CASE CARDS

WHAT ARE THE IDEAS FOR NEW EXHIBITION DESIGN AND NEW EXHIBITION FORMATS?

FUTURE MUSEUM
Description

The Mauritshuis, a Dutch art museum housing mostly Dutch seventeenth-century paintings, is named after Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen (1604-1679), a governor of Dutch Brazil connected to the transatlantic slave trade. In 2018, the Mauritshuis removed a replica of Johan Maurits’ bust from the foyer of the museum. This evoked a polarised public discussion about colonialism, slavery and heritage, especially heated in view of the upcoming elections in the Netherlands, and resulted in a so-called Twitter-war between public, Dutch media and politicians. The media storm was especially controversial, since the museum did not just take away the statue to silence the question, but developed the whole new permanent exhibition dedicated to Maurits which told his story in the most cohesive way, with all facts and assumptions concerning his biography.

Nevertheless, to respond to the Twitter storm, Mauritshuis brought the conversation inside of the museum, and in 2019, presented the exhibition “Shifting Image — In Search of Johan Maurits”. The exhibition was aimed at tracing and examining the perceptions of Johan Maurits’ role in the Dutch colony in Brazil in the seventeenth century and presenting various perspectives the topic conveyed and multiple readings of Johan Maurits’ figure. The selection of artworks for the exhibition consisted of works from the museum’s collection, namely of Johan Maurits’ portraits and paintings from artists who travelled with him to Dutch Brazil. The main question, the museum focused on while working on the exhibition’s concept was “as an art museum, how do you tell the sensitive story of a national hero with a slave-trading past, that simultaneously is the namesake of the museum, and therefore cannot be separated from the institute?”

The exhibition comprised the following exhibition design elements which helped to underline the problematic character of the topic:

- Twitter-quotes “depicting the clash between the progressive and the conservative opinions about the removed statue” projected on a wall made of 3D copies of Maurits’ bust;
- a graphic timeline providing visitors with an overview of information about Johan Maurits’ life and work;
- three wall-to-wall projections telling the story of Johan Maurits’ life but also showing provoking images connected to the topic of slavery;
- new captions for the selected artworks written by curators, historians, art historians, anthropologists, biologists, opinion makers, performers and politicians (55 new object labels, written by 46 different people);
- the labels presented interactively in a carousel on Ipads in no specific order to avoid hierarchy.

Studio Louter, Amsterdam-based exhibition design agency, comment on the captions created for the exhibition and reveal that in order to make sure that all authors could share their authentic narrative, there was a minimum of editing; all authors stayed in charge of the contents of their texts. Every text was signed with the name of the author and accompanied with her biography and a photo. No anonymous “institutional” texts were provided. Offering exhibition visitors 55 different object labels, Studio Louter were aimed at showing that not only through time the meaning or interpretation of a painting can change, but also depending on the viewpoint and backgrounds of people who behold them. As an example, the studio bring the painting “Girl by a High Chair” by Govert Flinck. One writer pays particular attention to the pictured wealthy Dutch girl, another focuses on the artistic skill of the painter, someone else notices the bits of sugar next to her hand, a 17th-century luxury and a product of slavery.

Research project

“Shifting Image” exhibition was accompanied by the academic research project “Revisiting Dutch Brazil and Johan Maurits”. The project focused on historical (archival) research into the Johan Maurits’s time as governor in Brazil, with an emphasis on subjects of his role in the
transatlantic slave trade between West and Central Africa and Brazil that before now have been given little attention. The research was led by Dr. Erik Odegard, who obtained his doctorate in 2018 with the thesis focusing on the career path of Johan Maurits.

Interestingly, it was museum’s conscious step to launch the exhibition before the research project. With this, museum’s team wanted to look into visitors’ interests and opinions first and, based on them, to delve into the research. Thus, the visitors of the exhibition could shape the research by voting on the questions and topics they would like the research team to investigate.

According to Hedwig Wösten, Mauritshuis’ Project Manager, “Shifting Image” was the first exhibition to make the museum feel really vulnerable but also to take this vulnerability as an advantage. The museum’s aim wasn’t to talk to opposing political parties, but instead, to reach out to the people in between and to have a conversation with them which would allow for multiple views and perspectives. The exhibition wasn’t a museum’s way to talk about itself but rather to encourage people to talk about the museum. The most important goal of this exhibition, according to Hedwig Wösten, was to make people feel whatever their feelings were, no matter if it was anger, happiness or sadness.

Visitor feedback
The museum was very approachable in terms of gathering the feedback on the exhibition. The staff members were open in sharing their contact details to answer any questions that the visitors had and, by this, to shift the discussion from Twitter to the institution. The exhibition was also accompanied by lectures and discussions during which all the staff was available to talk to.

How the exhibition informed the further approach
Hedwig Wösten underlines that the experience with “Shifting Image” exhibition helped the museum to learn to be more emotional and honest. When the historical facts are unknown or controversial, it is totally normal to say to the visitors directly: we don’t know but we can discuss it. Among other things, this approach influenced the exhibition for families and kids “Hello Vermeer!” within which the museums is not occupying the space of the first-person narrator but rather suggests topic for the discussion. Within “Hello Rembrandt!” the museum told the whole story of Rembrandt, but with “Hello Vermeer” the museum is not afraid to say: we don’t know the whole truth.

Additionally, Hedwig highlights that Mauritshuis’ collection doesn’t expand a lot, and this is exactly the chance to start experimenting with formats, dedicating time to keep telling the stories of the museum and of the collection.

Studio Louter’s case overview
The video about the exhibition concept and design

Mauritshuis’ exhibition practice comprises other curious examples of exhibition formats such as the following.

− Real-time restoration process open to the visitors

The Girl in the Spotlight

In 2018, Mauritshuis held an in-depth scientific examination of the “Girl with a Pearl Earring” by Johannes Vermeer. This became the first research after the one held in 1994, during a conservation treatment. The project “The Girl in the Spotlight” made use of the latest technologies and scanning techniques to investigate the canvas, pigments, oil and other materials that Vermeer used to create his painting.

For visitors, the project was a unique opportunity to witness the scientific examination of a world-famous painting. In order to make the research process visible and accessible to visitors, the Mauritshuis put up the studio (the glass cabin) where the researchers worked right in the exhibition space. The work done under the microscope was transmitted into the big screen so that the visitors could see all the details of the process. The project was accompanied by the series of public lectures. As the final part of the project, Mauritshuis’ team made the results of “The Girl in the Spotlight” research project available for the public.

− Single-object exhibitions

“Alone with Vermeer” exhibition is a special example of a single-piece exhibition which allowed visitors to spend 10 minutes in front of one of the most well-known Vermeer’s works “The View on Delf”. During a pre-booked slot, “visitors had the opportunity — either alone or in a
very small group — to experience in silence the effect that this very special artwork has on them”. To make the experience engaging and intimate, the exhibition was supported by the subtle design, special lighting and blockage of external sounds or distractions. The artwork was displayed on a sitting level, 50 cm away from the couch, in the space with no guards. To make the experience even more immersive the lighting was specially programmed reacting to the movements and adjusting correspondingly. The museum’s team recall that the exhibition had a particularly strong impact on visitors. According to Hedwig Wösten, it was a highly technology-driven exhibition but, due to the strong effect of the format, the visitors probably didn’t even notice it. “Alone with Vermeer” was created during the Corona time, and its format was attuned to the distancing measures and the limitation of visitation. The exhibition was created in a 3-month timeframe.

— Specially designed exhibitions for families and children

“Hello Rembrandt!” was the hands-on exhibition for families with children aged from 3 to 11. The exhibition offered interactive activities for children of all ages and invited visitors to learn all about Rembrandt’s life and art. Younger children had a chance to play with light and shadow, learn how to mix colours, discover hidden layers in Rembrandt’s paintings and dress up, just like Rembrandt did for his self-portraits. For children from 7 to 11 years, the focus was on learning about Rembrandt’s painting technique through the interactive experiences such as working with 3D prints of paintings and looking for the unique light in Rembrandt’s paintings in a special photo booth. The exhibition was also equipped by the timeline giving visitors an insight into Rembrandt’s life.

— Exhibitions aimed at collection popularisation through making it more accessible

The exhibition “In and Out in Storage” held in Mauritshuis in 2016 displayed works which are usually hidden from the public view. It comprised twenty-five paintings from museum’s storage and was aimed at answering some frequently asked questions about museum’s collection (concerning the kinds of paintings that are kept in storage, the reason for their ending up there, etc). The exhibition presented not only best works hidden in storage but also of “worst works which [were] taken off their racks especially for the occasion”. The storage pieces were all selected by the museum’s team. The interactive element of the exhibition presupposed visitors choosing their own favourite work which had to also get on display. Thus, the most popular painting at the end of the exhibition was given a temporary place in the Mauritshuis’ permanent collection.

— Exhibitions evoking new ways of perception of artworks

The most current Mauritshuis’ exhibition “Smell the Art: Fleeting — Scents in Colour” is on view until August 2021. Within it, the visitors are invited to “smell the 17th century”. The exhibition focuses not only on the visual dimension of paintings but, mainly, on the scents these paintings evoke. Via (covid-safe) dispensers, visitors are able to experience various smells represented in the art, both fragrant and disgusting (of the linen, herbs, canals). In total, the team behind the exhibition recreated 8 smells. Interestingly, the idea for the press kit accompanying the marketing campaign has unexpectedly became an integral part of the exhibition — “the first interactive virtual see-and-smell tour in the world”. The kit is now available online and comprises 4 smells and a tour through the exhibition. Within the digital tour, Dutch culinary journalist Joël Broekaert and Mauritshuis’ curator Ariane van Suchtelen take virtual visitors
through artworks of the exhibition. At the same time, the fragrance box (the part of the kit) contains scent pumps which allow to smell the scents at the same time when they appear in the tour. The fragrance box is now available in museum’s webshop and costs € 20.

This virtual experience has gained quite a popularity and is already sold more than 1000 times to the US and 500 within the Netherlands.

Benefits

− a careful and cohesive approach to “Shifting Image” exhibition format and design allowed to turn the media fuss and pressure into the successful marketing campaign;
− turning the modest scale of museum’s collection into the advantage as constant search for new ways and formats to present it allow for more experimentation.

Challenges

Studio Louter underline that “Shifting Image – In Search of Johan Maurits” was an in-depth exhibition and required more meaningful visitor participation.

Costs & Timeframe

Design and production took the period of July 2018 — April 2019.

Additional info & comments

Among Shifting Image – In Search of Johan Maurits’ awards:

EdAwards 2020, Exhibition Design category
International Design Excellence Award 2020, Public Space Design category
Museums + Heritage Award 2020, The International Project of the Year < £1m
Muse Design Awards 2019, Interior Design Exhibits, Pavilions, & Exhibitions

Response in press:

“Een toverformule”, de Volkskrant — 14 June 2019
“Op zoek naar de echte Johan Maurits”, Historiek.nl — 20 April 2020
“De vele gezichten van Johan Maurits”, Historisch Nieuwsblad — 9 April 2019
“De Suikerklontjes van Johan Maurits”, NRC — 3 April 2019

Involved Parties

Studio Louter (Content Design, Interactive Media Production), OPERA Amsterdam (Spatial & Graphic Design), Mette Menting (Film Production), Hans Wolff & Partners (Light Design), Fiction Factory (Construction), BeamSystems BV (Hardware).

Contacts

Mauritshuis:
Hedwig Wösten
Project Manager
h.wosten@mauritshuis.nl

Studio Louter:
info@studiolouter.nl
Franka Schaap
Operational Director, Senior Project Manager
franka@studiolouter.nl
Description

Encouraging people to discover new things is the core of NEMO’s exhibition practice. According to the museum, the spirit of self-discovery that defines NEMO is even reflected in the building, that has been its home since 1997, with its eye-catching exterior recognisable from afar and with its restrained interior which minimises the distraction from the content of exhibitions.

On five floors at NEMO, visitors are invited to experience how science works and learn more about the technology. Each of the NEMO’s floors offer a special exhibition:

- in “Fenomena”, on the first floor, visitors are welcomed to explore the principles of science and investigate the natural phenomena like light, sound and static electricity; they are also offered to join a scientific research within Science Live space;
- “Technium”, the exhibition on the second floor of NEMO, offers some practical experiences to the visitors inviting to design, make, test and improve simple technical products in the maker space; the exhibition helps to explore such topics as the power of water, energy sources and technology;
- “Elementa” on the third floor invites visitors to learn about the building blocks of the cosmos offering such interactive experiences as going back in time to the Big Bang, discovering cosmic rays and performing experiments in the laboratory;
- in “Humania”, on the fourth floor, visitors can experience everything about themselves through numerous exhibits and stations and get answers to the various questions about the human body and nature.

However, if to speak about the most peculiar exhibition format offered by NEMO, it is important to mention “Energetica”, the exhibition boasting an exceptional location on the museum’s roof. The terrace of the NEMO Science Museum building is the highest city square in the Netherlands and, apart from the interactive exhibition, hosts a public space, designed to provide visitors an opportunity to rest and watch the view, and a restaurant.

NEMO reveal that when museum’s architect Renzo Piano designed the roof, his aim was to create a real piazza (city square). It was in the initial Renzo’s conception that the interaction should be the most important element of the piazza, with the full scope for the interplay between people and the elements. Another peculiar Piano’s architectural move is so-called water cascade in the centre of the rooftop square. Every day 4000 litres of water flow through 30 pools and receptacles on NEMO’s roof offering all kinds of fun during the summer months.

The design of the exhibition was developed by the Berlin-based spacial communications studio Archimedes. The studio underline that drawing on the original concept of the creative agency Northern Light, they refined the exhibition design of “Energetica” and customised the exhibits according to the weather conditions before assembling them on-site. The hands-on installations were made highly interactive and enabling visitors to create rainbows, to illuminate high-tech sunloungers with the help of thermochromatic colours or to fly a kite in the wind park. Presenting the case in their portfolio, Archimedes point out: “Energetica is about power, but also about finesse and awareness for self-sustaining energy supply which will be ever more important in the future. Accordingly, the exhibits are part of nature but high-tech at the same time. The result is a fascinating contrast that changes in the course of the seasons and in dialogue with the audience, constantly recreating new social and natural spaces.”

Thus “Energetica” exhibition is dedicated to the elements, wind, water and sun, which are made tangible in a playful way through interactive exhibits. The exhibition “dynamically reacts to the interplay between visitor and nature: the available energy of wind and sun is directly shown by water fountains with which the visitors can compete by demonstrating their own strength”. Visitors can interact with the installations at so-called islands, special wooden areas on the roof where specific exhibits are installed.
— Wind Island (visitors can watch the wind turbine in action and interact with two special sculptures that move in the wind; additionally, energy, generated by wind turbines, power the Water Cascade fountains);

— Solar Island (shows three special chairs, covered with a film of solar cells which, if turned to face the sunlight, generate even more energy for the Water Cascade fountains than wind turbines; the LED displays built into each chair show how much energy they are supplying);

— The Viewpoint (a special space on the rooftop offering an impressive panorama of Amsterdam).

NEMO’s Rooftop Square is open every Tuesday to Sunday between 10.00 and 17.30. It is freely accessible for everyone and can be reached either from the stairs at street level or by lift from the central hall in the NEMO building. The admission to the space is free and does not require booking in advance. There is no access to the roof in inclement weather, during special events and holidays.

NEMO’s TripAdvisor’s reviews show an extremely high popularity of the rooftop terrace.

**Benefits**

NEMO took a bold decision to transform its roof, the highest point of the city, into the accessible and welcoming public space that offers visitors educational and highly interactive content and, additionally, invites them to relax and tackle the museum fatigue watching a beautiful view of the city. As such, the space becomes relevant for various audience segments, both tourists and locals, adults and children.

**Additional info & comments**

NEMO’s architecture

Founded in 1923 as the Labour Museum, NEMO is hosting since 1997 in a five-story building located in Amsterdam’s Docklands. The oxidized copper-clad iconic building was designed to resemble a ship at anchor in the middle of the old port. Both the building’s shape and structure (made in concrete and steel) were conditioned by a large vehicular tunnel the museum sits upon.

**Involved Parties**

Archimedes (design, fashion, science, technology and engineering)
Contacts

**NEMO Science Museum:**
Jeannine van der Vooren
HR Advisor/Office Management
directiesecretariaat@e-nemo.nl

**Archimedes:**
info@archimedes-exhibitions.de

---

Up on the roof at NEMO
Atelier Brückner, is a Stuttgart-based creative studio, focused on conceiving and designing “narrative architecture and spaces for brands, exhibitions, trade fairs and museums”. In their portfolio, Atelier hold the most exciting exhibition design concepts realised with and for multiple and various organisations and institutions covering the widest geographic spectrum. Some of the collaborations are with Shenzhen Urban Planning Museum (Shenzhen), The Lindt Home of Chocolate (Zurich), German Steam Locomotive Museum (Neuenmarkt), National Aquarium Denmark (Copenhagen), Hyundai Motor Company (Goyang), King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Dhahran), etc. Overall, Atelier Brückner realised 155 projects worldwide.

Atelier Brückner’s creative process is based on the “autonomous scenographic methodology” which comprises “a set of instructions and navigation system” serving as “a strategy for the creative process and the work of design”. This methodology implies approaching even the most complex projects in a well-mediated, structured way which presupposes developing a plot, a storyboard and “orchestral score”. According to Atelier Brückner, the work on a project encompasses the “analysis and consulting” stage which entails visitor research, strategic planning, feasibility study, benchmarking, master planning, budgeting and “creating vision and concept” stage which presupposes long-term visioning and creating so-called “partiture” of the project (the exhibition design concept encompassing the prologue, acts and epilogue).

Information on Demand

Information-on-demand strategy, developed by Atelier Brückner, enables visitors to decide themselves when to receive the information, as well as to choose the type and the amount of information that is offered via the media. The approach implies “the differentiated and suitably prepared layers of information” from which the visitors can “intuitively pick out the new knowledge they want on the basis of their individual needs and in line with their personal experiential horizon”. Atelier Brückner emphasise that “due to this individual acquisition and sustained experience of the content, the recipients are each assigned a role that they reinforce as a result of their interaction with the scenography”.

Archaeology in Switzerland exhibition

Swiss National Museum, 2016

Atelier Brückner’s role: exhibition design, scenography, general planning

“Archeology in Switzerland” entails the design principles around which Atelier Brückner’s practice is centred: the flexibility of technology, immersiveness of experiences, layering of the information provided to visitors, plot/experience adaptation to the interests of visitors. All of these elements make the exhibition design highly responsive and adaptable.

The exhibition offers there themed spaces: “Terra”, “Homo” and “Natura” showing 1,300 objects of Helvetian archaeology. The central exhibition area “Homo” offers an overview of more than 100,000 years of human history with artefacts from the Palaeolithic to the Early Middle Ages visualising different epochs. “Natura” reveals the human impact on nature as well as the interaction of humankind and environment. “Terra” shows the reference between the exhibit and location.

Exhibition design highlights

− the visitors walk underneath the Swiss landscape, a topographic model hovering in space, consisting of 3000 individual parts;
− the visitors discover artifacts with movable interactive screens installed on the glass display which offer detailed information on highlighted objects (material, date, description, photos);
7 highlights of museum’s collection (objects) are separated from the chronological arrangement and staged in the centre of the exhibition space in the glass displays; the film projections demonstrated on their background show the history of these objects;

- the Highlights collection is visually connected by the floor graphic and is marked by specially set lighting;
- the audience can become the part of the exhibition by sitting inside one of the glass showcases;
- visitors research artifacts at 7 thematic stations which offer hands-on interactions allowing to trigger the additional scenes connected to the topic in a life-scale projection.

Undeniably, one of the most engaging technological solutions which ensure “information-on-demand” function within the exhibition is movable screens (scanners) which, sliding through the glass display, offer multi-layered information about the objects which visitors wish to explore. Overall there are 25 objects, marked by the light, which can be investigated with the scanner.

Among the benefits the information-on-demand option ensures:

- an opportunity to compactly place the wide range of information in three languages and present it in a highly interactive way;
- allowing visitors to not only control the amount of the information they receive but to compare it when getting acquainted with different exhibits;
- compatibility with the CMS platforms allowing to easily insert changes or additional layers of information.

Museum team underline that among the benefits of the given solution, there is the opportunity to optimise the exhibition space since the objects are displayed not horizontally on the display tables but vertically, on the wall, while the information about them is contained within a movable screen. To help visitors use the screens and other interactive elements of the exhibition, the short instructions are presented in the videos in the exhibition space.
The main concept of the exhibition “Archeology in Baden” implies the extension of the role of visitors through giving them the unprecedent access to the museum’s exhibits. Within the exhibition, Badisches Landes Museum adopted “a new approach to the communication of knowledge” allowing for more interaction with the museum’s collection. “Archeology in Baden” is the pilot project for the new museum concept of the Baden State Museum developed in the run-up to the general renovation of Karlsruhe Palace. The exhibition was created in collaboration with the HTWG Konstanz University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Architecture and Design and the University of Konstanz, Faculty of Information Technology and Science.

Thus, within the concept, the admission ticket is replaced by a user card which encourages visitors to explore the collection exhibits in which they are interested. The exhibition starts with the selected objects on display presenting the early cultural history of Baden, from the Palaeolithic period to the Carolingians. And it is the next stage of the exhibition experience which unveils the innovative concept of the exhibition and invites visitors to the research laboratory “Expothek” where they get the opportunity to become active users of the museum. The space is equipped with workplaces where visitors can research the museum objects through the direct contact with them. For this, visitors can use digital tools and modern technologies such as 3D scanning and VR set. Trained employees, called Explainers, assist visitors explaining how the interactive tables work and giving out the exhibition objects to users on request. Virtual reality (VR) experience is also offered in the third room, the “Expalab”. Three scenarios developed for the VR experience visualise the contexts in which the original objects, displayed within the exhibition, were first used.

With the development of the new concept, “the museum has set to make its records publicly accessible and to expand the museum visit into the digital world with on-line offerings such as games and puzzles”.

As part of the project, Badisches Landes Museums is strongly focused on collection digitisation:

- the constantly growing object database currently contains over 181,400 object records and 276,900 image records;
- further data, in particular high-resolution 3D digital copies, will be added in the course of the year;
- Expothek features an intuitive 3D digitising station with robot arm and turntable especially for this purpose (prepared by the Department of Digitisation of Cultural Heritage of the Fraunhofer Institute for Computer Graphics Research IGD);
- the resulting digital copies will be available on site and will also be fed directly into the museum’s object database;
- the data will be open and available for the usage by other portals such as the German Digital Library, Europeana or user platforms such as Sketchfab.
Additional info & comments

One of other Atelier Brückner’s projects which can be a great example of the immersive exhibition design is Marine Research and Deep Sea in Senckenberg Naturmuseum. The exhibition offers visitors a unique immersive experiences which resembles a dive into the sea during which the museum visitors explore unbelievable depths of up to 8000 metres under the surface. The exhibits, research equipment, ship models and submarines are integrated into a dynamic light installation which is coupled with a large projection. The visitors themselves become active in a walk-in submarine: with a joystick, they set off on an expedition exploring the diversity of the deep sea inhabitants and their habitats.

Involved Parties

“Archeology Switzerland”: Atelier Derrer (light planning), medienprojekt p2 (media planning), Zav (media production), Christ & Gantenbein (Architects); “Archeology in Baden”: Belzner Holmes (Light Planning), medienprojekt p2 (Media Planning).

Contacts

Atelier Brückner:
Stefanie Klinge
Associate Partner
stefanie.klinge@atelier-brueckner.com
One of the permanent exhibitions in Kunstmuseum Den Haag is Chambers of Wonder (or Wonderkamers), a 3D game for kids set in a bright yellow labyrinth. The exhibition comprises 13 spaces, so-called cabinets, each with its own subject and a different interactive experience. The game is based on the works from the museum’s collection which get presented to the children in a playful and engaging way. Some of the experiences of the current edition of Wonderkamers include:

- dancing the Victory Boogie Woogie together with Mondriaan and discovering how the rhythm influenced his paintings;
- trying on the museum’s fashion collection which comprises items from the 17th century to the present day;
- doing the investigation about The Hague School paintings;
- designing a personal digital Chamber of Wonder as a final experience of the journey (this room can be uploaded to the Wonder World, “an ever-growing universe of virtual Wonders and a spectacular audio-visual experience”).

The project was inspired by the palace with 1000 rooms of Constant Nieuwenhuys and is aimed at encouraging young visitors to wander, get lost, encounter, play, learn and discover.

The history of Wonderkamers

In 2005, the Kunstmuseum Den Haag (Gemeentemuseum) decided to commit 1400 square meters of the gallery space for the development of the interactive space for kids studying in the lower grades of the high school. The curator of the project, Jet van Overeem and the team chose to focus on teenagers because, as they highlight, kids of this particular age have little interest in museums and are more reluctant to be engaged with the museum’s content. Helping to change it determined the concept behind Wonderkamers version 1.0.

After seven years of operation, the project had to be refreshed, and the team decided “to keep the good things from the first edition of Wonderkamers, improve its weak points and incorporate new elements based on what was learnt in the meantime”. Among things that proved to be most popular and, thus, had to be preserved, there were interactive display areas and certain themes — fashion and architecture. The main principles of Wonderkamers had to continue defining the project:

- a hands-on experiences;
- high interactivity;
- the presence of authentic works of art.

As for the changes, it was decided that the content of the rooms had to be linked to create a more coherent whole, which had been lacking in Wonderkamers 1.0 containing stand-alone exhibits.

The game

In developing the game the museum team focused on the story which was a good way of linking things and providing an underlying narrative that prompted players to move from one room to another and from one task to another. The concept of the game implied having something to aim for, a destination with a reward, the element which engaged and drove the participants forward. Thus, the museum partnered with the Amsterdam-based agency Kossman&Jong to create an experience which would stimulate the imagination, enhance the experience and give the players a context.

The development process brough an inspiration for the team — the classic principle of a board game — like Ludo or Ganzenbord (in Dutch). This idea was especially since the plan of Wonderkamers was exactly like a board game, with a large central area surrounded by 13 smaller
rooms and a rectangular area suitable for receiving visitors. Eventually, Wonderkamers’ design invites visitors to move from room to room (just like from square to square) to the climax of the game which occurs right in the centre (like in the board games).

The game began with a video prepared for visitors to stimulate their imagination, but it also had a very practical purpose. Video was an ideal medium for explaining how things work. The team asked the director of the museum, Benno Tempel, to play the lead. For the role, he was asked to run, skidding round corners in the gallery, up and down stairs. He made an urgent plea to visitors to help him, because the exhibition was due to open in two hours and some of the galleries had no exhibits. The idea behind was to urge the players help set up the exhibition.

Once the players had collected their points by performing a range of tasks in different rooms, the time came “to cash them in”. Towards the end of the game, players chose paintings from a thematically arranged exhibition which featured only authentic artworks and objects from museum’s collection (selection reflecting the diversity of the collection: fashion, photography, painting, sculpture, design and decorative arts).

By scanning the QR codes with the tablet, players saved their selection so that they could use their favourite art objects in their virtual exhibition. Then came the final part: the exhibition itself. The players got to decide what colour the walls should be and how to display the artworks to their best advantage. Finally, the exhibition makers were added in the form of avatars and the exhibition got to be virtually opened. Players viewed each others’ exhibitions and could “like” them if they wished. The director of the museum also gave some constructive feedback on their work via the tablet. There were no winners, the main outcome was that the players got to learn what it was like to work in a museum, learnt all kinds of things and had lots of fun.

Wonder Guide

One of the main elements of the exhibition, which was introduced within Wonderkamers second edition, is a tablet, the “Wonder Guide”, which guides the players through the game. It allocates the tasks and the rooms, splits the tasks between the players (usually two players work in team using one tablet) and, generally, guides them through the game. Assigning specific rooms to the players had a particular functionality within the organisation of the game serving to help avoid queues to the rooms. Additionally, the tablet shows the way with floor codes that players could scan, provides information to help with the tasks, keeps the score, knows the names of the players and even pops up Benno’s (museum director Benno Tempel) picture every now and then to encourage them or to prompt them to hurry up.

Overall, the game employs 30 tablets.

Wonderkamers 3.0

After an update, Chambers of Wonder 3.0 opened in mid-February 2019. The museum kept the central concept of the experience – a game with a unique mix of digital and hands-on challenges in thirteen thematic rooms based around the idea of an exciting maze. A number of technical adjustments were made that allow some tasks to be performed better and more quickly. Additionally, there was a change to the mediation of the game. The team introduced the so-called Wonder Kids into the game who, via the tablet, instruct and assist the players in going through the experiences. In the end of the game, coming to the immersive 3D environment, the players are invited to design the fourteenth Wonder Room based on 2 works chosen from the museum’s collection (instead of their own exhibition). The results that players create during the game are being saved within the game system. Since players provide their mail addresses at the beginning of the game, they receive an automatic message at home with a link leading them to the results of the work on a special section of museum’s website.

The current most popular rooms within the game are those related to fashion, particularly, the room in which the players themselves dance the boogie woogie with a virtual Piet Mondrian and the room in which people set a wonder table for a fictional dinner with a virtual service.

Wonderkamers show a great deal of adaptability to the age and the level of engagement. Players can set the duration themselves, and the game can be adjusted to the level of players for school groups. The basic route through Wonderkamers is suitable for kids from the age of nine and also for vocational students and first-year high school students, however there is an extra route with bonus questions for kids taking a higher level of secondary education and for adults. Players can choose to play in Dutch or English. Besides being fun and educational, the activity is also an inexpensive way to spend the day off. Admission is free for children aged 18 and under, as well as for parents or grandparents who have the museum pass (Museumkaart).
Technology
The experience is built on Kiss the Frog’s personal visitor identification system “Backstage”, a custom-built software which allows individual visitors to carry around a cloud of information (a tablet) with them during the visit. There’s a wayfinding system based on augmented reality markers in the floor.
According to Kiss the Frog, the tour is educational without being stuffy.

Wonderkamers’ team
The museum has a special technical team for daily maintenance as well as a project manager for all technical issues, planning and budget. Additionally, the team has maintenance contracts with the technical companies that they work with.

Visitors’ feedback
Jet van Overeem highlights that the feedback from visitors is usually received in an informal way. Wonder Crew, working in the space, have a chance to talk to visitors and share their experiences with the curator of the project sending messages and commenting via a special service desk system. With secondary schools, the team evaluate every visit using formal evaluation forms.

Chambers of Wonder is being redesigned in collaboration with Kossmanndejong, Kiss the Frog, Rapenburg Plazo and Tungsten.

Kossmanndejong’s case study
Kiss the Frog’s case study

Benefits
Wonderkamers project remains very popular with families, groups of adults and schools and sees the high numbers of repeat visits. A visit to the space often lasts as much as two and a half to three hours because kids simply don’t want to leave. The project has also drawn a lot of international attention from other museums.
Jet van Overeem underlines that “Wonderkamers demonstrates that modern exhibition techniques and technology are also applicable to art museums, that knowledge transfer, imagination and gaming are a winning combination, and that there are ways of getting kids to engage actively with the collection of an art museum”.

Challenges & Limitations
Challenges on the development and testing phase of the project:
— the description text proved to be one of the most challenging parts and needed some rewriting as people sometimes interpreted what was written in an entirely unexpected way (the most difficult thing turned out to be explaining exactly what people had to do and in what order as people tend to want to spring into action immediately);
— playing in pairs (the couples playing the game often consisted of one active and one passive player, therefore the Wonderkamers’ team adapted the game so that the tablet would indicate which of the two players was to play in a particular room, alternating between them);
— the duration of the experience for schools had to be more flexible (it was also important to be able to change the duration if schoolchildren arrived late);
— in terms of technology, complex and unique interplay of closely related and continually interacting elements like tablet, Wi-Fi, film, lighting, wayfinding, augmented reality, exhibits and QR codes required the pioneering work by the technical team;
— scanning the QR codes required an exact amount of light and this had to be reconciled with the light restrictions for an exhibition that included textiles and works on paper (the museum had to find a way, because the QR codes were the key to the success of the game).

Costs & Timeframe
As of phase 2, the project was costing 1.8 million euros.
Among project’s awards:

- Children in Museums Award 2015
- International Design and Communication Awards 2014, Best Scenography for a Permanent Collection, winner
- Dutch Game Award 2014, Best Applied Game Design, winner

Other projects by Kossmanndejong with an exceptional exhibition design:

- Fake. The Whole Truth, 2018, Stapferhaus, Lenzburg (CH)
- The Story of Gardening, 2020, The Newt in Somerset, Castle Cary (UK)

Involved Parties

Kossmanndejong (content development, spatial design, graphic design, creative direction), Kiss the Frog (interactives), Rapenburg Plaza (hardware, lighting), Tungsten (AV), Brandwacht & Meijer (Build 2019).

Contacts

Kunstmuseum De Haag:
Jet van Overeem
Head of Education, Curator
Jvanovereem@kunstmuseum.nl

KDJ:
info@kossmanndejong.nl
Stapferhaus is a museum in the Swiss city of Lenzburg which is especially known for its bold experimentation with exhibition formats and urgent topics raised within them. In 2018, Stapferhaus was given its first permanent home in the new building at Lenzburg railway station. The new building boasts a peculiar architecture which is designed with an eye towards flexibility and transformation: stairs and walls can be shifted, floors opened, the façade and forecourt changed and re-designed to make it adaptable to the themes of the exhibitions.

Within its exhibitions, Stapferhaus applies experience-oriented approaches providing space to negotiate relevant issues of today: “together with scenographers and architects, with documentary and animation filmmakers, with light, game and sound designers, with actors and puppeteers, with programmers and graphic designers, [the institutions] build[s] worlds in which entertaining storytelling and hearty debates combine”. The institutions’ exhibitions change every one and a half or two years and are “interactive, sensuous and accompanied by a range of tailor-made communication formats and diverse events, inviting the public to engage critically with the present in an entertaining manner”.

The inaugural Stapferhaus’ exhibition taking place in the new building was titled “FAKE. The Whole Truth” (2018-2020).

FAKE. The Whole Truth exhibition

The exhibition deals with the topic of truth and fake in the contemporary world and explores the thin line and controversy between these two notions. To outline the concept behind the project, Stapferhaus offered the visitors a highly engaging teaser of the exhibition:

“Fake news, fake profiles and fake products. Corporations that cheat. Politicians who don’t tell the truth - there has never been so much fake as there is today. And we are right in the middle. And ask ourselves: what is real, what is true and what is a lie? Who can we, who should we trust? Fake news, fake profiles and fake products. Corporations that cheat. Politicians who do not tell the truth - there has never been so much fake as there is today. And we are right in the middle. And ask ourselves: what is real, what is true and what is a lie? Who can we, who should we trust?”

In regard to the exhibition design, Stapferhaus’ team reveal that in the conception phase they looked for methods to bring the topic into the exhibition space. The decision was to transform the building into the “Office of the Whole Truth”. Thus, the space of the museum was turned into a labyrinth with many rooms (all having catchy names such as The Service for the Truth or Department for Pinocchio research) with each covering a certain aspects of truth and untruth. “FAKE” offered a large number of encounters that presented the concept of “truth” from many unexpected angles through such objects as, for example, the pacifier, the first fake product people get as infants, the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus, the judge’s robe, the object immediately associating with credibility. Moving from room to room, visitors were invited to different kinds of experiences, such as to test their own ability to tell the truth on a lie detector, engage in a debate about truth and falsity, explore the topic of fake news in the social media. One of the interactive experiences is the “One-Stop Lie Drop-off Centre” space where visitors are confronted with various lies and are asked to evaluate them and to add their contributions to a book of lies. To ensure the immersiveness of the experience, the exhibition was also accompanied with a series of graphic elements such as posters, visitors’ passes, a 130-page magazine “Fake. Das Magazin” parodying the well-known German news magazine “Der Spiegel” and featuring fake ads, fake recipes and a crossword puzzle.

According to Stapferhaus, it terms of its content, the exhibition “FAKE”

— helped to distinguish between fake and real, where it is possible;
— asked when a lie is okay and when it is unforgivable;
— provided guidance on how to deal with lies in the digital world;
— guided us to a critical awareness in dealing with truth, fake and lies;
— showed that truth and lies are not absolute values but must always be renegotiated;
— made clear that the concern for truth and lies is a common task;
— sensitised to the fact that there must be non-negotiable truths for a non-violent coexistence;
— was an example of applied democracy.

The above elements of the exhibition and the overall exhibition design (spatial design, graphic design, promotion) was developed by the Amsterdam-based studio Kossmandejong. Sharing their experience of working with Stapferhaus, among other complimenting comments, the studio put a stress on the flexibility of the space: “most museums are delicate buildings where you can’t just put screws into the ceiling, let in daylight, remove parts of the floor, or move the entrance. However, in the new Stapferhaus all this is possible. As we were involved in the early stages of design with Swiss Pool Architekten, the Stapferhaus building now has infinite possibilities and freedom for every new exhibition maker.”

Technological solutions aimed at enhancing visitor experience
Stapferhaus’ team underline that they spare no effort to transform the use of digital technology into immersive experiences in their exhibition practice. For “FAKE” the team elaborately packed personal and media stories into “packages”, fitted them with a chip so that the packages could be “read” at interactive stations and the stories (that had always a lie at their heart) rated. The packages made everything technically much more complicated, but they made the whole thing an emotional experience.

Interactive formats within the exhibition
Credibility Commission
For this installation, the Stapferhaus asked over 250 people from the spheres of politics, business, justice, science, education, journalism, theology and medicine to give their comments on the subject of lies, truth and credibility. From the diverse answers the team assembled the 25-minute debate played by actors from the Theater Basel. As participants in the Commission for Credibility, the visitors were able to follow and join these discussions.

Supporting materials
To support the teachers, complete teaching units on the subject of truth and lies were made available for download. The materials were also supported by the school workshops held by the museum team. The materials were also designed to assist parents in playing and doing handicrafts for children from 5 years.

Podcast
Fifteen conversations with experts, from “Mr. Corona” Daniel Koch, sex therapist Anne-Marlene Henning and LSD psychiatrist Peter Gasser to online expert Ingrid Bradning were offered within the podcast.
Survey
In the run-up of the exhibition, Stapferhaus carried out a representative population survey with the Institute Sotomo. Almost 10,000 people took part in the survey which showed the following results:

- people believe that fake news has increased in the media with over 80% seeing this as affecting their opinion-making;
- a vast majority of respondents believe that spreading falsehoods and false news is a threat to democracy and social cohesion;
- opinions about what can be done about it in Switzerland differ depending on political attitudes of respondents;
- a clear majority find that more emphasis should be placed on learning how to deal critically with sources in schools.

Exhibition’s audiences

- FAKE addressed a wide audience with a wide range of cultures, education and demographics;
- the average age of visitors was 45 years old;
- 62% were women, 37% men;
- around 40% visited the exhibition in a total of 3,043 groups, 1,859 of them were school classes;
- over two thirds of the audience came from outside the region, in particular from Zurich, Bern and Basel and abroad;
- around a quarter of visitors were in Lenzburg for the first time, around a third normally do not attend any cultural events;
- three quarters of the visitors stated that the exhibition encouraged reflection about society and personal engagement with the topic, offers good entertainment and is clearly understandable;
- 95% of the visitors rated “FAKE” as “good” or “very good”.

The exhibition in numbers

Over a period of 17 months, around 120,000 people visited the “Office for the Whole Truth”. That is more than ever before in the history of the Stapferhaus — despite the Corona crisis. An average of 244 visitors visited FAKE every day. Because visitors stayed in the exhibition for more than 2.5 hours on average and while the institution’s space provides 1400 square meters of the exhibition space, the Stapferhaus was considered as “fully booked” with these figures.
With each exhibition, Stapferhaus tries to additionally reach the audience that is particularly interested in the topic. In the case of “FAKE”, this included politicians and the authorities. Additionally, “FAKE” exhibition showed high levels of engagement of families with children, and, as a result, specific content for children was added to the exhibition.

**Stapferhaus’ general approach to exhibition formats**

The institution holds visitor surveys for every exhibition which get evaluated during and after the runtime of an exhibition to gain insights for both the current and upcoming projects. Before the exhibition opens, the institution launches test days and even after the launch, the team observes and surveys the public to eliminate any “teething troubles” such as the lack of signage’s explicitness or anything else. For such kinds of adjustments the institution always reserves a small budget item “updates”.

Stapferhaus creates experience-oriented and low-threshold approaches for as broad and diverse an audience as possible, without foregoing a substantial debate. With the focus always set on visitors, the institution playfully invite them to contribute their experiences, question their own opinions and leave their feedback. As the institution’s team reveal, the work is done with a strong dramaturgy and an elaborate scenography, with different reading levels and understandable language. Technology and innovation are not used as an end in themselves but always in the service of the particular cause since it is of importance for the institution that the visit to the Stapferhaus becomes an emotional experience, shifting boundaries and enabling real encounters.

In the new Stapferhaus, the team would like to continue to strengthen the dialogue in Switzerland with successful thematic exhibitions for a broad and diverse audience. To achieve this, the museum is focusing on:

− taking the projects beyond the Stapferhaus and around Switzerland;
− continuing to experiment with new exhibition and mediation/communication formats;
− sustainably processing and making institution’s collection of stories tangible as contemporary witnesses of immaterial heritage;
− opening up the entire house between the big exhibitions, also for third parties and their own projects geared towards promoting a dialogue in society.

**Benefits**

The exhibition was extended twice and broke all visitor records. Generally, Stapferhaus shows a great example of institutional flexibility and experimentation:

− it organises events, workshops, and classes;
− it is constantly testing new formats and welcoming third parties to showcase their ideas;
− “with its innovative, creative, and future forward attitude, Stapferhaus tackles unconventional though relevant topics and surpasses established museum standards”.

**Additional info & comments**

Among awards for the exhibition:

− European Design Award 2019, Miscellaneous Exhibition Design, Silver
− Muse Design Award 2019, Interior Design, Platinum winner
− International Design Award 2020, Print / Editorial, Bronze winner
− Stapferhaus is the winner of the European Museum Award 2020

The current Stapferhaus’ exhibition is no less engaging and interactive. “Gender and Sex” explores the topic of gender focusing on reflections and discussion of one’s own masculinity and femininity, insecurities and convictions, existing inequalities, gender stereotypes, role models and prejudices. According to Stapferhaus, the exhibition is aimed, among other things, at “bringing serenity into an overheated debate and leads from argument to dialogue about the question how different genders can live together in dignity”. Similarly to the previous institution’s exhibitions, “Gender and Sex” offers a wide range of interactive experiences, such as, to name one, Question App, allowing visitors to ask questions and engage into dialogue on the topic of the exhibition.
Involved Parties
Kossman de Jong (exhibition design)
Pool Architekten (architecture)

Contacts
Stapferhaus:
Sibylle Lichtensteiger
Artsitic and General Management
lichtensteiger@stapferhaus.ch

KDJ:
info@kossman dejong.nl
MOD. is Australia’s leading future-focused museum at University of South Australia. MOD sits at the intersection of art and science bringing together researchers, industries and students “to challenge, learn and be inspired”. The museum offers its visitors dynamic, changing exhibitions showcasing the edge of knowledge and is aimed at inspiring young people about science and technology presenting how research shapes our understanding of the world around us to inform our futures.

**It’s Complicated**

In its latest exhibition titled “It’s Complicated”, MOD is exploring the interconnectedness of systems around us and the problems that could arise when manipulating them. The exhibition centers around the argument that “even seemingly well-thought-out solutions can have unexpected and unintended consequences — such as those discussed in the Operation Cat Drop exhibit, which explores how a malaria outbreak resulted in parachuting cats descending on the country” (the operation Drop Cat exhibit looks at the chain of events in which the World Health Organisation’s efforts to combat malaria in Borneo in the 1950s using the insecticide DDT led to crippling rat plagues and the subsequent release of 14000 live cats).

Through interactive displays and immersive sensory experiences, the exhibition encourages visitors to think about how complex systems will be influenced by the developments in technology. MOD’s Director Dr Kristin Alford underlines that through “an exploration of the relationships between humans, nature, and technology the exhibition gives visitors the chance to put themselves at the heart of a number of complex systems”. Some of the other interactive exhibits:

- **Cave of Sounds** (an interactive musical instrument that responds to light, shadows and human bodies, developed by eight artists and hackers for the exhibition and offered for visitors to interact with);
- **Crazy Little Thing Called BRUV** (baited remote underwater video (BRUV) is a system used in marine biology research; by attracting fish into the field of view of a remotely controlled camera, the technique records fish diversity and their behaviour and thus allows visitors to observe it);
- **Grids, Codes and Chaos** (artworks, created by South Australian artist Kate Little, which draw from mathematics, textiles and music to offer new ways of thinking about relationships between humans, nature and technologies).
Interestingly, as “It’s Complicated” opened in February 2021, Dr Kristin Alford highlights that “launching during a global pandemic really drives home the exhibition’s relevance as we witness in real time how an invisible virus can disrupt lives across the world with ripple effects that will be felt for decades” and “if the last 12 months have proved anything, it’s that we are all connected” existing “in complex systems where tiny decisions and actions can change the course of history”.

Several exhibits of It’s Complicated draw heavily on the work of UniSA researchers. Dr Zoë Doubleday and Dr Jasmin Martino are authors of the exhibit Octopus Estate, where visitors can raise their own virtual octopus, making sure it eats, flees, hides and scares its way to adulthood in an interconnected world of predators and prey.

To develop the exhibition, MOD. partnered with Melbourne-based experience design agency Sandpit. One of the installations within the exhibition encompassed 3D designed tiles that have been engineered to create habitats for native marine intertidal species that live on seawalls to encourage native species colonisation and foster biodiversity. Sandpit was invited to design an interactive version of a seawall tile, that the visitor can sculpt through adjusting holes and ridges into a unique creation of their own. Sandpit mention that before COVID, MOD. had envisioned a series of tactile dials for the visitor to use but approached the studio to see if the interactivity could avoid physical touch. Sandpit developed a unique touchless control system using LIDAR sensors which can detect the hand of a visitor hovering above them. Through raising or lowering their hand, the user is able to sculpt the unique features of their own seawall tile, which is added to a gallery of those created during the exhibition.

**Benefits**

- a highly technological exhibition popularising science which adopts a laid-back and playful approach to the content

**MOD.’s vision and design principles:**

- Two-Way Mindedness (MOD. embeds Aboriginal knowledge and understanding by providing space for curation, creation and interpretation within our exhibition programs);
- Sustainability for Life (the museum designs for low waste and finds ways to extend the life of exhibits);
- Openness and Open-Endedness (MOD. is promoting and creating opportunities for multiple ways of knowing and experiencing);
- Connectedness to Research and Enterprise (the museum is aimed at showcasing research and innovation and bringing people and ideas together to promote further discovery and application);
- Accessible and Inclusivity (MOD. creates spaces with opportunities for engagement for all, welcoming diverse experiences, abilities, and identities);
- Participation (the museum offers spaces for doing and multiple ways of getting involved to interact, experience, contribute, shape, and explore);
- Being For One and Many (MOD. is aimed at creating to create connections between visitors);
- Being Unexpected and Audacious (by challenging the traditional and offering the experiences that are emotionally charged).
Involved Parties  Sandpit (experience design)

Contacts  Museum of Discovery:
Dr Kristin Alford
Director
kristin.alford@unisa.edu.au
New York-based Isometric Studio offers design and architecture solutions “to create empowering visual identities and spatial experiences”. Studio’s portfolio boasts collaborations with leading cultural institutions, universities, tech companies and nonprofit organisations. Isometric’s spectrum of services encompasses the work on visual identities, exhibitions, websites and signage programs that, according to the studio, “convey intellectual rigor, aesthetic sophistication, and memorable storytelling”.

A significant part in Isometric’s portfolio is defined by the social projects within which the studio “shapes narratives and spaces of belonging”. This mission is underlined in the studio’s profile presentation: “Through design, we advance an ethos of inclusion, equity, and justice, centering the lived experiences of marginalized people. Our projects often address complex social issues, amplifying activism on gender equity, climate change, racial justice, LGBT identity, and immigrant rights.”

The report “Spaces of Belonging: A Designer’s Perspective”, curated, written and designed by Isometric Studio’s partners Waqas Jawaid and Andy Chen (under the guidance of the Spaces of Belonging Working Group), presents case studies from studio’s practice which help to explore different types of spatial design interventions for projects that promote inclusion and equality. The report was commissioned by Princeton University and introduces a visual analysis of a curated selection of inclusive spaces, both on contemporary college campuses and at other comparable institutions. The project started with the reflection on how “marginalized groups—people of color, women, LGBTQ people, differently-abled people, and those at the intersection of these identities—find themselves in spaces of privilege that are not necessarily equipped to welcome their experiences and contributions.”

The report can be seen as a proposition to look into how institutions and other spaces can reflect the “vibrant diversity” of its visitors in the design and the narrative their spaces adopt.

Thus, the report’s section Exhibitions aims at exploring the questions:

— How do we critically assess and creatively imagine not just visual and spatial design but also the overarching project prompt to ensure it is aligned with values of inclusion and dignity?
— How do we involve stakeholders with kindness and honesty, and how do we leverage the experience and backgrounds of everyone to build knowledge around the project being discussed?
— How do we authentically celebrate a specific community without glossing over the struggles and setbacks faced by that community and with a mindfulness to avoid unintended harm?
— At what point in the project should feedback be solicited? How do we encourage collaborators to translate a legitimate complaint into potentially creative solutions? How do we build the capacity to welcome an overarching critique even at a late stage in the project?
— How do we let people know that they are being heard? How do we challenge a stakeholder to have a discussion based on reason? When is a debate not appropriate? (Hint: Personal experiences and basic human dignity, especially of a less-powerful group, should not be debated.)
**Sis Boom Ah! exhibition**
Princeton University, 2019

“Sis Boom! Ah!” is an immersive, graphic exhibition that celebrates 50 years of undergraduate co-education at Princeton University. The work on the exhibition started in 2019 with the initiative of Amada Sandoval, then-director of the Princeton University Women’s Center who invited Isometric to source and curate archival materials in collaboration with the Mudd Manuscript Library. The location of the exhibition was the Frist Campus Center, the school’s most high-traffic public space. The aim behind the exhibition was to “immerse visitors in a vivid history of the university that they could feel part of” by activating the campus center with images, quotes, newspaper clippings and timelines. Thus, the exhibition design comprised life-size historic images of “women’s presence, contributions, and achievements” and was aimed at “situating them as integral members of contemporary Princeton”. Interestingly, Isometric highlight that the exhibition focus was on “recognizing the struggles and hardships” and “evoking a degree of discomfort and necessary discourse by putting women and their narratives in a central space on a campus that historically centers men’s narratives” but at the same time “maintaining a tone of celebration”. Isometric Studio underlines that in approaching this project, they wanted “to honor the struggle for equity and to celebrate the contributions of women and gender non binary people”.

In terms of the format and design, the exhibition was divided into four main themes based on examples of alumni’s achievements over the years”. The main element of the exhibition was “supergraphics”, which embedded “empowering quotations and images of unsung women heroes, offering inspiration and preserving shared cultural memory around feminist achievements that have made Princeton a more inclusive place”.

Other elements of the exhibition design comprised:

- avoiding alteration to the existing architecture, including the paint color (as a result, “a dynamic, collage style of banner-like graphics that used the existing neutral paint palette as a base” was developed as part of the exhibition);
- usage of matte, self-adhesive vinyl graphics to create an “elegant and striking aesthetic effect that does not fundamentally alter the architecture of the building”;
- the thematic organisation of the exhibition, with content presented on four main walls that line the dining space;
- contextualisation of the introduction giving viewers a summary of each theme;
- presentation of “the carefully-curated images which provide a window for the current community into a different time and place”;
- timeline of key events;
- adding detail with scans of historic ephemera;
- echoing the space organisation with the format of the images (large photos of women heroes line the columns);
- presenting the remaining narrative content—themes, timelines, images, and historic ephemera on the flat walls;

Stages of exhibition preparation and development:

- stakeholder workshops to discuss different ways in which the project could unveil;
- collecting compelling content that told a multivalent narrative (photographs and ephemera from the Mudd Manuscript Library, a timeline of events prepared by the Women’s Center, photographs of women heroes from the Daily Princetonian archives, and inspiring quotations);
- creating a physical model to demonstrate the design concept to stakeholders, including staff responsible for the venue.
Rising Together
Google’s New York headquarters, 2019

Isometric’s role: visual identity, exhibition, architecture

“Rising Together” is an immersive community space and exhibition at Google’s New York headquarters that examines the Black experience with police in America. The exhibition narrates the Black American experience “through ethnographic vignettes, historical context and carefully-curated data”. The exhibition is based on the interactive report that summarised two years of Google’s research on the role of technology in creating safer communities. In it, Google team was focusing on excessive police violence against Black Americans and, as part of this large-scale project, was to create a physical exhibition and a space of reflection for Google employees.

For the project, Isometric Studio gathered original photography and narratives on the basis of interviews held with nine participants—three each in Oakland, Atlanta and Washington, D.C. whom they traveled to meet personally.

Exhibition design elements:
- the typographic titles of each section abstract the idea of reflection, personal and historical;
- a timeline charts the evolution of policing from the time of slavery to today;
- a memorial wall shows portraits of Black Americans who have been killed by police in recent years;
- large portraits of Black Americans are shown alongside ethnographic selections of first-hand narratives and experiences;
- QR codes allow visitors to deepen their knowledge about specific issues through their mobile devices;
- a community table in the center of the exhibition space that encouraged visitors to talk to one another.

In their report, Isometric Studio describe in detail the exhibition design approach they employed. The exhibition architecture evoked a public square, with a series of intersecting plywood panels that created five rooms and a central space for events and programming. Each room corresponded to a theme, including economic disenfranchise, racial profiling, police encounters, coping mechanisms and reflection. The graphic design used contemporary versions of civil rights-era typefaces. According to Isometric Studio, “a key design move was to put ethnographic vignettes into historical and theoretical context” and to focus on “the design that contextualizes [people’s narratives] in a broader history of discrimination” to build “a foundation for an understanding of systemic racism and disproportional violence”. 
Who We Are

Museum of the City of New York, 2019

Isometric’s role: visual identity, exhibition, architecture

The exhibition “Who We Are” at the Museum of the City of New York was aimed at examining the urgency of the decennial census through digital artworks that used census data to tell stories about economic and political inequalities. Isometric Studio underline, that the 2020 US Census was of critical importance to New York City, particularly because of the threat of an undercount among minority and undocumented populations. The goal of Museum of the City of New York and Isometric Studio’s collaboration was to translate census data into an interactive, immersive experience with the work of leading artists and designers.

As the centre of the exhibition served a monumental acrylic “X”—”referring to the simple mark of self-identification on a census form”—whose practical function was to display projections and prints in luminous suspension. According to Isometric, it formed “a translucent surface that evoke[d] simultaneous experiences of exposure and privacy—a carrier for data art that translates millions of human stories into metaphorical representations of immigration origins, economic disparities, and networks of intimacy”. The acrylic X was meant to solve a number of problems:

− “it gave a framework to include artwork in a way that was digestible rather than overwhelming”;
− “it fully occupied the main gallery while opening up the space of the anteroom gallery for a preamble on historic narratives”;
− “it created a distinctive sense of place—at no other time or location could [visitors] experience these artworks in this particular way along with fellow New Yorkers”.

Exhibition spaces

− the exhibition entrance gallery was equipped with a long table with a sliding interactive that allowed visitors to explore changes in the city’s racial distribution over five decades;
− the anteroom displayed the juxtaposition of historical objects and visualisations with contemporary posters, animations and custom infographics, “underscoring the significance of the census and its implication on public funding and congressional representation”;
− main gallery presented the digital artworks (interpretation of which was facilitated by the historical context provided in the anteroom).

Exhibition design elements:

− a large, translucent acrylic X visually juxtaposing gallery visitors against art projections and prints;
— a custom case, designed for Ekene Ijeoma’s work “Wage Islands”, an interactive sculpture in which acrylic islands rise and fall to indicate areas of New York’s affordability by income level;
— a large animated projection featuring Pedro Cruz’s artwork “Simulated Dendrochronology of U.S. Immigration, 1790—2016” showing the locations around the world from which immigrants arrived over the years in the form of tree rings;
— a projection featuring an interview with Nora K. Jemisin, a science fiction and fantasy writer who explores cultural conflict and oppression in her work.

Isometric Studio’s selected awards
Society of Experiential Graphic Design 2020 (Honor Award / Rising Together Exhibition; Merit Award / Who We Are Exhibition)
Type Directors Club 2020 (TDC 66 The World’s Best Typography / Who We Are Exhibition)
Society of Typographic Arts 2019 (STA 100 Judge’s Choice / Happy Family Night Market; STA 100 Judge’s Choice / Rising Together Exhibition)

Further reading
Isometric Studio is Rethinking What it Means to Design for Social Good, AIGA Eye on Design
Equity and Justice: Poster Design in the COVID Age, Poster House

Benefits
Isometric Studio’s exhibition practice allowed them to gather and summarise the main take-aways that can be adopted when working on the socially urgent topics within the exhibition design:
— advancing a shared discourse (through exhibits providing public awareness and education, exhibitions serving as the background for public programming);
— canonising new traditions (elements of historic narrative such as images, quotes, newspaper clippings and timelines immersing visitors in a vivid history that they could feel part of);
— engaging new media (e.g. “The Who We Are” census exhibit brings together an eclectic set of artistic expressions to create a definite sense of place and a memorable experience—engaging and educating the public about the importance of data and the significance of the census”).
### Challenges & Limitations

Waqas Jawaid from Isometric Studio underlines: “Many of the cultural and educational institutions that we work with have complex histories of racism, misogyny and classism that have historically enshrined the power of white male leadership, suppressing minority identities and voices. The good news is that these same institutions are now taking on the challenging task of interrogating those histories and redressing injustices that have long undergirded their financial and reputational success. However, this process is often uncomfortable and leads to long discussions about the degree to which an institution can be openly critical of itself, whether donors will be offended, and whether radical change is desirable or even possible. In private, questions arise as to whether highlighting minority experiences constitutes an erasure of white, male history. Unless there is specific leadership that centers justice in the conversation of institutional advancement, institutions are often more comfortable making modest, insignificant changes that fail to confront inequalities. Our charge as designers is to urge museums and universities to stand on the right side of history and to take bold steps: to take down the stories of slaveowners and segregationists—no matter how prominent they are—and to replace them with the stories of abolitionists and activists who have been ignored.”

### Timeframe

The average timeframe of the project depends on the institutional speed with regard to content development and interpretive planning, but the studio’s work tends to take between 4—8 months. According to Isometric Studio, in exhibition design, the most critical aspects of successful projects are: clear allocation of responsibilities, adherence to a reasonable timeline, dedicated staffing for exhibition project management and installation supervision and a consistent line of communication.

### Additional info & comments

In 2019, Isometric Studio created a [Toolkit for Museum Reopening](#) to support the ongoing efforts of museums to reopen following COVID-19 safety measures.

### Contacts

Isometric Studio:

Waqas Jawaid  
Partner  
waqas@isometricstudio.com

Andy Chen  
Partner  
andy@isometricstudio.com
**Description**

Studio Louter is the Amsterdam-based content design studio which offers solutions at every stage of the projects’ realisation: master planning, interpretive planning, creative advice and concepts and narratives for exhibitions, interactive media and film. The central concept of the Studio Louter’s practice is Emotion Design. According to the studio, in order to apply Emotion Design within the project, it is important to center the development process around “analysis of the facts, articulating the meaning and determining the emotion to be conveyed in the design”.

Studio’s content design process comprises:

- defining the “project’s boundaries” and figuring out whether they will remain fixed or can be redrawn (boundaries exist on multiple levels: the location, the collection, the visitors, the budget, the organisation, the ambitions and the dream);
- developing a narrative for a museum (with a careful approach to the story’s construction with facts but also emotions);
- answering four essential questions with regard to the concept: Why will visitors come? Why will they stay? What will they tell others? And why will they come back?
- using various working methods and design tools defined by the principle of co-creation (laying the foundations in a pressure cooker sessions, focusing on the questions that were formulated at the design sessions, presenting ideas to museumgoers in focus groups, bringing in specialists to provide input in expert sessions, documenting Emotion Design concepts in presentations that become part of feasibility studies, bid books, funding applications and more).

Throughout their creative journey, Studio Louter cooperated with such institutions as National Museum of Qatar, Museum of Rotterdam, Naturalis Biodiversity Centre, Louvre Abu Dhabi, Eye Filmmuseum, Mauritshuis, as well as with universities and municipalities. Some of the most interesting Emotion Design applications and new format and design examples are Studio Louter’s collaborations with Museum of Natural Sciences, Brussels and Bibliotheek Hoogeveen.

**Living Planet exhibition**

Museum of Natural Sciences (part of Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences in Brussels, Belgium), Brussels, 2020

Studio Louter’s role: content design, digital media, interactive media production

The main focus of the permanent exhibition “Living planet” is to reveal the beautiful hidden structure of the biodiversity on the planet. The museum designed the storyline of the exhibition, which features more than 800 animals. In their turn, Studio Louter fleshed out the story with digital components such as interactive screens, projections and games.

According to the Studio Louter, the given project is a good example of how the studio implements the Emotion Design method through the exhibition’s digital components. The studio worked with the existing exhibition design made by Tempora, so the team could concentrate only on the Emotion Design of the exhibits themselves, rather than on the scenography of the exhibition as a whole. For every kind of means, Studio Louter set a (sub) emotion design, with a one-line concept, an emotion and the objective and subjective story. But to create a coherent multi-media line, three important pillars were defined that had to fit in every digital component:

- what you can see in real life, you show in hyper-reality;
- what you can’t see in real life, you show in graphics;
- the dynamics of the living planet: teamwork and improvisation.
Digital components used in this exhibition

— ID kits
21 in-depth touchscreens replace the traditional object texts next to the stuffed animals and bring the exhibition halls to life with video footage of the animals in their natural habitats. Visitors can learn more about the age, gender, and original habitats of the displayed animals.

— Habitats
To see the animals in their natural habitat, visitors walk through projected landscapes and discover different habitats all over the world: the ice-cold polar deserts alternate with mystical rainforests and high mountains.

— Games
In multiple games, visitors discover how animals interact with each other and with their environment. For example, in the game “Camouflage”, visitors look for animals that are hidden in the landscape. In the game “Wolf in Yellowstone”, visitors have to answer multiple questions to learn that, for example, the wolf holds a key position in Yellowstone’s ecosystem.

Not only animals are central in this exhibition, but also landscapes and organisms, such as coral and bacteria. In the game “Benefits from Nature”, visitors become one with nature by standing in front of a projection wall full of life. By taking a step forward, life drastically decreases on the projection. This step symbolizes the consequences of breaking the relationship with nature. Various in-depth screens illustrate how landscapes can repair themselves after a natural disaster. Visitors can interact with the screens to discover the different phases of recovery.

Benefits:
— with interactive media productions, the studio ensured that visitors are immersed in the teeming life of the world;
— the exhibition is more than a presentation of stuffed animals in a museum, it shows the turbulent interconnection of all those organisms to each other, their habitat, and now also humans.

Limit and Drawbacks:
— the production of the exhibition took a lot more time than planned due to troubles with restoration and tendering.

Timeframe
The development of the project started with the media design and production in September 2019. The exhibition was finished a year later, on 11 September 2020.
More on the exhibition: “Showing how beautiful our earth is”: new expo capstone 15 years of renovations in the Museum of Natural Sciences

Bibliotheek Hoogeveen
Hoogeveen (NL), 2019

Studio Louter’s role: content design, graphic design

Hoogeveen is a municipality and a town in the northeastern Netherlands with the population of 55 thousand people. With 13 shipyards, in the 19th century Hoogeveen was one of the Netherlands’ main inland shipping centres, thanks to the peat-cutting industry. In 2015, the local museum of Hoogeveen “5000 morgen” closed endangering the local stories “of industry, perseverance and enterprise” of being lost. In response to this, the local library took over the management of the museum’s collection of historical objects and, with this, received a new function: to help to tell the story of Hoogeveen. The challenges this endeavour brought were defined by questions: How do you build this story together with the inhabitants of the city? Or otherwise, how do you create relevant heritage in a globalising world?

Library Hoogeveen brought in Studio Louter to help develop the new heritage function at an early stage. Together the studio and the library created a concept and used it to set up a pilot project and raise additional funds. The temporary setup, “Story Yard in Progress” was constructed with the help of volunteers which gave an idea of the new direction of how the collection is presented and how the community is involved.

Story Yard

The Verhalenwerf, or “Story Yard” space, gives Hoogeveen’s cultural history a new home and preserves it for the future. This active meeting place consists of a permanent exhibition showcasing the collection; a space for temporary exhibitions chosen and created by community members, led by a supervisor and a workshop where local people can add to the exhibitions. Every temporary exhibition is preserved in digital form. In line with the motto “For, by and belonging to Hoogeveners”, every local resident can contribute to the collective memory bank. Their stories are collected and preserved in an online platform, www.verhalenwerf.nl.

Online Story Yard

On the website, inhabitants of Hoogeveen can upload stories on various themes such as music, love, and famous Hoogeveners, or they can be asked to contribute to a specific theme. At the moment, the organisation is searching for stories about a local tin factory. Everybody who worked there or has memories about the factory can make his or her contribution to this theme. There is also the possibility to give (online) lectures and discussion evenings. In this way, the website works as an online platform where the community of Hoogeveen comes together and shares their common heritage. These sharing identities are important for cities like Hoogeveen, where low literacy is relatively high and many people have only received practical education which brings the inhabitants together in a globalising world. Their history cannot be found in the great national museums, but in the local library, “the heart of the society”.
Benefits
Because of Corona, the library and the exhibition are closed for almost a year. Fortunately, the story Yard continues online. More than a year after the opening, people are still uploading stories. Also, other municipalities in the region are interested in a platform like the Story Yard.

More on the project: Dagblad van het Noorden — 24 May 2019
“Over groei, liefde, harde werkers”

Benefits
— Studio Louter developed a signature concept of Emotion Design defining and framing their approach to exhibition design

Additional info & comments
One of the Studio Louter’s content design projects is Mauritshuis’ exhibition Shifting Image — In Search of Johan Maurits

Involved Parties
Living Planet:
Tempora (spatial design), Shosho (film production), La Vita studio’s (audio production), Potteau Laba (construction), Ocular (hardware).

Bibliotheek Hoogeveen:
Todd van Hulzen (spatial design), Driebit (Interactive Media Production), Fiction Factory (construction).

Contacts
Studio Louter:
Franka Schaap
Operational Director and Senior Project Manger
franka@studiolouter.nl
York Art Gallery and Kaiser Chiefs

Who York Art Gallery (UK) and Kaiser Chiefs
What When All is Quiet exhibition
Where York, UK
When 2018-2019

Description
York Art Gallery is a public art gallery in York, England, hosting a collection of paintings from 14th-century to contemporary, as well as prints, watercolours, drawings and ceramics. It closed for major redevelopment in 2013 and reopened in summer of 2015. The gallery is managed by York Museums Trust.

In 2018, York Art Gallery took an unprecedented step and partnered with the award-winning Yorkshire indie rock band Kaiser Chiefs. The institution invited musicians to co-curate an innovative exhibition which was aimed at exploring the boundaries between art and sound and creation and performance. As part of the project, the members of the band selected 11 paintings from the gallery's collection to show alongside a selection of songs by contemporary musicians and sound artists which have directly influenced their practice. Kaiser Chiefs’ curatorial focus was set on rethinking sound as a medium and inviting visitors to explore the edges between music, art, creation and performance.

To realise the above concept, the musicians

— brought together works by internationally regarded sound artists which have resonated with them while on their travels and inspired them to look at sound in new way;
— created a silent gig using light and colour and projected lyrics to make an immersive environment that offered visitors a reconfigured experience of a live music show;
— selected a “set list” of songs in response to works from York Art Gallery’s collection that reference creation, production or performance.
—

Kaiser Chiefs’ are open about their curatorial experience and highlight that it was important to them as musicians to bring in a different perspective to the project and to explore the interconnectedness of different media: “When York Art Gallery approached us as a band to work with their collection, we thought it sounded like an exciting proposition and wondered where it could lead. As we started to look into the archive the works seemed to suggest connections with music beyond the approach of pairing or translating. We found that we were thinking about sound in a wider sense... We are not artists — we are musicians, and so we’ve chosen to use this opportunity to work with the gallery to explore sound as a medium — our medium — and to open that up further for us and for the viewer/listener. To stretch ourselves, to explore the edges between music and art, creation and performance.”

Jo Killeya, head of public engagement for York Museums Trust, comments on the decision to invite Kaiser Chiefs to exhibition curation: “As experts in creating music and performance, Kaiser Chiefs offer us a distinctly different perspective on the creative process and a personal insight into the links between art and sound. They are masters of pop music and have explored our collections through the eyes of musicians, while hand picking works by artists who have pushed the boundaries of what art can sound like.”

The exhibition comprised:

— Janet Cardiff’s “The Forty Part Motet”, a 40 part choir singing in harmony through 40 individual speakers;
— the short film “Fiorucci Made me Hardcore” by Mark Leckey;
— the Turner Prize winning work “The Woolworths Choir of 1979” by Elizabeth Price;
— archive material from the collections of pioneering composer Pauline Oliveros, who coined the phrase “deep listening”;
—
"Daytrip Maryanne" work, a collaboration between sound sculptor MaryAnne Amacher and guitarist Thruston Moore of Sonic Youth;
— works drawn from York Art Gallery’s collection paired with songs selected from a “set list” by the band (artists in the set list included Bridget Riley, Jack Butler Yeats, L.S. Lowry, John Hoyland);
— installation entitled “Silent Gig” created by the band which made use of light, colour and lyrics to create an immersive environment and offered visitors a reconfigured experience of a live music show and its elements;
— Sarah Graham’s work “Kaisers Rock!”, the cover art for the band’s greatest hits album “Souvenir: The Singles 2004-2012”.

The exhibition was accompanied by a range of multi-disciplinary events such as workshops, performances artist-in-residence sessions allowing to explore the creative process of making music. It was seen by more than 25,000 people during its run between December 2018 and March 2019.

**Benefits**
— cross-sectoral collaboration as a fresh and exciting way to present the collection and the space in a new and unexpected way.

**Additional info & comments**

**Museums + Heritage Awards 2020, Partnership of the Year, winner**

**Contacts**

York Art Gallery:
Beatrice Bertram
Senior Curator
bbertram@yorkartgallery.org.uk