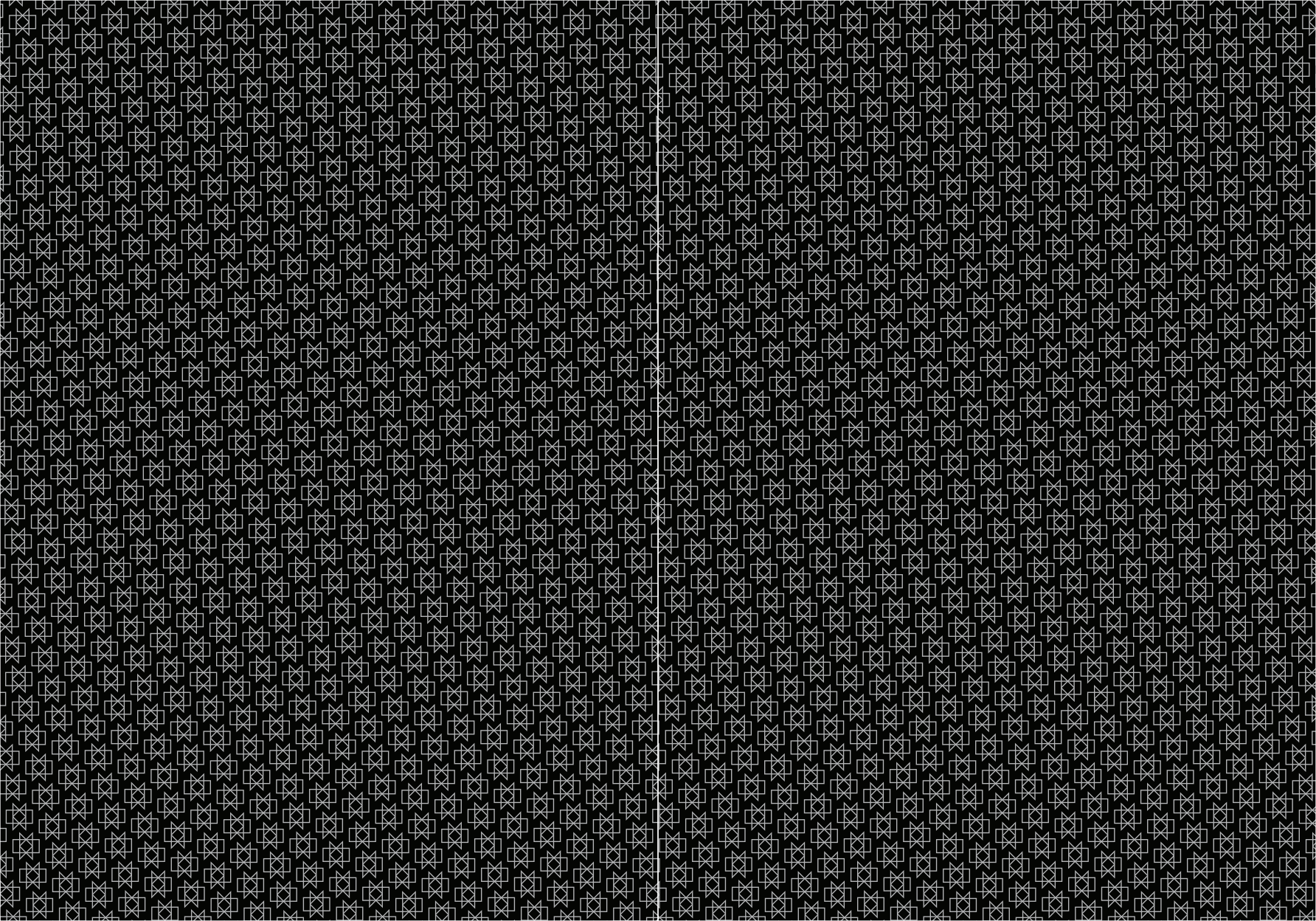


TELLART CULTURE





— .....  
NAME

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DATE

*Dedicated to every Tellerter*



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FOUNDED 2000

Steeple Street, Providence, Rhode Island

TELLART CULTURE

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## INTRODUCTION

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Tellart was founded as a modern base for the designer, a place where our team can live a safe, secure and happy life doing what we love.

Together we have created a condition of work where a group of people from all over the world can spend our days together practicing design. We have a community of talented peers to collaborate with. We have fabrication workshops that invite us to experiment with the newest materials and tools. We have clients who challenge and trust us to create beautiful things. We are paid to observe the world and find inspiration in everything around us. The work we create allows people to engage with the world in new ways that were not previously imagined. This is an incredible privilege.



## TELLART CULTURE

This company is steered by the passion and vision of the people who work here. Each and every person at Tellart brings a unique constellation of skills, interests and aspirations. This book is a reminder that each one of us plays a unique part in making Tellart what it is today and in charting the future. It explains why Tellart exists, what we believe in and how we act in the world.

## HISTORY

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Tellart was founded in 2000, at a time when software and networked connectivity began a rapid spread into products, buildings and cities. Graduating from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) with a traditional training in industrial design and film, Tellart's founders perceived an increasingly blurring boundary between the physical and digital. They saw that the design of material things could no longer be separated from the immaterial plane of digital behaviors. Data, networks and software-enabled interactions were poised to shape the reality of objects and spaces as much as their physical form.

The first office on Steeple Street overlooked the First Baptist Meetinghouse in Providence, a historic symbol of the city's centuries-old culture of risk-taking and free thinking. The founding team envisioned a new type of

studio where computation could exist fluidly alongside traditional materials like wood and metal, and where emerging technologies could be seamlessly incorporated into an ever-evolving palette.

The name Tellart means “the art of telling.” Tellart opened its doors as an information design studio, with the vision of integrating the physical and digital through culturally meaningful work. Even in the earliest web design projects, we used visual explanations to map complex information and reveal the immaterial aspects of digital projects. We also created interactive documentaries to engage audiences in ways not seen before on the Web. This impetus to probe the boundaries of technology while visualizing the complex and immaterial has remained a hallmark of Tellart’s work.

Major installations marked a turning point from web design to physical computing, bringing computation away from the screen and into the material fabric of the objects and spaces around us. It became clear that in order to design behaviors we needed new tools for sketching and prototyping.

We began hacking keyboards, mice and game controllers and then developed our own toolkits. In parallel we began teaching early physical computing courses at RISD to train a new generation of designers to work with digital materials. The single most important thing to us was to take in the natural world through sensors, transform it through computation, and pass new meaning out into the world in the form of physical experiences (light, sound and motion).

As the market matured, clients approached us to help them imagine future products. Rather than relying on design fiction, we developed working prototypes. Believing that the best way to explore ideas was to make them real, we called our approach “design nonfiction.” Our work moved into the realm of interactive products and immersive architectural-scale installations.

The next major turning point was *Chrome Web Lab*, a pioneering educational exhibition with Google that created a space for millions of people online to collaborate in real time with onsite visitors at Science Museum, London.



Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian National Design Museum then acquired our sand-drawing robot, along with its source code and hardware schematics, for their permanent collection. This set the stage for Tellart to collaborate with the Prime Minister's Office of the UAE on an ongoing series of *Museum of the Future* exhibitions for the World Government Summit in Dubai—immersive, multisensory experiences designed to help people imagine possible futures and engage in meaningful debate.

Our team today includes designers, architects, filmmakers and creative technologists in offices in Providence, Amsterdam, New York, San Francisco and Dubai. Tellart has been honored with the 2016 National Design Award in interaction design. The prize, conferred by Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, celebrates *"lasting achievement in American design ... in recognition of excellence, innovation, and enhancement of the quality of life."* We have reason to be proud of what we have built together, and to look ahead with a renewed sense of purpose and inspiration.

Design has changed in response to rapid and massive technological advances since the turn of the century. Our evolution as a studio has been shaped by, and has actively contributed to, several areas in creative culture including early physical computing, ubiquitous computing, quantified self, maker culture, interaction design, experience design, immersive multisensory storytelling and experiential futures.

As emerging technologies become increasingly complex and opaque, 21st Century designers will have a significant role to play as advocates for society. We must translate science and technology into forms people can experience and understand, empowering them to consider downstream implications and ultimately influencing decisions about the products, services and government policy we bring into the world today. As designers we have already incorporated the digital. Moving forward we will enter new areas that include advanced robotics, artificial Intelligence and synthetic biology.

While we cannot predict the future, we know that change will come fast and the challenges facing our world will require deep creativity and collaboration. Tellart's constant will be our culture. We will continue to create at the frontiers of technology, turning complexity into transformative and empowering experiences—striving always to make our planet and our human experience better through design.

## CULTURE

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*This is who we are and what we believe in*  
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**DESIGNERS BY NATURE** Design is not just a job—it is our way of viewing and acting in the world. We are by nature always probing, exploring, discovering. We find beauty and stimulation everywhere and our curiosity runs around the clock: at work, at home and at play. Every act of design brings us closer to the world and to ourselves. We hone each of our senses to become better observers, sensemakers, storytellers and meaning-makers.

**FUTURE-FOCUSED** We are driven to imagine and shape preferable futures for humanity and our planet. We want the products and experiences we design to have lasting positive impact. Each idea—each material thing we put into the world—enters a sensitive ecosystem with unexpected consequences, both positive and negative. We take this

responsibility seriously, respecting that any image we create of the future has great power to both limit and inspire our collective imagination.

**EXPLORERS** We approach the invisible and immaterial with the same mindset we apply to traditional physical materials. As new technologies emerge, we explore their unique characteristics and fold them into our material palette, advancing our understanding and craft through personal experimentation. We build our own tools and explore opportunities for design currently beyond the horizon of our clients' needs. We are curious and passionate about the potential of technology and always push ourselves to advance the boundaries of what is possible today, to create a favorable future.

**STORYTELLERS** We transform data (raw, unorganized facts) into information that is accessible, useful and meaningful. We make complex information easier to understand. We make what is invisible, visible. We give shape and structure to new and unfamiliar ideas. We repurpose and

reshape past ideas, presenting them in new light to enable fresh perspectives. Our stories are immersive—both physical and virtual, they engage all of the senses and involve our audience as actors.

**OPEN AND ENGAGED** We live in a time of rapid change. Collectively we face challenges of a complexity and scale that will require everyone to pool their knowledge, skills and creativity. We work within industry and academia. We collaborate with specialists, including would-be competitors. We continuously present our work and run workshops internationally. We regularly publish design plans and code to the open source community. We believe that open collaboration is the surest way for everyone to win.

**HUMAN CENTERED** We actively discover human needs—they are the spark of every project. We continuously study the physical, cognitive, emotional, cultural and social aspects of our audience through field work, prototyping, testing and refinement. Our work balances our responsibility to users with the best interests of our natural environment.



*This is how we conduct ourselves as a team*



**NEVER TOO LATE FOR BETTER** Tellart maintains the most exacting standards for quality in design and production. Rare, extreme quality is why people choose Tellart. Over and over again, we have accomplished what was previously thought impossible. We have done this by actively listening to our clients, maintaining a flexible mindset and committing to excellence at all times. When we are dealt hurdles and short-notice changes we turn them into creative challenges. When we are deep into a project and discover a better approach that involves sacrificing much of our prior work, we take the leap—because often a project that is 80% complete can be built from scratch in the 20% of time remaining, thanks to the deep understanding we have developed in the process.

**DESIGNING AIRPLANES IN FLIGHT** The unique nature of Tellart's work and clientele often calls for some degree of research, sketching, and concept development before a project is even awarded. Although it is understandable that clients need a certain level of clarity before engaging, this also has its drawbacks: it can prematurely lock us into a shared mental model of the final product, shortcutting the design process itself.

When a brief is open-ended both sides need to be adaptable, collaborative and clear communicators. It is important that our clients regard us as their advocate from the very first moment. They need to trust that when we sign up to work together, we share a common goal of getting all the possible value out of available resources. Where feasible, we begin by defining deliverables in terms of their underlying purpose, rather than form. This leaves space for really listening to users, thinking broadly while sketching, staying open to discoveries, and in some cases even redefining project goals. While it is not always possible to "design airplanes in flight," this approach very often

yields the most thoughtful, harmonious, efficient and effective designs.

**PURPOSE BEFORE TECHNOLOGY** We have created all kinds of wildly complex custom technology solutions for projects; our expert ability to do this remains one of our core strengths. However, we don't pursue technology for technology's sake. Design is about matching a need with a solution. When the solution is best achieved with existing parts and code, we choose to integrate and adapt. When the necessary technology truly does not exist, we actively mobilize our own R&D to create it.

**PROTOTYPE TO DISCOVER** Sketching and prototyping are essential to Tellart's practice. They are a critical part of how we collaborate and develop ideas. While most great design work finds its inspiration in client and user needs, technologies that suggest a purpose can also provide a fruitful starting point. By sketching with technological materials we often discover new opportunities that shift how we approach a design challenge. "Looks like" and

“works like” prototypes also allow multidisciplinary teams to work creatively together. They enable us to probe the possibility space, validate our assumptions and identify valuable insights.

**TEACHING IS LEARNING** To teach something we need to understand it well. An experienced designer reads a design solution and deconstructs the dynamics at play; a good teacher creates exercises that help students practice, make and fix mistakes, and discover unintended outcomes. These are similar mindsets. We believe that design and teaching mutually reinforce each other. Most of Tellart’s early tools and design philosophies were developed in the classrooms of top design schools including RISD, Umeå Institute of Design (UID) and Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design (CIID).

Every Tellarter has valuable things to teach, and together we always seek out these opportunities as a way to develop our teammates as well as ourselves. Tellart encourages all team members to teach workshops and courses as a form of professional development.



*This is what we expect of ourselves and of each other*



**PERSONAL EXCELLENCE** Tellart is an all-star team. By nature, we contribute to the future of our discipline, continuously develop our skills and strive to be the best we can possibly be. The deeper we dig into the materials, tools and theories of our areas of interest, the stronger the voice we can bring to a project. We are not only a company of Makers. We build hardcore technology and are also curious, articulate thinkers who invent things that never existed before. This requires more than just workshop skills. It requires knowledge about people and the world.

Everyone in the studio has a responsibility to fuel their own self-development, and the studio has a responsibility to support them. Every team member is encouraged to pursue continuing education and extracurricular activities.

Senior team members work to provide inspiration, motivation and support to every member of Tellart so that they may be at their most creative and productive for the good of the entire team.

**COMMUNICATION** Good communication is critical to fruitful collaboration. Tellart prizes a communication style that is concise, concrete and collegial. *Concise* means being brief and to the point. *Concrete* means being definite, specific and vivid. *Collegial* means creating an atmosphere that is collaborative and friendly.

Each of us is on a mission to achieve our personal best. We actively develop our communication skills through verbal expression, writing, drawing, photography and model making. Every Tellarter can sketch—this is not about representational figure drawing, but an easy fluency with communicating ideas visually.

**EXPLORING PERSONAL LIMITS** It is good to work at the edge of our experience. Every Tellarter is encouraged to learn and try new things. We each have a comfort zone

composed of unique skills and strengths. We have a few things we are *competent* at—things we can do reliably and unsupervised, to a high standard. We have several things we *understand*—concepts we can explain to others but have yet to develop competence in. We have many things we are *aware of*—things we know exist but have yet to deeply experience and understand.

If we find ourselves reaching the limits of our competence and understanding in a project, we raise our hand. We will never be faulted for this and will always be supported. We never risk a late finish or falling short of the extremely high standard of quality that Tellart insists on and is capable of. Instead, we love our limits, treat them as opportunities for growth, and always ask for the guidance we need.





*This is how we advance*



**BUILD PROJECTS AROUND TEAMS, NOT TEAMS AROUND PROJECTS** Beyond the shared physiology of the senses, we each perceive and act on the world through our personal set of experiences, skills and attitudes. Every design project is shaped by the specific individuals who work on it. Just as tools leave marks on the things they shape, so do people. This is something we embrace at Tellart. The team forms the project, not the other way around.

**DESIGN THE COMPANY AROUND EMPLOYEES** In addition to building projects around teams, we also build the company around employees. Every person at Tellart is here because they are exceptional at what they do, because they want to improve the world through design, and because they like working together. Team members'

## TELLART CULTURE

families are a major part of their life experience and are welcomed as an honored extension to the team.

Many unique and talented individuals have helped grow this studio since its founding in 2000. Tellart evolves with each new person who joins. Every Tellarter, from intern to senior-most leader, influences how we navigate—the projects we take on, the R&D we embark on and how we grow our team.

**You are an important part of this. Your skills, interests and dreams matter. They are a core part of Tellart's direction. Please share them. Together we will shape the present and chart our course to the future we believe in.**



PUBLISHED

October 2016 on the occasion of receiving the  
National Design Award  
from Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum

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ILLUSTRATION

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