

Problem-Solving Through Design:
How Can Graphic Design Reconstruct American Art Museums?

Submitted by
Ashley Lee

Graphic Design

To
The Honors College
Oakland University

In partial fulfillment of the
requirement to graduation from
The Honors College

Mentor: Dr. Susan Lynne Beckwith
English Department & Honors College Faculty Fellow
Oakland University

April 2, 2021

Ashley Lee

Dr. Susan Lynne Beckwith

Honors College

2 April 2021

Reconstructing American Art Museums with Graphic Design

Amusing, bewildering, and captivating, art museums are destinations where people go to explore. Being a place of not just historical but inspirational objects, artwork, and ideas, the questions of whether museums still gather interest to the public and how are they staying relevant through generational and societal shifts come to rise when discussing this matter. Acknowledging common perceptions on uninteresting and/or unapplicable art museums and artists, there also needs to be the understanding of the impact of art in daily life. In response to the issue, a creative project was constructed and is targeted at art museums who are searching for innovative, modern design methods that demonstrate the significances of multiculturalism and modern social technology. Consisting of a completely new campaign delivered inside a design process book, the steps of meticulous research, creative design choices, and consistent feedback were taken. The process was further developed to cater towards a local art museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts, which resulted in researching and designing deliverables that were suitable for this specific location. There is the understanding of how this creative project does not serve as an absolute solution to all museums as each design problem is altered to one's situation. However, it was with the approach of encompassing inclusive mission statements and solutions that will help unify further investigations and explorations into solving this issue.

Understanding the fundamental purpose of the process book, the process book is a vital creation in any design process. Essentially standing as documentation of the research, design,

and results process, it is not only useful for the project designer, but also for any viewer to obtain a better understanding of how a final project has become to be. Often used to show to clients the breakdown as well as financial scheme of a design project, the process book is also commonly seen as a chance to tell a narrative for the designer. Having to frequently pitch ideas and projects to clients in daily work, a designer's skills in ideating, creating and storytelling are able to shine through this piece of work. It was with this collection of graphic design work however, that played a primarily role as I furthered my investigation in art museums.

A destination where people gather to seek new knowledge or to simply be inspired by the past, museums are still a thing of the present. However, seeing how museums are having to quickly adapt to the new age of technology, there has been recorded research on what museums currently provide for people and exactly how museums could continue to change in coming years. Researcher Ramesh Srinivasan, for example, explores how museums could potentially transform their catalog databases from traditional documentation of artifacts to implementing social technology that would incorporate discussion and contribution from the community. The research argues how "(...) the core information artifact of the museum, its catalog, must be fundamentally altered by the diversity of reactions that the presentation of an object must consider. The object, as a piece of tangible cultural heritage, is a gateway to a number of intangible, yet critically connected, practices..." (Srinivasan 2009). The use of technology to include and consider the community brings museums a step closer to staying relevant in peoples' lives. As mentioned in the study, the museum's primary use of catalogs to manage the countless numbers of historic objects and artwork, rather than using simplified terms and labels to categorize these works, allows the community to contribute and add to the artifacts. This would bring in more inclusive representation and interaction for not just the community, but also to the

respective cultures as well. Based on the information from *Re-Imagining the Museum through 'touch': Reflections of Individuals with Visual Disability on Their Experience of Museum-Visiting in Greece*, I explored in my creative project how museums can include more interaction with a diverse community with the use of graphic design to progress toward this goal. While focusing on young adults (ages 18-35 years old) as my intended audience, social technology was very relevant when creating methods of interaction and attraction. Keeping in mind the thoughts and experiences individuals can have, the creative project for a personal, yet universal perspective.

With community and inclusion a priority for museums, education and knowledge is another area of consideration. While museums provide a destination full of history and unexplored knowledge for many, it is also one of the few places where people of all ages can go for inspiration. Minuette Floyd, a professor at the University of South Carolina, makes a strong argument in *More than Just a Field Trip... Making Relevant Curricular Connections through Museum Experiences* in how art museums are one of many real-world environments where students should be exposed to when learning. Stating how “an effective curriculum must be integrated, relevant, and interesting” to reach the expectations of students, taking them outside of the classroom to make new experiences that are increasingly memorable is vital. Knowing that the age group were young middle schoolers, the understanding of how “social, emotional, and physical than intellectual” the students were taken into consideration when conducting the research and concludes with how students were amazed by their art museum experience (Floyd 2002). Restating how opportunities like visiting an art museum can spark personal connections and revelations for students, museums should also be looking into methods of how they can continue to attract the young demographic. Therefore, bringing in social technology or other

interactive components, similar to those mentioned in Srinivasan's study, could be a potential method that would successfully attract this demographic. With technology becoming increasingly relevant in daily life, creating activities or sites that draw attention and spark curiosity for the intended audience could improve the perception of museums in general. However, compared to Srinivasan's research focused on museums collectively, Floyd brings the attention to art museums specifically. Looking at this point-of-view, art museums are where individuals can arrive to be inspired by past artwork and artists rather than be distracted by other historic objects or monuments. While designing this project, the emphasis was placed on meeting a young, diverse audience's expectation in today's world. Furthermore, understanding previous and new methods of creating interest towards my intended demographic of young adults was an important consideration for this project.

As I continued to design this project, this research was held in mind, as technology plays an important role throughout the process. Also remembering to adhere to my target audience in the best methods possible, further research on past investigations on young adults and their experiences at art museums was also carried out. Noting that museums are continuing to adapt to the advanced usage of technology, there is an absence of information in how in particular, graphic design aids to the reconstruction of art museums, if at all. Unexplored topics in this research like sustainability and disability design were also put into consideration, hoping to meet the expectations of all art museum goers. This creative project was designed to ultimately support the transformation of art museums and potentially offer new strategies on how art museums will continue to stay relevant in this modern age of diversity and technology.

Understanding how museums aim to appeal to all audiences with a preliminary literature review, a look closer at the campaign's local museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), as well

as other competitor museums, like the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met), and the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), were the next steps in the process of creating a successful campaign.

Founded in 1885, the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) has evolved to become a place full of life, history, and countless amounts of artwork from all over the world with their collection labelled in the top six largest museum collections across the United States. Known for holding diverse art collections, the museum contains artwork from many cultures including but not limited to, Asian art, Native American art, and Oceanic art. Diversity has continued to be a principal element within the museum, going beyond the artwork and reaching through the staff and museum attendees as well.

With the recent pandemic progressing this past year, the DIA has not only adapted to the modern social technologies, but also to the safety measures that people have had to adjust to over the past year. With the DIA's vision in creating a safe gathering space for everyone, the recurring themes of diversity and modern social technologies were kept in mind as the design process continued. Looking at their marketing deliverables and overall strategy, it was clear that the DIA entertains a large audience. The DIA website contains a page full of events and activities that



Figure 1: Screenshot of the DIA Interaction/Events Page

have either been held at the location or, more recently, online activities that are self-paced or do-at-home. These social activities range from interactive exhibits to scavenger hunts with their mobile-app. The DIA also underwent a weighty renovation starting in late 2008 and collaborated with Perich Advertising + Design to generate a successful campaign that comprised of posters, banners, and motion graphic advertisements. Sticking with an organic theme and set of unique characters, we were inspired by their ideas to create a fresh and successful campaign. Like many, the DIA has expanded their presence through the various social media platforms. However, their platforms contain a wide variety of posts and images ranging from image-based advertisements of their new exhibits to poster-like images that are attached to text-heavy posts. Although this marketing strategy is not uniform or easily identifiable, their messages are very direct and understandable. Researching the range of marketing materials the DIA maintain and offer to the public were vital in fully understanding before designing the campaign elements. Now knowing how the DIA presents themselves, looking at other American art museums was also important in learning the competition.

Understanding the endless range of art museums in the United States, it was chosen to observe three of the more well-known American art museums to gather a better perspective on how these museums successfully communicate to large audiences. With that, examinations on the MoMA, the Met, and the AIC were completed with keen observations on their marketing strategies and their deliverables.

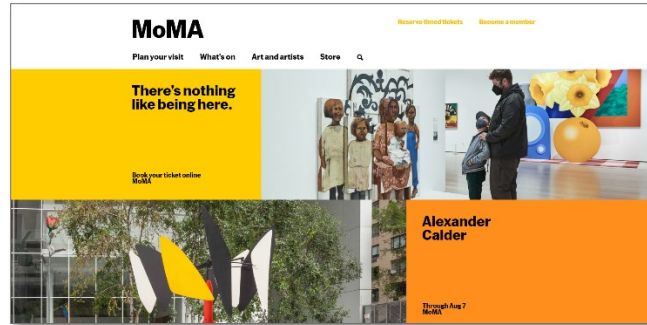


Figure 2: Screenshot of MoMA Landing Page

The MoMA expanded their museum in late 2019, and while the museum physically expanded, they also created a fresh brand identity. Made by Order Design, the MoMA went from an exhibition-focused approach to a seasonal approach, as well as pivoting their brand to appear more modular, adaptable, and scalable to the public. Their focus on motion was also implemented into their brand identity. Having a podcast on their magazine website, something like their podcast cover art also reflects the MoMA brand identity.

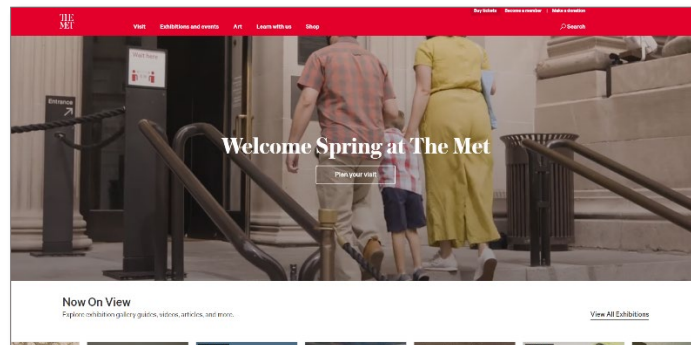


Figure 3: Screenshot of the Met Landing Page

The Met contains a distinct brand identity that revolve around color and typography. With red having many positive meanings in multiple cultures, the bright iconic red is symbolic for the Museum. The Met website contains a looping video that captures people's attention, yet formally showcased with its serif typography and small, distinct color palette throughout the site. The Met's Facebook post is an example of one of many common image-based posts among art

museums with a transparent title to indicate what the images mean. Implementing Facebook's sources, like Facebook links and videos, will be considerable features to include.

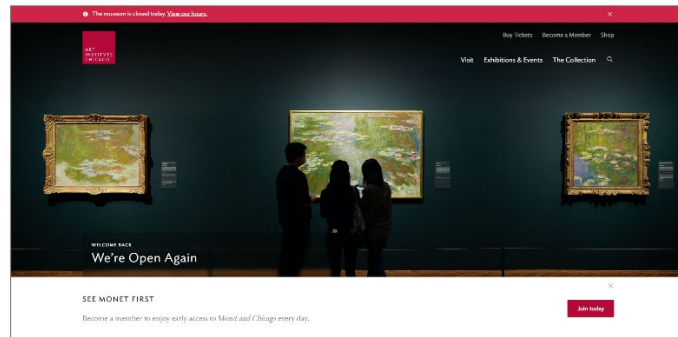


Figure 4: Screenshot of the AIC Landing Page

Similar to the Met, the Art Institute of Chicago also has a brand identity with color and typography as key elements. However, unlike the Met, the Art Institute has its own unique style that pertains to design and architecture. The Art Institute magazine is a known advertisement the museum uses to update museum goers as well as attract new ones. Again, with an image-based cover, it showcases what the Institute is about with its choice of picture topped with its iconic logo. In terms of environmental design, the wayfinding signs of the Institute are small, but significant elements of design that collectively help tie the brand identity of the museum together.

Such design choices, whether the deliverables were tangible or not, were kept in mind when creating the deliverables. Having the campaign mission of employing diversity and social technology as guidance, these examples of audience interaction and inclusion worked as inspiration and comparisons with the five final campaign deliverables for the DIA: a streetscape poster, streetlight banners, social media posts, an online podcast, and an interactive activity. Acting as the overarching campaign deliverable, a streetscape poster is a common, yet crucial element for any campaign. Starting with the poster, it allows the designer to display the main campaign components and an overall sense of continuity and cohesiveness. With the DIA located

in the busy city of Detroit, the poster can be posted in high-traffic areas like the Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, or in the Downtown Detroit area. Streetlight banners will also be beneficial for environmental marketing in the Detroit area. The banners would also be advertised in the same fashion as the streetscape poster. Social media posts are easy, fast, and inexpensive methods of marketing, and with the DIA's already known presence on their Facebook and Instagram platforms, posts would be created for these outlets. The social media posts will be designed that cater towards our target audience to increase attention. Along with social media, podcasts are becoming relevant with our target audience. Creating a new podcast channel that could be advertised either directly on the DIA website or a third-party platform, this will not only attract intrigued listeners, but also to those who prefer or can solely listen to audio. The podcast aims to attract avid listeners who seek to learn about diverse topics the DIA can discuss with the public and special guests. Once interested museum goers arrive, an interactive activity was created to keep the audience engaged. Stimulating the guests with a visually interesting exhibit that allows interaction, this small exhibition piece also allows those who rely on their sense of touch to further enjoy the experience. Additionally, we will also be adding in consumer marketing strategies (picture-taking, #hashtags) with the use of modern social technology to further advertise the museum while maintaining audience interest.

Completing the initial research process, afterwards was the ideation and design process. Narrowing the campaign deliverables, design schematics were created and shared with other designers for beneficial feedback and critiques. This step in the design process varies from each project as successful ideas can always be finessed, and final deliverables can be completely transformed due to alterations in the campaign. Keeping in mind the increasing diversity of individuals and our audience for the final campaign, *Detroit Institute of Arts: Surprise Yourself!*,

the mission was best communicated through the design concept of characterized hands and bright color palette. With our colorless creation of playful hands and gestures as a prime element



Figure 5: Mockup of the Campaign Streetscape Poster

for our campaign, the hands resemble individuality, similar to how fingerprints are unique to each person, but also community through the emptiness of color and ambiguous shape. Allowing anyone to “fit” our hand illustrations, it was sought to include anyone and everyone through this design choice. Our campaign colors have also been decided that closely resemble common colors



Figure 6, 7, and 8 (from left to right): Mockup of Campaign Podcast, Mockup of Campaign Social Media Post 1, Mockup of Campaign Social Media Post 2

of the rainbow while including the same shade of blue the DIA already utilizes. Wanting to remain primarily inclusive of all colors, we decided to go with this 6-color palette that slightly diverge from the original shades of ROYGBIV. Targeting young adults for this campaign with

softer and friendlier color shades, the final color palette furthermore expanded the limits in creating captivating designs.



Figure 9 and 10 (from left to right): Mockup of Campaign Streetlight Banners, Mockup of Campaign Interactive Activity

With the completion of the marketing deliverables and overall campaign, the outcomes of the campaign design and communicated mission are found acceptable. However, this does not mean it is the end; with the actual creative project being a simple yet intricate process book, the next hypothetical steps would be pitching the expansive project to the Detroit Institute of Arts or other non-profit organization in order to fully take action and see response. Seeking to also reach out to other art museums and non-profit organizations who have similar missions to this one, I hope this campaign aids in creating safe spaces for those who seek knowledge, understanding, and overall inspiration and expression. Foreseeing that this project will not be able to satisfy everyone's needs when marketing towards a large demographic, I seek to continue down this path that will hopefully inspire others to eventually create the place we can only imagine for now. With this in mind, I look forward to the next challenge that will take the people one step closer towards a better community and greater society.

Works Cited

“About the DIA.” *Detroit Institute of Arts Museum*, Detroit Institute of Arts, www.dia.org/about.

“About The Met.” *The Met*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met.

Alexander, Donovan. “Museum Field Trips: Here’s How Technology Is Changing the Way You Experience Art.” *Interesting Engineering*, Interesting Engineering, 1 Feb. 2019, interestingengineering.com/museum-field-trips-heres-how-technology-is-changing-the-way-you-experience-art.

Alexander, Edward Porter, et al. *Museums in Motion: an Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*. United Kingdom, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.

Argyropoulos, Vassilios S., and Charikleia Kanari. “Re-Imagining the Museum through ‘touch’: Reflections of Individuals with Visual Disability on Their Experience of Museum-Visiting in Greece.” *Alter*, vol. 9, no. 2, Elsevier Masson SAS, 2015, pp. 130–43, doi:10.1016/j.alter.2014.12.005.

“Art Institute of Chicago - Story.” *Pentagram*, Pentagram, www.pentagram.com/work/art-institute-of-chicago/story.

Carlsson, Rebecca. “Why We Need Museums Now More Than Ever.” *MuseumNext*, MuseumNext, 9 Mar. 2021, www.museumnext.com/article/why-we-need-museums-now-more-than-ever/.

“DIA.” *Perich Advertising + Design*, Perich Advertising + Design, perich.com/work/dia/.

Dilenschneider, Colleen. “Real Talk: Why Cultural Organizations Must Better Engage Millennials (DATA).” *Impacts Experience*, Colleen Dilenschneider, 13 Jan. 2016, www.colleendilen.com/2016/01/13/real-talk-why-cultural-organizations-must-better-engage-millennials-data/.

Falk, John H., and Lynn D. Dierking. *Learning from Museums*. United States, Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.

Figure 1: Screenshot of the DIA Interaction/Events Page taken by Ashley Lee. *Detroit Institute of Arts Museum*, Detroit Institute of Arts, 2021, www.dia.org/education/resources/scavenger-hunt-dia-african-american-artworks.

Figure 2: Screenshot of MoMA Landing Page taken by Ashley Lee. *Museum of Modern Art*, Museum of Modern Art, 2021, www.moma.org.

Figure 3: Screenshot of the Met Landing Page taken by Ashley Lee. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2021, [/www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

Figure 4: Screenshot of the AIC Landing Page taken by Ashley Lee. *The Art Institute of Chicago*, The Art Institute of Chicago, 2021, www.artic.edu.

Floyd, Minuette. “More than Just a Field Trip... Making Relevant Curricular Connections through Museum Experiences.” *Art Education*, vol. 55, no. 5, 2002, pp. 39–45. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3193957.

Marcil, Pamela. “Museum Fact Sheet - The Detroit Institute of Arts”, *Detroit Institute of Arts*, web.archive.org/web/20150627062906/www.dia.org/about/facts.aspx.

Molin, Emile, and Daniel Koppich. "The Story behind Our Brand Identity." *The Met*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1 Dec. 2016, www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2016/brand-identity.

"MoMA." *Order*, Order, order.design/project/moma.

"Museum History - The Detroit Institute of Arts", *Detroit Institute of Arts*, web.archive.org/web/20150627101610/www.dia.org/about/history.aspx.

Srinivasan, Ramesh, et al. "Digital Museums and Diverse Cultural Knowledges: Moving Past the Traditional Catalog." *Information Society*, vol. 25, no. 4, July 2009, pp. 265–278. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/01972240903028714.

Sutton, Benjamin. "Museums Are Becoming More Diverse, But There's Still Work to Do." *Artsy*, Artsy, 8 Feb. 2019, www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-museums-diverse-work.