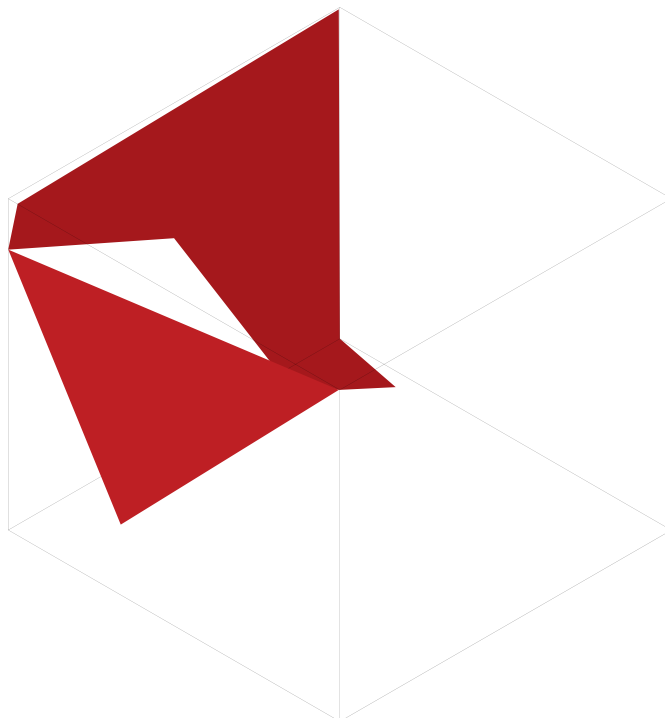


# Studies in Material Thinking



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## Volume 12 Material Thinking of Display

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### Art museum architecture as spectacle or receptacle?

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**Susan Freeman**

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*Abstract: Over the last twenty years, art museum architecture has become a focal point of the visitor experience, with the building providing as much of an attraction as the collections and exhibitions—more spectacle than receptacle. Simultaneously, art museums have begun to reconfigure their approach to exhibitions. They now often program a series of themed events in conjunction with the exhibition, and exhibitions themselves are changing, with artworks displayed in designed and interpreted environments that are as much a part of the exhibition experience as the artworks. These two changes may seem to be in harmony, but they can conflict when the spectacle of the building impedes the museum's ability to stage the exhibitions. This does not mean that museums must fall back on to the receptacle model. A travelling exhibition designed by a team headed by the author is used as a case study to investigate the complex, collaborative design and installation process that is called for when the art is displayed within a designed and interpreted environment. Then, several buildings that successfully and creatively balance spectacle and receptacle are examined.*

*Keywords: Exhibition design, art museum, architecture, visitor engagement, FRD, art collections*

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**Introduction**

Over the last twenty years, art museum architecture has become a focal point of the visitor experience, with the building providing as much of an attraction as the collections and exhibitions. The building has become a spectacle rather than a simple receptacle. Simultaneously, art museums have begun to reconfigure their approach to exhibitions. Museums and galleries now often program a series of events outside of the exhibition itself, going beyond the traditional guided tour to provide art workshops, seminar programs, music, entertainment and even exhibition-themed food. These attract visitors and encourage them to contribute to museum revenue in more than ticket sales.

These changes in approach go much deeper than mere programming, however. Exhibitions themselves are changing. Perhaps influenced by changes in the non-art museum sector, visitors have come to expect a far more interactive and engaged experience than is given by artworks hanging on a blank surface. In the author's twenty-five-year experience in exhibition design, the last fifteen as the director of an independent exhibition design company, Freeman Ryan Design, exhibition design is taking a more prominent role, and artworks are now often displayed in designed and interpreted environments that contribute to the aesthetic and intellectual experience of the visitor. In turn, artists, curators, museums and designers now often work collaboratively on projects to provide an all-encompassing experience for visitors, who can engage in multiple ways with the artworks on display rather than simply look at them hanging on the walls.

This may seem to be in tune with the move away from museums as receptacle to museums as spectacle. However, just as the rise of large-scale abstract art encouraged the development of the white cube exhibition space, these complex exhibition experiences are most successful in a particular kind of space: one which allows complete control over the environment and includes the infrastructure necessary for substantial lighting and multimedia installation. In cases where the tendency to treat the building as a spectacle goes so far that the architectural form, or the ambient environment it creates, intrudes upon the exhibition spaces, the museum's ability to show these kinds of exhibition can be hindered.

This does not mean that museums need to fall back on to the receptacle model; however, modern exhibition experiences place new demands on museum and exhibition design, meaning that collaboration between museums, artists and exhibition designers is required at the outset of exhibition planning to ensure a successful visitor experience. In what follows, we first survey the significant changes that have occurred in art museum exhibitions in the last 20 years. Then a travelling exhibition is examined as a case study of the new collaborative and immersive model for art exhibitions. The discussion looks at the design process, investigating the infrastructure necessary to display an exhibition in an existing space, and the collaboration it requires between museum, designer, and artist. Finally, several new museum buildings are examined to show the varied ways in which a successful balance between spectacle and receptacle can be achieved through the creative interweaving of art, building, site, and other functions.



**Agents of change in art museums in the last twenty years**

This section details the most important changes that have occurred in the way art museums program and present exhibitions and visitor experiences, and spells out the impact of these changes on museum planning and exhibition design.

**Art is taking new material forms**

Exhibitions of art, while still exploring traditional media, have evolved from delivering art fixed to the walls, or freestanding in the space, to works suspended, projected, broadcast and breathing in the gallery. Art transgressed the traditional boundaries from the museum walls to outside the building back in the 1960s and 70s, and since then it has continued to take many new and different material (and immaterial) forms. These can place new demands on museum infrastructure planning and design.

As sophisticated new electronic media works are made, for example, spaces need to be found or created, and the technology and relevant services provided. For exhibition designers and installers there are pragmatic issues that need to be addressed: access, structural integrity (often of the work and the building), floor loadings, anchor points in ceilings and walls, supply of electrical and data services, sourcing appropriate media hardware, dealing with water and drainage in areas that may have environmental climate restrictions, sound attenuation, and the ability to control daylight.

However, not all requirements of contemporary art can be predicted or included in the architectural brief. Moreover, accommodating this unpredictability by providing high structural floor loadings throughout gallery and foyer spaces has a considerable impact on the budget, as does provision of extensive power and data, environmental controls and numerous flexible lighting options throughout the building.

The current generation of museum professionals has grown up working to the internationally recognised and until recently unassailable standards of  $20^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$  temperature and  $50\% \pm 5\%$  relative humidity. However, in response to the financial and environmental cost of maintaining this rigid standard universally, the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) is currently reviewing environmental parameters that may look to a broader range of standards and be more targeted to the materials of specific collection artefacts.



Figure 1. Anish Kapoor, *Memory*. Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Photo: © Susan Freeman

#### Visitors are demanding more engagement with the art

Added to the long-practised function of exhibiting art, museums and galleries are now often interpreting the works in some way for the visitors, and visitors, for their part, are becoming more demanding of their desire to better understand and interact with the works. Interpretation may take many forms, some of which impact on the building and, for new museums, the building brief. Within the exhibition, interpretation can be made through the design language of graphics, built forms and material selections, with multimedia (which might be projected, screen or tablet-based, or downloadable apps that visitors engage with before, during or after their visit), and through immersive works, soundscapes and theatrical lighting. New technologies have produced new opportunities in materials (from composite sheet or solid to seamless membranes) and multimedia (LED in both image tile and lighting hardware).

Thus it is not only new artistic media that must be accommodated within the traditional art museum; rather, the trend towards incorporating audience participation, interactivity and multimedia into the traditional art exhibition places significant demands on museum and exhibition planning and design.



Figure 2. Goddess, *Divine Energy*, Art Gallery of New South Wales. Photo: © John Gollings

#### Galleries are attracting visitors through programs and events

As government funding has been in decline for some years and exhibition budgets have become much smaller, museums have responded by attracting visitors in other ways. Programming events to increase numbers has proven very successful for many museums. And for visitors, a place to take the family is appealing when many levels of engagement can be achieved.

The role and impact of visitor programs have been elevated in the last ten years, partly to attract new audiences, and in part to increase revenue. The nature of the dependency between the visitor and the museum (the museum to nurture the visitor in the realm of art, and the visitor to continue to visit and ensure future funding or revenue), has also been altered in the exchange. Art museums have moved on from the grand edifice containing art with visitors behaving passively, to spaces where visitors are participating, responding to the artworks and contributing to the artist's forum. The conversations can continue after the event, and beyond the walls of the museum. Responses are texted and tweeted to ensure



the participation of the visitor is shared with others, reinforcing their position in and relationship to the art world. In this reciprocal arrangement, visitors are (self-appointed) voices of marketing for the museum.

For example, at *The Drawing Room, Matisse: Drawing a Life* exhibition at the Gallery of Modern Art at the Queensland Art Gallery, a large studio was set up with still lifes, including furniture, musical instruments, fruit, flowers, crockery and live models, where visitors were provided with pencils and paper, tablets and drawing tools. Visitors could email their completed image to a friend, an excellent opportunity to use visitors to assist in marketing.

This was seen in perhaps its most elaborate form at the *Portrait of Spain: Masterpieces from the Prado* exhibition, again at Queensland Art Gallery, where interpretation included live broadcast, performance, and dance, which extended into the restaurant and café.



Figure 3. *The Drawing Room, Matisse: Drawing a life*, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane. Photo: © Susan Freeman

Changes extend even into a museum's hours of operation. The Art Gallery of New South Wales was the first Australian gallery to introduce late night opening. Since its introduction ten years ago, visitation has been boosted by over 600,000 to the events. As well as the more-traditional exhibition talks and tours of the contemporary galleries, also on offer are workshops, live music, food, talks and events that relate to the exhibition on display, and specifically provide an opportunity to draw newcomers to the gallery. Visitors enjoy the 'immersion in art' and attend repeatedly to a known event format and the promise of more than one element of interest.

These programs can affect the spaces and services required of museum buildings. They often occupy spaces in the building traditionally dedicated to galleries, which may thus lack the services needed to supply the programs. Pop-up anything requires servicing in some way—even the espresso machine requires 3-phase power. Food and beverage services away from the café or restaurant demand more of back of house and the installation of temporary arrangements. The programs then place further demands on the building—BCA requirements, visitor amenities, way-finding and signage—as visitor numbers increase.





Figure 4. Late night opening 10th anniversary event. Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Photo: © AGNSW

#### The artist working in collaboration with the art museum

Art, interpretation and visitor programs sometimes merge as artists collaborate with galleries to develop the programs and art becomes more participatory. This opens new opportunities for visitor engagement, for new kinds of exhibition, and even for new kinds of art. However, sometimes this collaboration can be in danger of succumbing to marketing initiatives at the expense of deeper engagement with the museum and its collection.

Artbar, held on the last Friday evening of the month at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Sydney, encourages visitor interaction in various programs involving art, music, dance and design.

What is the role of the artist in this circumstance? How much more about the art do we know if we attend? The degree of success in actual engagement with art is hard to measure, and is no doubt different for each program. What is drawing people to the place? Is it the artists' premise, or perhaps the appeal of a cool new venue, where we are encouraged to behave differently, badly even, in a place we usually show respect? How many of the revelers participate in the programs and how many retire to the top floor sculpture terrace with a drink? Whatever the outcome, the events inevitably involve extensive planning and additional resources, as well as additional building services (sometimes in unlikely places).

Visitors are also demanding more personal engagement—to meet the artist, even to *be* the artist. The role of celebrity cannot be underestimated. An extraordinary number of visitors under the age of twenty five were seen flocking to the Yoko Ono exhibition at the MCA—one wonders how much of her art they were familiar with. Perhaps the appeal is the performance nature of much of the work, the encouragement of self-focus, her invitations for visitors to participate, and to indulge in their own desires, write them on a tag and tie them to the wishing tree. And of course, take a selfie.

To successfully commandeer the audience's desire for participation within the interpretive and experiential purposes of the exhibition rather than merely co-opting it for marketing imperatives, care must be taken to incorporate the capability for participation and interaction in the exhibition planning and design. Incorporated capabilities must also be flexible to accommodate rapidly changing media technology.





Figure 5. Yayoi Kusama, *Look now see forever*, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane. Photo: © Susan Freeman

#### The museum as an entertainment package

Art museums have become a destination in themselves, where visitors will attend the venue, then look to see what is on, as opposed to coming specifically for the exhibition. The experience may include an event, a lecture, performance, film, the café, the bar and perhaps an overnight stay. The Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart is a highly successful example of this. People will generally say that they are going or have been to MONA, as opposed to naming the exhibition they are travelling to see. Short attention spans are sated by the option to cut out of the art experience and go to the bar, the café, the shop, the market on the lawns outside. The ferry ride to the museum contributes significantly to the whole experience of the gallery.

The visitor experience of art museums now starts well in advance of arrival at the building. It is preceded by expectation, built from word of mouth, reviews, advertising and snippets gleaned from the electronic world. We often arrive with an opinion already intact about the building architecture, the collection, the exhibition, the program, the restaurant, even the quality of the coffee. This is often the result of very engaging advertising, cleverly woven into a review of a recent visit.

Part of the attraction of packaged programming is that it disrupts traditional audience expectations of art exhibitions. For this reason the behind-the-scenes planning it requires can also be disruptive if not considered in full. Aside from the need to supply building services to accommodate event programming, consideration should be given to design to ensure consistency of identity across the full package of products.

#### Private art museums—singular visions

As more private art museums emerge, there is greater ability to break from the known and venture into uncharted territory. Depending on the scale of the institution, fewer people are involved in the decision-making, and they often have a more singular vision. As a result, there is the potential for the building architecture and interior spaces to respond to some very specific circumstances and drive a more unique solution. In Australia, the White Rabbit





Gallery in Sydney, the TarraWarra Museum of Art in the Yarra Valley, and of course MONA in Hobart reflect this approach. A potential disadvantage is that where such institutions have given a strong role to the building architecture, they may find it more difficult to accommodate exhibitions that do not fit with the aesthetic or structure of the interior spaces, such as fully designed travelling exhibitions.

**Case study:**  
***Yiwarra Kuju—***  
***Stories from the***  
***Canning Stock Route***

In this section we examine a case study of an exhibition in the new mould—involving multiple organisations collaborating to bring together the full range of exhibition components: artworks and artefacts, interpretation including graphics and multimedia installations, and designed supporting structures and showcases which themselves act as interpretive elements.

*Yiwarra Kuju* was a travelling exhibition on the story of the Canning Stock Route, a track running nearly 2000 km through the Western Australian desert. The route, begun in 1906, cut through the land of more than 15 Aboriginal language groups. For many years, the story of the route was known only from the white man's perspective. This exhibition told the other story: of the Aboriginal people whose connection to Country was broken by a track that paid no heed to traditional ownership, tribal boundaries, or sites of cultural and spiritual significance.

The project was instigated by FORM, an independent arts organisation based in Perth. FORM spent several years working in collaboration with artists in Aboriginal art centres in Western Australia, developing works for the exhibition and researching their stories of the stock route. In 2008 the collection of artworks was acquired by the National Museum of Australia (NMA), which developed the project into a travelling exhibition in partnership with FORM and with us at Freeman Ryan Design.

As a social history museum, the NMA had a different curatorial vision from that which typically drives art galleries. The paintings and objects were treated as they are understood by Aboriginal people: as icons that communicate cultural meaning. This approach emphasised the lived experience from which the artworks emerged: telling the stories of the connection of Aboriginal people to land, and of their experiences of conflict, exodus, and rupture as the stock route was constructed. In this way it symbolised a return to Country, a reconnection with the land and the cultural traditions tied to it.

The cultural context that would enable visitors to understand the story of the track and of the people would be communicated through extensive and varied interpretive media and through the exhibition design, which would provide a coherent framework to bring the different elements together. Thus the exhibition, though nominally an exhibition of contemporary artworks, needed to discard the art-gallery tradition of presenting contemporary paintings in a minimally interpreted empty space or receptacle.

At Freeman Ryan Design we took this curatorial vision as the starting point for a design which would immerse the visitors in the landscape and where the paintings would be vehicles to tell the stories of Country. To achieve this we designed the exhibition into a black box space. The paintings were hung around the perimeter and the contextual stories were housed in internal built structures punctuating the centre of the room, disconnected from the walls.

Inside the exhibition, reduced ambient and strong spot lighting combine with the dark walls and discrete structures to create an impression of unboundedness: the walls recede from the visitor and the paintings seem to hover around the perimeter of the space.

The discrete structures create views through the exhibition and set up sightlines to reinforce connectivity between different themes. These are built on a lengthwise axis taking the visitor notionally along the stock route from south to north. Curvilinear structures create containers for Aboriginal stories of culture and of family, while the European histories unfold on rectilinear walls.

A suspended ceiling piece creates an intimate environment in which visitors can interact with large-format multi-touch screens. There are other multimedia pieces integrated into wall panels and graphics, or housed in the exhibition structures. The exhibition technologies are concealed from the visitor, so focus remains on the artefacts and stories in the exhibition



space. Curvilinear seating is used to slow the visitor journey and to create spaces for storytelling and conversation.

These elements of the design contrast with a traditional art gallery exhibition, where paintings are for the most part displayed for their visual qualities only, and their social and cultural context is downplayed. While the exhibition is a fully orchestrated experience, it was nonetheless designed to interpret the collection subtly, and without compromising the experience of the artworks. In this way the exhibition design has a dual role: reflecting both what one would expect to find in a museum and also in an art gallery.

Interestingly, in *Yiwarra Kuju*, the black box creates the opportunity for extensive use of multimedia and lighting effects, including the orchestration of a lack of light, certainly to place more emphasis on the interpretive context, but it also reinforces the power of each painting—they hover in front of the walls that support them, and come out to greet us as visitors move through the exhibition. Thus the visual experience of the artworks—as well as our understanding of them—is not diminished but rendered more powerful by their being situated in a designed and interpreted space.

But more than the design it is perhaps the long, collaborative process of development that signals this exhibition as different from the traditional art gallery exhibition, and which illustrates the impact of the multidisciplinary exhibition model. The duration of the project evolution, prior to the exhibition design commencing, resulted in an in-depth knowledge of and connection with the collection. For over three years the project curators and media producers travelled to Country with the artists, sharing deeply profound histories and stories while the art was produced, creating enduring respect for the works. This is evident in the curatorial voices, and the care with which the works are described and positioned. Many voices are represented. Some specific desires of the artists—such as suspending the paintings associated with the seven sisters story high in the space—were designed into the exhibition, a challenging task for both the designers to solve and the National Museum to install.

The collaborative process meant that each iteration of exhibition concept, layout and design we produced at Freeman Ryan Design was thoroughly scrutinised by the project team, and when agreement was reached, sent to the artists themselves for approval. As designers we use a suite of familiar tools—hand sketches at the early concept stage, then CAD plans, elevations and sections as the project progresses. In this instance, the most successful tool to communicate the ideas to the artists was to develop 3D 'bird's eye views', with each painting or artefact used photographically and accurately in a perspective of the exhibition forms that showed the relationship between the various elements. These drawings were then re-done for each different exhibition space, with the exhibition being re-designed to travel to Perth for the CHOGM conference, then to Sydney at the Australian Museum.

The interpretive texts for each artwork—not a single label but multiple small panels, starting with a photograph of the artist—also underwent many drafts, re-writes and redesigns under the scrutiny of curators and the NMA editors. Exhibitions of this depth and complexity require time as well as the passion and skills of the contributors.

As can be seen from this case study, the success of a modern, multidisciplinary exhibition design depends on the coherence of all the elements—placement of works, interpretation, the circulation, the form and relationship of the structures, the selected colours and finishes, lighting and multimedia. And the design is only part of a much larger collaboration which places demands on the venue and on the process of design, production and programming. Especially in a travelling exhibition, the coherence of a complex, multidisciplinary exhibition such as this can be lost if the venue is not sufficiently flexible to accommodate the design and the planning process.





Figure 6. *Yiwarra Kuju—Stories from the Canning Stock Route*. National Museum of Australia, Canberra. Project development and painting in country. Photo: © Tim Acker



Figure 7. *Yiwarra Kuju—Stories from the Canning Stock Route*. National Museum of Australia, Canberra. Project development and painting in country. Photo: © Tim Acker



Figure 8. *Yiwarra Kuju—Stories from the Canning Stock Route*. National Museum of Australia, Canberra. Photo: © Tim Ackera



Figure 9. *Yiwarra Kuju—Stories from the Canning Stock Route*, Exhibition. National Museum of Australia, Canberra. Drawing: © Freeman Ryan Design



Figure 10. *Yiwarra Kuju—Stories from the Canning Stock Route*. National Museum of Australia, Canberra. Project development. Photo: © Tim Acker



Figure 11. *Yiwarra Kuju—Stories from the Canning Stock Route*. National Museum of Australia, Canberra. Photo: © John Gollings



Figure 12. *Yiwarra Kuju—Stories from the Canning Stock Route*. National Museum of Australia, Canberra.  
Photo: © John Gollings



Figure 13. *Yiwarra Kuju—Stories from the Canning Stock Route*. National Museum of Australia, Canberra.  
Photo: © John Gollings



**The built and programmed response to changing conditions in museum practice**

This section undertakes a brief review of some recent art museum buildings to examine the interplay of museum architecture with exhibition design and curatorship. It shows that there are many different possible outcomes of this interplay, nuanced by the collection, the brief, the building and the budget.

**Rockbund, Shanghai**

Rockbund Shanghai is a restored heritage building in a new cultural precinct at the north end of the Bund. The Museum has no permanent collection but has temporary exhibitions and programs in both interior and exterior galleries.

David Chipperfield is currently commissioned to deliver eleven buildings as part of the Rockbund Project. The task involves both the careful restoration and conversion of an ensemble of some colonial architecture, including the Rockbund Art Museum, and some new works. As China's first public museum, the Rockbund Art Museum is dedicated to exhibiting contemporary art, but is not a collecting institution.

The Art Deco building provides a series of flexible spaces, where a new atrium, piercing the centre of the building, allows for diffused daylight entry and the linking of the upper level volumes. The spaces are robust, stripped of detail and white, but with the capacity to fully control the natural light levels and create 'black box' galleries. This makes provision for spaces that accommodate many art forms, including multimedia, and the possibility of creating theatrical environments in the museum. The galleries can expand and contract to allow for different exhibitions and changes in visitor navigation.

The inaugural exhibition showed *Peasant Da Vincis*, a work of the Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang, and occupied all of the museum galleries. It was a pioneering cross-disciplinary project featuring 'cultural ready-mades', a common element in his works, with a focus on the creative power of individual Chinese peasants. The media varied from physical flying (and apparently working) structures to fragile sculptural multimedia pieces. The exhibition demanded full lighting control of specific spaces, and made use of numerous hanging points and extensive power and data throughout the exhibition.

The dignified architectural response to the heritage shell of the building seems to perform equally well as both 'spectacle' and 'receptacle'.



Figure 14. Rockbund, Shanghai. Photo: © Susan Freeman





Figure 15. Rockbund, Shanghai. Photo: © Susan Freeman



Figure 16. Rockbund, Shanghai. *Peasant Da Vincis*, Cai Guo-Qiang. Photo: © Susan Freeman





Figure 17. Rockbund, Shanghai. *Peasant Da Vincis*, Cai Guo-Qiang. Photo: © Susan Freeman



Figure 18. Rockbund, Shanghai. *Peasant Da Vincis*, Cai Guo-Qiang. Photo: © Susan Freeman

### CaixaForum, Madrid

This building demonstrates the adaptive re-use of a 110 year-old industrial building, by Herzog and de Mueron, where the galleries are only part of the cultural platform, and the building itself is seen as an artwork, becoming part of the collection.

The CaixaForum is one of several buildings that house the social and cultural forum of La Caixa in Spain. Consistently the buildings commissioned by La Caixa have an interesting brief in that there is no permanent collection to house, but rather travelling exhibitions of multidisciplinary arts.

The CaixaForum is the result of close collaboration between the client and the architect, located in the key cultural district, between the Reina Sofia, Museo Thyssen and the Prado.

Inasmuch as the building itself is a cultural artwork, and clearly a 'spectacle', this is not at the expense of the interior requirements—the building design also responds to, in fact is generated by, the spatial and pragmatic needs of its interior. A series of different exhibition spaces has been provided, well suited to myriad art forms, providing both white and black box spatial options, and a wide variety of visitor programs.

The interior brief called for flexible galleries accommodating changing exhibitions of varying media, in addition to entrance lobby, restaurant, shop and offices above ground, and a large auditorium below ground. The external courtyard provides spaces for performance, audience and visitor gathering.

There are bold architectural moves in this 'spectacle' building. Inside the building shell, the space was not sufficient. Volume was added at the top of the building, with an additional two levels underground. Externally, to make the building visually accessible, the corner was severed, and a new space between the brick building and the surrounding streets created.

A significant intervention was to remove a component of the building horizontally, such that the building hovers over an open space that provides access the building, and clearly signifies entry. A twenty-four metre high vertical garden, designed in collaboration with the botanist Patrick Blanc, beautifully defines one wall of the square.

None of these interventions distract from the program within, but rather combine to support the ambitious, and aesthetically very pleasing, mandate of the CaixaForum.



Figure 19. CaixaForum, Madrid. Photo: © Susan Freeman



Figure 20. CaixaForum, Madrid. Photo: © Susan Freeman

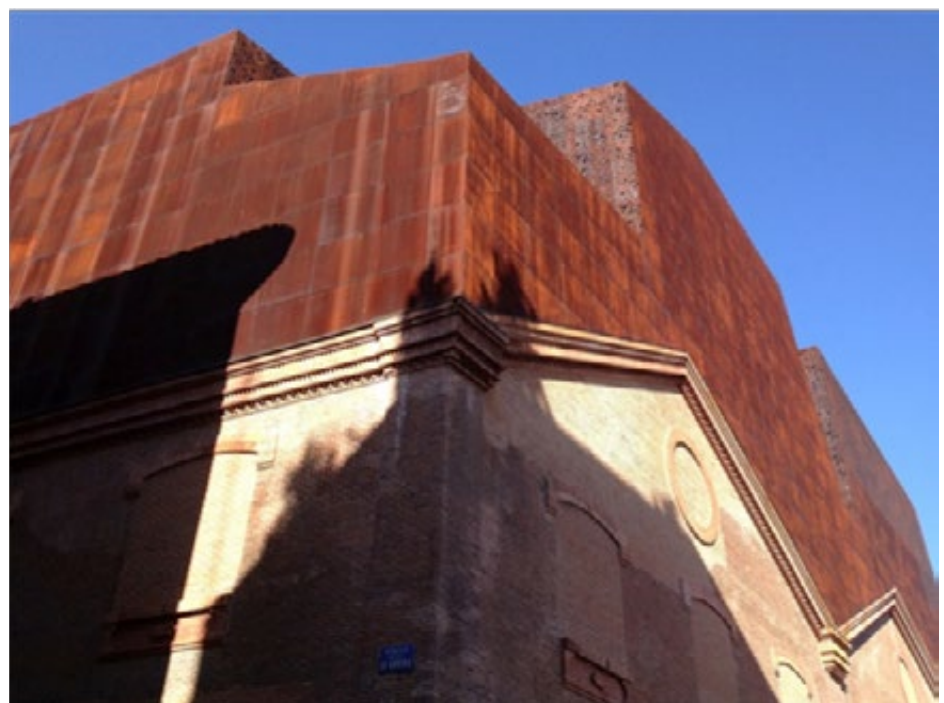


Figure 21. CaixaForum, Madrid. Photo: © Susan Freeman



Figure 22. CaixaForum, Madrid. Photo: © Susan Freeman



Figure 23. CaixaForum, Madrid. Photo: © Susan Freeman



Figure 24. CaixaForum, Madrid. Temporary exhibition *Rome: Piranesi's Vision*. Photo: © Susan Freeman

#### Dia: Beacon, New York state, USA

Dia Art Foundation, which has fostered long term relationships with artists, opened its Beacon site in 2003—in a 1929 brick Nabisco printing factory—and attracts around 65,000 visitors a year. The site was developed to showcase Dia's works of Minimalist, Conceptual and Post-Minimalist art.

The building is an adaptive re-use of a large factory to create a series of luminous white boxes, where the building primarily functions as receptacle. A collaboration between artist, architect and client, the building delivers robust white boxes to house the permanent and temporary art collections and travelling temporary exhibitions.

As with a number of art museums outside urban centres, the journey (in this case the 80-minute train journey out of Grand Central, rolling north on the east bank of the Hudson) contributes significantly to the visitor experience. When we visit, the journey has allowed us to relax, and we arrive primed for the experience.

Entry is made through the modest opening to the north side of the building, following ticketing and cloakroom in the separate building adjacent. Once inside the museum, the grand spaces are reserved not for the entry foyer and public spaces, but for the gallery spaces within.

The luminous spaces have white-painted brick walls, saw-tooth skylights, and heavily stained timber floors, reflecting its earlier use as a factory building.

Again, unlike most gallery experiences, there is no prescribed circulation path and little signage; we are cut adrift to make our own way through the galleries. This fugue through the maze-like galleries significantly enhances the art-viewing experience. There is a heavy dependence on daylight (diffused and reflected), so the spaces, and the light on the artworks, varies greatly depending on the time of day, year, and weather. UV levels run high. Services are exposed, cabling evident and multimedia rudimentary, and the simple spaces are ideal for artworks on open display. Some of the works are site-specific, commissioned for the Beacon, but others come from the greater collection and rotate through the galleries on temporary show.

Much of the conception of Dia:Beacon is attributed to three of Dia's founding artists—Flavin, Judd and De Maria—who designed not only the art but the spaces for the art to occupy.

Robert Irwin collaborated with Dia to develop the interior and exterior planning to allow the accommodation of art and the visiting public. The hand of the architect is not evident; the artists are in control.

The net result is we are dislocated from the urban context, liberated from the day-to-day and free to roam. We reconnect momentarily for coffee, thumb through the books in the shop, or experience the soundscape in the garden, then immerse ourselves once again in the grand white receptacle.



Figure 25. DIA: Beacon entry. Photo: © Susan Freeman



Figure 26. DIA: Beacon. Photo: © Susan Freeman





Figure 27. DIA: Beacon. Photo: © Susan Freeman

#### Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum, Japan

This museum incorporates art 'villages' with both purpose-built contemporary buildings by Tadao Ando, and restored and modified traditional buildings. The new buildings are both spectacle and receptacle, where artworks are often commissioned and site specific. But here the landscape also has a key role.

Naoshima is a small island floating in the inland sea on the periphery, and a ferry ride away from Okinawa. Like visiting the DIA Beacon, the journey is a significant part of the experience. From the ferry you can just see the first of the buildings at the top of the hill at the end of a long set of stone steps, not unlike the journey into a Shinto temple. The museum buildings are partly dug into the ground, and trees are planted on the roof. The buildings are for the most part concealed and fully integrated into the landscape.

Inside the museum, the buildings go beyond the architectural norms of white cubes and neutral spaces, and build on the influences of nature: air, light, sea and woods. Here the Ando intertwines nature, art and architecture. The buildings orchestrate natural light in the spaces, moving from dark spaces (a cylindrical space with 10m concrete walls where a large Bruce Nauman work glows) through to light filled ones, then burst into the landscape. Although the building opens in places to the exterior, daylight entry into the building is carefully managed and the interior spaces can be completely controlled: black or white boxes.

At certain intervals the view to the outside is framed by large windows, and looks like a painting. There are a number of open areas that allow visitors to break from the galleries and enjoy the views to the misty water. On a terrace, with a view to the sea facing west, Hiroshi Sugimoto's boundless photographs of the sea are hung on the exterior walls.

Much of the art has been commissioned, both within the museum buildings and Cultural Village and also in Honmura, one of the older settlements on the island, with the idea of revitalising this part of the island. The process of creating the work is as significant as the finished work itself, and these projects are ongoing. The artworks become tied to the place.

There is a hotel, the Benesse House Annex, at the top of the hill, accessed through the museum and via a cable car. The building is also dug into the hill, is planted on top, and has a large circular opening to the sky at its centre. Each room has a commissioned artwork.

Beyond the building lies the 'Naoshima Cultural Village' including an International Camping Ground and a growing number of artworks. In Honmura, there were a number of traditional houses unoccupied, so the project was in part to restore the houses but also give them new life. The house keeps its traditional form and in itself becomes a piece of art, keeping Japanese culture in mind in the process. Sometimes the process involved collaboration between contemporary art and architecture, as with Tadao Ando and James Turrell, in other instances, as with the Miyajima work, a collaboration with the heritage restoration architect, Tadashi Yamamoto, the artist and local volunteers.

The buildings are both spectacle and receptacle, but the museum is as much an exterior experience for the visitor, where art has a considered place in the landscape.



Figure 28. Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum. Photo: © Peter Emmett



Figure 29. Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum. Photo: © Peter Emmett





Figure 30. Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum. Photo: © Peter Emmett

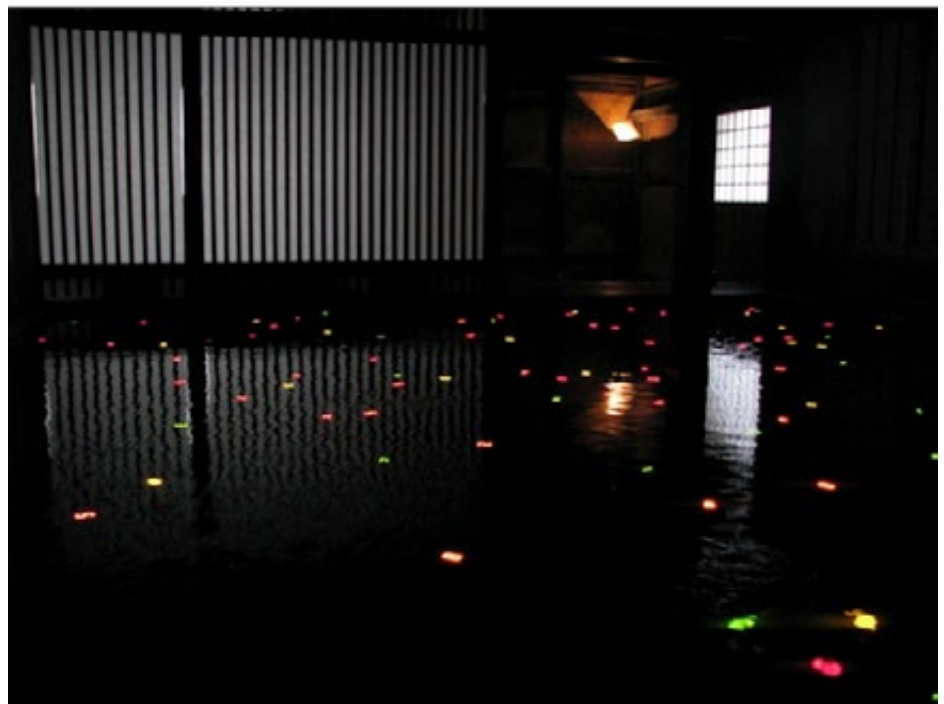


Figure 31. Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum. Photo: © Peter Emmett



Figure 32. Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum. Photo: © Peter Emmett



Figure 33. Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum. Photo: © Peter Emmett

What conclusions can be drawn from the examination of these four successful but very different museum designs? At the most elementary level, each of these buildings successfully provides a 'receptacle' for the art, but they are not necessarily 'spectacle' buildings. Rather,

it is the specific interweaving of the art, the building (new or existing), the site, and the other complementary functions and programs that determines the resultant visitor experience. And within this mix, ideally the hand of the exhibition designer can remain light.

### **Conclusion**

Changes in contemporary approaches to art exhibitions, where exhibitions can be large events accompanied by outside programming, visitor and artist participation, and entertainment, mean that a collaborative approach to exhibition design on the part of designer, museum and artist is becoming the norm. This is reflected in the tendency towards the museum as spectacle, with the architecture of the museum as itself a focal point of the visitor experience. The content of exhibitions is also often more diverse and complex, with artworks interpreted against a background context that can be provided through additional artefacts, graphics, stories and multimedia. These changes place new demands on the exhibition design and programming process, and even on the design and construction of exhibition spaces and museums.

In this paper a case study of a travelling, multidisciplinary exhibition of Aboriginal art was used to illustrate some of these demands from the perspective of exhibition design. Flexibility of exhibition spaces is of paramount importance so that designed exhibition experiences can be easily accommodated without too heavy an impact on the budget. Considerations of services have also become more crucial as the installation of lighting, multimedia and other design elements increasingly accompany the selection of artworks as an element of exhibition design in art museums.

Still, as our tour through various recent museums has shown, a tremendous variety of architectural styles, both external and internal, can accommodate the new collaborative and multidisciplinary model with interplay between artist, curator, exhibition designer, architect and landscape architect, and public programmers who together create an environment for successful participatory visitor experiences.



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