for Spatial Practice, Hood Design and Arupin for a community predominated by African Americans. The greening of a neglected former industrial area appeals to me and probably to everyone else not singularly focused on turning empty land into expensive housing or commercial real estate.

The **Cross-Border Community Station** exhibit showcased plans that, when built, will incorporate the reuse of waste materials into construction of a multi-use facility for Los Laureles, a slum on the border between San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico. The University of California, San Diego (UCSD) partnered on this design with Alter Terra, a non-profit organization committed to restoring and preserving coastal areas. The Station will house a performance space, health clinic, classrooms for the community's use, small business education and assistance center and other facilities. The site will also be a pivot point to study the impact of sewage leaching into the wetlands surrounding the nearby Tijuana River and to preserve that ecosystem.

The exhibits **Designing Justice**, **Designing Spaces** and **Probation Resource Hubs** both address an emerging concern about the escalating prison population in the US and the conviction that our justice system must change. I found these design ideas inspiring and potentially healing for inmates or formerly incarcerated men and women transitioning back into society. The following poster, interior design for a

probation center, illustrates how redesigned spaces and services might affirm and inspire them. It's a colorful waiting area with positive signs instead of the usual admonitions against things not permitted.

PROBATION RESOURCE HUBS



IMAGE SOURCE: <https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/visits/fpm4/109956051/>

The Cooper Hewitt experience was the main attraction of the day but time spent in the New York Transit Museum shop and Grand Central Terminal, deserves to be included. Grand Central is a museum in its own right—an impressive and beautiful space that I (and many locals) don't know enough about.

GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL, NEW YORK, MAIN CONCOURSE



IMAGE SOURCE: <https://www.cnet.com/pictures/grand-central-terminals-best-kept-secrets-photos/>

As our group assembled under the four-faced ball clock I learned that a former First Lady, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy-Onassis, was instrumental, years ago, in obstructing plans to reinvent this amazing space.

GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL BALL CLOCK, 1913– Designer Seth Thomas Company, Connecticut



IMAGE SOURCE: <http://iwmagazine.com/news-and-now/20120919/public-faces/>

I hope other grand New York buildings will also be preserved in future years. The tiny Transit Museum shop contains its own gems, books about surprising and unknown aspects of New York City, for instance, as well as clever representations of the city's landmarks and MTA icons that I'd love to take home.

I am reminded, writing this report, as I was on November 2, that there is so much in New York yet to be unearthed and enjoyed and that great design is all around us. We should pause often to take it all in.

SOURCES:

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