

Overall mark: 75

General Feedback

This is a proposal for an exciting and inventive exhibition about the role of interactivity in the museum. It was a wonderful idea to use other museums' displays as your 'objects', creating an array of diverse experiences for visitors to engage with. You also chose appropriate themes as groupings. I also loved the idea of setting the displays within a round gallery space that would allow your visitors to curate their own experiences in an 'engaging' way. Your very good introductory panel not only explained the exhibition, but asked viewers to take an interactive approach to your exhibition about interactivity—reminding them to question and evaluate their own preferences and desires about museums. I was left with just a few questions about the background for this topic, which were left unanswered by your context and rationale section. For instance, what exactly happened in the 19th century that caused museums to begin rejecting touch as an aspect of museum attendance? Rounding this section out with a bit more information about the history and relevance of this topic would have improved the whole, but it was nonetheless a good summary. All in all, this was a well-considered and creative approach to fulfilling the assignment. Well done.

Summary:

The title of my exhibition is Interactivity, Engagement, and the Senses. It will examine the ways in which many modern museums have attempted to encourage visitor participation in order to create more meaningful museum experiences. In bringing together an array of diverse examples of this, visitors to my exhibit can decide for themselves which type of engagement they find most valuable. Some of the objects I will display will use technology as a way to simulate involvement with history or art. Some will focus on sound, others on touch, and still others on sight. Which type of interactive museum exhibits are most effective? Why? What do visitors respond to most when visiting a museum? These questions will be explored in a fun and interesting way in my exhibit.

It is important to evaluate the effect of museums on society, and the ways they can help the past interact with the present; therefore, my exhibit would be worth funding because it will ponder just that, and possibly yield critical new information as to what attracts museum-goers. It will also encourage meaningful interactions with museum topics, and remind people why going to museums is worthwhile by providing them with experiences that they will take with them far past the door.

Ideally, this will bring together some of the best aspects of the greatest museums in the world today, and teach us something about what kinds of learning and/or cultural experiences people value.

Context and Rationale:

My exhibit proposal, Interactivity, Engagement, and the Senses, would make a great addition to the Museum of Museums for a variety of reasons. It perfectly complements the museum's aims of teaching the public about the purpose of museums, as well as capturing their interest in the subjects themselves. Interactive exhibits and activities have become a prominent feature and a big draw for museums in recent years. People want to be participants in their own experiences, more so than they want to glimpse art and history from afar. This exhibit will help them do that by letting them play active parts every step of the way, and showing them some of the impressive and fun activities featured in other museums.

Although over the past two-hundred years or so we have become accustomed to only looking at the artifacts presented in museums, this was not always the case. Before the late eighteenth century, touch was almost equal to sight in importance to viewers of art and students of history, providing a different kind of information than the eye can pick up – the weight, the feel, the texture of an object.¹ In fact, when visiting early museums and cabinets of curiosities, people were actually encouraged to touch things. According to the Constance Classen and Jennie Morgan, this would allow for visitors to have “an intimate experience of objects and by extension peoples and places.”² However, as the modern museum developed in the nineteenth century, more restrictions began to be put in place as more people flocked to museums, limiting how they could interact with the objects within.³ This has denied museum visitors the sensory experience of touch, something that is instinctual to us, and often integral to shaping how we understand things. Museum studies scholars Elizabeth Wood and Kiersten

¹ Constance Classen, "Museum Manners: The Sensory Life of the Early Museum," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (2007): doi:10.1353/jsh.2007.0089.

² Jennie Morgan, "The Multisensory Museum," *Bulletin De LInstitut Ethnographique Glasnik Etnografskog Instituta* 60, no. 1 (2012): , doi:10.2298/gei1201065m, 66.

³ Morgan, 67.

F. Latham argue that touch is in fact “the site for the intersection of body and mind,”⁴ without which our appreciation is severely hampered.

This is not to say that all items in museums should be available to touch or feel; conservation is always a factor, of course. However, the assertions of Classen, Morgan, Wood, and Latham go some way towards explaining why sight is not always enough to produce a meaningful cultural or learning experience. My exhibit will attempt to illustrate alternatives to the traditional, one-sided museum experience by showcasing some of the different ways many diverse museums are trying to engage visitors and find innovative ways of learning and enjoying museum content.

This issue is not as simple as just incorporating new technology into museum exhibits – these contributions must be meaningful, whether or not they are high-tech. In regards to science museums, researchers have found that active participation allows people to become more invested in and capable with the materials they are engaging with. However, the same study states that “it is not enough to add new interactive displays and touch screens into the museum space, but to reshape the museum for the purposes of better science communication.”⁵

Every station in my exhibit is meant to do this by bring museum-goers closer – whether physically or intellectually – to the subjects they have come to visit. Both their senses and their minds will be stimulated, in the hopes of helping people learn in a fun way, and creating a long-lasting impression. Because my exhibit will feature stations from many different museums on a wide array of topics, visitors will also be able to actively choose what they would like to spend time learning about. Interest is key in the museum-going experience,

⁴ Elizabeth Wood and Kiersten F. Latham, "The Thickness of Things," *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 27, no. 2 (2011):.

⁵ Alben Yaneva, Tania Mara Rabesandratana, and Birgit Greiner, "Staging Scientific Controversies," *Public Understanding of Science* 18, no. 1 (2009): , doi:10.1177/0963662507077512, 89.

and cannot be intensified if there was none there to start with; it is important for people to *want* to learn about the stations they are interacting with, and by offering many different options, there is sure to be something to interest everybody. From chocolate, to earthquakes, to ABBA, visitors can choose the route of their own education and experience.

Additionally, the interactivity of each station will allow for the engagement of multiple senses. Along with sight and touch, there will be stations to stimulate the sensations of taste, smell, and sound as well. As Morgan claims, sensory engagement can be “harnessed to facilitate physical (closeness), emotional (visceral), and intellectual (sensual empiricism) access” to museums.⁶ They are therefore very important to the museum-going experience, and yet, at many museums, our senses are hardly engaged at all. My exhibit aims to show the possibilities of the impact and enjoyment of museums when visitors feel they are able to participate. This is particularly essential because recent research shows that interactive activities at museums inspire a feeling of belonging, eliminating the perception of space between visitors and what they are visiting.⁷ That is exactly what I hope my exhibit can achieve.

If my exhibition is chosen, it will be a place in the Museum of Museums where people of all ages and backgrounds can come to both learn and have fun, while educating themselves about many different topics. The present is a better time than ever to remind people why museums are so important, and display the innovations that have taken place at many of them. Above all, my exhibit’s purpose is to build interest and excitement about museums through engagement, possibly encouraging many more museum visits in the future.

⁶ Morgan, 72.

⁷ Marta De Miguel De Blas, Dominique Bourgeon-Renault, and Elodie Jarrier, "Can Interactive Mediation Tools Bridge the Gap Between the Public and the Art Museum?" *International Journal of Arts Management* 18, no. 1 (Fall 2015): accessed March 27, 2018, <http://libproxy.usc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy2.usc.edu/docview/1717298977?accountid=14749>.

Introduction to the Exhibition:

What makes a museum visit special to you? What makes it memorable? Exciting? Valuable? This is a space that is designed to help you answer these questions, where you will witness techniques implemented by establishments all around the world in order to enhance your museum-going experience. In here, you will encounter a variety of tools museums are utilizing to promote interactivity between exhibits, artefacts, and their visitors, aiming to stimulate both the senses and the mind. What methods are most effective for you? Which techniques will help attract and engage the most people, and best encourage a positive, meaningful museum-going experience?

In this exhibit, you will find a host of things to do, see, and listen to. Every station, display, and activity is a recreation taken from the exhibits of lauded museums around the world. Ireland, Sweden, Belgium, America ... these are only some of the countries whose museums are represented here.

The idea is not necessarily to try every station, but rather to allow yourself to be drawn to whatever most appeals to you. The different categories that stations are divided into are touch and feel, sound, creativity, human interaction, technology, and taste and smell. Never have so many diverse means of interactivity been brought together in one place. What you take from it is entirely of your own making. You will have a chance to play with and learn about so many different topics, from recording your own hit song, to experiencing a simulation of a real earthquake, and experimenting with how apps can help you make the most of your time in museums.

When you are finished, you may want to take a moment to consider what stations you found most engaging. Why do you think that was? What did you learn? Would you have learned it just as well if it was written on a wall panel? Should more museums strive to include more interactive exhibits, or do you prefer a simpler approach? Hopefully, you will

have learned something about how museums aim to engage visitors, and some of the best methods of doing that.

Object List and Texts:

Some of the stations that will be utilized in the exhibit (approx. 1/3) are listed below, along with the sections they will be placed in. For more on the sections, see Display.



Recording booth from ABBA Museum in Stockholm

Section: Sound

<https://www.abbathemuseum.com/en/exhibitions/experience-abba-the-museum/>

In this recording booth, you can sing along to one of many hit ABBA songs, such as “Mamma Mia” and “Take a Chance on Me.” Your vocals will be recorded over the band’s musical track, and then saved digitally. Once your museum visit is over, you can go home and log in online using your ticket code to access your recording.

This interactive activity from the Stockholm ABBA Museum is here to stimulate interest and incorporate fun into your visit. Positive emotions brought about by fun activities can often encourage people to learn about the subjects behind them.⁸



Earthquake simulator from the Natural History Museum in London

Section: Touch and Feel

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/visit/galleries-and-museum-map/volcanoes-and-earthquakes.html>

This simulation in the Volcanoes and Earthquakes exhibit at the National History Museum models the real-life Kobe earthquake that took place at a supermarket in Japan on January 17, 1995.

⁸ Jessie Pallud, "Impact of Interactive Technologies on Stimulating Learning Experiences in a Museum," *Information & Management* 54, no. 4 (June 2017): doi:10.1016/j.im.2016.10.004, 474.

This station heavily involves the three senses of sight, sound, and touch, as you are temporarily immersed in the experience of an earthquake. How does the application of these senses enhance your understanding of what an earthquake is? What would you prefer to see in a museum: this simulator, or a picture of the supermarket post-earthquake? Which makes more of an impact? Do you think engaging three senses is any more or less effective than one?



Rope in Space from Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria

Section: Technology and Museums

<https://www.aec.at/center/en/rope-in-space/>

This rope will pull you in to a rather unusual game of tug-of-war. While it looks as though you are pulling against the wall, you are really competing with a visitor at another museum. They are pulling a rope, just like you, and thanks to this advanced technology, the exact force of your opponent's pull will be felt by you, and vice versa.

This is meant to provide an educational science experience, as well as a fun and memorable activity. With the Rope in Space, visitors can learn about force, while also virtually interacting with people who are learning the same things in a separate location.



Build in Clay at Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) in Ohio

Section: Creative Simulation

<https://mw17.mwconf.org/paper/removing-the-barriers-of-gallery-one-a-new-approach-to-integrating-art-interpretation-and-technology/>

From the innovative and highly interactive ArtLens exhibit at the CMA, Build in Clay allows you to virtually craft your own sculptures, using your hands to form an on-screen product. What will you create?

Illustrating the power of technology in stimulating creativity, this station allows visitors to do more than just look at sculptures – you can actually interact with them, and make your own masterpieces. This helps make art museums more engaging; rather than one-sided viewing, visitors are encouraged to respond to the museum art with their own.



Belgian Chocolate from Choco-Story in Brussels

Section: Taste and Smell

<http://choco-story-brussels.be/en/The-museum>

Watch chocolate be made before your eyes – and then have a taste! Belgian chocolate is celebrated as some of the best in the world, and at this station, you will have a chance to learn about how it is made, and what makes it so good.

Everything is better with chocolate, including museums. Addressing a subject that everyone is familiar with, this station from the Choco-Story museum in Brussels allows you to reap the rewards of your own sugar-coated education. Learning is easier when you are both interested in the topic, and being motivated by an enticing final product.

Display:

The exhibit will be divided into six sections: Sound, Creative Stimulation, Human Interaction, Tech and Museums, Touch and Feel, and Taste and Smell. Each section is designed to prompt a different type of interactive learning and engagement with museums. Some of the sections, such as Sound, Touch and Feel, and Taste and Smell, focus on sensory experiences, and how they enhance our involvement with the presented materials. Other sections, such as Creative Stimulation, Human Interaction, and Technology and Museums, are geared towards activating and encouraging the mind to engage with the stations and the information or experiences they are trying to convey.

If possible, all the stations and sections would be positioned against the wall in one large, round room, with the sensory sections on one side, and the mentally stimulating ones on the other, but no dramatic break between them. Section signs will be labelled in large letters on the wall, with two or three stations in each section, positioned under the letters. The round shape of the room would perhaps recall that of a brain, and all sections would be connected to each other within the circle. Visitors would be able to wander around the room as they liked, only going to the stations and sections that strike their interest. That is one of the most important points of this exhibit: how to make museums as interesting as they can be to as many people possible.

Section details:

Sound: The stations in this section would encourage learning and interacting via audio. One station would be the ABBA recording booth; another might be a listening device that visitors would pick up to hear a first-hand account of history, like those in the Family in Wartime

exhibit in the Imperial War Museum.⁹ Audio guides for the rest of the exhibit in the form of touchpads would also be offered here, with different oral information, games, and activities to be carried out in each section.

Touch and Feel: This section would focus on museums exhibits and objects that allow visitors to have a unique sensory experience with the subject they are learning about. Along with the Hurricane Simulator from the National History Museum, this section could have historically-based clothing people could try on, sculptures they could touch, or wax figures to take pictures with. Because the Hurricane Simulator is so big, it would probably only have one other, small station. which could be anything that brings a new tactical or physical element to learning.

Taste and Smell: There are many museums that focus on food and drink, and they are often some of the most enjoyable museums you can go and visit. In this section, samples from museums like the Choco-Story in Brussels and the Irish Whiskey Museum in Dublin will help spur visitors into learning about the processes of making special, culturally-significant foods and drinks. This in turn will help them learn about the cultures whose delights they are sampling, and therefore result in an experience that is both enjoyable and educational.

Creative Stimulation: This section would feature stations that center around creating new things and allowing a platform for imagination to blossom. One of the displays here would be the Build in Clay station from the Cleveland Museum of Art, so that visitors could have the experience of making their own art. There could also be a lower tech station in this section

⁹ "A Family in Wartime," Imperial War Museums, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/events/a-family-in-wartime>.

that still allows for fun creativity. For example, at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, there are tables equipped with bean bags and colored pencils for drawing approximations of some covers in their esteemed book collection.¹⁰

Human Interaction: At some museums, like the Norsk Folkemuseum in Oslo, the people who work there add greatly to the experience of the visit. In the case of the Folk Museum, guides dressed up in traditional Norwegian clothes take you around the open air museum, and tell you what life was like many years ago.¹¹ Similarly, at Hampton Court, you can take a tour given by Anne Boleyn.¹² In this section, the possibility of interacting with highly knowledgeable staff would be presented in the hope that it would enhance the personal connection of visitors' experiences, and convey information in a social and lively way. The "stations" will be people, rather than objects.

Technology and Museums: With so much amazing and revolutionary technology being developed over the last twenty years, museums have seen a lot of changes. They have tried in many ways to incorporate technology into exhibits – some successfully, and some not. When it works, however, technology can contribute highly to the value of a person's museum visit. Along with the Rope in Space, there could also be a station featuring VR and video simulation. Also, the touchpads distributed at the Sound section would be greatly intertwined with the incorporation of technology into museology, allowing different virtual or digital activities to complement the varying sections and stations.

¹⁰ "Intercultural Education Services," Chester Beatty Library, , accessed March 27, 2018, <http://www.cbl.ie/Education/Education-Services.aspx>.

¹¹ "Norsk Folkemuseum," Visit Oslo, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.visitoslo.com/en/product/?TLp=13356>.

¹² "Guided Tours," Historic Royal Palaces, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/explore/guided-tours/#gs.tfuH73s>.

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