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Museum Observation #1

For the contemporary museum, the use of digital tools becomes a requirement if the museum wants to be up-to-date and attract more visitors. In their book, "Museums in a Digital Culture," Chiel van den Akker and Susan Legêne say that "digital technologies bring the new forms of curation and co-creation within museum space, providing visitors with a new level of experiences" (3). One of the reasons that I chose to work with Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum was because the museum amazed me with its technological and digital advancement. Cooper Hewitt is probably one of the best examples of how the cultural institution connects museum objects to the visitor, making the process of discovering new things interesting and engaging.

The interaction with the objects starts from the admission desk, where, along with the ticket, visitors get a pen.

Image 1. Cooper Hewitt Pen

The use of the pen is simple and convenient: use the flat end to save, align the collect symbols and press. The pen allows visitors to collect and save information about the exhibited objects and later access this information through the Cooper Hewitt website by creating an account. Once an account is created, visitors can get back to it after each museum journey and explore their personal collection of favorite items online. The visitor's account contains a lot of curious information, such as the duration of his or her visit and a visualization of collecting habits during the visit. In the images 2, 3 and 4 of this paper readers can see how I interacted with my object, Dragonfly Lamp that is on view as a part of *Passion for Exotic* exhibit, using the pen and my personal account.

Image 2. Dragonfly Lamp and object label with collect symbols

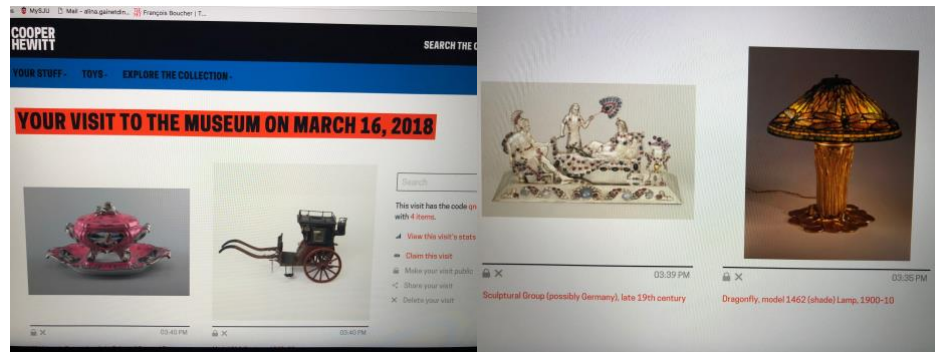Image 3. Collecting information with the pen

Image 4. Personal Account on the Cooper Hewitt website showing my collection of objects

Large touchscreen tables that are installed throughout the museum are another digital wonder. The tables give access to thousands of objects in the museum's collection. Using their pens visitors can interact with the tables by choosing different objects from the "object river" that flows down in the middle of each table, zoom in on the items' details and learn their history. What is more, visitors can use their pen to draw different shapes on the table that can bring up related museum objects. While I stopped by to take a look on how the table works and to find my object

I heard how one excited visitor said, "I can spend the whole day in front of this table and never make it to the actual exhibition!"
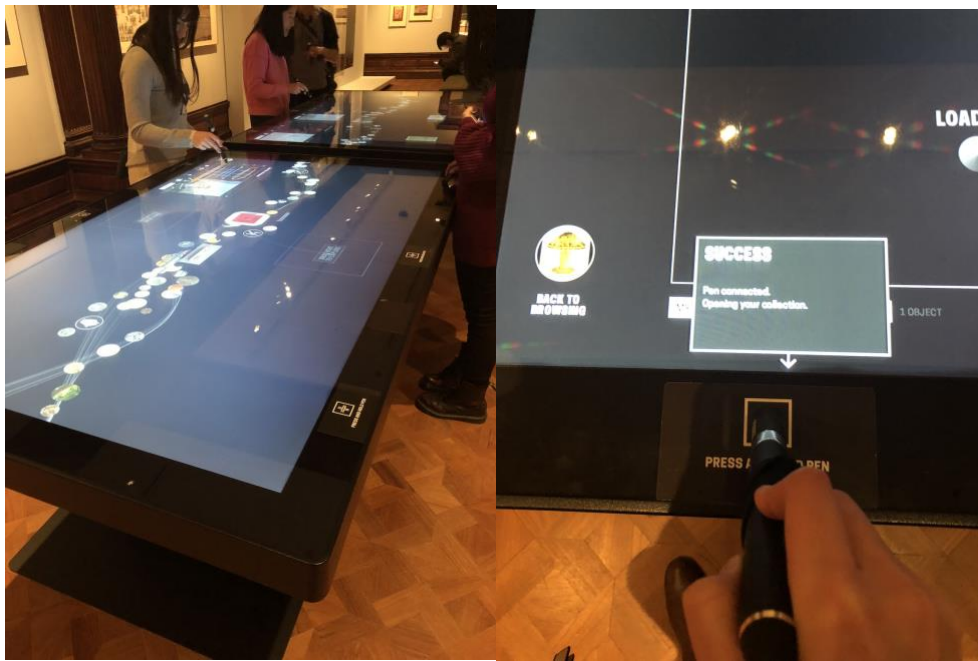

Image 5. Cooper Hewitt interactive table

As it is said in the *Developing Effective Digital Strategies Solvable Challenge: Those that we understand and know how to solve* of the NMC Horizon Report: 2016 Museum Edition, "[a]s mirrors of contemporary society, which is increasingly networked, mobile, and open, museums are in the midst of a digital paradigm that is impacting all areas of a museum's operations" (22). While incorporating new technologies into museum environment, museum professionals should take into consideration the fact that digital innovations influence the museum's policy, mission and development strategy. That is why it is crucial to make sure that the tools are meaningful and user-friendly, but not made for technology sake. Just as the TuoMuseo that is represented in the NMC Horizon Report as one of the examples of developing effective digital strategies, and aimed "to make the online experience personal, emotional, interactive, and participatory" (23), Cooper

Hewitt Museum is a wonderful example of the connection between the tool, object and visitor that brings a rich, informative and exciting experience.

Works Cited

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know how to solve." *NMC Horizon Report: 2016 Museum Edition*

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