Beyond Cabinets of Curiosity

How Effectively is Graphic Design Used to Cement the Role of the Museum in the 21st Century?

With specific reference to the branding and exhibition design of the V&A and Natural History Museum.

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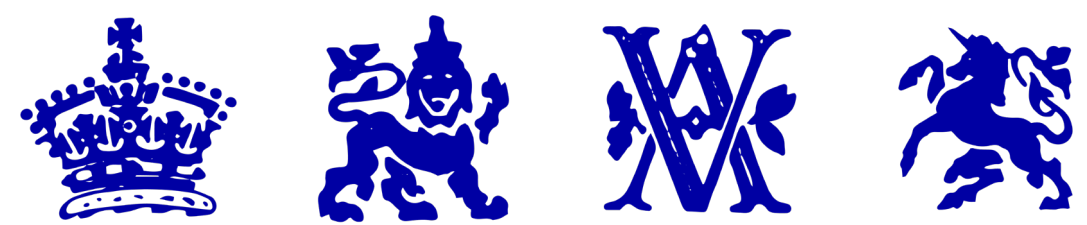
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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The aim of this investigation is to explore the role of graphic design in the museum sector and understand the extent that design influences the struggle to remain relevant in the 21st century. From my research, I have found that the role design plays in museums is very broad, from wayfinding and print to exhibition design. In this dissertation I will be focussing on the two main ways I have identified as having a significant contribution to helping museums cement their positioning in the present and future. These are: the role of branding in the museum sector and how it is used to build a strong public-facing identity to incentivise people to come and visit in person, and the role of exhibition design in creating an immersive experience for people during their visit.

A number of factors have led to an overall decrease in visitor numbers across almost all British museums in recent years. People are changing the way they live and with the prevalence of streaming services and social media in the last decade, museums have an ever-growing number of entertainment options to compete with. The National Gallery has seen a shocking 47 per cent drop in visitor numbers since 2019 (Quadri, 2025). Many cultural institutions have had to work even harder to recover from the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting restrictions that forced many museums to close their doors. It is clear that now more than ever it is essential that museums find a new positioning and role in society to stay afloat in the modern world.

In Chapter 1, I will set the scene and give context to my investigation by exploring the origins of the museum from the ancient to the modern world and introduce key theories and critical perspectives, in addition to discussing current issues within the museum sector in the 21st century. In Chapter 2, I will focus on the use of brand identity in museums and how designers utilise visual identities and brand values to influence public perception of the role of the museum in the 21st century. I will do this by analysing the brand identities of my case two studies, the V&A and Natural History Museum. In Chapter 3, I will delve into the world of museum exhibition design and explore how designers are creating increasingly more immersive exhibitions to engage a contemporary audience in an evolving digital world. I will explore this topic by analysing two exhibitions from my case studies: the 'Naomi: In Fashion' exhibition at the V&A, and the 'Visions of Nature' interactive experience at the Natural History Museum. I will also gain a greater understanding of the role of exhibition design from an interview with Briony Hartley, a freelance graphic designer who has worked in collaboration with the Russell Cotes Museum.

I chose to focus on this topic because outside design I have a passion for history and the way it influences the present and future. After learning about museum exhibition branding from a lecture by Briony Hartley in 2023, I took an immediate interest in the role of graphic design in museums. As a result of this, I am very interested in a career as a designer in the heritage sector and doing this research has helped to inform me about current issues within the industry.

Fig. 1

Chapter 1: The Origins of the Museum

The word 'museum' comes from the Greek word mouseion 'seat of the Muses', based on mousa, meaning 'muse'. The muses were a collection of nine mythological deities who presided over the arts, culture, astronomy and history of ancient Greece (Fig. 2 and 3). The word 'museum' translates to 'place of the muses', which can also be read as 'temple of the arts'. The Latin meaning of the word can be translated as 'library' or 'study'. This means that the concept of the museum has always had a link between divine knowledge, education, curiosity and inspiration (History Extra Podcast, 2024).

Although people have collected and catalogued items of importance for long time, the idea of the museum was popularised during the renaissance period as a way of showing your wealth, intelligence and interest in other things outside your usual sphere. These intriguing items were typically collected in rooms called 'cabinets', leading to the phrase 'cabinets of curiosity' (Wallentine, 2023). During the age of enlightenment, there was a mass democratisation of knowledge alongside an emerging desire to catalogue, leading to the opening of some of the biggest and most celebrated museums in the UK such as the British Museum in 1759. The growth of museums coincided with the popularity of 'the grand tour' (Fig. 4). In essence, the grand tour was an early form of the gap year popular among young people finishing education today. Young men from affluent British families would travel across Europe and learn about the world, returning with artefacts and souvenirs that would later end up in museums and historic estates as generations passed (Royal Museums Greenwich, n.d). Throughout the 19th century, the government were becoming more aware that the general public could be educated and 'civilised'. This sparked a movement of museums welcoming lower classes by opening their doors on Sundays and opening restaurants and cafés like the Morris Room at the V&A. The goal was to get families to come to the museum after church, have a meal together and be educated about historical and cultural affairs instead of going to the pub for lunch (History Extra Podcast, 2024).

One of the biggest events in museum history was the Great Exhibition in 1851, arranged by Prince Albert and aiming to improve the standard of British industrial design (Fig. 5 and 6). This exhibition was housed in the Crystal Palace and was incredibly successful, with 6 million people visiting in just one summer, equivalent to one third of the British population (V&A, 2017). Because if this success, the exhibition was developed into the South Kensington Museum, which later became the V&A.

In 2022, the International Council of Museums voted to change the official definition of 'museum' for the first time in half a century. The new description defines the museum as a 'not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage' (International Council of Museums, 2022). The new definition also draws attention to the push to make these spaces more accessible, diverse and sustainable.
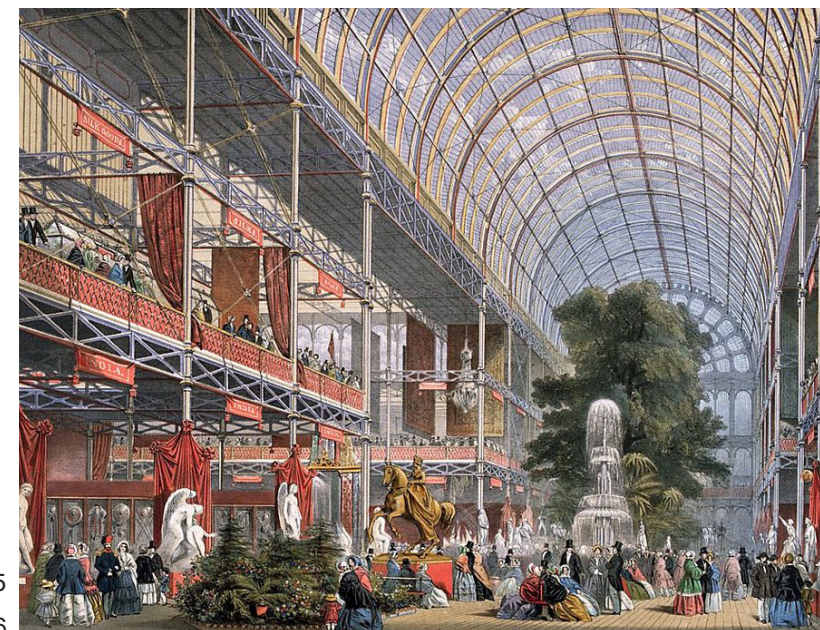

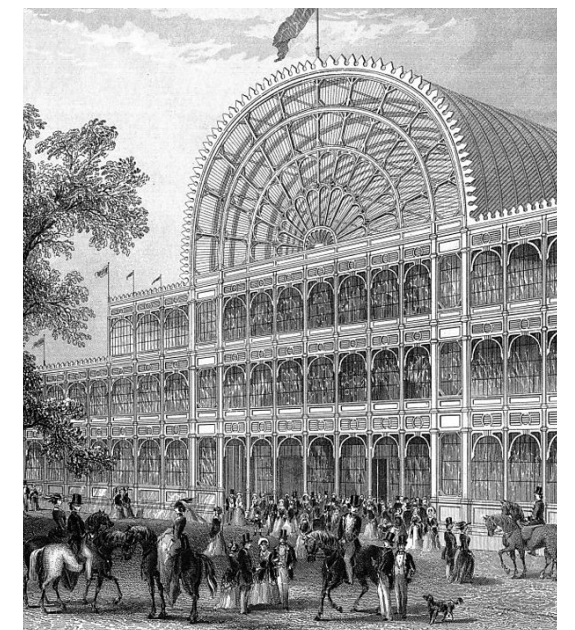Fig. 2
Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5
Fig. 6

I feel that it is impossible to discuss the topic of British museums in the 21st century without acknowledging some of the current issues in the industry regarding the consequences of the British Empire. In recent years museums have begun a drive to diversify their collections in an effort to decolonise our collective history. In the museum sector, to 'decolonise' is to free something from the effects of colonisation, which is the action of establishing control over the indigenous people of an area (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). This has caused a trend in which museums are creating more displays and exhibitions to showcase the hidden voices of minority groups such as people of colour, women, and LGBTQ+ history and overcome the rigid conventions of the past (Museums Association, n.d.). The changing positioning of the museum in the 21st century is also evident in the way museums are striving to create more sustainable futures and make their locations more accessible for people with disabilities. One example of how graphic design is being used to do this is by providing visitors with a book of large print versions of object labels to help those with visual impairments (Hartley, 2025).

In addition to my primary research visits to major London museums, I have also used secondary sources, in the form of journal articles and books, to investigate this topic. One of the most useful sources I have used in my research has been 'Branding: Positioning Museums in the 21st Century' (2000), an online journal article written by Carol Scott, an audience research manager at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Scott discusses a theory from Kiely and Halliday (1999), stating that there are three types of brands: corporate, product, and values. Museums are values brands with an 'enduring core purpose' and they should therefore aim to connect with their audience by creating a set of values for them to align with (Scott, 2000). This aligns with an increasing 'marketisation of the public sphere' and the trend of branding everything in the modern world as discussed by Niall G. Caldwell in 'The Emergence of Museum Brands' (2000), this perspective is supported by an argument in 'The Branding of the Museum' (2014), where Julian Stallabrass states that the trend for museums turning into brands is a rather new concept.

During my research process I have found that much of the existing literature on the topic of brand identity in museums has been written within the last 25 years, with a particular rise in studies on this topic around the turn of the century. This seems to align with developments in the field of museum studies around that time, with scholars beginning to refer to newer views and values in the industry as 'new museology' in the early 1990s (Museum News, 2007).

Another key resource I have used is the book 'Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). This key critical perspective discusses the changing role of museums in the 21st century and how this is affecting the museum-visitor relationship. Hooper-Greenhill states that 'after almost a century of rather remote relationships between museums and the public, museums today are seeking ways to embrace their visitors more closely' (p.1). This means reframing the role of the museum from a strictly educational environment to a place of leisure and discovery. This links to ideas discussed by Diane L. Viera in 'Strike Up the Brand: Creating or Enhancing Your Museum's Brand Identity' (2005). Museums are struggling to stay relevant in the 21st century because of the ever-growing number of alternative leisure activities in an increasingly digital age. Designers now need to convince the target audience why they should choose to spend an afternoon exploring a museum instead of streaming the latest film on Netflix. This reflects how museums are continuously evolving with society and adapting to the norms of contemporary culture. In the past museums opened cafes to attract lower class audiences to otherwise intimidating and exclusionary education spaces, in the present museums are finding ways to compete for a share of modern audience's decreasing amount of leisure time (p.1).

> " After almost a century of rather **remote relationships** between museums and the public, museums today are **seeking ways to embrace their visitors more closely.** "
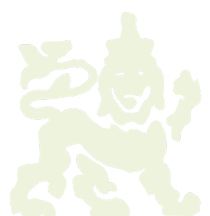
Eilean Hooper-Greenhill
2000
Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture

Chapter 2: To what extent does branding help cement public perception of museums?

In this chapter, I will be investigating the role of graphic design in museums by analysing the brand identities that have been constructed for two prominent London museums, the Natural History Museum and the V&A. In 'The Brand Handbook' (2008), Olins stresses the importance of a brand having a core idea. This core idea is then reflected in a brand's products, behaviour, environment and communications and it is essential that this message maintains consistency across all outputs and consumer touchpoints (p.25). It is the role of the designer to communicate the core idea visually. Olins states that 'the word 'brand' can therefore embrace both the corporation as a whole and its products and services' (p.21). In effect, the branding is the promise to the user and the experience of visiting a museum is what is delivered. This is why it is so essential for museums to regularly reassess their identity and update it for the contemporary climate. This aligns with ideas discussed by Diane L. Viera in 'Strike Up the Brand: Creating or Enhancing Your Museum's Brand Identity' (2005). In this article, Viera states that every museum already has a brand – whether planned or not (p.1). It is the role of the designer to curate and maintain an edited version of this identity to present a core idea or set of values to the audience, so they understand what the museum stands for.

It is essential for museums to create brand identities that audiences want to align with to keep the role of the museum afloat in the modern world. Since the millennium, the world has changed significantly due to the emergence of social media, climate change, and numerous other issues. This has coincided with a significant shift in the museum world (Thomas, 2017, p.7). The museum's role continues to be essential in society as an outlet for curiosity. Almost all of human evolution 'has all been made possible by curiosity' (p.11) and it is this innate sense of curiosity that drives the human race forward. Communities throughout history have evolved and progressed by learning from the past and having an 'eagerness to encounter what is new or unfamiliar' (p.15). This supports ideas discussed by Colleen Leth in the talk 'Seeing the Past as Present: Why Museums Matter' (2016). Here, Leth staes that exposing people to unfamiliar cultures, artworks, emotions and general 'otherness' helps to dissipate ignorance and build tolerance in a world of friction and hate. Leth also argues that museums are so essential in helping us answer the questions 'who am I? where have I come from? and where am I going?'.

Natural History Museum

With over 80 million artefacts in its collection, the Natural History Museum is one of the biggest attractions in the UK and welcomes over 5 million visitors every year (Williams, 2023). The museum was recently rebranded in 2023 by Heavenly, Pentagram Design and Nomad Studio, with the aim of breathing new life into the almost 150-year-old 'cathedral to nature' (Fig. 7). Along with a new visual language, the studios also worked on building a new strategy that has been implemented consistently across the museum's various touchpoints, experiences and locations. This widespread implementation has help build a new public perception of the Natural History Museum and spread awareness of the move into a more active positioning.
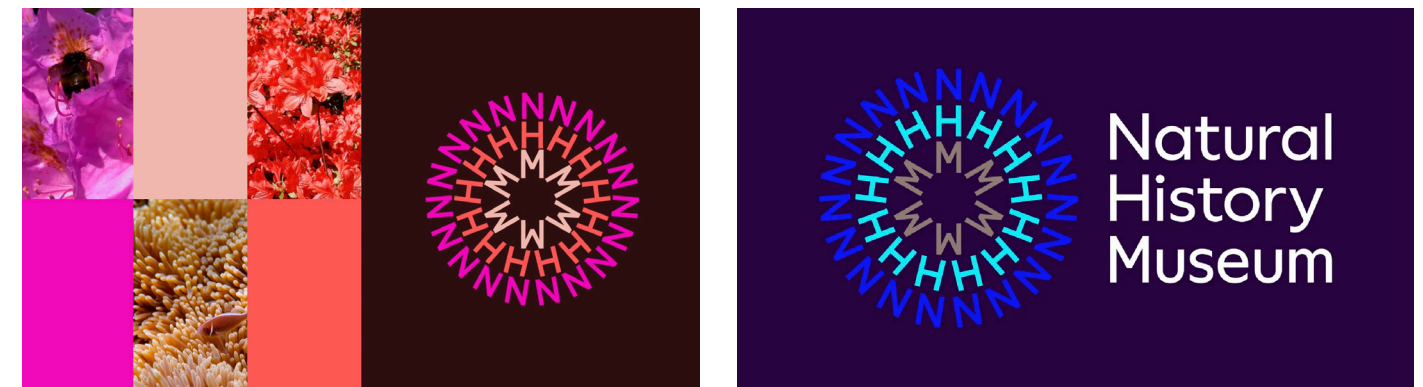

Fig. 7

By analysing this case study, I aim to understand the extent to which designers use branding to construct an identity and effect public perception of museums. The Natural History Museum is a perfect example of how a museum's brand identity can help the institution stay relevant in the 21st century and convey contemporary issues. With the increasing media attention and awareness of the climate crisis, the Natural History Museum has used this opportunity to reframe itself as an active warrior in the fight to protect our planet. The museum has now asserted itself as a key leader in scientific research and an advocate for a more sustainable future, much more than just a passive collection of artefacts. This aligns with the theory that museums are 'values' brands and must therefore maintain a strong core identity and mission to preserve their connection with the target audience (Scott, 2000.p.36). A perfect example of how this was implemented in the new Natural History Museum identity is the use of emotive copywriting. The powerful phrase 'from catalogue to catalyst' demonstrates the museums' aim to 'reassert itself as a leading scientific voice in the discussion on the future of our planet' (Pentagram, 2023).

The visual language also reflects these values. The new logo is comprised of the NHM initials arranged in a dynamic circular sunburst shape. This has visual connotations of an explosion, implying that this new identity is the spark of a radical new revolution in the museum world. The colour palette is diverse and vibrant, with energising lime green, deep oceanic blues and invigorating fuchsia pink. Pentagram revealed how these colours were taken directly from the natural world, championing the untouched beauty of nature and creating an intense link with the brand's values. These elements help form an identity that is empowering, engaging and appropriate for a wide range of demographics.

Another key feature of the Natural History Museum's new brand is the prominent use of motion design to communicate a personality and experience to visitors. In an increasingly digital-first world, this is an essential move for a brand that wants to promote change and movement. By animating elements such as the sunburst logo and imagery of dinosaurs, the designers have brought history to life and the museum into the 21st century.

V&A

Another example of how branding is used to establish a strong identity for a museum is my second case study, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). After the success of the Great Exhibition in 1851, the project's creator, Prince Albert, observed a need to improve and inspire British industrial design. An initiative began to invest in arts and culture and one of the first institutions to receive funding was the South Kensington Museum which, after 40 years, was named the Victoria and Albert Museum, after its patrons (V&A, 2017).

Unlike the recent overhaul of the Natural History Museum's identity, the current brand identity of the V&A has been constructed over the last few decades (Fig. 8). The museum's iconic logo was designed by Alan Fletcher in 1989 and is hailed as the perfect blend of tradition and modernity (Creative Review, 2011). The wordmark is comprised of the museum's initials written in an authentic version of the original Bodoni typeface, giving the identity a sense of classicism, elegance and refinement.

Fig. 8

In 2002, international design studio and experts in museum branding, Wolff Olins were brought in to refresh and organise the museum's identity. They retained Alan Fletcher's logo and chose to incorporate cleaner, more modern sans-serif typefaces and a palette of contemporary colours. This contrast between old and new built the foundation for what the brand stands for today. This is another example of how museums are telling their audiences that they aren't just catalogues of the past but are also adapting to the present and for the future. More recently, Saffron Brand Consultants identified ingenuity and imagination as the two key values that underpin every interaction the consumer has with the V&A (Saffron Consultants, n.d). Therefore, the brand identity had to be brought in line with this. The current colour palette used by the V&A is flexible and can be adapted for use across the various locations and branches of the museum, but the use of colour is consistently bold and inspiring, reinforcing these values.

In 2024 the V&A launched a new advertising campaign with the aim of showing a wider range of people who would otherwise feel excluded from an art museum, that there is something for everyone in the V&A collection. The campaign, created by adam&eveDBB aimed to target niche audiences by appealing to people's passions and telling them 'If you're into it, it's in the V&A' (Williams, 2024). In the advertisements, a series of objects from the museum's collection were photographed with striking, colourful backgrounds and placed in strategic locations across the UK that people visit to pursue their passions. These include 1980s Doc Marten boots in Camden Town and a silver tankard in a popular metal detecting location.

This aligns with the trend of museums trying to embrace their audiences more closely by creating more interactive and personal relationships. After a long history of detached relationships between the museum and the public, this campaign is evidence of ideas discussed by Hooper-Greenhill (2000) as a way museums are seeking new ways to embrace their visitors more closely in the 21st century when people have an increasing variety of leisure activities to choose from. By tapping into people's niche interests and passions, the V&A and adam&eveDBB are aiming to persuade people to take an interest in the museum by meeting them in their communities, instead of appealing to the masses.

Fig. 9

Chapter 3: What role does exhibition design play in creating an immersive experience for visitors?

In Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture (2000), Eilean Hooper-Greenhill discusses the changing nature of the museum-visitor relationship stating, 'after almost a century of rather remote relationships between museums and the public, museums today are seeking ways to embrace their visitors more closely'. In the past museums have been seen as fairly passive institutions but in the current climate, where heritage institutions are competing against an increasing number of leisure activities (Viera, p.1, 2005), museums are utilising graphic design to help engage visitors. Once a carefully constructed brand identity has connected with the consumer by aligning with their values and persuaded someone to visit, the experience of walking around the museum needs to deliver an immersive and inspiring experience to connect with the visitor further.

Beyond just a wayfinding device, graphic design has many roles in guiding a visitors experience around a museum. In exhibitions, designers need to carefully consider accessibility and legibility when designing descriptive labels to be displayed alongside objects. Sonnet Stanfill (2025), the senior curator of the Naomi: In Fashion exhibition at the V&A, discussed the fact that designers are aware that not every visitor will want to or have the ability to stop and read every label so a big part of putting an exhibition together is ensuring the visitor will still experience the story and understand the significance of items without relying on small written text.

Briony Hartley Interview

To investigate the process of designing and opening an exhibition, in addition to better understanding decisions made by the graphic designer and their aims, I interviewed freelance designer, Briony Hartley (2025) as a form of primary research (see Appendix B for full interview). Hartley has worked with the Russell Cotes Museum in Bournemouth on a number of exhibitions, choosing paint colours for the walls, creating large scale vinyl typography designs and marketing materials. She stated that the biggest problem museums are facing right now is maintaining and growing visitor numbers. This aligns with almost all of my secondary research sources. Hartley also agrees that this is a result of an increasing number of other activities you can do in the modern world and so many online distractions, so museums are having to be more imaginative. Hartley discussed that one way museums are doing this is by hosting events instead of just opening their doors from nine to five and expecting people to come. The Russell Cotes Museum holds seasonal events in school holidays, over Christmas, Valentine's Day etc to encourage repeat visits from those who live in the local area but otherwise would only visit the museum once per year.

Hartley also commented on the use of developing technologies and their impact on design in museums. While the Russell Cotes Museum is a rather traditional and
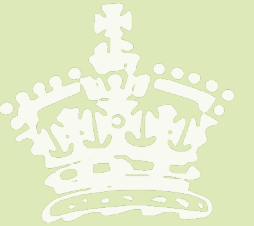
small-scale museum, designers can still communicate through online platforms before visitors arrive, and once they arrive you can use digital technology to create immersive and interesting experiences within the space such as audio and projections etc. Technology like this is being used in much larger museums such as the Natural History Museum and V&A as one of the many ways graphic design is being used to engage modern audiences in an increasingly digital age. "It's less about having an object in a glass case with a little caption, and more about bringing that to life somehow with something a bit more experiential", Hartley explained. This aligns with ideas discussed by Hooper-Greenhill (2000), who states that successful museums in the 21st century are seeking ways to embrace their visitors more closely.

Staying relevant in a digital world, well indeed there are challenges, and also *new opportunities* of how we can tell the stories of these *narratives within these museums*.
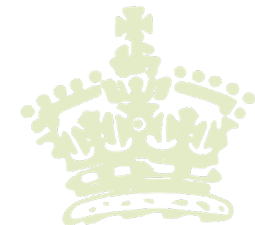
Briony Hartley
2025

Fig. 10

While researching this topic, I undertook a primary visit to the Naomi: In Fashion exhibition at the V&A in January 2025 to analyse the use of graphic design in creating an immersive experience. This temporary exhibition is currently being held at V&A South Kensington in the fashion gallery and focuses on the career of world-renowned 'supermodel' Naomi Campbell, displaying the journey of her collaborations, activism and cultural impact. It is the first exhibition to focus on a model instead of the work of a fashion designer. This shows the continuing innovative spirit of the V&A, and the senior curator of the exhibition stated that it is important to the museum to always push boundaries (Stanfill, 2025). This is an example of how the museum's values of ingenuity and imagination bleed into every interaction the consumer has with the brand. I carried out a psychogeographic walk through the exhibition, making note of the sights, sounds and physical experience of visiting. Guy Debord created his theory of Psychogeography in 1955 and it is a useful tool in analysing the emotional reaction to an environment (Tate, 2017).

At the entrance of the exhibition, visitors are greeted by a looping projection of clips of Naomi Campbell walking down the catwalk towards the viewer. This direct address is a striking opening and immediately captures the visitor's attention, involving them in Naomi's story from the start. The exhibition then delves into the model's early years, choosing to tell the personal stories through audio clips from interviews with Campbell herself to create a more personal connection to the visitor. After a few displays of the most iconic garments worn by the famous model, the exhibition leads onto a large glass room displaying a dressing room styled by Naomi Campbell herself. The involvement of Campbell in this exhibition is clear from the start and the personal connection can be felt as you walk around the space. The designers have used various techniques throughout the experience to enhance this connection and utilised modern technologies to embrace visitors more closely. This supports ideas discussed by Hooper-Greenhill (2000) and findings from my interview with Briony Hartley (2025).

As I moved through the exhibition, I noticed the clear use of music to create an optimistic atmosphere in the otherwise very dark space. At the end of the exhibition, the designers have placed a QR code on a wall for visitors to scan to access a Spotify playlist of the music curated for the exhibition and listened to after they leave the museum. This link to music creates a lasting connection with the visitor, extending the relationship to the V&A long beyond the visitors have left the museum's doors.

Sound is also used in a key display depicting Campbell's time in New York. While visitors are viewing a selection of iconic garments, a subtle hidden speaker plays the atmospheric soundscape of a bustling such as city. These sounds such as traffic noises, have connotations of a particular time and place and are accompanied by

The introduction uses audio recordings of interviews with Campbell to create a strong emotional connection with the audeince.
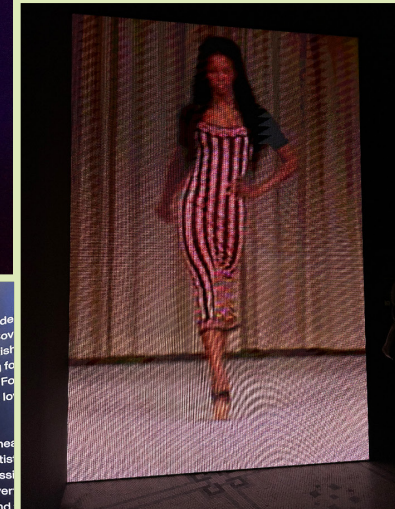
Visitors are greeted with looping footage of Campbell on the catwalk as they enter. This striking direct address creates immediate engagement.

The dressing room styled by Campbell herself adds a personal connection between the subject and the visitor.

Photography and soundscape of busy city played through speakers sets the scene and transports visitors to New York.
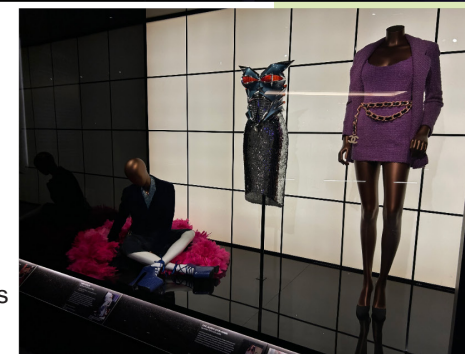
Focus on Campbell's activism is evident. This aligns with museums striving to create a set of values for visitors to align with.
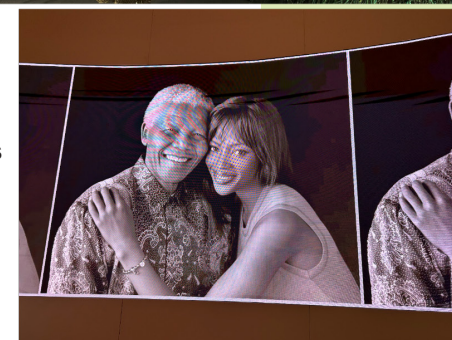
The interactive catwalk experience is a good example of how museums are stepping up exhibition design by using modern technology. This creates greater engagement.

Fig. 11
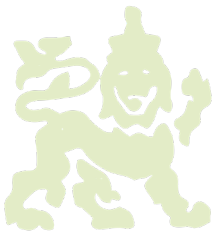
a large scale black and white photograph of New York as a backdrop on the wall behind to create immersion and engage visitors further.

At the end of the exhibition the designers have set up an interactive catwalk experience, giving visitors the opportunity to put themselves in Campbell's shoes and see themselves on a screen, resulting in them becoming part of the exhibition. This use of contemporary technology was discussed by Briony Hartley in my interview. Hartley stated that although there is a challenge to stay relevant, modern technology also creates "new opportunities of how we can tell the stories of the narratives within these museums" and that a successful museum in the 21st century goes beyond just displaying items in glass boxes and instead creates something much more experiential (Hartley, 2025).

Natural History Museum

Another clear example of how a museum is using emerging technologies to maintain relevancy in the 21st century and create engaging experiences for a modern audience is the 'Visions of Nature' exhibition at the Natural History Museum (Fig. 12). The experience invites people to explore what the natural world will look like 100 years from now through the use of a virtual reality headset. The museum describes the result as a 'mixed reality experience', where visitors can interact with virtual and physical elements (Natural History Museum, 2024a). One of the focusses of this exhibition is on how some species are declining as a result of climate change and how they can be saved and protected so that they are once again thriving in 100 years from now. From watching the promotional video for this experience (Natural History Museum, 2024b), the target audience of this exhibition is families, suggesting the goal is to get children excited about the beauty and possibilities of the natural world and how they can be the generation that saves it. This exhibition is a prime example of the museum's new push for raising awareness of sustainability as part of their new brand identity and how museums are utilising graphic design to maintain relevancy and connect with visitors.

Fig. 12
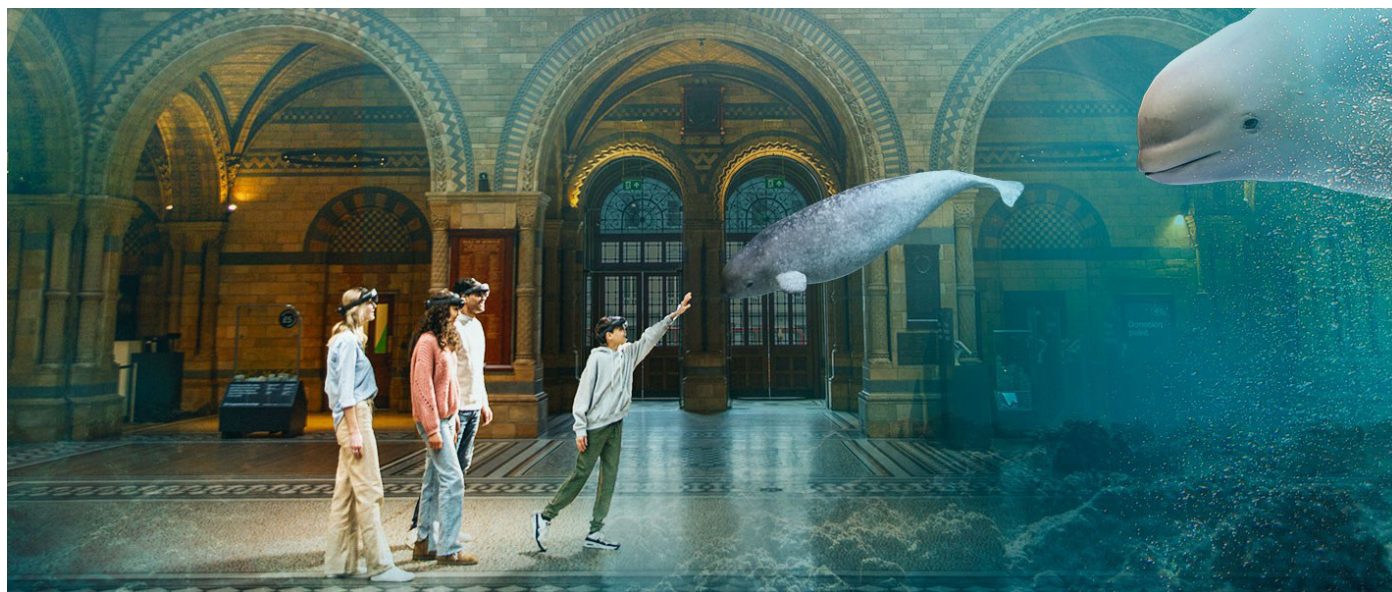
Conclusion

From this investigation, I've found clear evidence that graphic design is being used to establish museums in a much more active role than in the past. I have identified two key methods designers are utilising to engage a modern audience and discovered how they work in unison to cement the role of the museum in the 21st century. In chapter 1 I investigated the long rich history of museums and how they have had to constantly evolve from small scale private collections and 'cabinets of curiosities' to internationally recognised public facing institutions that stand for progressive values in a modern world. Evidence suggests that graphic design has a significant effect on how museums are perceived by the public. From my research into the Natural History Museum in chapter 2, I have found that designers use brand values and tone of voice to construct an identity and prevent museums from feeling too intimidating and elitist for their target audience. This coincides with a trend in the museum industry of institutions moving away from solely educational spaces and towards leisure spaces instead. Many of my research sources indicate this and I found evidence of this when analysing one of my case studies, the V&A marketing campaign, 'If you're into it it's in the V&A', which appeals to people's niche passions in a much more active way than museums typically have in the past. This shows another way museums are utilising graphic design to cement their positioning and influence public perception in the 21st century to compete with increasing choices of leisure activities with evolving digital technologies.

It has been beneficial to investigate two different ways design is used in museums and study how these work in unison. This has helped me better understand the journey of the user when deciding to visit a museum. It begins with the brand identity, which constructs a set of values for the target user to align with, as discussed by Scott (2000, p.36). In chapter 3, I then explored how exhibition design is utilised to create immersive experiences within the physical spaces of museums. My findings were that despite the difficulty of maintaining relevancy and persuading people to visit in an increasingly digital age, the development of modern technology is actually proving to be extremely beneficial for museums. After analysing my case studies, specifically the interactive catwalk at the 'Naomi: In Fashion' exhibition at the V&A and the use of VR augmented reality headsets in the 'Visions of Nature' exhibition at the Natural History Museum, I have found that in the last few years museums have been harnessing developing technologies to bring the past to life and immerse the visitor more. This immersion is a perfect example of how museums are seeking ways to embrace their visitors more closely, as discussed by Hooper-Greenhill (2000). It also has a lasting effect on the visitor and helps persuade them to maintain their relationship with the museum, increasing the chance they will visit again.

In conclusion, I have found sufficient evidence that graphic design is used to great effect to help museums move into a new role, more appropriate for the 21st century and the issues we face as a society. It seems clear that museums will continue to harness developing technologies to stay relevant and engaging in the future, which will result in some innovative fusions of traditional history and contemporary methods. I believe that instead of fighting changing technology and modern life, successful museums will embrace new methods to bring the past into the 21st century.

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Appendix A: Project Planning

I organised the majority of this project using an online Miro board where I compiled everything related to my dissertation. To keep track of deadlines and milestones, I created a calendar which I ticked off to help me visualise how long I had left before each deadline more clearly. I also used this calender to mark other key dates from other projects I was working on such as the D&AD competition deadline and final presentations. This helped me adapt my plan because I was more aware of how busy I would be with other projects at certain times.

I also used my Miro board to keep a list of all my sources and make notes on any key passages or quotes I discovered. This meant all my resources were easily accessible from the links I had collected. I also used this tool to plan my interview questions for Briony Hartley and make a moodboard of my inspirations for the design of my dissertation.

Overall, I have found this method to be very successful and keeping everything in one easily-accessible place has meant that I have stayed on track to meet deadlines more successfully. The challenges I have faced were when I had multiple deadlines for different projects in the same week, and I have had to pause work on this project. To prevent this from becoming a problem, I aimed to get the majority of my writing done in time for the interim deadline, meaning I had less to do later in the project when my focus was divided between other projects.
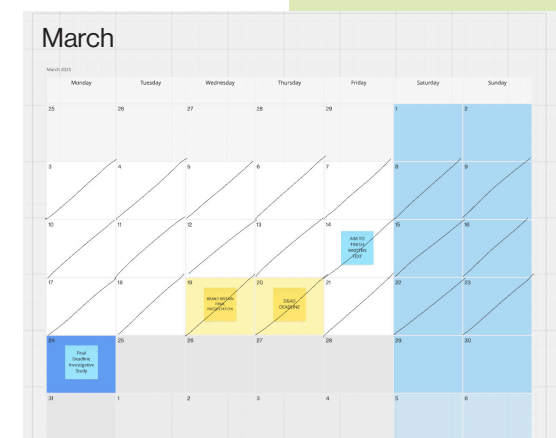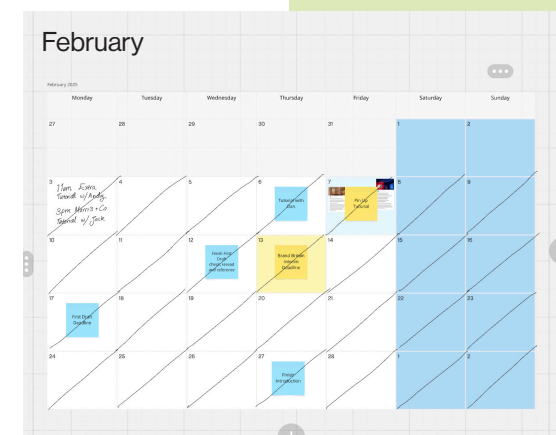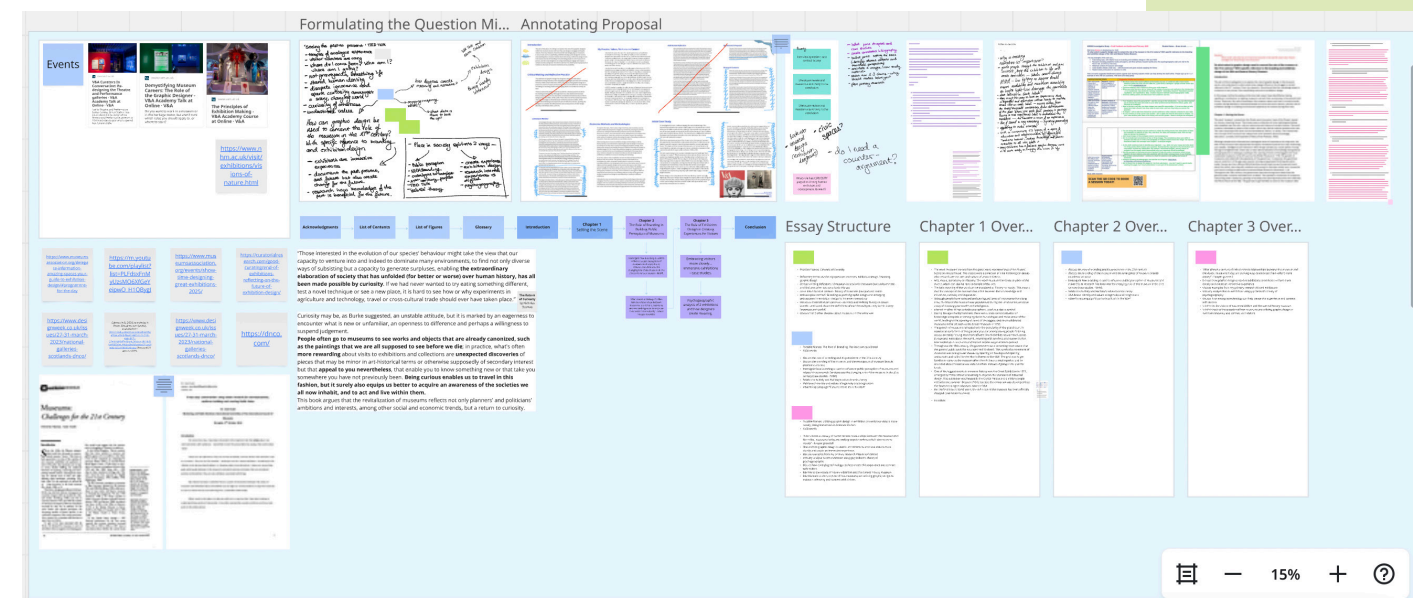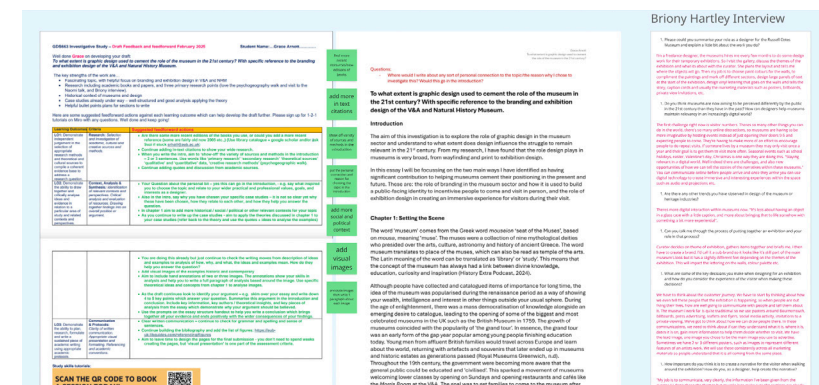
Appendix B: Briony Hartley Interview Notes

The following notes are from an interview with Briony Hartley, a freelance designer who has previously worked with the Russell Cotes Museum. The interview took place via email in February 2025, with Briony returning her answers in the form of an audio recording. As a result, her answers below are paraphrased unless specified with quotation marks.

1. Please could you summarise your role as a designer for the Russell Cotes Museum and explain a little bit about the work you do?

I'm a freelance designer, the museums hire me every few months to do some design work for their temporary exhibitions. I visit the gallery, discuss the themes of the exhibition and what it's about with the curator. She plans the layout and tells me where the objects will go. Then my job is to choose paint colours for the walls, to compliment the paintings and mark off different sections, design large panels of text at the start of the exhibition, design vinyl lettering that goes on the walls and tells the story, caption cards and usually the marketing materials such as posters, billboards, private view invitations, etc.

2. Do you think museums are now aiming to be perceived differently by the public in the 21st century than they have in the past? How can designers help museums maintain relevancy in an increasingly digital world?

The first challenge right now is visitor numbers. There are so many other things you can do in the world, there's so many online distractions, so museums are having to be more imaginative by hosting events instead of just opening their doors 9-5 and expecting people to come. They're having to make more of an effort to encourage people to do repeat visits. If someone lives by a museum they may only visit once a year, and their goal is to get them to visit more often. Seasonal events such as school holidays, easter, Valentine's Day, Christmas is one way they are doing this. "Staying relevant in a digital world. Well indeed there are challenges, and also new opportunities of how we can tell the stories of the narratives within these museums." You can communicate online before people arrive and once, they arrive you can use digital technology to create immersive and interesting experiences within the space such as audio and projections etc.

3. Are there any other trends you have observed in design of the museum or heritage industries?

There's more digital interaction within museums now. "It's less about having an object in a glass case with a little caption, and more about bringing that to life somehow with something a bit more experiential".

4. Can you talk me through the process of putting together an exhibition and your role in that process?

Curator decides on theme of exhibition, gathers items together and briefs me. I then have to create a brand. I'd call it a sub-brand, so it looks like it's still part of the main museum's look, but it has a slightly different feel depending on the themes of the exhibition. This will impact the lettering on the walls, colour palette etc.

5. What are some of the key decisions you make when designing for an exhibition and how do you consider the experience of the visitor when making these decisions?

We have to think about the customer journey. We have to start by thinking about how we even tell these people that the exhibition is happening, so when people are out living their lives, how are well going to communicate with people and tell them about it. The museum I work for is quite traditional so we use posters around Bournemouth, billboards, press advertising, leaflets and flyers, social media activity, invitations to a private viewing. We've got to think about how we can draw people there. In these communications, we need to think about if can they understand what it is, where it is, dates it is on, gain more information to help them decide whether to visit. We have the lead image; one image you chose to be the main image you use to advertise. Sometimes we have 2 or 3 different posters, such as images to represent different features of an artist's work. We will use these consistently across all marketing materials, so people understand that it is all coming from the same place.

6. How important do you think it is to create a narrative for the visitor when walking around the exhibition? How do you, as a designer, help create this narrative?

"My job is to communicate, very clearly, the information I've been given from the curator." I don't choose the themes, but my role is to make sure the sections are clearly defined to represent the different stages of an artist's career for example. This can be done through the colour on the walls, the text, any other signposting. In larger spaces, way finding is very important. How can you guide visitors to the space where the exhibition is being held? Do we want people to walk a certain way around the exhibition? How can we make that clear? You're very much guiding the visitor around. If there are accessibility issues, such as sight impairments, we provide those visitors with a booklet of large format printed text of all the captions. All the captions have a minimum print size of 18pt to allow for standard readers to read from a metre away.