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COOPER HEWITT ANNOUNCES 2026 NATIONAL DESIGN AWARD WINNERS



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Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum announced today the winners of the 2026 National Design Awards. Launched in 2000 as an official project of the White House Millennium Council, the National Design Awards celebrate excellence and leadership in design, recognizing the innovation and impact of individual designers and organizations across 10 categories. Award recipients are selected by a multidisciplinary jury of practitioners, educators and leaders from a wide range of design fields and will be honored at the Smithsonian National Design Awards Gala May 19 in New York City.

This year's National Design Award recipients are:

Design Visionary: Robert Earl Paige

Climate Action: Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman

Emerging Designer: Mattaforma

Architecture: Frida Escobedo Studio

Communication Design: Thought Matter

Digital Design: Laura Kurgan

Fashion Design: Josh Tafoya

Interior Design: Charlap Hyman & Herrero

Landscape Architecture: Ten Eyck Landscape Architects

Product Design: Berea College Student Craft

“At Cooper Hewitt, we celebrate design not only for its impact and innovation, but also for its role as a civic force—one that reflects shared values rooted in the common good, fuels creativity and shapes everyday life,” said Maria Nicanor, director of Cooper Hewitt.

“The National Design Awards demonstrate the potential and possibilities of American design, shining a spotlight on the designers and communities whose talent and creativity speak of the pluralistic richness of America at its best,” said Aric Chen, chair of the 2026 National Design Awards jury.

Public programming featuring the contributions and voices of the winners has been a hallmark of the National Design Awards program since its inception. A new series of public conversations between the winners and Nicanor, kicking off this spring, will expand the awards’ reach and the public’s access to the expertise of winners across all categories.

In addition to the National Design Awards, Cooper Hewitt will also mark this momentous year with a major multi-year installation of the museum’s permanent collection—a selection of which will be brought out of storage to be made widely and more permanently accessible to the public. Opening this summer, “Design Across Time: Exploring the Smithsonian’s Design Collection” will occupy the entire first floor of the museum’s Carnegie Mansion and feature historic and contemporary works across disciplines—including product design and graphic design, fashion and textiles, digital and interaction design, wall coverings and architecture—highlighting the scope of the national design collection and the varied creative processes designers use to shape the world and people’s daily lives.

THE 2026 NATIONAL DESIGN AWARD WINNERS

Design Visionary: Robert Earl Paige

The Design Visionary award, recognizing an individual, company or organization who has made a profound contribution to advancing the field, is given to **Robert Earl Paige**.

Paige is an artist, designer and educator whose work disregards boundaries between fine art, craft and design. After earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and working for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Paige transitioned to creating commercial objects and fashion, partnering with Fiorio and Sears to produce scarves and interior decor. In the 1970s, his signature Dakkabar Collection, home furnishings inspired by West African textiles, was sold in over 100 Sears stores nationwide, introducing Black visual culture into mainstream design. A participant in the Black Arts Movement, Paige champions community engagement in art and culture, and his practice reflects a

love of color, a commitment to design principles and a belief in making art accessible for everyday people. Repurposing is central to his work, transforming found fibers, cardboard and paper into new creations that invite others to embrace curiosity and making. His works have been exhibited at Salon 94 Design, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum and the SMART Museum of Art, and he has held residencies at the DuSable Museum of African American History, Schomburg Center and Hyde Park Art Center.

Climate Action: Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman

The Climate Action award, recognizing a design project for its significant contributions to addressing the urgency of the global climate crisis, is presented to **Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman** for their **UCSD Community Stations** project.

The University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Community Stations are a collaborative network of civic spaces along the U.S.–Mexico border, designed to advance climate resilience and social equity. Developed by Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman, an internationally recognized research-based design practice, the stations support cross-border dialogue, participatory design and research focused on regional migration and ecological interdependencies between San Diego and Tijuana. Located on both sides of the border wall, the stations are each co-designed and programmed with local partners to leverage university resources for climate adaptation strategies, including housing, public space and environmental conservancy projects. By integrating cultural programming with scientific research and close community engagement, the stations aim to generate actionable knowledge for communities to address climate vulnerability and strengthen collective capacity for resilience. Cruz is an architect and serves as professor of spatial practice in the Department of Visual Arts, and Forman is a professor of political science and founding director of the Center on Global Justice, both at UCSD.

Emerging Designer: Mattaforma

The Emerging Designer award, given in recognition of a designer or practice who has demonstrated profound talent in the early stages of their career to contribute to the future of design, honors **Mattaforma**.

Founded by Lindsey Wikstrom, Mattaforma is a New York City-based architecture and research studio redefining sustainable design through mass-timber innovation and healthy materials. Every Mattaforma project begins with field research: locating nearby forests, quarries and farms, and drawing from their material networks, histories and knowledge. The studio's restorative approach creates classrooms, homes and community venues designed for disassembly and reuse, ensuring flexibility and resilience. Projects often cross disciplines, from timber pavilions built in 48 hours to open-air classrooms and structures that serve as music venues in the summer and become plant nurseries in the winter.



Through writing, teaching and advocacy, Mattaforma invites policymakers, schoolchildren and neighbors to co-author plant-based futures where climate action is tangible, communal and joyful.

Architecture: Frida Escobedo Studio

The Architecture award, given to an individual or firm for their meaningful contributions to the built environment that advance the understanding of spatial experiences, goes to **Frida Escobedo Studio**.

Founded in 2006, Frida Escobedo Studio works across architecture, art, design, installation, research and academia. Each project explores overlooked aspects of the built environment, using simple forms to reveal the forces shaping collective identity and public space. The studio's practice, with offices in Mexico City and New York City, spans a range of scales and territories, from multistory residential buildings to temporary art installations, adaptive reuse renovations, public sculpture, book publications and object design, often pushing the conventional boundaries of architecture. Recent commissions include Escobedo's appointment as lead designer of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's new Modern and Contemporary Art Wing (2022), her selection as co-designer, following the lead architectural team Moreau Kusunoki, for the renovation of the Centre Pompidou in Paris (2024) and her selection as the lead designer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Doha (2025).

Communication Design: Thought Matter

The Communication Design award, recognizing an individual or firm for the impactful use of design in the service of information sharing, messaging and overall communication, is presented to **Thought Matter**.

Thought Matter is a New York City-based communication design studio founded in 2015 by Tom Jaffe and led by Jessie McGuire. Working at the intersection of design and civic life, the studio creates brand identities, campaigns, digital platforms and installations that distill complex ideas, spark dialogue and inspire participation. Thought Matter is deeply invested in art, culture and change, using design to reframe narratives, shift perspectives and shape the future. Collaborating closely with clients and communities, the team finds inspiration in uncovering untold stories and exploring forms, technologies and mediums to merge the personal and the political. Key clients have included the Met, the New York Historical, the Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art, Misfits Market and Thinx. The studio has partnered with the Times Square Alliance and the Street Vendor Project to advance civic advocacy, and has worked with Fortune 500 companies on sustainability and social impact projects.

Digital Design: Laura Kurgan

The Digital Design award, given to an individual or firm for the innovative design of digital products, environments, systems, experiences and services, is presented to **Laura Kurgan**.

Kurgan is a designer and educator who works in spatial computation, data visualization and digital cartography at the intersection of technology and social justice. Trained as an architect, Kurgan has long pioneered creative uses of emerging technologies. From employing GPS as a design tool in the 1990s to leveraging declassified satellite imagery to map political conflicts, her projects help us to visualize systemic injustices, such as incarceration patterns in *Million Dollar Blocks* and migration flows in *Exit*. Kurgan's work starts with the claim that working creatively and critically with data is essential to the pursuit of social justice, and that one must utilize new technologies to learn from them. At Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, she founded and directs the Master of Science in Computational Design Practices program and the Center for Spatial Research, emphasizing hands-on critical engagement with digital tools to uncover hidden spatial logics of inequality. The author of *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics* (2013) and co-editor of *Ways of Knowing Cities* (2019), Kurgan has had her work exhibited globally, from the Venice Biennale to the Museum of Modern Art.

Fashion Design: Josh Tafoya

The Fashion Design award, given to an individual or firm for the forward-thinking design of apparel, accessory, jewelry, footwear and textiles, honors **Josh Tafoya**.

Tafoya is a textile artist whose work explores Indigenous identity within Hispanic and Latino communities. Drawing on his Genízaro, Spanish and Chicano heritage, Tafoya redefines the "Southwestern" aesthetic and American fashion from an Indigenous perspective, celebrating cultural heritage while embracing a raw, grungy spirit. Tafoya's designs reflect the rich textile traditions of his heritage, blending knowledge passed down from his ranching grandfather and weaving grandmother with contemporary fashion innovation. After earning his Bachelor of Fine Arts and working with various luxury brands in New York City, Tafoya returned to Taos, New Mexico, in 2020 to launch his namesake brand. Tafoya infuses his ancestral knowledge of Rio Grande Valley weaving with his experiences, and he works with the goal of ensuring the traditional cultural crafts of New Mexico live on in a contemporary world.

Interior Design: Charlap Hyman & Herrero

The Interior Design award, honoring an individual or firm for their innovative contributions to interior environments that advance the understanding of spatial experiences, is given to **Charlap Hyman & Herrero**.



Founded in 2014, Charlap Hyman & Herrero is an architecture and design firm with studios in Los Angeles, New York City and Mexico City. Principals Adam Charlap Hyman and Andre Herrero lead a multifaceted practice that considers all aspects of the built environment, from site plan to furniture, delving into a diverse range of media. They have designed sets for the Santa Fe Opera and the Juilliard School, retail spaces for Aesop and Moda Operandi, exhibitions for Jeffrey Deitch and Hauser & Wirth, and residential projects spanning from ground-up architecture to sensitive restorations of historic houses and interiors. The firm also produces an ever-growing line of textiles and rugs alongside collections of lighting and furniture. Confidently navigating a rich interdisciplinary trajectory, Charlap Hyman & Herrero has blurred the boundaries of their discipline and its traditional hierarchies. Through a rigorous creative process, the firm poetically engages with memory and the hidden histories of interiors, while producing radically striking, distinctly contemporary spaces.

Landscape Architecture: Ten Eyck Landscape Architects

The Landscape Architecture award recognizes an individual or firm for their meaningful contributions to the integration between the built, urban and natural environments and for advancing the understanding of spatial experiences. This year's award is presented to **Ten Eyck Landscape Architects**.

Ten Eyck Landscape Architects (TELA) has spent nearly three decades creating ecologically restorative outdoor spaces that foster community healing. Based in Austin, Texas, with origins in Phoenix, Arizona, founder Christine Ten Eyck, FASLA and her 14-person studio take a regional approach to the landscapes of the American Southwest, sparking conversations around pressing ecological issues through people- and place-based design. Drawing from extensive experience and intimate environmental knowledge, TELA transforms overlooked landscape project sites into vibrant environments that stimulate the senses and unify communities, prioritizing native plant species, water harvesting technologies and durable materials expressed through form, color and texture. Their approach combines ecological sensitivity with beauty and inclusivity, creating landscapes that are resilient, accessible and deeply rooted in history and community.

Product Design: Berea College Student Craft

The Product Design award, given to an individual or firm for the forward-thinking design of objects, products and materials, is presented to **Berea College Student Craft**.

Based in Kentucky, Berea College Student Craft integrates design education with hands-on making, continuing a tradition that began in 1893 as part of the college's tuition-free work program. Founded on principles of equity, inclusion and justice, Berea was the South's first coeducational and interracial college, and today its craft program provides experiential learning for students



across all 35 academic majors. Foundational to the curriculum is the belief that every student in the program must feel safe and supported both to succeed and to fail, as most students have not had formal art and design education prior to arriving at Berea College. Students design, prototype, test and market thousands of objects annually, gaining a deep understanding of the inherent qualities of the raw materials they work with through rigorous hands-on experience.

NATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS JURY

National Design Award winners are selected by a multidisciplinary jury of design practitioners, educators and leaders. Nominations are open to all and are also solicited from experts from a wide range of design and related fields.

The 2026 National Design Awards jury was chaired by **Aric Chen**, director of the Zaha Hadid Foundation. The jury included **Liz Danzico**, vice president of design at Microsoft AI; **Patricia Moore**, president of MooreDesign Associates; **Henk Ovink**, executive director and founding commissioner for the Global Commission on the Economics of Water; **Valerie Steele**, director and chief curator of the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology; and **Thomas Woltz**, senior principal of Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects.

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, education and research complex—Cooper Hewitt is located on New York City's Museum Mile in the landmarked Carnegie Mansion. Steward of one of the world's most diverse and comprehensive design collections—over 215,000 objects that range from an ancient Egyptian faience cup dating to about 1100 BC 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.

For more information, visit www.cooperhewitt.org or follow @cooperhewitt on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

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