QUARTERLY OF THE INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA **SUMMER 2016**

INNOVATION

The State of Design

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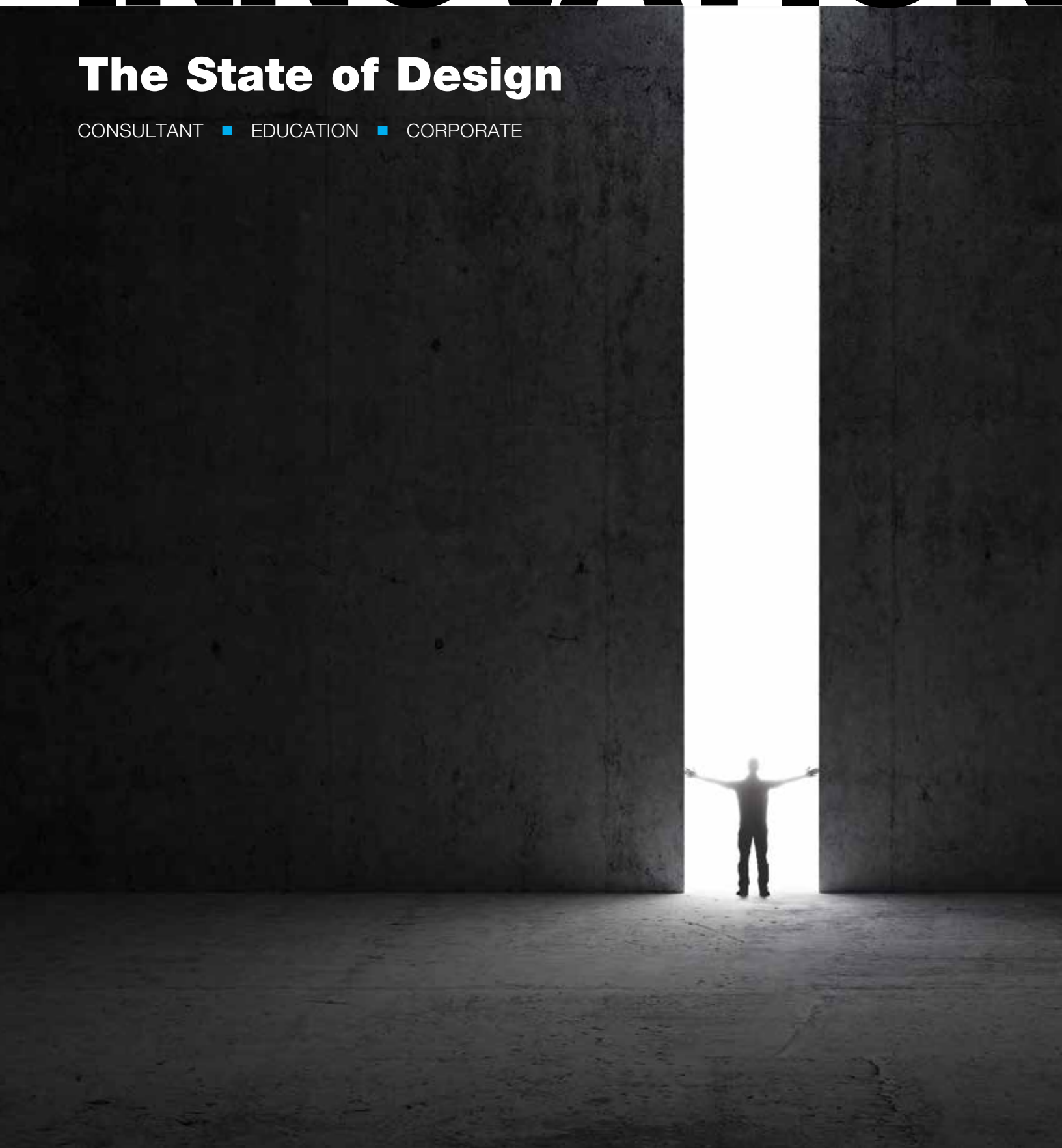

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The quarterly publication of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA), INNOVATION provides in-depth coverage of design issues and long-term trends while communicating the value of design to business and society at large.

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Advertisers' Index

STATE OF THE ART

Terminology and jargon can often be confusing. Take "leading edge," "bleeding edge" and "cutting edge." They usually mean "ahead of the curve" in some fashion. The term "state of the art," on the other hand, means, according to Wikipedia, "the highest level of general development, as of a device, technique, or scientific field achieved at a particular time. It also refers to such a level of development reached at any particular time as a result of the common methodologies employed at the time."

In this issue of INNOVATION, we explore the realm where something transitions from being on the edge to being common as well as the common methods in use in industrial design today. In the service of this effort, we turned to a cutting-edge design tool as a way of generating content: crowdsourcing. Instead of a small number of authors focusing on a single topic, we reached out to a large group of design experts to get a mixed and balanced view of the state of the art today in industrial design.

It's a big ask to profile the dimensions of the field in one issue. To do it we needed a tool, a framework, so we established three verticals—consultant, education and corporate—to encompass the perspective of most design initiatives. INNOVATION invited an equal amount of opinions from each area. We gave everyone a bookend as to how many words to use and invited suggestions for photos and submissions of original photos and art. Of course this is a nonscientific survey, as they say, but our ambition is to provide a fair cross section and distribution of perspectives from each of these three points of view.

This mix of ideas and impressions is made more important by the moment design finds itself in as it transforms before our eyes into the thing we always have hoped it would: the best way for business and society to thrive. Sure there are other ways, especially in business (for example, distribution, marketing, pricing), but these methods generally don't leave humanity better off in the wake of their executions. It has always been design's great value and, some would also argue, hubris, that we as a profession believe we can improve life and living through our method. It starts with identifying true a need and then uses the practice to answer that need. What could have more impact than that?

In *Valuing the Art of Industrial Design: A Profile of the Sector and Its Importance to Manufacturing, Technology, and Innovation*, the National Endowment for the Arts' seminal 2013 report, author Bonnie Nichols describes design as "a field with a large and extensive presence in our nation's manufacturing and services industries" and says that "designers are prolifically inventing new products, processes, and systems that have a profound impact on our economy and civil society." As an indicator of the state of the art of design, the report describes in detail "the growing movement of design thinking to social impact design" and calls for an expanded definition for industrial design. It points out that "today's industrial designers find themselves in a variety of roles and functions beyond the development of manufactured products. ... working on projects for a variety of organizations, from government entities to private enterprises. Using a creative lens for approaching complex problems or challenges (often referred to as the design process), designers are engaged by a range of clients to bring a fresh approach to age-old issues. Industrial designers are not just designing commercial products, but designing user experiences, processes, and systems by applying the creative approach of what has been come to be known as 'design thinking'."

The report suggests that "the idea to utilize the design process as a way to analyze and innovate has been widely embraced—from business schools to major consulting practices—and has changed the landscape of how industrial designers work." Of the expanding role industrial designers play, it says that "design thinking requires industrial designers to work on diverse teams to solve these more complex challenges. In a typical firm, a team might include an engineer, design strategist, marketer, and anthropologist, as well as software designers and developers, as products become more intelligent and responsive to media inputs."

This report is a spot-on analysis of the landscape of industrial design today. It suggests that designers now more than ever design less for clients and more for social causes and populations that need design but can't pay for it, and that education is "retooling" their curricula by creating hybrid programs focused more than ever on cross-functional understanding. It also calls out the current designer-as-

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entrepreneur trend, suggesting that “new funding platforms such as Kickstarter have enabled entrepreneurial designers to obtain capital to explore conceptual ideas and realize new inventions.”

On the origins of the term “state of the art,” Wikipedia notes that it was first used in 1910, as documented by the *Oxford English Dictionary,* in *Gas Turbine*, an engineering manual written by Henry Harrison Suplee. Specifically Suplee wrote: “In the present state of the art this is all that can be done.” According to Wikipedia, “The term, ‘art,’ itself refers to the useful arts, skills and methods relating to practical subjects such as manufacture and craftsmanship, rather than in the sense of the performing arts and the fine arts. Over time, use of the term increased in all fields where this kind of art has a significant role.”

It’s clear that industrial design has a significant role to play in the manufacture and craftsmanship of products and services as well as in promoting design as an art and a form of independent expression—an art that leaves us all better off in a meaningful way. We hope that after reading this issue of INNOVATION you will have a better sense of the state of the art of industrial design today.

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