

News / USA

Robots Drive, Swarm, Jump into Smithsonian Collection

Museum acquires milestone pieces of robotic history

[Print](#) [Email](#) [Comment](#)



Created by 'Star Wars' filmmaker George Lucas, C-3PO is among the most famous of all science-fiction robots.

Rosanne Skirble

TEXT SIZE

Last updated on: May 22, 2011 8:00 PM

C-3PO of "Star Wars" movie fame lives here. So, does his side-kick R2D2. They are part of the robot collection at the [National Museum of American History](#) in Washington.

Curator Carlene Stephens says even though these androids are just movie props, they represent something much more. "They have a long history. And, as a history museum, they fit directly into our interest in things relating to industry, things relating to invention and innovation."

MULTIMEDIA



Video
Skirble Video Report

Audio

Skirble Audio Report

[Listen](#) [Playlist](#)

Missing Plug-in

Among Stephens' favorites is a 450-year old carved wood figure from Germany. The intricately designed object, less than 40 centimeters tall, is a kind of prototype [robot](#) from the mechanical age.

"It looks like a figure of a monk and it rolls across the floor, simulating

MORE USA NEWS



Guitar Hero
American Folk Legend Doc Watson Dies



Revved Up
China Beats US as Top World Auto Market



Pakistani Doctor Jailed for Militant Ties, Not Helping CIA



Romney Clinches Republican Nomination



Polished
Nail Business Booms in Weak Economy



Facebook Stock Falls Below \$30 a Share



Romney Clinches Nomination with Win in Texas Republican Primary



US: No Commando Spies in North Korea



US Expels Syrian Diplomat Over Houla Massacre



Ocean Blue
Clothing Company Ties Sales to Ocean Cleanup



Top 5 Posts That Might Change How You See the World

[More](#)

Top 5 Posts of the Year

[More](#)

walking, simulating the mea culpa and simulating rising a crucifix to its lips and kissing it," says Stephens. "All the while, he's rolling across the floor his eyes are moving side to side."

Missing Plug-in

Worldwide, more than six million robots labor on factory assembly lines and perform military service. Among the robots in the museum is [PackBot](#), a remote controlled minesweeper that's also used in surveillance operations by U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Then there is the driverless car, named [Stanley](#), that raced more than 200-plus kilometers across southern California's Mojave Desert to win the \$2 million [DARPA](#) Challenge.

"I had to take a chance that Stanley is going to represent a key moment in the history of American technology that indicates the future of driving," says Stephens. "Stanley at this moment influences driving of the future. Already we have cars that park themselves, that have collision avoidance systems. Stanley is in this stream of inventive outpouring."

That stream of inventive outpouring has helped generate new gifts to the museum. [Bruce Hall](#), the president of a California-based company called [Velodyne](#), came to the Smithsonian with an assortment of electronic sensors and obstacle-detection devices that were invented by his brother Dave and deployed on robotic vehicles in DARPA Challenge races. He says the HDL-64 is a game-changer.

Missing Plug-in

International Students and US Employment

[More](#)

It's Not Too Late To Get Admission for the Fall

[More](#)

An 'A' Won't Get You a Career, But a Good Education Might

[More](#)

[Read more](#)



TED LANDPHAIR'S AMERICA

The Golden Gate Bridge — A Diamond Over the Rough

[More](#)

The Empire State Building: No. 2 in New York, 1 in Our Hearts

[More](#)

On California's Royal Road, Traces of 'New Spain'

[More](#)

Heart of the Heartland

[More](#)

So You Want to be Famous!

[More](#)

[Read more](#)

Most Viewed

1. Egyptians Outraged Over Presidential Poll Results
2. White House Responds to Report on Obama's Role in Targeted Killings
3. Liberia's Taylor Sentenced to 50 Years for War Crimes
4. South Sudan Questions Khartoum's Sincerity as Peace Talks Resume
5. Aung San Suu Kyi Starts Landmark Bangkok Visit

Most Emailed

Most Discussed

“It contains 64 lasers. So we have all this: about 2.5 million points of data per second - distance points per second - around the vehicle. So it gives us a complete understanding of everything going on around us so we can make intelligent navigation decisions.”

Hall says his company's innovation could make its way into safety features and eventually, the brothers believe, to robotic cars and trucks. “You will see advancements, I believe in our lifetimes, when you tell (the car) to drive somewhere and it will take you there.”

Barry Spletzer, former senior scientist at [Sandia National Laboratories Intelligence Systems and Robotics Center](#), was “nothing short of astonished” to have his miniature robots in the Smithsonian. “It was just a project to see how small we could make robots.”

Spletzer came to the museum with a gift box of mini-robots that include the [Miniature Autonomous Robotic Vehicle or MARV](#) and other tiny offshoots. “They are historically significant because we have the world’s smallest robot. We have the world’s highest-hopping robot. We have several cooperative, ‘swarm’ robots. These are all advances in technology in the last 10 to 15 years.”

Spletzer says these robotic technologies are finding uses in space exploration, medicine, and security systems. Museum Curator Carlene Stephens hopes the donated robots and others that follow will remind the public about the important role science and technology play in everyday life.

[Print](#) [Email](#) [Comment](#)

[Tweet](#) 0

[Recommend](#) 0

0

YOU MAY LIKE



Controversy Follows Comments on Military Operations in N. Korea

Top US military official's description of intelligence in North Korea's activities sparks concern in the region [More](#)



China Cracks Down Following Tibetan Immolations

Sources tell VOA there have been undetermined number of arrests as Chinese authorities seek to control spread of anti-government protests [More](#)



Obama Administration Defends Afghanistan Withdrawal Timeline

Secretary of Defense Panetta says US will continue to work with Afghans on counter-terrorism and continue to provide training, assistance, guidance [More](#)

This forum has been closed.

Comments

There are no comments in this forum. Be first and add one

SERVICES: [Podcast](#) [RSS](#) [Mail Subscription](#) [Mobile](#)

VOAnews.com

[USA](#)

[Africa](#)

[Asia](#)

[Mideast](#)

[Europe](#)

[Americas](#)

[Science & Technology](#)

[Health](#)

[Arts & Entertainment](#)

[Business & Economy](#)

[Blogs](#)

[Video](#)

[Editorials](#)

About VOA

[Inside](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Job Opportunities](#)

[Terms of Use/Privacy Policy](#)

[Our Languages](#)

Our Partners

[RFE/RL](#)

[Radio Free Asia](#)

[MBN](#)

[Radio Marti](#)

Our Broadcasts

[Frequencies and Schedules](#)

[Radio Programs](#)

[TV Shows](#)