

WHAT IS EXHIBITION DESIGN?

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ESSENTIAL DESIGN HANDBOOKS

RotoVision

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Preface

When RotoVision approached the Society for Environmental Graphic Design (SEGD) with the idea about a book defining exhibition design, it opened up a number of debates and discussions inside the organization about the nature of exhibition design. Over the past few years, SEG D has been focusing on defining exhibition design as a merger of communication and environments. Defining it in this way opened the door to contributions by designers that at one time may have been called architects, curators, industrial designers, or historians, but by their design vision and ability to collaborate are creating a distinctly unique field. This definition brought up a number of debates and required careful treading among a variety of existing and entrenched fields. There are several organizations that already exist that specialize in museum exhibitions, trade shows, and heritage parks. Our premise that exhibition design has a process that is consistent across all these areas would require careful and consistent analysis. This book should be judged as much by what is excluded as what is included.

This book is not meant to be the last word on exhibition design, but to serve as a clear statement about the nature of what the authors and SEG D consider to be the direction exhibition design is developing in. The focus is on collaboration; the balancing of space, object, and information; the subtle integration of technology; and the role of the audience. All of these trends have made exhibition design the cutting edge field it is evolving into.

The chapters of this book explore the infinite variety of design firms that develop exhibitions, from industrial designers to interior designers to theatrical designers. All of the professional disciplines are different, but many of the skills and design processes required to produce the exhibitions are similar. They all require simultaneous engagement in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional design thinking, and must master the craft of storytelling in the environment.

Finally, this book is dedicated to illustrating the mastery of design craft in areas ranging from museums to trade shows in venues around the world. In a world envisioned in this way, designers will be known less by what their discipline is than by their vision and ability to collaborate in vast and complex ways, creating enjoyable and educational environments.

Jonathan Alger
Board President, SEG D

Leslie Gallery Dilworth
Executive Director, SEG D

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GREGORIO

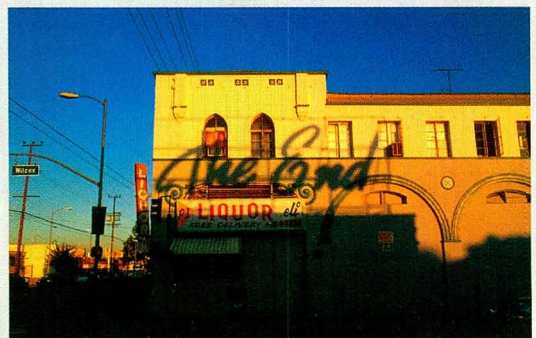
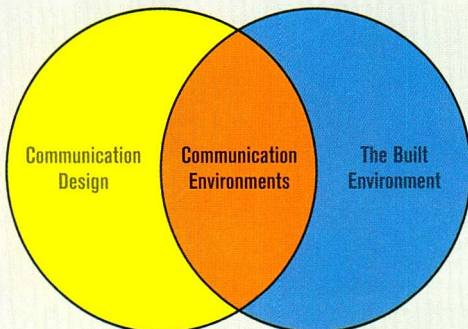


Right: *Hollywood Shadow Project*

Designed by Cameron McNall. Nothing shows the blending of the barriers between storytelling, environmental design, exhibition design, and public art better than the *Hollywood Shadow Project*. The intention is to evoke memory, as it is constituted via photographs and movies, and present this memory on the site of its invention: Hollywood. All of the project sites incorporate buildings and businesses involved in making movies. It is also significant that the sculpture silhouettes were captured via optical means and then reprojected via the sun, which offers both light and motion. The installation leaves it to the audience to interpret the story. Is it a narrative of the past, a commentary on the present, an attempt to establish an identity for the future, or just a way of establishing a wonderful sense of space and place?

Below: Venn diagram

This diagram defines the blending of communication design and environmental design to create a fusion: environments that communicate. Exhibition design, environmental design, public art, and technology design all fall into this camp.





Left: The Unisphere
Designed by Gilmore D. Clarke. The Unisphere was constructed as an attraction for the 1964/1965 New York World's Fair.

Below: Wanamaker's Grand Court
Department stores such as Wanamaker's were pioneers in retail display design.

Retail department stores

Early department stores, particularly in large cities, were not only purveyors of goods, but were also responsible for major advances in display and design communication. Often, items were displayed in thematic exhibitions without the direct intention of being sold, but rather to sell the store's overall brand—its power, reach, and sophistication, and of course to induce people to come and see the spectacle in the grand halls of the store. These exhibitions sought to display culture and elevate the store's brand in the eyes of consumers, through offering a kind of free, social entertainment.





Left: Target display

Designed by Random Productions. Target is known as a company that utilizes design in products to attain a competitive advantage in the discount store market. Often criticized for environments that do not match the quality of its products, this display is an attempt to use environmental design at a mass-market level.

Below: Clerc trade show booth, Basel

Designed by Pentagram. This design typifies the quality of materials used in high-end trade show exhibitions, especially for specialty product manufacturers such as Clerc. The movement toward using higher quality materials has been spurred by intense competition.



Immersion

The guided tour is one of the oldest interpretive devices in exhibitions, bringing an unprecedented level of interaction. The use of human guides to tell compelling stories will never be truly replaced, but the use of kiosks, personal digital assistants, and the internet has enriched the storytelling experience. A new development is that audience reactions and additional stories can be archived and used to expand the experience, while adding additional imagery and depth. In this environment, the live tour guide can become a channel, taking the rich archive of experience and adding their own personal spin.

What conclusions can we draw from these histories? The most important is that, with all the changes in technology over the

centuries, the way people perceive and enjoy space has remained remarkably similar. The desire to be surrounded by a story in a public space, to be told stories dynamically, and to have an interactive experience blended with real environments will forever drive design decisions. This means that no matter how far technology progresses, tried and true methods will still be used. The power of the human voice, the electricity of being surrounded by an audience, and the excitement of using light for movement will always have their places among the digital devices and holographic images.



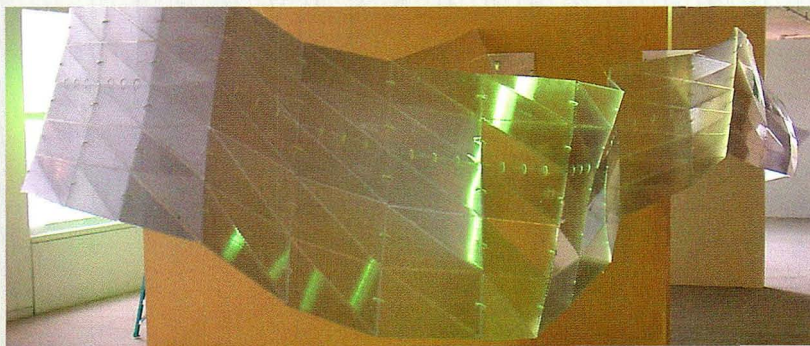
The Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route

Designed by Talisman Interactive. This heritage trail extends from New York to Virginia to commemorate and interpret the route taken by George Washington's troops to attack the British army at Yorktown. The interactive kiosks, maps, and cellphone information systems interpret an historic environment that is invisible to the eye in most cases, using technology to interpret place, instead of graphics and stage sets. The project looks to a future where technology can help interpret and archive multiple levels of meaning in one place. Hundreds or thousands of possible interpretations can occur in this environment.



CoReFab, traveling exhibition (top two images) and Nubi-Verdopolis, Steel Case Building (bottom two images)

Designed by Ammar Eloueini Digit-all Studio. The exhibition design work of Ammar Eloueini straddles the line between interpretation and art through a strong use of sculpture and materials. Display elements float in space in high tension, demanding to be read along with the information in the display.



Experience design and themed environments

A concept and design process called “experience design” has long been a buzzword in the exhibition and environment design fields. Experience design has been used to explain everything from a process of developing products and services around customer behaviors, to developing unique educational models. Is experience design really unique though, or is it a design process that has evolved as a more advanced version of traditional storytelling that has existed for hundreds of years?

Are themed environments experience design?

Experience design in environments has often been described as incorporating passive storytelling, nonlinear educational experiences, and interactive engagement with visitors. These concepts though have been around for the past 150 years and are in fact the central tenants of themed environments. World’s Fairs starting in the mid-1800s, and amusement parks in the twentieth century used performance, detail, immersive environments, and public space to create memorable educational experiences. The skill and craft involved in creating these environments have become institutionalized in certain design regions, such as southern California with its large number of movie studios and theme parks, and Stockholm and Copenhagen with their concentration of toy and furniture manufacturers.

Why is experience design different?

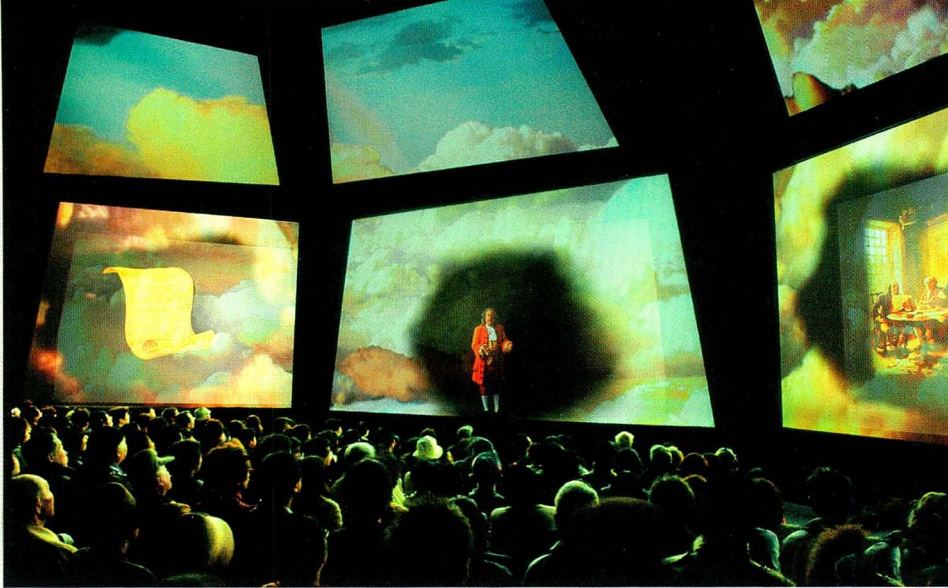
Experience design is different from developing themed environments in a number of fundamental ways. This does not mean that experience design does not incorporate many of the values of theming. Experience design takes the concept of themed storytelling deeper, while questioning the nature of how environments communicate in a number of ways, which we will now examine.

Utilizing nontraditional models

Themed environments have fundamentally been a craft developed by designers using familiar models for environmental storytelling that have evolved over time. IDEO’s Fred Dust defines a key tenant of experience design as looking outside of traditional project types, turning a trade show display into a museum space, or looking at a retail display like a classroom.

Designing for behaviors

Demographics are considered a primary tool for the development of design concepts for audiences. Increasingly however, life states are not in line with age states and shared attitudes across generations suggest new ways to design. By looking at behaviors as a key to designing experiences, environments cut through demographic barriers.



**US Pavilion, 2005
World Expo, Japan**

Designed by BRC
Imagination Arts. World's
Fairs were the first themed
environments, enclosing and
encapsulating an experience
under one roof. In this pavilion,
visitors were immersed in
a storyline and experience
focusing on the life and
work of Benjamin Franklin.





ONS (The Offshore Northern Seas Foundation) exhibition
Designed by Ammar Elouein
Digit-all Studio and Fasett.

This design reflects the Norwegian landscape, with offshore petroleum and gas installations, the sea, and mountain ranges. The project

brings advances in experience design to the forefront by using abstract sculptural imagery to reflect landscape and climate.

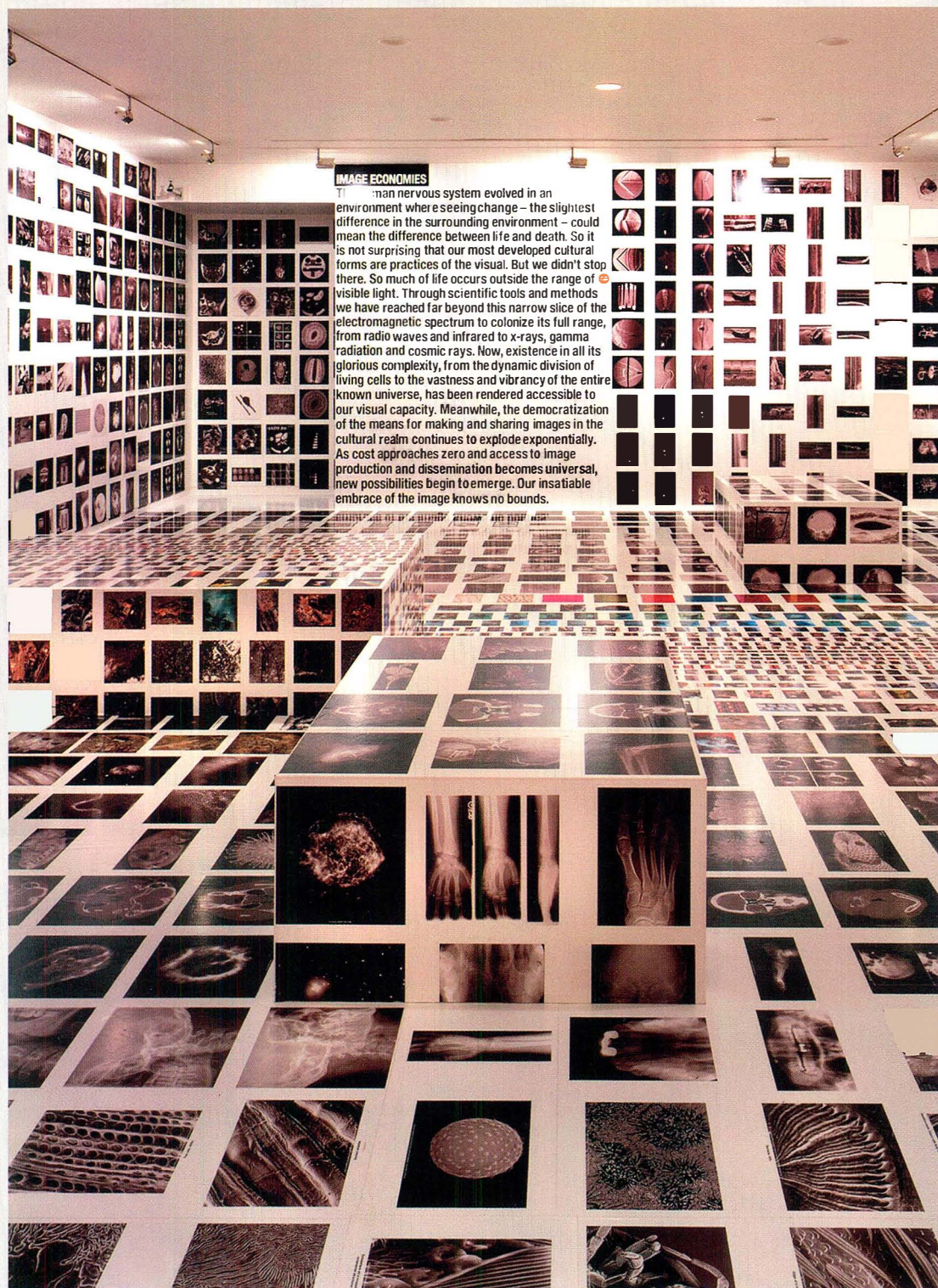
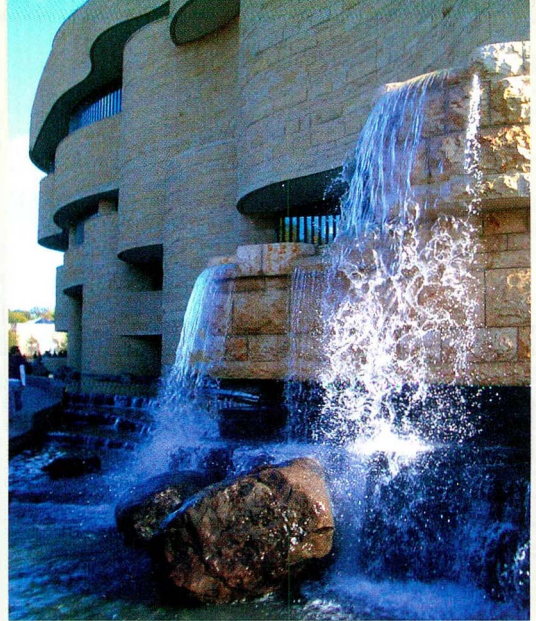


IMAGE ECONOMIES

The human nervous system evolved in an environment where seeing change – the slightest difference in the surrounding environment – could mean the difference between life and death. So it is not surprising that our most developed cultural forms are practices of the visual. But we didn't stop there. So much of life occurs outside the range of visible light. Through scientific tools and methods we have reached far beyond this narrow slice of the electromagnetic spectrum to colonize its full range, from radio waves and infrared to x-rays, gamma radiation and cosmic rays. Now, existence in all its glorious complexity, from the dynamic division of living cells to the vastness and vibrancy of the entire known universe, has been rendered accessible to our visual capacity. Meanwhile, the democratization of the means for making and sharing images in the cultural realm continues to explode exponentially. As cost approaches zero and access to image production and dissemination becomes universal, new possibilities begin to emerge. Our insatiable embrace of the image knows no bounds.



The Museum of the American Indian

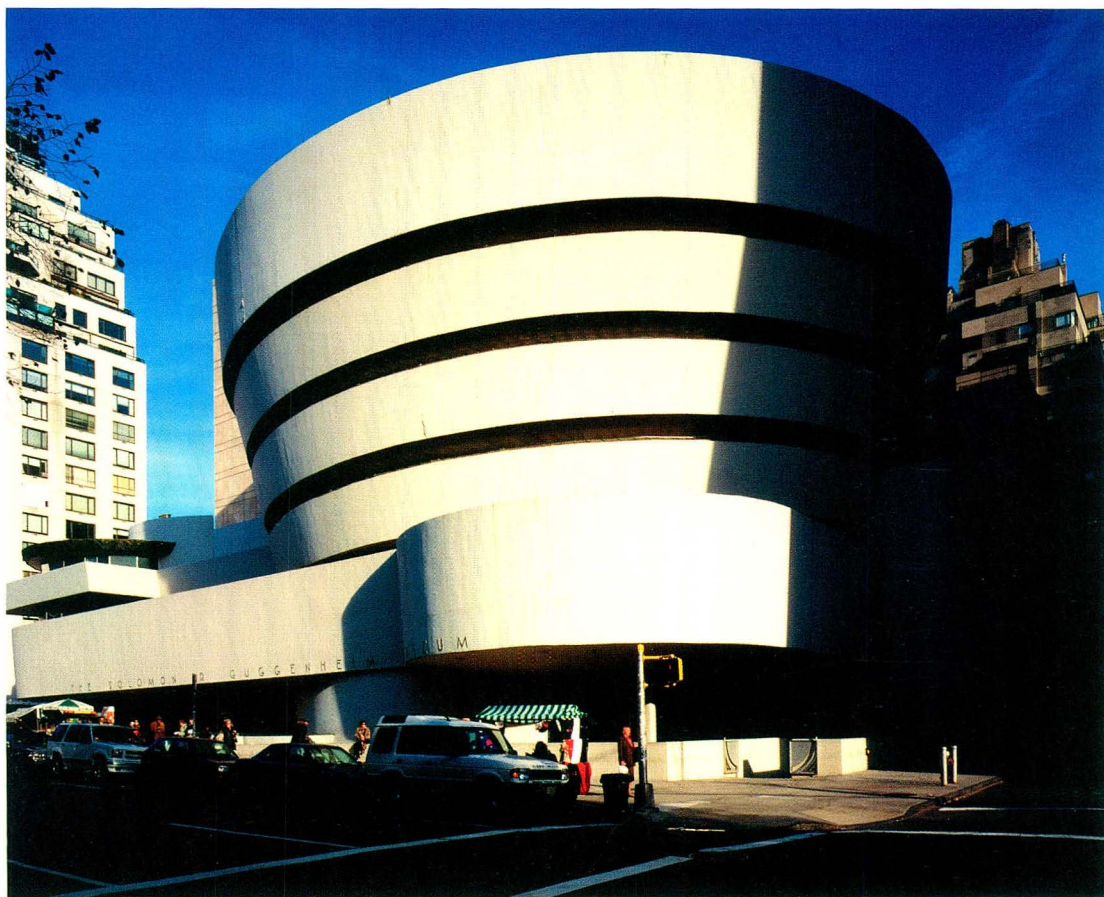
Designed by Douglas Cardinal Architects, GBQC Architects, and Johnpaul Jones. The role of some museum buildings is to house multiple exhibitions by many different design firms. This does not mean though that the building should be designed outside the realm of the story. In the case of this large museum, the early stakeholder process defined a number of themes that would be reflected in both the exhibitions, the building, and the grounds.



Art museum architecture

The architecture of an art museum can often dominate the organization of its exhibitions, by mandating a specific circulation and organization of display spaces. The challenge for the exhibition designer is not only to work within the special confines, but also to turn them to their advantage.

Below: Guggenheim New York, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright
Right: Guggenheim Bilbao, designed by Frank Gehry and Associates

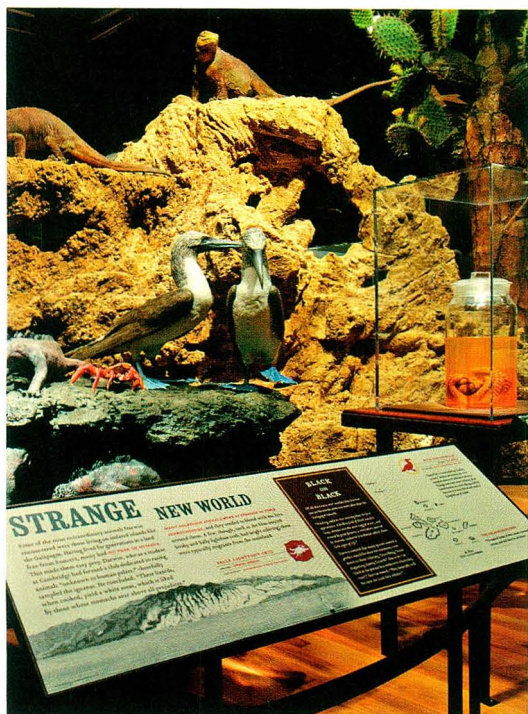




On the storytelling side, it must be noted that one can never be completely sure how an exhibition will be configured in each and every space in which it is installed. For this reason it is incumbent upon the designer to devise a flexible layout that can adapt to each venue. Linear narratives with a spatial sequence of a strong beginning, middle, and end can be difficult to deploy in some places. Thematic, or even random organizations, might be more adaptable.

Another characteristic associated with traveling exhibitions can come as a nasty surprise: they are usually much more expensive! Even a simple show composed of demountable graphic panels must bear the added cost of specialized materials and hardware, packing crates, transportation, insurance, etc. Just continue to multiply those costs as the scope and complexity of a project increases—special handling for objects and electronic equipment; complex installation processes; specialized structural and power systems; traveling work crews who are trained to install, break down, and maintain exhibits; duplicates for items that could break on the road; and added protection for all of it.

Today the subjects for traveling exhibitions are as broad and varied as are the stories out there to be told. Museums and other organizations have even reached out to a wider audience by creating “moveable museums” in vans and trucks, and the trend is only getting stronger.



Telling a story

As the work presented in this book shows, exhibition design spans a wide range of disciplines, but all exhibitions have one important thing in common; they all tell a story. Storytelling is the central craft of the exhibition designer, who creates a story from four elements: a narrative, a narrator, a path, and a context.

Narrative

When planning an exhibition, most institutions begin by determining the message that they wish to convey to their audience. However, by itself, this is not a story. The message only becomes a story when it is given a narrative thread with a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Narrator

A narrator is needed to drive the story forward. The narrator can be created using any number of mediums, such as text, graphics, or technology. Most exhibitions employ multiple narrative mediums.

Path

The path is what gives the story its structure, transforming the narrative into a three-dimensional space, which brings the story to life for each visitor. Just as in architectural and interior design disciplines, the space must be organized into a sequence that relates to the story and the visitors who will experience the exhibition. This sequence of experiences can be arranged around a timeline, theme, or hierarchy; any structure that has a consistent logic. Exhibitions provide this sequence of experiences in segments,

building up the whole story, but never allowing the visitor to see the entire structure at once. Revealing the story step-by-step or through a series of possible steps is a key factor in engaging the visitor.

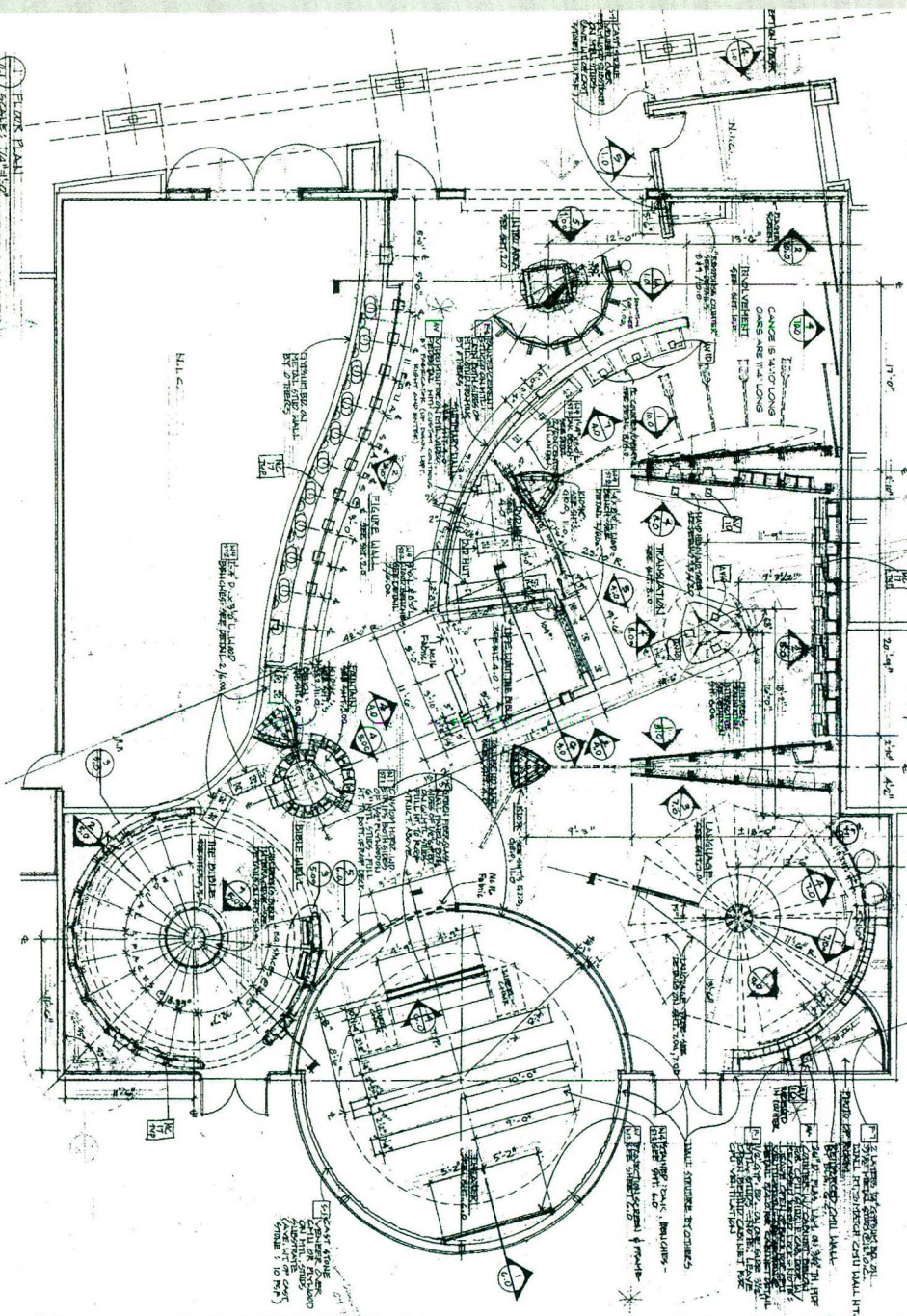
Context

Often the most neglected part of storytelling in exhibition design is the external context. An exhibition does not stand in a void, it is integrated into a building or landscape. How the visitor approaches and engages with the exhibition is as important as the exhibition itself. The visitor's introduction to the exhibition is not a part of the story, but is crucial to preparing the visitor for the experience.

Telling a story correctly

The primary role of an exhibition designer is to tell a story, but the obligation of a good exhibition designer is to use space, technology, displays, and materials effectively in service of that story. The following chapters focusing on the process and details behind exhibition development may seem daunting, but the designer is not alone: they have the support of multiple specialists throughout the process.

1 FLOOR PLAN
211 SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"



LORENC-YGO-DESIGN

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These drawings are for the sole purpose of expressing a client's design intent only and are not intended for actual construction purposes.

0.1

PROJECT: Wycliffe Bible Translators
FILE NAME:
TITLE: Floor Plan

PROJECT NO: 00.225
DATE: 9.19.00
REVISIONS: 12.19.00 6.06.01
6.25.01 7.25.01
11.9.01





Issues

What is Exhibition Design? is the ultimate guide to the many facets of this rapidly emerging discipline, covering every field that applies graphic information to place and object. Beginning with a brief history of exhibition design, the book examines the issues surrounding the subject today, such as communicating effectively with the audience and the effects of technology on design. The book discusses what constitutes an exhibition, and explores the boundaries between exhibitions, public spaces, and art.

Anatomy

The second section of the book examines the various disciplines of exhibition design, covering design for museums, public centers, commercial spaces, and traveling shows. The book then looks at every aspect of the exhibition design process, from concept generation, through design, fabrication, and evaluation. It discusses the selection of materials, environmental concerns, the use of media and technology, and issues concerning lighting and acoustics.

Portfolios

What is Exhibition Design? concludes with a stunning, diverse presentation of cutting-edge work from designers and studios around the world. This impressive portfolio section showcases the breadth and richness of international exhibition design, featuring design studios of all sizes and areas of specialization.

Includes work by

4274 Design Workshop
AldrichPears Associates
Ammar Eloueini Digit-all Studio
Atelier Markgraph
atelierbrückner
bachman.kern & partner
Box & Cox
Bruce Mau Design
Burkhardt Leitner constructiv
C&G Partners
Caruso St. John
Casson Mann

Chemetov & Huidobro
Chermayeff & Geismar
Cloud Gehshan Associates
Electrosonic
emerystudio
Gallagher Associates
Gensler
GL Associates
Hewitt Pender Associates
Lee H. Skolnick Architecture +
Design Partnership
Lorenc+Yoo Design

Ellen Lupton
Mauk Design
Mayer Reed
nendo
Pentagram
Project Arts & Ideas
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Staples & Charles
Ueland Junker McCauley
Nicholson
Vignelli Associates

