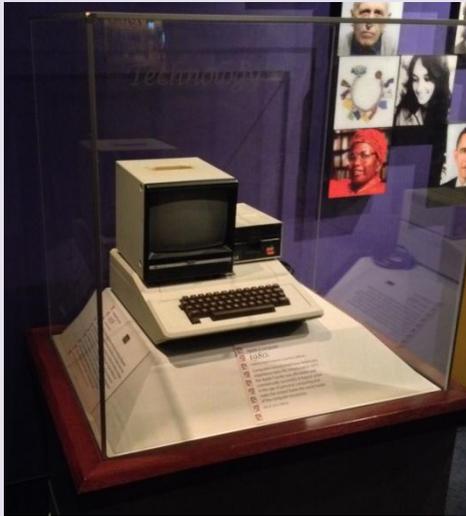


## Why Is This Here?

# A Study of How the Responsive Practice of Contemporary Collecting Computer-Based Technology Has Fostered Agile Curatorial Expertise at the Smithsonian Institution

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### Appearances Are Deceiving

While the Apple II Computer (above) is instantly recognizable, the self-driving vehicle 'Stanley' (below) is less easily identifiable as computer technology.



### Curating Computer-Based Technology

The main objective of this study is to investigate how the curatorial staff at the history and technology museums of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC have collected and exhibited objects that contain computer-based technology. What is emerging is an agile, distributed, and sustainable model of curatorship, one that has been honed by a long tradition of technology-related collection stewardship and one that is fully prepared to answer the challenges posed by computer-based technology, revealing the museum as a trusted source for context and clarity in a rapidly evolving world.

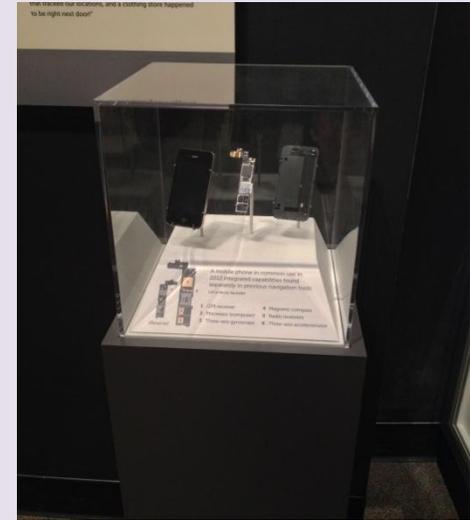
### Contemporary Collecting and Collection Stewardship

Contemporary collecting can be seen as a continuing contribution to the greater tradition of collection stewardship in which curators and collection managers actively and conscientiously participate. Museum collections are meant to last beyond the span of a human lifetime, which means that any given museum collection will have a specific history of curatorial staff responsible for it. These staff members, in turn, understand that they are part of a tradition that will continue on after their time at the institution. Contemporary collecting offers opportunity for current curators and historians to assist their future counterparts.

### Agile, Distributed, and Sustainable Expertise

When the curator [t]o collect contemporarily, he or she is actively shaping collective knowledge by what they chose to preserve. As shown in the panels on either side, computer-based technology poses challenges for which there is no museum precedent, prompting Smithsonian curators to find solutions using a model of expertise that is:

- Agile (able to meet the unfamiliar with creativity)
- Distributed (equally shared between museum professionals, field experts and museum visitors)
- Sustainable (preserved in a way that is beneficial for the next generation of collection stewards)



### What Is Inside Is What That Matters

Software poses a challenge both in developing straightforward display techniques for current audiences and in preserving digital data in a meaningful way for future generations.

