

WHY DESIGN NOW?

National Design Triennial



Smithsonian
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum



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Ellen Lupton

Cara McCarty

Matilda McQuaid

Cynthia Smith

with contributions by Andrea Lipps



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New York

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Ellen Lupton, Cara McCarty, Matilda McQuaid, and
Cynthia Smith, with contributions by Andrea Lipps
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Viviana Peña. Colombia, 2004–7

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Foreword

Caroline Baumann and Bill Moggridge

The 2010 *National Design Triennial*—entitled *Why Design Now?*, the fourth installation in Cooper-Hewitt’s acclaimed series since its inception ten years ago—is global in reach for the first time, showcasing some of the world’s most innovative, forward-thinking designs while assessing themes in social change and environmental accountability. We ask questions throughout the exhibition and within this catalogue to engage the viewer and the reader: Why and how is design thinking an essential tool for solving some of today’s most urgent problems? Why should business leaders, policy makers, consumers, and citizens embrace design values? How can design promote environmental stewardship, social equity, accessibility, and creative capital? This *National Design Triennial* and its 134 selected projects—from ZenithSolar’s Z-10 concentrated solar-power system, which achieves greater efficiency and cost reduction, and David Chavez’s Haptica Braille timepiece, which provides time reading without the need for sound, to the Samarth bicycle trailer, which empowers rural Indian women—answer these questions and provoke further discussion. We are proud to present this groundbreaking exhibition of design projects representing the “revolution” taking place within all areas of design practice—not only how products and projects are conceived, but also

how goods, services, and ideas are produced, distributed, and used worldwide.

We, and the Board of Trustees, wish to thank Cooper-Hewitt’s terrific curatorial team and the entire staff for organizing this stunningly varied survey of contemporary design. Thanks are also in order for Paul Warwick Thompson, the former Director of Cooper-Hewitt and current Rector of the Royal College of Art, who embraced the show’s theme and breadth from the start and encouraged the curators to cast the net far and wide to collect the best examples of design.

Why Design Now? would not have been possible without the generosity of GE as our lead sponsor. We thank the entire GE team for their support and promotion of the exhibition, particularly Cooper-Hewitt trustee Beth Comstock, who recognized the importance of the exhibition from the start. We also extend our sincere gratitude to Cooper-Hewitt trustee Agnes Bourne for her continued support of the *Triennial* series since its start in 2000; Agnes was instrumental in the creation of the series and advocates its importance from west to east coasts! Thanks are also in order to the Norwegian Consulate General in New York, the Esme Usdan Exhibition Endowment Fund, the Ministry of Culture Denmark, NYSCA, Dr. Leonard Polonsky and Dr. Georgette Bennett, the Consulate General of Switzerland in New York, and the Consulate General of Israel in New York. Thank you all for making this stellar exhibition possible!



Introduction

The Curators

Why design now? Designers around the world are answering this question by creating products, prototypes, proposals, buildings, landscapes, messages, and more that address social and ecological problems. How can we power the world with clean energy? How can we move people and products more safely and efficiently? How can we shelter communities in safe, sustainable environments? How can we close the open loop of materials extraction and disposal? How can we enable people around the globe to share and generate wealth? How can we improve the quality of life for all people through health-care innovations? How can we communicate ideas more effectively and creatively? How can we discover beauty in simple forms that use minimal resources? Collectively, designers are seeking to enhance human health, prosperity, and comfort while diminishing the conflicts between people and the global ecosystems we inhabit.

Celebrity wallpaper. Mieke Gerritzen, All Media Wallpaper. The Netherlands, 2009

Energy is essential to every human endeavor. As we deplete the earth's finite supply of fossil fuels, we are also polluting the atmosphere and catalyzing climate change. Around the world, scientists, engineers, and designers are studying ways to harness energy from the sun, wind, and tides and to create new products and structures that use energy not just efficiently but also self-sufficiently, generating surplus power.

The human urge for **mobility** has produced interconnected landscapes where time and distance have progressively collapsed—at a steep environmental cost. Allowing people to travel across town or over a continent while conserving resources requires fresh design solutions, from foldable bicycles, on-demand electric vehicles, and self-propelled trains to new conceptions of how cities work.

Architecture creates the context for **community**. Built environments shelter the body while inspiring the mind and enabling social life. In response to ever-expanding sprawl in the developed world and escalating urban density in developing areas, architects are creating rooftop villages, urban farms, and mixed-use housing developments that employ local materials and encourage harmonious, energy-efficient living at close quarters.

Products and buildings all consume **materials**. Chemists, engineers, and designers are inventing everything from biodegradable, petroleum-free plastics to foam insulation that grows in the dark like a mushroom, requiring minimal energy to produce. New information systems are helping consumers find goods with a clean biological record, such as materials made from reclaimed waste, from nontoxic substances, or from rapidly renewable agricultural products.

Prosperity is a state of material well-being that exceeds mere subsistence. Without access to adequate food, hygiene, safety, and protection from the elements, people cannot enjoy social and spiritual life. Nor can they invent solutions to the problems around them. Today, progressive designers and entrepreneurs are building engines of prosperity that enable local communities to use their own resources to create their own wealth as well as to participate in the global economy.

The **health** of individuals and societies depends on design ingenuity. From creating prosthetic limbs controlled by the human mind to devising new ways to deliver health care to rural populations, designers are improving mental and physical wellness for the rich and poor, young and old, able-bodied and physically challenged.

New ideas have nowhere to go without the tools of **communication**. Smart phones, digital reading devices, and social networks are changing the way people use and produce information. Designers are helping people understand the world's problems by visualizing complex data and by delivering urgent messages about safety, equality, and the environment.

The design process often involves a quest for **simplicity**. Many designers seek to create compact, coherent structures

that speak clearly to their purpose. Today, as designers strive to simplify production processes and consume fewer materials in smaller amounts, the quest for simplicity is shaping design's economic and ethical values as well as its sense of beauty.

Why Design Now? is the fourth installment in the *National Design Triennial* series, launched by the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum in 2000. The previous exhibitions focused on work conceived in the United States or created abroad by American designers. The *Triennial* has now gone global, reflecting the growing connectedness of design practices and the need for international cooperation to solve the world's problems.

Why Design Now? is organized by a team of curators from Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, each of whom represents different areas of expertise, including product design, architecture, textiles, technology, communication, and design for social change. The curatorial team invited nominations from the public and from colleagues in the field and conducted independent research. A long process of internal vetting and discussion yielded the final selection of projects, which we are proud to share with you here.

Why Design Now? is an open snapshot of contemporary innovation, a sample of what progressive designers, engineers, entrepreneurs, and citizens are doing in diverse fields and at different scales. For each project selected, dozens more could take its place, addressing similar questions from different angles and from different points on the globe. Many of the featured works have influenced other designers by proposing new methodologies or by pioneering new techniques. Included are practical solutions already being implemented as well as experimental ideas designed to inspire further research. A few projects will provoke controversy, answering some questions while raising others. Each one—from a soil-powered table lamp to a post-petroleum urban utopia—celebrates the transformative power of design.