TEACHER EXHIBITION NOTES

CALIFORNIA

24 APRIL – 15 OCTOBER 2017

INTRODUCTION
The central premise is that California has pioneered tools of personal liberation, from LSD to surfboards and iPhones. This ambitious survey brings together political posters and portable devices, but also looks beyond hardware to explore how user interface designers in the San Francisco Bay Area are shaping some of our most common daily experiences. By turns empowering, addictive and troubling, Californian products have affected our lives to such an extent that in some ways we are all now Californians.

WHAT TO EXPECT
The exhibition is separated into five sections that look at an aspect of the Californian ethic; whether it be the spirit of the working practice or the hippy mind-set of the Californian local. The five sections contain exhibits that look at the chronology of those themes. There is no set route around the sections perhaps in keeping with the Californian 'liberated' freedom.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE EXHIBITION
The exhibition is split into the following sections;

SAY WHAT YOU WANT
Tools of self-expression and rebellion

Californian designers have pioneered various forms of freedom of expression, producing distinct graphic cultures that have been widely influential. The political agitation of the 1960s produced a wave of activist design in support of free speech and civil rights for African Americans, women and the gay community. Artists and designers such as Sister Corita Kent and Emory Douglas of the Black Panthers created a politically charged language with a pop aesthetic.

By the 1980s, political content gave way to more individualistic forms of expression. Designers such as April Greiman pursued a postmodern 'New Wave' aesthetic that was emotive and influenced by punk. David Carson gave the subcultures of skateboarding and surfing their own anarchic graphic language, which culminated in the often illegible pages of Ray Gun magazine. Southern Californian graphic design of the 1980s and 90s was a rejection of the corporate modernism of New York.

These idiosyncratic style have been superseded by social media platforms that put tools of personal expression in the hands of anyone with a computer or smartphone. We can all broadcast our individualism, but through the standardised interfaces of Facebook and Twitter. Now activists and egotists use the formats to say what they want.
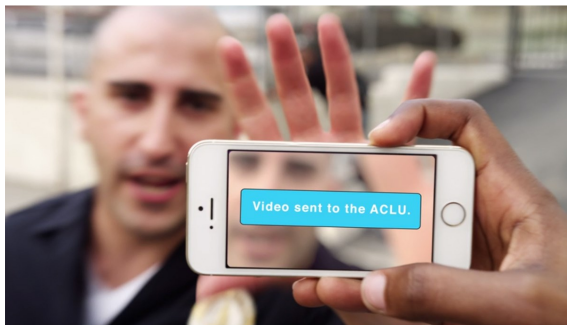
Exhibits to see in this section;
-#BlackLivesMatter: From Hashtag to Movement (2016-17) is just one example of a social media phenomenon that has started in the virtual environment and transitioned to a tangible movement.

-The Rainbow Flag by Gilbert Baker (1978) was created for 1978 San Francisco Pride Parade but has been a sign for the LGBT* movement. Each colour represents its own quality in the community, the hot pink and turquoise (representing Sex and Art respectively) have been revised out of the design over the years.

-The Mobile Justice CA app (2015) allows users to document interactions with authority figures such as police officers by recording them in the app on their mobile device. Users are then encouraged to complete a witness survey before all data is sent to a American Civil Liberties Union affiliate. The state that witnessed the Rodney King police brutality just over two decades previously uses modern technology to guard against similar incidents.

MAKE WHAT YOU WANT
Tools of production and self-reliance

After the Summer of Love in 1967, thousands of hippies left San Francisco to form communes across the country. They set out to build a new society and needed the tools with which to do it. Stewart Brand's Whole Earth Catalog became an essential resource. It offered a revolutionary view of the potential of technology in a practical guide that included everything from weaving kits to scientific calculators.

The Catalogue recast technologies previously understood as the exclusive preserve of large corporate or military users as tools of individual empowerment. 'Democratising' these technologies became a mission. Eventually, it also became a business model, as tools that once required huge budgets and years of training were translated into affordable gadgets that almost anyone could use.

A few former hippies, led by Steve Jobs, would eventually produce the Macintosh, the so-called 'computer for the rest of us'. The Mac, in turn, launched the desktop publishing revolution, the effects of which were first felt in California by graphic designers and typographers such as Zuzana Licko and Ruby Vander Lans. After desktop publishing came desktop manufacturing and, more recently, desktop genetic engineering. Silicon Valley frenetic start-up scene is the extreme version of a culture of democratised technology in which the amateur is king and DIY is an imperative.
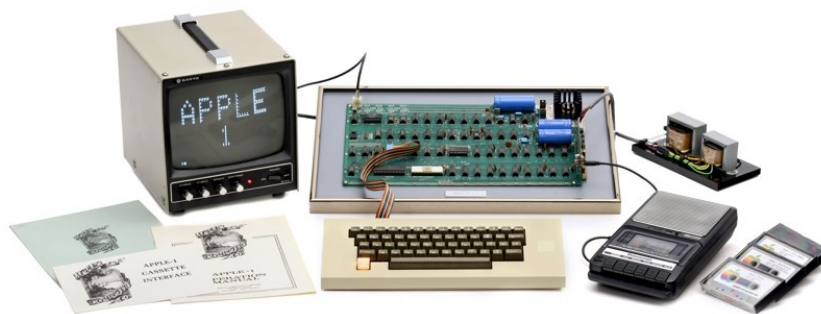
Exhibits to see in this section;

-The birth of home computing; the Apple 1 computer (1976) was sold for $666.66 and came in board form. Users would often make their own cases for it from wood.

-Maker Movement; Raspberry Pi computer and Arduino microprocessor offer a modern alternative to homebrew style computing allowing users to buy affordable all in one solutions.

-The cardboard surfboard (2017) is an open-source, free to download CNC cut out template that can be constructed to form the frame of a surfboard that is set in resin. The maker movement is seeing more design sharing and proliferation of design solutions.

- Sketches for Apple Macintosh icons by Susan Kare 1982 show how the limitations of available pixels and simple design were married up to make an intuitive user

-Start-up garages were common place in California. Large companies such a Disney, Hewlett –Packard , Google, Mattel and Apple can all trace the history of their head offices back to a garage.

SEE WHAT YOU WANT
Tools of Perception and Fantasy

From Disneyland to Hollywood, California is a place that manufactures fantasy on an industrial scale. This capacity for make-believe coexists alongside the urge to invent media and new ways of seeing the world. In the 1960s, LSD was part of the same tendency, treated not just as a recreational drug but a way of expanding consciousness. It shaped both the music and the psychedelic graphics of San Francisco's counterculture.

That desire to lug in to alternative realities found different outlets in the 1970s and 80s with the development of video games. Atari's Pong game consisted of batting a single pixel back and forth across the screen. It proved wildly popular and spawned an industry that is dedicated to making games ever more lifelike.

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Today's tool of perception are blurring the boundaries between fantasy and the physical world. Augmented reality aims to enhance our vision with layers of data, while virtual reality headsets simulate experiences that feel real. At the same time, the proliferation of tiny cameras and photo-sharing apps has bred a culture that records itself obsessively, often with an audience in mind. We submit to self-surveillance to an extent that previous generations would have found shocking.

Exhibits to see in this section;

-Snap Spectacles (2016) link in to the users Snapchat and allow them to recorded and post straight to social media. The user need not take their phone from their pocket.

- Google glass (2013), now discontinued, was a bold move into the world of the personalised heads up display. Producing an augmented reality, the glass superimposed visual and audio information into the user's field of view.

GO WHERE YOU WANT
Tools of Movement and Escape

California's most viable contribution to freedom of movement used to be the multilevel freeway interchanges of Los Angeles, and their promise of high-speed connectivity (traffic willing). Consumer electronics deliver that promise more reliably. Laptops and smartphones have made work mobile and entertainment universal. And they are explicitly sold as tools of liberation.

The iPhone, now just 10 years old, has transformed the world in the most profound way. It allows us to do almost anything, anywhere, from a single device. Smartphones have changed the way we understand the cities in which we live. They have radically changed transport and tourism by enabling ride-sharing and home-sharing 'apps' such as Uber and Airbnb. With Google Maps and high resolution satellite images in our pockets we are more mobile than ever, both physically and virtually.

Even the idea of the car, that American emblem of personal freedom, is changing. With Silicon Valley companies developing autonomous vehicle, driving a car, let alone owning one, may become redundant instead, freedom is being recast as the luxury of being a passenger in the hands of an artificial intelligence.

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Exhibits to see in this section;

-Different faces of Freedom; The Easy Rider bike and the Google self-driving car.

 - iPhone; liberator of design; Exhibits right from the iPhone Sized multi-touch prototype (2005) through to the revolutionary end product (2007). Allowing the user to augment their reality and search receive map and area information about their environment.

- The Google Street view Trekker (2013) allows Google's global documenting to go even further and reach mountain tops and remote forests. Google builds a map that is almost as large as the territory and allows screen based wanderlust.

JOIN WHO YOU WANT
Tools of Collaboration and Community

The freedom to live and work together has always been essential to success and survival in California. That spirit still informs the work of designers, engineers and programmers who have pushed community building into the digital realm.

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, California's counterculture experimented with autonomous communities. Festivals, conferences and communes provided a testing ground for prototypes of what an egalitarian, networked society could be like. That vision would inform the state's emerging computer culture. Informal hobbyist groups such as the Homebrew Computer Club took digital technology out of the hands of corporations and made it a tool for connecting smaller groups.

In the 1980s, the utopianism of the communes was replaced by the potential of virtual communities. In 1985, the creators of the Whole Earth Catalogue launched one of the first computer networks, the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link'. The emergence of social media, such as Facebook, has expanded the size of online groups exponentially. It remains an open question whether virtual communities flourish at the expense of real-world togetherness

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Exhibits to see in this section;

The 1984 California Olympics were played out in front of a television audience and design played a key role in ensuring that the viewer saw the coverage as all part of the same event. Posters, graphic design, colour schemes all help a series of events covering 43 art sites and 28 game venues feel coherent thanks to designers Deborah Sussman and Paul Prejza, and architect Jon Jerde.

- Amazon Echo (2016) has taken the screen and key based interface away from the computer to create a personal assistant that can be voice activated. Seven microphones pick up trigger words such as Alexa, Echo or Amazon to allow users to make requests about anything from the weather to the next bus.

- The oN-Line System (NLS) demonstration (1968) is retrospectively known as the 'mother of all demonstrations'. A keynote style demonstration that features such commonplace concepts as hyperlinks, shared documents and video conferencing, which at the time were unheard of.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS
There are many different aspects of the exhibition that can be explored – some sections allow students to interact with exhibits. Please look for interaction opportunities or ask staff if you are unsure of their location. The use of sketchbooks and pencils is welcomed in the gallery, and will support all of the suggested activities listed below. The following activity is a starting point for school and sixth form groups visiting the exhibition:

Design your own
Task A: As part of her Icon designs for the Apple Mac, 1984, Susan Kare used grid paper to draw out pixel designs for anything from a paintbrush, to a pair of scissors to a pointing hand in order to simplify the function to the user.

Get your class to use graph paper in order to design their own Icons for things around the corridor outside your classroom. It could be a pencil sign denoting where the classroom is or a fire extinguisher sign etc.

Task B: Originating on Japanese mobile phones in the late 1990s, emojis go global when Apple incorporates them into iOS 5. In a few years an initial library of just over 200 evolves into almost a thousand. Get your class to draw themselves as an emoji and create a class photo style display from their pictures.

Task C: California's hippy counterculture exists uneasily with the state's many motorcycle clubs. Motorcycle clubs apply 'colors' in the form of patches that identify membership, rank, territorial location and in some cases political views. Get your students to redesign their school uniform as a biker vest, complete with patches that identify the geographical location of the school and some other identifying factors.

BEFORE YOUR VISIT
Prepare your students by showing them some of the media content of the exhibition from video sharing websites.
1984 Apple Commercial – (1984) Director: Ridley Scott
Operation of the Machine speech – (1964) Audio only. Speaker: Mario Savio

EXHIBITION GUIDANCE
Objects in the exhibition are on open display rather than in cases. Care should be taken when moving around the exhibition and most objects should not be touched. Any objects that can be touched will be clearly signed. We would be grateful if you could brief your students accordingly.

Depending on your group and your itinerary for the visit, we would recommend that you set aside approximately 40 minutes to explore this exhibition.

This exhibition contains mature content.

Please ensure that you read our school visit Terms and Conditions document before making your visit.
https://designmuseum.org/schools-colleges-and-universities/selfguided-visit-terms-and-conditions

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Gallery Map

1. Say What You Want

2. Make What You Want

3. See what You Want

4. Go Where You Want

5. Join Who You Want

Entrance

CAR PLINTH

DUET

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION 3 PROJECTIONS

SAY

SEE

GO

MAKE

JOIN

Gallery policies:

No food and drink, water in closed bottles only
Rucksacks must be carried by side
Photography is encouraged, please no flash
No leaning on plinths or tables

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