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**Engaging Displays of Architecture and Design History:  
Approaches to Museum Exhibition Practice**

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

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**Engaging Displays of Architecture and Design History:  
Approaches to Museum Exhibition Practice**

**by**

**Bridget Gayle Ground**

**Thesis**

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On my first visit to the Ransom Center in spring 2004, I was immediately hooked. After encountering a work by Robert Rauschenberg—who had become one of my favorite artists growing up in Houston and around Louisiana, on either side of his hometown of Port Arthur, Texas—I turned a corner to discover a letter by the influential architect Le Corbusier—who I had only just learned about in a course in the School of Architecture that spring, my first semester in college. Although I'd been enrolled in art classes since I was a kid, I was barely aware of architecture until that year, and the experience of learning about, becoming intrigued by, and then encountering the subject in an exhibition in dialog with an artwork I'd long admired, was like an epiphany.

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## **Abstract**

### **Engaging Displays of Architecture and Design History: Approaches to Museum Exhibition Practice**

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In spring 2019 the Harry Ransom Center, a humanities research library and museum at The University of Texas at Austin, will present the exhibition tentatively titled *Toward Everyday Design: Making and Selling the Arts and Crafts Idea*, co-curated by university faculty members and historians of architecture and design Christopher Long and Monica Penick. Using this planned exhibition as a case study, this thesis investigates the capacity of the museum exhibition as a medium for conveying histories of architecture and design to broad, public audiences in an accessible, meaningful, and engaging way. To situate *Toward Everyday Design* in the broader context of exhibition practice, I consider the traditional and contemporary approaches to museum exhibitions, particularly of architecture and design. I argue that opportunities for engagement with the exhibition can be enhanced through a thoughtful balance of these approaches, as well as through approaches related to the exhibition's authorship, the objects it features, their spatial arrangement and display, and the exhibition's accompanying interpretive texts and programs. The resulting discussion offers specific strategies for presenting architecture and design histories in public museum exhibitions, while illuminating the value that such projects have for local and scholarly communities.

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## Introduction

By policing our own disciplinary boundaries... we end up writing largely for other architectural historians. And when we do so, we aren't reaching the people who make decisions about the built environments we inhabit. We certainly aren't reaching interested members of the general public, among whom we might be cultivating greater levels of spatial literacy. And we limit our ability to contribute to the humanities more generally. —Dianne Harris<sup>1</sup>

Our daily environments are made up of designed objects and spaces, the quality of which impact our individual and communal lives. The public interest in the value of the built environment has grown in recent years, with many people seeking ways to improve and personalize their surroundings by consulting an array of magazines, websites, television shows, and retailers who cater to and nurture design-conscious audiences. Yet the exchange of information about architecture and design in the public sphere is seldom accompanied by substantial historical discourse. Although design images and tips proliferate online and in marketing materials, they are framed as “eye candy” or as starting points for inspiration, offering little contextual information about the complex ideologies and histories from which they developed.

This is due in part to an underrepresentation of the discipline in institutions for public education. While students of architecture and design are trained to observe, interpret, and evaluate the designs that shape our built environment, this practice is rarely taught outside of professional and college-level schools. Furthermore, there are inherent challenges in representing and disseminating information about architecture and design. If we have not experienced a particular space or object first-hand, we must rely on other media—such as drawings, models, photographs, and written accounts—to represent their multi-sensorial and site-specific qualities.

The museum exhibition presents an opportunity to harness the growing interest in architecture and design by engaging the public with rich representations of the discipline

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<sup>1</sup> Dianne Harris, “That’s Not Architectural History!” in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 70, no. 2 (June 2011): 151.

and its history. By bringing a variety of materials and formats together under one roof, exhibitions can reveal the patterns and variances across design styles and their global and local interpretations, compare the “good” designs to the “bad,” and trace the transformation of designs as they have been conceived, constructed, and used over time. As institutions dedicated to public education, museums are positioned to present exhibitions in a manner that is accessible and engaging for broad audiences. Museum exhibitions on architecture and design history therefore have the potential to advance knowledge of, and future support for and participation in, the discipline—whether by fostering community advocacy and discourse relating to the local built environment and its preservation or development, or by inspiring individuals to pursue formal training in the field and thereby advancing design scholarship and practice. Museum exhibitions also offer an opportunity to integrate information about architecture and design into new contexts, illuminating the discipline’s broader relevance to society—for example, photographs, drawings, and written accounts that portray particular environments might help to illustrate the lived experience of a given chapter in history. Likewise, new connections and meaning might be made for the discipline by extracting new or more nuanced histories of architecture and design from museum collections otherwise focused on particular areas of the arts, sciences, or humanities.

In spring 2019, the Harry Ransom Center, a humanities research library and museum at The University of Texas at Austin, will present an exhibition tentatively titled *Toward Everyday Design: Making and Selling the Arts and Crafts Idea*. This exhibition, curated by university faculty members Christopher Long and Monica Penick, will consider the history of the Arts and Crafts movement and how its founding ideals were disseminated, popularized, and used by designers, manufacturers, and consumers, and was ultimately transformed into an everyday, household style. Looking to this exhibition as a case study, this thesis will consider the museum exhibition as an instrument for promoting knowledge of and appreciation for architecture and design history among public audiences in the twenty-first century.

This thesis will situate the field of architecture and design history broadly, and

*Toward Everyday Design* specifically, in discourses related to museum and exhibition practice. The first chapter will provide an historical overview of museum and exhibition practice as it relates to architecture and design history, from nineteenth-century European models to twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century North American approaches, to explore the strategies by which museums have represented and engaged the public with the discipline, conditioning audience expectations for the twenty-first century. The second chapter surveys contemporary discourses related to the architecture and design exhibition, considering the perspectives of (1) architecture and design professionals and historians who seek to employ the exhibition as a platform for developing and disseminating their work, and of (2) museum professionals who seek to produce exhibitions that are increasingly contextualized, diverse, and interactive. The comparison of the ambitions and challenges that these respective communities strive to address will set the stage for an investigation into the specific strengths and limitations of—and strategies for—the museum exhibition as a medium for conveying histories of architecture and design.

The third chapter examines the development of the Arts and Crafts exhibition at the Ransom Center and the ways that it reflects and responds to historical traditions and present-day initiatives. This will be achieved through a discussion of the channels through which it conveys its narrative: the objects and the manner of their arrangement and display within the exhibition space; the accompanying descriptive and interpretive texts; and the programming and events that offer further engagement with local and scholarly communities. The final chapter, in conclusion, reflects on the opportunities revealed through the Ransom Center case study, specifically considering directions for future exhibition practice by architecture and design historians in collaboration with museum professionals, and how institutions like the Ransom Center, without departments specifically dedicated to architecture and design history, can engage with and contribute to the field through such collaborations.

In considering *Toward Everyday Design* during its planning stages, this thesis focuses on the process of organizing an exhibition and of making it engaging for present-

day audiences. This process involves numerous factors, including the over-arching ambitions of the exhibition's curators and of the exhibition planning team of its host institution; the strategies and approaches by which these ambitions are achieved; the local conditions and constraints against which they must be balanced; and the innovative solutions and possibilities that these conditions produce. As an employee of the Ransom Center and a student of the exhibition's co-curator Christopher Long, I have had the opportunity to observe and participate in this process, from both an institutional and curatorial perspective. Indeed, my experience at the Ransom Center has driven my interest in the processes surrounding museum exhibitions—from the collections and research that inform them, to the interpretive programs and publications that grow out of them, to the ever-evolving body of collective knowledge to which they contribute.

As a research methodology, the case study provides an opportunity to trace the local approaches to the particularities of a singular project that may have broader applications for future practice. Meanwhile, the case study also serves as a valuable tool for promoting a self-conscious awareness of the impacts of the exhibition throughout the planning process. The active consideration of the goals and challenges that must be negotiated throughout an exhibition's development is an important exercise given the responsibility of museums as educational institutions that shape public and scholarly dialogs, as well as individual experiences, through their interpretive activities.

It is my hope that by considering the universal objectives of the fields of architecture and design and of museum studies through the lens of a specific project, this case study can make a productive contribution to future exhibition practice. One of the greatest challenges—and opportunities—in exhibition practice is that each project presents unique considerations based on its narrative, supporting collections, and audiences, and therefore requires a unique planning process. As architecture and design critic, historian, and curator Sylvia Lavin has observed, “the practice of exhibition-making today encompasses a rich range of modalities that moves across various institutional structures, modes of production, and types of author and public. Exhibitions

are many, they operate in a multitude of ways...”<sup>2</sup> Despite these variations, one might approach meaningful analysis by considering particular classes of exhibitions and institutions—in this case, an exhibition of an everyday history of architecture and design drawn from a research library and museum with a strength in rare books and archival holdings.

In a 1989 article, Gary Kulik, who has directed such institutions as the Winterthur Museum and Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History, laments, “there is no organized way of learning from the past practices of museums, for there are few journal reviews, few professional schools, few conferences.”<sup>3</sup> Although literature on museum practice has expanded significantly since then, the field continues to evolve in response to changing technologies, approaches to history-making, and audience expectations, giving continued relevance to the insights of specific case studies. Rather than attempting to devise a static formula for exhibition-making, this thesis endeavors to contribute to a strengthened understanding of the broader considerations and goals that apply to exhibitions of architecture and design history. It is my hope that this discussion will help to advance exhibition practice within the discipline, and, in turn—in the spirit of the ambitions set forth by architectural historian Dianne Harris—to engage a broader audience in meaningful discourse about architecture and design history in the twenty-first century.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis, of course, has limitations. I focus on the collaborative process of making exhibitions of architecture and design *history*, for the purpose of *public education and engagement*. There has been an uptick in publications devoted to the architecture and

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<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Lavin, “Just What is it that Makes Today’s Architectural Exhibitions So Different, So Appealing?,” in *As Seen: Exhibitions that Made Architecture and Design History*, ed. Zoë Ryan (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2017) (hereafter cited as *As Seen*), 118.

<sup>3</sup> Gary Kulik, “Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present,” in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, eds. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989) (hereafter cited as “Designing the Past”), 31.

<sup>4</sup> See Note 1 and Dianne Harris, “Architectural Histories and Architectural Humanities” (plenary talk, annual conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Austin, TX, April 9–13, 2014). Harris calls for architectural historians to situate their work within broad humanities themes and to utilize public scholarship platforms in order to make the field more accessible and compelling for diverse audiences, and, in turn, to foster advocacy for its values.

design exhibition over the past 15 years, but the majority of these works examine the exhibition as an instrument for contemporary design practice. While some of these works offer insights that can be extended into a discussion of history exhibitions—and to that end are cited in this thesis—they generally fall outside of my scope of interest. By extension, my discussion is limited to the *museum* exhibition, which draws from objects that have been collected for their historical or cultural significance, and does not include the gallery exhibition featuring objects created for display.

This thesis also excludes substantial discussion about digital exhibitions. This is not to reject the value of the opportunities made possible by evolving technologies, but to acknowledge that the topic merits focused attention by those better versed in the unique considerations involved in the collection, management, and interpretation of digital cultural materials.<sup>5</sup> Instead, my discussion will consider strategies for effectively engaging audiences with in-person experiences in the digital age.

Finally, and most significantly, because this thesis focuses on the decisions and strategies employed during the exhibition planning process, it does not measure audience reception of the resulting exhibition. Visitor feedback is an undeniably important part of evaluating an exhibition's success, as it provides a measure of a visitor's immediate reactions to the exhibition in relation to their expectations and the perceived relevance and clarity of the information offered. However, an exhibition's success also relates to longer-term, higher-level goals that are less easily gauged. For example, the questions raised by a particular exhibition may influence the trajectory of future scholarly discourse.<sup>6</sup> Exhibitions also shape the sense of a shared value system and identity among the museum's immediate local community.<sup>7</sup> This thesis aims to contribute to a dialog

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion about digital curatorial opportunities related to architecture and design, see Paola Antonelli, "Digital Natives," in *As Seen*, 106–8.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see Penelope Dean, "On the Uses and the Abuses of the Exhibition Review," in *As Seen*, 113–15.

<sup>7</sup> For example, see Gordon Fyfe and Max Ross, "Decoding the visitor's gaze: rethinking museum visiting," in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, eds. Sharon MacDonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 127–50. This article considers how individuals and

about how such big-picture outcomes might elevate the discipline of architecture and design history, proposing strategies and theories to be further interrogated, tested, and measured in future exhibition practice.

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communities develop their outlook on society and a sense of identity and cultural capital through museum visiting.



## Chapter 1: Historical Context and Traditions

To assess the capacity of the museum exhibition to engage twenty-first century audiences with histories of architecture and design, it is helpful to consider how the discipline has been approached in earlier museum practice. A historical review will reveal how institutions have grappled with conveying the complexity of the discipline in the past, and how resulting exhibition strategies have conditioned the way that present-day audiences encounter and interpret information about the built environment.

A number of scholars have observed the significance of the history of exhibitions in shaping collective knowledge. In his essay “The Exhibitionary Complex,” sociologist Tony Bennett shows how the emergence of the public-oriented museum in the mid-nineteenth century resulted in new approaches to communicating information to society-at-large, including new disciplinary and display conventions.<sup>8</sup> In her book *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, art historian Mary Anne Staniszewski considers how these conventions were perpetuated in and by the modern museum institution of the twentieth century, arguing that the “unconscious, or less obviously visible, aspects” of exhibitions—such as their installation design, the focus of her book—“can be understood as manifestations of historical limitations and social codes.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, museum exhibitions develop and maintain frameworks that significantly influence our understanding of the world around us.

If every aspect of an exhibition—from its objects to the manner in which they are displayed and interpreted—is informed to some degree by the traditions and expectations established by others that have preceded it, it is useful to scrutinize past exhibitions related to architecture and design to consider how the discipline might be presented in future exhibition practice.

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<sup>8</sup> Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” in *Culture, Power, History*, eds. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 123–54.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998) (hereafter cited as *The Power of Display*), xxii. In this book, Staniszewski surveys and analyzes display techniques in MoMA exhibitions from 1929 to 1970, what she terms MoMA’s “laboratory period.”

## **TRADITIONS OF COLLECTION AND DISPLAY: SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM**

Sir John Soane's Museum provides an early example of a collection of architecture and design being exhibited for the purpose of education. The specific manner in which Soane developed and displayed this foundational collection reflects the professional and academic traditions of his time. As part of his architectural training in the 1770s, Soane traveled to Rome, and then Naples and Sicily, to observe the remains of classical antiquity. This "Grand Tour" was common practice among young architects, who would document their encounters through sketches, rubbings, and plaster casts so that their impressions could be taken home for future study as well as to signify their professional status. Soane's encounters during his Grand Tour inspired his collecting habit, which he was able to pursue following success in his career as an architect as well as a marriage that brought him increased financial security.

By around 1800 Soane transferred his collection from his home just outside of London to his apartment in the city at Lincoln's Inn Fields, where he would subsequently acquire and remodel additional buildings to accommodate his collection as it grew. Soane's museum was therefore a collection of architectural artifacts and documents as well as of his own architectural designs and ideas. In the remodeled spaces of Lincoln's Inn Fields, Soane introduced stylistic features that were prominent in his other architectural projects—such as sky-lighting, decorative moulding, and Pompeian red hues—as well as designs that specifically supported his collections and their display—such as hinged planes for picture hanging and passageways that enabled a continuous viewing experience (fig. 1).

The manner in which Soane organized his collection reflects the lingering presence of the "curiosity cabinet" tradition of display—typical of the eighteenth century and Renaissance period—in which the arrangement of objects is guided by personal tastes and idiosyncrasies rather than a systematic, pedagogical strategy. But even though Soane's collection was not displayed to convey a particular narrative, he grasped the relatively new concept of the museum as an institution for public education, as evidenced

by his organization of the 1833 Act of Parliament that would make his museum accessible to students free of charge after his death.<sup>10</sup>

Although the nature of the collections and displays of Sir John Soane's Museum are influenced in part by Soane's antiquarian impulses, they are also a product of the inherent complexities associated with exhibitions of architecture and design history, which museums and curators still grapple with today.<sup>11</sup> Rather than being wholly eccentric, the coexistence of fragments from previously built works alongside drawings and designs for future projects creates a collage-like depiction of the built environment, at various stages and scales, that is not unlike how it is encountered in the real world. The legacy of Soane's collecting practices is found in today's house museums, in which an individual's experiences and personal effects become the framework for presenting aspects of architecture and design history,<sup>12</sup> as well as in gallery settings, where exhibitions bring together a variety of material types to explore a broader architectural style or movement. In this way, Soane's Museum helped to develop a language through which to represent the complexities of the discipline: one that employs an array of formats to convey layers of information pertaining to spaces and objects as they have been imagined, built, and encountered.

## **DISPLAYS FOR THE PUBLIC: THE CRYSTAL PALACE AND HENRY COLE**

The Great Exhibition of 1851 became influential for both the discipline of architecture and design history and for museum and exhibition practice by contributing new conventions for display, and doing so for a vast audience. Housed in Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London, the exhibition space was a spectacle in and of

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<sup>10</sup> Details in this and the preceding two paragraphs were drawn from Tim Knox, "An Introduction to the Museum," in *Sir John Soane's Museum London* (London: Merrell Publishers Limited, 2009), 15–31.

<sup>11</sup> Soane's Museum has continued to participate in and contribute to the professionalization of architecture and design exhibition practice since Soane's death, under the leadership of such figures as architectural historian Sir John Summerson and former Victoria and Albert Museum curator Peter Thornton.

<sup>12</sup> The house museum genre has become pervasive, with its first American iteration considered to be Mount Vernon, established in 1858, and twenty-first century examples found Austin, including the Charles Moore Foundation and O. Henry Museum.

itself, demonstrating the architectural possibilities of the technologies and materials of the industrial age. The spacious structure accommodated large numbers of people, attracting a sweeping six million visitors over the course of its five-month run. Once inside the Crystal Palace, visitors encountered a series of displays of the material cultures and achievements of diverse regions and cultures. While the immersive, contextualized approach to the displays was not entirely new—for example, Charles Willson Peale incorporated realistic backgrounds into the natural history exhibits of his Philadelphia Museum in the 1790s—the breadth of their content was.<sup>13</sup> The Great Exhibition of 1851 was the first to bring together a series of displays that were international in scope, presenting its visitors with a depiction of the world that spanned space and time (fig. 2).

The Great Exhibition was particularly influential to the history and theory of architecture and design. Among its visitors was Gottfried Semper, whose encounter with an exhibit of the Caribbean hut formed the basis of his seminal essay on the origins and evolution of domestic architecture. The Great Exhibition also informed architecture and design exhibition strategies that would be further developed in the coming century. It was a precursor to all subsequent world's fairs as well as to later open-air museums (such as the Civil War Sanitary Fairs of the 1860s, Artur Hazelius's Skansen of 1891, and Henry Ford's Greenfield Village of 1929) and period rooms (such as those in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's American Wing, established in 1924).<sup>14</sup> It established the model of the museum environment serving as the “main attraction” for visitors,<sup>15</sup> contributing to commonly-held notions of acceptable museum-viewing behaviors.<sup>16</sup>

The Great Exhibition of 1851 even resulted in a direct prototype for the modern museum. In the wake of the temporary exhibition's popularity, and on the same grounds,

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<sup>13</sup> “Designing the Past,” 5. This article offers an overview of trends and approaches to the design of historical exhibitions in the early U.S.

<sup>14</sup> The Met was among the first art museums to showcase its decorative arts holdings within contextual displays evocative of the objects' origins and uses. For the history of the modern period room, see Neil Harris, “Museums, Merchandising, and Popular Taste: The Struggle for Influence” in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby (New York: Norton, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> Zoë Ryan, “Taking Positions: An Incomplete History of Architecture and Design Exhibitions,” in *As Seen*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> See Note 8.

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and the Great Exhibition's organizer Henry Cole established a new museum. Initially known as Museum of Manufactures (1852–1857)—then as the South Kensington Museum (1857–1899), and now as the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A, 1899–present)—the museum was dedicated to the unification of the arts and sciences, or the applied arts, as well as to Cole's mission for education reform. Cole viewed the museum as a mechanism for benefitting society by educating artists about industrialism, and the working class about the arts. This educational mission led to innovations that would be adopted by future museums, such as the “refreshment room” (established in 1856) and gas lighting that enabled extended opening hours to encourage visitorship among the working class (1857). Through its inviting spaces and disciplinary approach that embraced the applied arts, Henry Cole's museum engaged the public with the industrial age. It set a precedent for the museum's responsibility to society: to provide content that responds to the present moment and that has applications beyond the museum walls.

### **ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN IN THE MODERN MUSEUM: THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

The attention that Henry Cole's museum gave to modern forms of the applied arts—rather than to the more traditional collecting areas of the sciences and fine arts—broadly influenced twentieth-century institutions, such as the Bauhaus, established in 1919 with an emphasis on the unification of allied forms of art, and, in the United States, New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which similarly organized its collections and interpretive activities according to art and its related disciplines. As the first museum to have a curatorial department dedicated to architecture—initially founded as the Department of Architecture in 1932, then renamed the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design, and now the Department of Architecture and Design—MoMA made important contributions to defining the bounds of the discipline and to raising an

awareness of it among the American public.<sup>17</sup>

Through its exhibitions, MoMA made architecture and design accessible for its visitors. For example, the department's founding show, Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock's 1932 *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, used a variety of conventions characteristic of MoMA's early exhibitions that contributed to a pleasant and unthreatening viewing experience. Architectural models were elevated on individual pedestals, creating an opportunity for visitors to observe them closely and comfortably, as if they were engaged in a one-on-one conversation. The models were accompanied by explanatory text written in plain language, while drawings and photographs of the buildings they represented were printed in uniform size and hung at eye-level on neutral, beige walls. That *Modern Architecture* was the museum's first traveling show further helped it reach the broadest possible audience (fig. 3).<sup>18</sup>

The same tactics that made the exhibition content accessible also made it alluring. By distilling the "international style," the subject of the show, into a succinct lineage of select works and architects, and by isolating their works on pedestals, *Modern Architecture* endowed its objects with a sense of being "exemplars of an ideal canon" and with an "aura of art."<sup>19</sup> This effect was later magnified by Johnson's 1934 *Machine Art*, which employed pedestals, drapery, and dramatic spotlighting to present otherwise utilitarian and industrial objects in a highly aestheticized manner, as objects of desire entirely divorced from their ordinary context. According to a press release, *Machine Art* marked the first time MoMA was "giving as much importance to the installation as to the Exhibition itself."

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<sup>17</sup> On the development of MoMA's architecture department, see *The Power of Display*, "Alfred Barr's Multidepartmental Plan," 73–81, and *Built in USA: Since 1932*, ed. Elizabeth Mock (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1945), 5–6, 124–28; on the debate on whether architecture should be represented in a museum department or made the subject of a dedicated museum, see Barry Bergdoll, "Out of Site in Plain View: A History of Exhibiting Architecture since 1750," A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., April 7–May 12, 2013 (hereafter cited as "Out of Site in Plain View"), Lecture II, 14:10–15:27, [soundcloud.com/nationalgalleryofart/the-sixty-second-a-w-mellon-1](https://soundcloud.com/nationalgalleryofart/the-sixty-second-a-w-mellon-1).

<sup>18</sup> For further discussion on *Modern Architecture* and the significance of the conventions of display developed by MoMA in this period, see *The Power of Display*, 64–70, 293.

<sup>19</sup> *The Power of Display*, 292; "Designing the Past," 15.

*Machine Art* also featured a price list and manufacturer information in its accompanying catalogue.<sup>20</sup> This consumerist aspect of the department's exhibitions reached its peak by the 1940s and 1950s with the *Useful Objects* and *Good Design* shows—where visitors were encouraged to purchase the mass-produced and well-priced objects on display—and with the 1949 *The House in Museum Garden* installation—where visitors could envision their life taking place within a full-scale model home. Indeed, as art and museum historian Eric M. Wolf has observed, MoMA's entire building was designed to simulate an environment of consumerism, from its façade mimicking a storefront to a domestic-scale interior that allowed visitors to sample a modern lifestyle.<sup>21</sup>

By displaying objects as accessible, aestheticized, and consumable, MoMA and its Architecture and Design Department, in the first half of the century, generally emphasized *products* over the process of their creation or use. There are some exceptions to this tendency: in addition to the Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen design for an "organic chair" that it famously introduced, the 1941 exhibition *Organic Design in Home Furnishings* also presented a timeline situating the evolution of the modern chair in a cultural framework. This timeline began with the Great Exhibition of 1851 and a William Morris chair, and was interspersed with such references as "reproductions of advertisements [for furniture, automobiles,] and other equipment of daily living, photographs of women in the varying styles of the succeeding decades..."<sup>22</sup> But even while offering this historical and cultural context, the unidirectional timeline (to which visitors were lead by a dramatic ramp created specifically for the show) concluded with modern, commoditized products, reflecting the museum's progressive and consumerist approach (fig. 4). Through its early exhibitions, MoMA suggested that everyday visitors could consume—but not create—history.

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<sup>20</sup> This observation and the previous quote noted in Zoë Ryan, "Taking Positions: An Incomplete History of Architecture and Design Exhibitions," in *As Seen*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Eric M. Wolf, *American Art Museum Architecture: Documents and Design* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), 144–47.

<sup>22</sup> The Museum of Modern Art, "Museum of Modern Art to Present Entirely New Type of Chair in Exhibition of Organic Design Opening September 25" (press release, September 19, 1941), [www.moma.org/documents/moma\\_press-release\\_325259.pdf](http://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325259.pdf); *The Power of Display*, 167–71.

## INTERPRETIVE ACTIVITIES AT THE POST-MODERN RESEARCH INSTITUTION: THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE AND HARRY RANSOM CENTER

By the second half of the twentieth century, a new approach to history had gained momentum. An interest in social and cultural history that had developed in WPA-era America reemerged in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>23</sup> In response to this shift, museums sought to develop interpretive exhibitions that emphasized information and ideas as much or more than objects. This was achieved through a variety of means that often blended the functions of the museum with those of the research library, such as partnerships with university professors who performed research activities; expanded collections of archives with deep research value; and the development of new, highly specialized institutions and humanities centers focusing on distinct areas of study and their relationship to one another.<sup>24</sup>

In the realm of architecture and design, this shift is evident in a number of such post-modern, museum-like research institutions that integrated the discipline into a broader cultural context. In 1968 the Smithsonian Institution adopted the Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum into its outfit of museums and research centers dedicated to the “increase and diffusion of knowledge.”<sup>25</sup> In the mid 1980s, the Getty Research Institute of the J. Paul Getty Trust, an institution dedicated to the visual arts, began to acquire archives of major figures and movements in the history of architecture and design, such as the Nikolaus Pevsner Papers (1984); the International Congresses for Modern Architecture (CIAM) Belgian Section Papers (1985); and a collection of publications,

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<sup>23</sup> On the WPA-era approaches to history, see William Stott, “WPA,” in *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 102–18.

<sup>24</sup> On the interpretive exhibition and university partnerships, see “Designing the Past,” 26–28. On the merging of library and museum functions, see Elaine Heumann Gurian, “What is the Object of this Exercise?” *Daedalus* 128, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 167, 182. On the development of specialized humanities institutions and the “humanities center movement,” see James Chandler, “Critical Disciplinarity,” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 358–59.

<sup>25</sup> “Mission,” The Smithsonian Institution, [www.si.edu/about/mission](http://www.si.edu/about/mission).



curricula, correspondence, and artwork of the Bauhaus (1992).<sup>26</sup> And in conjunction with the burgeoning preservation movement, government records and historical society archives were recognized as valuable components of a documentation strategy that would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the built environment.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps most significant is the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), founded in 1979 (prior to opening in 1989) by Phyllis Lambert. Deeply involved in architectural practice through her own work as an architect, preservationist, and as a consultant in the design for the iconic Seagram headquarters building in New York, Lambert sought to create an institution that would interpret the full spectrum of architecture, its reception, and role in society. In a 1999 article reflecting on her vision for the CCA, Lambert describes the nineteenth-century museum, like Soane's, as an institution centered on the collector, and contrasts it to the museum after 1945, which she defines as a "research-based" institution for scholarly inquiry. She calls for the thoughtful collection of documents, including new media, that reveal creative processes and connections (rather than objects "made for the market").<sup>28</sup> This approach has resulted in a diverse collection of materials that relate to architecture and design broadly—from drawings, photographs, and business records to toys and travel guides to digital design files and oral histories—extending beyond the art-like objects so central to MoMA's early exhibitions on the discipline (fig. 5).

In pursuing this specialized research focus, the CCA furthered the interpretive activities practiced by museums in the first half of the century. In addition to producing exhibitions and public programming—activities that had become standard practice for museums—the CCA established a visiting scholars program in the late 1990s, inviting

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<sup>26</sup> The J. Paul Getty Trust, "The Getty Research Institute Architecture and Design Collection," press release, [www.getty.edu/news/press/center/gri\\_architecture\\_design.html](http://www.getty.edu/news/press/center/gri_architecture_design.html).

<sup>27</sup> Illustrative of this point is Nancy Carlson Schrock, "Images of New England: Documenting the Built Environment," in *The American Archivist* 50, no. 4 (Fall 1987), 474–98. In this article, Schrock advocates for a cross-institutional coordination of collecting practices for the development of a rich, comprehensive body of records to represent the built environment.

<sup>28</sup> Phyllis Lambert, "The Architectural Museum, A Founder's Perspective," in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, no. 3 (September 1999): 308–15.

new perspectives from outside of the institution to deepen and broaden its research activities. Since this program's inception, the CCA's visiting scholars have collaborated with its staff to develop exhibitions, lectures, symposia, and publications through their interpretations of the institution's collections. Resulting projects have investigated the built environment and its multifarious relationships with society—including its relationship to curatorial practice itself, leading to scholarship that is self-reflective about the institution's activities and how they contribute to our understanding of the discipline. This commitment in the late twentieth-century to expand interpretive activities was not unique to the CCA, but is reflected in the activities of like-minded institutions that developed in the same period, such as the Getty and the Harry Ransom Center.<sup>29</sup>

The Harry Ransom Center was founded as the Humanities Research Center for The University of Texas at Austin in 1957, just months after a December 1956 speech in which its founder Harry Ransom—an English professor who would also serve as dean, vice president and provost, president, and then chancellor of the university—announced his ambitions for an institution dedicated to the “collection and diffusion of knowledge” that would be “a center of cultural compass, a research center to be the *Bibliothèque Nationale* of the only state that started out as an independent nation.” It is worth noting that in this early speech, Ransom discussed at length the “collection of knowledgeable people” who contribute to and benefit from cultural collections such as the one he envisioned, and in a newspaper article the following year he stated his intention for the Center “to be a working library, not a museum.” With these comments, Ransom pointed to the value of a living collection to be engaged with rather than merely confronted on a

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<sup>29</sup> On the development of the Getty, see History of the Getty: Getty's Will,” *The J. Paul Getty Trust*, [www.getty.edu/about/whowere/history.html](http://www.getty.edu/about/whowere/history.html). Upon the death of founder J. Paul Getty in 1976 and his \$700 million estate willed to the institution, the Getty museum's operations expanded dramatically, with a new plan that focused on acquisitions, scholars, and collaboration with other art organizations in the region. These emphases are reflected in current organization into conservation institute, research institute, museum, and foundation. Regarding the Ransom Center, it is interesting to note that in addition to being developed in the same general spirit as the CCA, they shared a bookseller, Ben Weinreb, whose full stock of books and papers the Ransom Center purchased in 1968, and was also instrumental in helping Lambert build the CCA's library. See Nicolas Barker, “Ben Weinreb: Obituary,” *Independent*, April 6, 1999, [www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-ben-weinreb-1085605.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-ben-weinreb-1085605.html).

pedestal.

This spirit was reflected in Ransom's approach to collecting. In order to build a collection that would document the creative process, he sought to acquire entire archives rather than individual masterworks, and collected works of both major and minor figures, including living writers. What began as a rare book library grew into a multifaceted collection that by the early 1960s included literary manuscripts, photography, and performing arts and design materials (namely the archive of industrial and urban designer Norman Bel Geddes), and by the early 1980s included significant collections of art and film. Its activities, too, became hybrid, with a rigorous publishing program in the 1960s; an expanded conservation program beginning in the 1980s; a research fellowship program established by 1990; and a new commitment to exhibitions and public programming marked by a building renovation initiated in the last decade of the century and completed from 2001 to 2003 (fig. 6).<sup>30</sup>

Although the subject matter represented by the Ransom Center's collections differs from that by the CCA's, these institutions are aligned in terms of their founding ideologies as well as of their contemporary missions. Since their beginnings, both institutions have sought to develop collections that support focused yet wide-reaching research, offering opportunities to deepen knowledge in their respective fields of primary interest (architecture for the CCA; the humanities for the Ransom Center) while also drawing new connections between those fields and our culture and society more broadly.

This survey of twentieth-century exhibition activities reveals the evolution of specific approaches for exhibiting architecture and design, and of more general approaches to museum practice. Together, these strategies have established a language for representing and interpreting information about architecture and design for public audiences that involves the combination of a variety of material formats (such as those found at Soane's Museum) and their display in immersive and contextualized

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<sup>30</sup> This and previous paragraph drawn from Megan Barnard, ed., *Collecting the Imagination: The First Fifty Years of the Ransom Center* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), especially xv–xxiii, 23–25, and 30; and “About Us,” Harry Ransom Center,” [hrc.utexas.edu/about/us](http://hrc.utexas.edu/about/us).

environments (as at the Crystal Palace); in near isolation (as at MoMA); or in information environments, integrating the discipline into broader aspects of social history (as at the CCA and like-minded research institutions). This varied approach to the exhibition of architecture and design in museums is symptomatic of the discipline's indefinable nature (also reflected in its treatment in academic institutions, where it is alternately governed as a fine art, science, or autonomous discipline) while also highlighting and even celebrating its complexities. The variety of materials that are brought together to illustrate architecture and design, and the dynamic approaches to their display and interpretation, offer endless opportunities for continued interpretation of the discipline in museum exhibitions in the twenty-first century.

## Chapter 2: Contemporary Context and Initiatives

In the twenty-first century, museum exhibitions continue to evolve to adapt to new approaches to history-making and changing audience expectations. In order to better understand the specific challenges and initiatives to which exhibitions of architecture and design history presently respond, this chapter surveys current discourses among the architecture and design community—as evidenced by recent publications by historians and professionals in the field—and among the museum community—as evidenced by contemporary institutional activities.

### MAKING EXHIBITIONS OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

Over the past fifteen years a number of publications have examined the relationship between exhibition practice and the architecture and design discipline, establishing the architecture and design exhibition as a distinct genre—and one that is garnering increasing interest. Discourse on this topic has been generated by special journal issues—such as the 2005 issue of *Praxis* devoted to the relationship between the contemporary city and the museum, and the Fall 2010 issue of *Log* on “Curating Architecture”—as well as by numerous symposia—such as *Place and Displacement: Exhibiting Architecture* (2013) and *Exhibiting Architecture: A Paradox?* (2015), both of which resulted in eponymous publications based on their proceedings.<sup>31</sup> The participants in this dialog include students, scholars, and professionals of architecture and design who have made forays into exhibition practice, as well as professional curators of architecture and design working within museums. A review of recent works by two such figures, Barry Bergdoll and Zoë Ryan, provides a glimpse into the current approaches to organizing the architecture and design exhibition.

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<sup>31</sup> Thordis Arrhenius, et. al. (eds.). *Place and Displacement: Exhibiting Architecture* (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2014); Eeva Liisa Pelkonen, Carson Chan, David Andrew Tasman (eds.). *Exhibiting Architecture: A Paradox?* (New Haven: Yale School of Architecture, 2015).

Barry Bergdoll's 2013 lecture series "Out of Site in Plain View: A History of Exhibiting Architecture since 1750" provides a "genealogy" of the exhibition of architecture and design through a history of the genre, with a focus on contributions by MoMA, where Bergdoll served as Chief Curator of Architecture and Design from 2007 to 2013. His lectures offer a set of definitions, considerations, and directions for architecture and design exhibitions, as well as observations about their influence on the broader field. For example, he points to the high proportion of exhibition images used as illustrations for Nikolaus Pevsner's seminal *Pioneers of Modern Design* (1936) and correlates Frank Lloyd Wright's position in the canon to the frequency of his exhibitions, produced in every year of his career.<sup>32</sup> Through these observations, Bergdoll suggests that the power of exhibitions lie not merely in their ability to demonstrate information about architecture and design through the objects and images that they display, but in their ability to elevate that information in the broader discourses that take place within and about the discipline, thus actively shaping the field by framing its key actors and ideas.

The prolific series concludes with Bergdoll calling for exhibition organizers to harness the capacity of the exhibition to instigate debate about contemporary design work and its "very real implications for [exhibition] viewers' current and future lives" (and to complement what he refers to as the more traditional "reactive mode" of curating that considers and contextualizes work that has already occurred).<sup>33</sup> He proposes that this can be achieved through exhibitions that focus on the *processes* of design as much as its products. While Bergdoll advocates for the exhibition as a catalyst for contemporary design practice and criticism, rather than historical reflection, his suggestion that foregrounding design process might enhance audience engagement has relevance for the discussion at hand. Scholars of architecture and design are already working to bring such invisible histories to light to offer a renewed understanding of the conditions by which the discipline is shaped and understood;<sup>34</sup> displaying these intangible processes in a

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<sup>32</sup> "Out of Site in Plain View," Lecture IV, 59:08–40, and Lecture V, 16:09–38.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Lecture VI, 54:55–55:40; 1:05:10–50; 1:11:00–12:30.

<sup>34</sup> The sustained interest in processes of architecture and design is evidenced by a panel discussion at the

gallery space would increase their visibility quite literally, through the material objects that represent them, while also elevating their prominence in the discourses of the field.

*As Seen: Exhibitions that Made Architecture and Design History* (2017), edited by Zoë Ryan, Curator of Architecture and Design at the Art Institute of Chicago (as of 1981, the second American institution, after MoMA, to have a dedicated architecture and design department),<sup>35</sup> focuses on exhibitions on “contemporary architecture and design and its future” and the influence that these contemporary exhibitions have subsequently exerted on history and practice in the field. Although this study excludes historical or retrospective exhibitions, the themes that Ryan identifies across the projects discussed in her book might be extended to other types of architecture and design exhibitions, unifying them as a genre: their potential to generate *interdisciplinarity and collaboration*; their interrogation of design as a *specialized, discrete discipline*; and their interrogation of architecture and design as not just fabricated objects but as *multisensory environments*.<sup>36</sup>

Like Bergdoll’s lecture series, *As Seen* considers the ongoing evolution of cultural institutions and curatorial approaches in response to shifting technologies and audience expectations. For example, an essay contributed by Mirko Zardini, director of the CCA, describes the twenty-first-century exhibition as one that offers a contextualized narrative about architecture and its broader significance, and that is presented much like a film—at once informative, moving, and universal in its visual language:

...today the nature of the elements at play is shifting, as are audience expectations. This occurs because of the ever-greater production of multimedia and digital materials, and because the culture of movement, built through cinema over the last hundred years, and the culture of experience in the last twenty or thirty years have altered the visitor’s gaze...This calls for new ways of engaging visitors in dialogue—for example, by conceiving of an exhibition more and more

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2018 conference of the Society of Architectural Historians on “The Stagecraft of Architecture,” which considers the “institutional structures” underlying the production of modern architecture, and by the March 2018 special issue of the journal *Architecture & Culture*, themed “Behind the Scenes: Anonymity and the Hidden Mechanisms of Design and Architecture.”

<sup>35</sup> Zoë Ryan, “Taking Positions: An Incomplete History of Architecture and Design Exhibitions,” in *As Seen*, 15.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

as a narrative or a cinematic experience, as well as a display of cultural objects.<sup>37</sup>

Other essays in the collection consider how exhibition catalogues, websites, and other approaches to display can likewise convey different types of information about the experience of making and using architecture and design. While Bergdoll identifies an emphasis on design process as a strategy for increasing audience engagement with twenty-first century exhibitions, Ryan's book focuses on the interdisciplinary, multi-sensory, and narrative approaches by which the exhibition can demonstrate the broader effects of architecture and design in the world.

### **MAKING HISTORIES OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN**

The projects described in Bergdoll's and Ryan's works demonstrate the extent to which exhibitions shape the understanding of architecture and design both within the field and for public audiences. Although their works treat exhibitions related to contemporary architecture and design practice, their observations can be extended to exhibitions of architecture and design history that are organized by scholars who can similarly benefit from the exhibition as a dynamic platform for developing and disseminating their work. In her 2011 article "That's Not Architectural History!" and a 2014 lecture to the Society of Architectural Historians, architecture and humanities scholar Dianne Harris presents a picture of the aims and constraints for history-making in the twenty-first century—revealing challenges for which museum exhibitions can offer solutions.

Harris argues that histories of the "built environment" (encompassing design and architecture at all scales, and their creation and reception broadly) can at once benefit from and contribute to broader knowledge about culture and society. She proposes that architectural histories engage with other humanities disciplines that relate to issues affecting the built environment, so that new relevance and meaning can be established, new areas for future research can be identified, and richer discourse can occur among an

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<sup>37</sup> Mirko Zardini, "Exhibiting and Collecting Ideas: A Montreal Perspective," in *As Seen*, 104.



expanded audience. Disciplinary boundaries present a hurdle for this goal. Although necessary in providing practical criteria and standards according to which scholarship is commonly understood, pursued, and recognized, disciplinary conventions also limit possibilities for new ways of thinking and for collaboration, and tend to perpetuate self-affirming value systems, insulating the field from criticism.

In particular, Harris points to the pressure on faculty in professional schools of design to create histories that “are immediately instrumental to design studio instruction, or that vaunt the architect and his or her professional endeavors.”<sup>38</sup> Such mandates prevent the discipline from re-examining its canon and tenets, inhibiting opportunities for its own development and for demonstrating its relevance to other fields. And even more concerning are the limitations that this creates in terms of the communities that the discipline is understood to represent. Harris cites architect, activist, and scholar Craig L. Wilkins’s 2007 book, which considers that academic disciplines serve as “a way to control and perpetuate knowledge and privilege” by the interests of a ruling class—which, since these disciplines were developed in the Enlightenment, have generally been educated, wealthy, heterosexual, white, and male.<sup>39</sup> Like Harris, Wilkins looks to the relationship between architectural knowledge and practice, calling the studio the “primary site for the gathering and dispensing of discipline-specific architectural knowledge.”<sup>40</sup> These observations underscore the significance of public engagement to the development of the discipline, which will otherwise continue to be shaped by and for limited participants.

Interdisciplinary research presents a solution for these issues. By generating discourses through and for more diverse perspectives and populations, interdisciplinary approaches to architectural history can effectively expand its audiences. In her 2014 lecture, Harris called for historians to transmit such interdisciplinary discourses through

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<sup>38</sup> Dianne Harris, “That’s Not Architectural History!” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 70, no. 2 (June 2011): 150.

<sup>39</sup> Craig L. Wilkins, “Discipline-Person,” in *The Aesthetics of Equity: Notes on Race, Space, Architecture, and Music* (University Of Minnesota Press, 2007), 34.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

works of public and digital scholarship in order to make them more accessible and engaging, and to invite further dialog among broad audiences. Beyond contributing to richer discourses for architectural history, she argues that making the field more accessible and compelling for diverse audiences will, in turn, foster advocacy for the preservation and construction of a quality spaces—serving the broader field of architecture and design over the long term.

If the studio or scholarly journal is the site where the architecture and design discipline has traditionally been developed, Harris is interested in the site where it is presented for a broad public. The museum exhibition offers a platform for Harris's aims. While exhibitions created for those already involved in architecture and design yield little new value for the field, exhibitions that translate histories for the public-at-large, and through interdisciplinary collections, can open the field to new opportunities and discourses.

## **VALUES AND EXPECTATIONS FROM THE MUSEUM PROFESSION**

The values and ambitions expressed by curators and historians in the field of architecture and design reflect the goals and activities of the broader museum field—suggesting that both arenas are responding to broader social and technological shifts, and offering opportunities and strategies for mutually beneficial collaboration. The contemporary initiatives of the museum community can be considered in three categories: exhibitions and activities that are interdisciplinary and contextualized; diverse and collaborative; and participatory and interactive. Although these categories are often connected, with success in one area leading to another, they demonstrate a general direction for twenty-first-century museum exhibitions.

### **Interdisciplinary and contextualized exhibitions**

As demonstrated by the historical context established in the previous chapter, disciplinary boundaries are often encoded in the organizational structures of museums.

Today there is an attempt to re-assess and complicate these boundaries through the development of collections, exhibitions, and other interpretive programs that are increasingly interdisciplinary and contextualized. For example, in an ongoing project to reconfigure its gallery spaces, MoMA is also reconfiguring its approach to its interpretive activities. In a 2015 article introducing this plan, Robin Pogrebin of *The New York Times* observed, “While curatorial activities used to be highly segregated by department...the museum has gradually been upending that traditional hierarchy, organizing exhibitions in a more fluid fashion across disciplinary lines.”<sup>41</sup> This shift has resulted in exhibitions characterized by “chronological and thematic approaches that include multiple formats as well as more minority and female artists.”<sup>42</sup> Given the stature of MoMA, this initiative marks a significant shift for the field, challenging other museums to work beyond the abstract bounds of previously established discipline-based organizational structures.<sup>43</sup> The resulting multi-disciplinary and multi-format exhibitions will convey more contextualized histories that are both intellectually and visually engaging, creating different entry points for viewers who identify with different aspects of the project.

### **Diverse and collaborative exhibitions**

As exhibition narratives become more contextualized, they make space for new perspectives. For example, a show seeking to convey a complete account of a movement may feature otherwise under-represented populations. This might be achieved through acquisition efforts targeted toward filling such gaps within an institutional collection. It might also result from collaborations with external partners who can bring fresh perspectives to collections, identifying narratives that have previously been overlooked.

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<sup>41</sup> Robin Pogrebin, “MoMA to Organize Collections That Cross Artistic Boundaries,” *The New York Times*, December 15, 2015, [www.nytimes.com/2015/12/16/arts/design/moma-rethinks-hierarchies-for-a-multidisciplinary-approach-to-art.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/16/arts/design/moma-rethinks-hierarchies-for-a-multidisciplinary-approach-to-art.html).

<sup>42</sup> Robin Pogrebin, “MoMA’s Makeover Rethinks the Presentation of Art,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/arts/design/moma-redesign-art-expansion.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/arts/design/moma-redesign-art-expansion.html).

<sup>43</sup> See Note 41. In this article, MoMA’s chief curator Ann Temkin has commented, “I’m not naïve about the fact that the Museum of Modern Art is a very influential institution, but I think the way we can be influential today is different.”

There have been many recent examples of such collaborations over the past five years. Food historian Ivan Day has guest-curated exhibitions and accompanying programs at such institutions as the Getty, Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, reviving and reinterpreting their period room collections through installations and demonstrations of historic table settings and cooking traditions.<sup>44</sup> The Getty, Huntington Library, and several scholars (including Dianne Harris) engaged in a collaboration to produce *Form and Landscape*, a digital exhibition about the history of Los Angeles (fig. 7).<sup>45</sup> Most recently, the CCA's website was redesigned with the aim to provide a platform for critical discourse across an international community.<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting that these latter two collaborations have been made possible by the internet, allowing diverse materials, perspectives, and institutions to come together in a digital space.

These collaborations demonstrate an openness on the part of museums to turn a critical eye toward past acquisitions and practices, realizing Gary Kulik's suggestion that collaborations with external scholars might diffuse the tendency of curators to revere and defend the "objects under their care."<sup>47</sup> This shift is evident in the changing meaning of the word "curator" today, which has come to describe a wide range of professional and amateur roles, from someone who "curates" images, music, or apparel for a group of like-minded individuals, to the twenty-first-century museum curator who is as much responsible for developing relationships with—and advocating for the interests of—the communities that their collections represent as they are for developing and caring for collections of physical objects.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ted Loos, "Setting a Place for History," *The New York Times*, February 21, 2013, [www.nytimes.com/2013/02/24/arts/design/culinary-exhibitions-add-life-to-museums-period-rooms.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/24/arts/design/culinary-exhibitions-add-life-to-museums-period-rooms.html).

<sup>45</sup> "Form and Landscape," *The J. Paul Getty Trust*, [pstp-edison.com](http://pstp-edison.com).

<sup>46</sup> James Taylor-Foster, "Expanded Audiences and the "Second Building": An Interview with CCA Director Mirko Zardini," *ArchDaily*, June 1, 2017, [www.archdaily.com/788868](http://www.archdaily.com/788868).

<sup>47</sup> "Designing the Past," 27–28.

<sup>48</sup> For example, see W. James Burns and Sheila K. Hoffman, "Beyond Collection Work: The Evolving Role for Curators" *Museum*, May/June 2017, 13–15, on the developing emphasis on community outreach and collaboration in museum curators' work.

## Participatory and interactive exhibitions

The trend toward more diverse and collaborative exhibitions brings new perspectives into the exhibition planning process, which in turn brings new emphasis on the visitor's perspective and his or her personal experience with an exhibition. Participatory programs can engage families and K–12 audiences, reinforcing what is taught in school, or supplementing what is not (as is often the case for architecture and design). Examples include the Minneapolis Institute of Art's "Living Rooms" program series, which activates and re-contextualizes its period rooms by engaging children and families in participatory activities relating to each room's histories, and the National Building Museum's permanent interactive family-friendly exhibitions *Play Work Build* and *Building Zones*.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, digital technologies offer new opportunities for engaging audiences both in and outside the exhibition space. For example, the Cooper Hewitt's interactive "pen" technology allows visitors to "collect," "save," and digitally manipulate objects from the galleries on a mobile device, and the Getty's *The Life of Art: Context, Collecting, and Display* exhibition encourages visitors to actively examine material aspects of select decorative arts objects through interactive touch-screens, label text, and a web component.<sup>50</sup>

Such interactive and participatory programs address historian Susan Crane's call for a museum that "confounds as much as it synthesizes information, by bringing together "cues" or artifacts and historians or remembers to interact in the production of memory."<sup>51</sup> In other words, the exhibition curator and visitor participate in a process that at once draws on and creates histories and memories in order to produce new meaning. If the late twentieth century exhibition presented contextualized histories, the twenty-first-century exhibition presents them in a way that makes diverse audiences active

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<sup>49</sup> "Living Rooms: The Period Room Initiative," Minneapolis Institute of Art. [new.artsmia.org/living-rooms](http://new.artsmia.org/living-rooms).

<sup>50</sup> "Designing the Pen," *Cooper Hewitt*, [www.cooperhewitt.org/new-experience/designing-pen](http://www.cooperhewitt.org/new-experience/designing-pen); "The Life of Art: Context, Collecting, and Display," *The J. Paul Getty Trust*, [www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/life\\_of\\_art](http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/life_of_art).

<sup>51</sup> Susan Crane, "Memory, Distortion and History in the Museum" in *Museum Studies*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 50.

collaborators in the exhibition event. Exhibitions that subscribe to this ideology offer multiple entry points to their content in order to accommodate a wide range of individual learning styles and experiences, enabling the public-at-large to engage with the content in deeper and more personally meaningful ways.

The values expressed in the works by Bergdoll, Ryan, and Harris and in the actions of contemporary museums offer a blueprint for creating exhibitions of architecture and design history today. While exhibitions in this genre will continue to be influenced by the conventions established in preceding centuries, the marriage of traditions with present-day values will result in exhibitions that balance legibility and engagement. By foregrounding the unique aspects of the discipline—the multi-sensory qualities of works of architecture and design and the dynamic underlying processes that shape them—exhibitions of architecture and design history can express new and more nuanced histories that are at once accessible, participatory, contextualized, diverse, and ultimately, more engaging for broad, public audiences.

### Chapter 3: The Arts and Crafts Exhibition as Case Study

If an exhibition is informed by the history of others preceding it, by present-day societal values, and by the project's particular circumstances—its organizers, objects, spaces, and narrative and pedagogical goals—the case study provides valuable insight into how these factors are balanced and negotiated in order to effectively engage its audiences with history during its present cultural moment. *Toward Everyday Design* provides a lens through which to examine these considerations. The decisions and strategies that have shaped the exhibition in its planning stages thus far reveal the extent to which it is informed by tradition and to which it engages contemporary currents.

The exhibition's curators, Monica Penick and Christopher Long, bring influences from their training and previous scholarship to the project, which is also inevitably shaped by the history of the Ransom Center and its collections. Indeed, many of the items selected for display are among the Center's foundational holdings.<sup>52</sup> The exhibition also responds to previous scholarship on the Arts and Crafts movement, taking a new approach to an otherwise well-trodden chapter of architecture and design history: while previous exhibitions and catalogues have emphasized the movement's handcrafted objects and their method of production, *Toward Everyday Design* will offer “a close exploration of how Arts and Crafts ideas were spread in the popular media of the time” and “translated into a popular style and philosophy.”<sup>53</sup> But beyond bringing nuance to an under-explored aspect of the movement, the exhibition also pushes the boundaries in terms of *the way* this history is presented, reflecting the general strategies of the museum field to engage twenty-first-century visitors.

The exhibition will offer its visitors a *contextualized history* of the Arts and Crafts movement. The Ransom Center is committed to presenting exhibitions that “provide a balance of concepts” that have appeal for diverse audiences by drawing from its multi-

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<sup>52</sup> Stephen Enniss, “Foreword,” in draft manuscript for the *Toward Everyday Design* exhibition catalogue edited by Christopher Long and Monica Penick for Yale University Press, forthcoming.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Long and Monica Penick, book proposal for the *Toward Everyday Design* exhibition catalogue, May 1, 2017.

disciplinary collections.<sup>54</sup> *Toward Everyday Design* will achieve these criteria through its focus on a clear historical narrative that situates the movement into broader aesthetic, social, and economic contexts, and through the variety of objects that support this narrative (a strategy that distinguishes it from exhibitions that display objects in isolation to emphasize their formal qualities). The objects selected for *Toward Everyday Design* comprise an array of formats—drawings, photographs, objects, and printed books, pamphlets, and ephemera—that together demonstrate how a design theory is translated into a style, and disseminated, interpreted, and used by designers, manufacturers, and consumers. By focusing on the transformation and spread of the movement from its founding ideologies to present-day legacy, from the United Kingdom to the United States, and from the designer to manufacturer to user, the exhibition offers a contextualized history that emphasizes, in accordance with Bergdoll’s approach, *process* over product.

As a guest-curated exhibition, *Toward Everyday Design* is inherently *collaborative*. The Ransom Center currently focuses its curatorial activities and staff on five areas of identified strength: literature, film, photography, art, and the performing arts. Although its vast collections support research in all fields of the humanities, including architecture and design, interpretative activities that reach beyond the five focal areas generally depend on external expertise, such as that provided by *Toward Everyday Design* curators Long and Penick. The guest curators bring a new perspective to the Center’s collections and interpretive activities. This perspective is informed by their academic training as well as their personal approaches to history-making. In addition, in developing their exhibition narrative the curators have also identified opportunities for collaborating with other institutions and individual collectors who might contribute to the exhibition as object lenders. These potential collaborators will contribute further voices and perspectives to the Center’s exhibition program, and will in turn appeal to a new subset of the Center’s broad target audience while also strengthening the design

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<sup>54</sup> Harry Ransom Center, “Exhibition Idea Form,” 2018.



community in Austin. In this sense, Penick and Long embody the evolving definition of the role of the curator that increasingly refers not just to an exhibition's objects, but to the voices and perspectives it engages and represents.

Finally, the exhibition is poised to be *participatory*. The exhibition narrative will emphasize the “everyday” aspects of the Arts and Crafts movement that make it familiar and relevant for broad audiences. Visitors may recognize the patterns and motifs of the movement from their own families' homes, or notice parallels between the advertising strategies that carried the movement's designs and ideals and those employed in lifestyle marketing today. Visitors will be able to actively draw connections between the exhibition and the world around them. Meanwhile, the multi-sensory quality of the exhibition's objects and planned gallery design will foster audience participation. The curators selected items with vibrant colors and patterns that will be enhanced by strategic use of color, lighting, and spatial arrangement in the galleries. The side-by-side presentation of related texts, images, and objects will encourage visitors to make active visual connections between stylistically related objects. The curators also intend to integrate interactive opportunities in the galleries to recreate the qualities of a domestic environment, or to allow visitors to touch, smell, or try out products and design processes from the movement's broad history.

These contextualized, collaborative, and participatory aspects of *Toward Everyday Design* will enable it to engage audiences in meaningful discourse related to architecture and design history while also serving the Ransom's Center mission to engage broad audiences with its collection in new ways. But exactly how these goals are achieved is worth studying. By analyzing the components that make up the exhibition, and the challenges and solutions that surface in their coordination, it is possible to identify strategies for making effective and engaging exhibitions of architecture and design history that can be further tested and developed in future practice. To this end, the following case study will consider how the objectives of *Toward Everyday Design* have been pursued through its authorship, objects, environments, texts, and programs, while leveraging traditional and contemporary exhibition-making strategies.

## **AUTHORSHIP**

### **Individual authorship**

The Arts and Crafts exhibition is authored by its co-curators Christopher Long and Monica Penick, both architecture and design and cultural historians with respective faculty appointments in The University of Texas at Austin's School of Architecture and School of Design and Creative Technologies. Their particular approach to history-making is informed by the traditions of their discipline as well as by their individual backgrounds. Long was trained in cultural and intellectual history, and has focused his scholarship on ideological architectural theory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and in Central European modernism. His recent books consider how modern design—from the interior spaces of Viennese architects Adolf Loos, Josef Frank, and Oskar Strnad to the American furniture designs of German-born Kem Weber—concurrently reflected and informed ideas about modern lifestyles. Penick was trained in cultural history, classic studies, and historic preservation—the latter including instruction by Long. Her scholarship focuses on twentieth-century American architecture and interiors and the influence of popular media on these areas. Her most recent book considers how concepts of modern living were promoted among the American middle-class in the mid-twentieth century through the editorial projects of Elizabeth Gordon, namely her *House Beautiful* magazine.

### **Institutional authorship**

Penick and Long's shared interests and approach to history-making shaped their interpretation of the Center's collections, which in turn shaped the guiding narrative of *Toward Everyday Design*. The Center's holdings relating to British intellectuals John Ruskin and William Morris and to American businessman Elbert Hubbard and his Arts and Crafts-inspired Roycroft community provide primary source materials that support a narrative about the movement's conceptualization in England and subsequent

popularization in the U.S. That these holdings primarily comprise sketchbooks, letters, lectures, books, and pamphlets that carried the ideas of the movement's thinkers and purveyors enables a narrative that specifically investigates the mechanics by which the movement's ideas were developed, circulated, and commodified. While the materials selected for the exhibition were acquired at different times in the Ransom Center's history and to support different areas of research—for instance, an item might have been acquired for its relevance to book history or photography history, or as part of a significant figure's library to reveal his or her influences—the curators connected these items from across the Center's collections (while also identifying complementary materials for potential external loans) to extract an under-explored story about a significant movement in their field.

The Ransom Center contributes to the exhibition's authorship through the scope and nature of its collection, as well as through its more general support of the exhibition as its hosting venue. The Center accepted the project for its exhibition program because of its alignment (1) with the Center's mission to “encourage discovery, inspire creativity, and advance understanding of the humanities for a broad and diverse audience” through its collections, and (2) with the specific objectives for the Center's exhibitions to have broad appeal for diverse audiences; to make an intellectual contribution; to demonstrate innovation and a standard of excellence; and to build community interest, understanding, and support.<sup>55</sup> While Long and Penick author their books with particular, primarily academic audiences in mind, their exhibition will be shaped with consideration to—and indeed was proposed with enthusiasm for—the Ransom Center's mission to engage a broad audience that includes both academics and a general public, and that is primarily local.

*Toward Everyday Design* will also respond to audience expectations established by the Ransom Center's previous exhibitions and interpretive activities. As a generally appealing subject accompanied by little controversy—for example, a web search for

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<sup>55</sup> “About Us,” Harry Ransom Center, [hrc.utexas.edu/about/us](http://hrc.utexas.edu/about/us); “Harry Ransom Center, “Exhibition Idea Form,” 2018.

“Arts and Crafts style” yields such articles as “Get the Look: Arts and Crafts-Style Architecture” and “So Your Style Is: Arts and Crafts”—the Arts and Crafts movement offers the opportunity to present a crowd-pleasing show of attractive antique objects and designs.<sup>56</sup> But the curators of *Toward Everyday Design* aspire to present a narrative about the movement that provides new insight into the social, cultural, and economic conditions that influenced exactly *how* this movement developed and spread. This narrative is well-suited for the Ransom Center’s typical audiences, who will seek the level of historical and interpretive depth that accompanied the Center’s past shows—such as *The Making of Gone With The Wind* (2014–2015), which presented production materials, fan mail, and other correspondence to explore the creation and reception of this classic film, and *Banned, Burned, Seized, and Censored* (2011–2012), which presented correspondence, legal documents, and books to illuminate the “machinery” of censorship in America during the interwar period. Given the academic background of its curators, the accessible nature of its topic, and the depth of the Center’s collections and past interpretive activities, *Toward Everyday Design* is positioned, on one level, to appeal to general audiences who wish to learn more about the Arts and Crafts movement, and on another, to serve as a springboard for new lines of scholarly inquiry into the movement’s specific history and significance.

In addition to establishing an audience that will shape the exhibition’s curatorial voice, the Ransom Center contributes collaborators to the exhibition planning team, who provide expertise according to the professional standards of the areas that they represent (for example, marketing and public affairs, conservation and installation, education and programming). The exhibition planning team helps to translate the exhibition narrative into a physical experience that is accessible and engaging for diverse audiences.<sup>57</sup> The

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<sup>56</sup> Lisa Frederick, “So Your Style Is: Arts and Crafts,” *Houzz*, March 5, 2012, [www.houzz.com/ideabooks/1622797/list/so-your-style-is-arts-and-crafts](http://www.houzz.com/ideabooks/1622797/list/so-your-style-is-arts-and-crafts); Debra Steilen, “Get the Look: Arts and Crafts-Style Architecture,” *Traditional Home*, [www.traditionalhome.com/design0/get-look-arts-and-crafts-style-architecture](http://www.traditionalhome.com/design0/get-look-arts-and-crafts-style-architecture).

<sup>57</sup> The collaborative exhibition planning processes at museums vary across and within institutions. For additional descriptions of these processes, see Candace Tangorra Matelic, “Forging a Balance: A Team Approach to Exhibit Development at the Museum of Florida History,” in *Ideas and Images: Developing*

exhibition is therefore a multi-vocal work of authorship, collaboratively developed by the exhibition curators and the staff of the host institution.

This collaborative aspect of an exhibition's authorship presents specific opportunities and challenges for its capacity to be engaging. The exhibition planning process is necessarily collaborative, given the variety and specificity of skillsets required to produce an exhibition and the broad range of audiences that the museum is expected to serve. Yet the ability of the exhibition to attract and have an impact on its audiences demands that these collaborative efforts be orchestrated and unified by a strong and cohesive curatorial vision. In a 2006 essay, Robert Storr, a former curator of painting and sculpture at MoMA, argues against the "bureaucratic division of labor" associated with exhibitions planned by committees of museum professionals, advocating instead for the uncompromised vision of the exhibition-maker to determine all aspects of the project. But even while he makes his stance for curatorial authority clear, he concedes that exhibition-makers "will at some point or another...need to rely on the expertise of specialists for technical advice, as well as for imaginative solutions to specific problems."<sup>58</sup>

In what has become a standard reference for organizers of interpretive history exhibitions, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, Beverly Serrell offers a solution to this problem. She prescribes that the exhibition curator and planning team establish a "big idea" statement that clearly and succinctly defines, at the start of the planning process, the scope of an exhibition. This big idea serves as the rationale according to which all decisions are made, enabling a multi-modal planning team to effectively convey the exhibition's "soul" or "fundamental meaningfulness" through its discrete components.<sup>59</sup>

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*Interpretive History Exhibits*, eds. Kenneth Ames, Barbara Franco, and Thomas L. Frye (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995), 187–209 and Isto Huvila, "How a Museum Knows? Structures, Work Roles, and Infrastructures of Information Work," *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 64, no. 7 (2013): 1375–87.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Storr, "Show and Tell" in *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, ed. Paula Marincola (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006), 15.

<sup>59</sup> Beverly Serrell, "Behind It All: A Big Idea," in *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 1996), 1–8.

At the Ransom Center this is effectively achieved through an exhibition creative brief that outlines the exhibition objectives in concise terms, through which subsequent design, advertising, and programming decisions are filtered.

The ability to balance collaborative processes with curatorial vision is of particular relevance to exhibitions of architecture and design history, since these projects, as former CCA staff member Meredith Carruthers has observed, are frequently organized by “practitioners who are only temporarily inhabiting the role of curator in collaboration with institutions.”<sup>60</sup> Because architecture and design is infrequently represented in museums through dedicated departments and staff—in part because the field can be approached through combinations of art historical, technological, and historical frameworks and collections—its representation in exhibitions is often reliant on the guest curator model, in which a subject-area expert collaborates with a team of museum staff as a means of sharing his or her research with public audiences in an engaging way.

## **OBJECTS**

### **Objects and their communicative capacities**

The Arts and Crafts movement traversed a range of material formats, leaving its mark on buildings, furniture, decorative and utilitarian objects, books, toys, and more. Meanwhile, the advent of mass production allowed the style to be encountered by expansive audiences through a multitude of copies, from original designs to knock-offs. Drawing upon (and selecting items from across) the Ransom Center’s vast collections, *Toward Everyday Design* will tell the story of the dissemination and reception of the Arts and Crafts movement through first edition books and original manuscripts of well-known figures who articulated the movement’s founding ideals, and through mass-produced trade books, marketing pamphlets, and furniture and household objects that demonstrated, promoted, and commoditized those ideals for use by everyday, middle-

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<sup>60</sup> Meredith Carruthers, “Some Other Systems of Orientation: Publishing Exhibitions,” in *As Seen*, 109.

class consumers in the domestic sphere.

This variety of material formats will carry different levels of visual and textual meaning, accommodating varying learning styles of the exhibition's broad target audience. For example, while a displayed title page of a first edition copy of Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture* marks the date of his influential critique on the architecture and machine-made ornamentation of the industrial era, the botanical drawings in his sketchbook offers insight into the ideal against which his critiques were cast: the near-perfect patterns and forms derived from nature (figs. 8–9). Similarly, Morris's assertion, documented in a page from his lecture on "Applied Art," that ornamentation beautifies both objects and the act of making them will be exemplified by the Kelmscott Press edition of the works of Chaucer, which exhibits decorative fonts and artwork that were meticulously designed, printed, and bound by hand and using handmade materials (fig. 10). The abstract processes of the dissemination and popularization of ideas will be demonstrated by multiple examples of the book specimens, order forms, and catalogues and magazines that circulated among consumers (fig. 11–13). Finally, objects such as a dining chair by L. & J. G. Stickley and an enlarged photograph depicting a domestic interior in the Arts and Crafts style will demonstrate the manifestation of the movement's ideals in everyday homes (fig. 14).

Visitors will be able to engage and interpret this range of media in different ways, reinforcing their understanding of the exhibition's concepts. Sylvia Lavin observes three categories of relationships between objects and viewer that are typical to architecture and design exhibitions: "demonstration/witness," "object/holder," and "information/processor." These "dyads" roughly correspond to the historical display traditions exemplified by the immersive displays of the Great Exhibition of 1851 (which evoked the sense of witnessing foreign cultures and places first-hand); by MoMA's aestheticized object exhibitions (in which visitors admired and desired isolated objects); and by the CCA's research-driven exhibitions (which present visitors with objects representing information to be actively interpreted and assessed). These categories of object-viewer relationships will also be present in *Toward Everyday Design* through such

items as the enlarged photograph of the domestic interior; the Kelmscott edition of the works of Chaucer; and the multiple copies of promotional materials. Their concurrent employment achieves Lavin's prescription for an engaging exhibition: she concludes that the compatibility of architecture and design to a variety of communication strategies that "simultaneously produce actuality, aesthetic experience, and knowledge" is what makes exhibitions of the discipline particularly appealing.<sup>61</sup>

### **Objects and their contexts**

The range of materials in the exhibition will also represent a variety of perspectives, providing a comprehensive picture of the participants in and recipients of the Arts and Crafts movement, and a range of viewpoints that is relatable for diverse audiences. To help present a dynamic and textured depiction of how Arts and Crafts ideas and objects were conceived, the exhibition will offer biographies of significant thinkers and promulgators of the movement. These characters will be represented by the literary and artistic works that they produced and by portraits of them, and will include both well-known figures like Ruskin and Morris and lesser-known personalities such as Walter Crane and his sister Lucy Crane, and Elbert Hubbard and his wife Alice Hubbard. These characterizations will humanize the exhibition narrative, providing a sense of how styles and tenets developed from individuals' personal beliefs, gained momentum through their collaborations with one another, and ultimately proliferated among a broad consumer audience. The exhibition objects therefore range from "masterworks" of the movement's perceived leaders to more anonymous works that both shaped and were shaped by the spirit of the age.

Lavin again offers insight: she considers the effect of selecting objects for an architecture and design exhibition "not only because of the information they convey, but also because they possess their own qualities and generate an aesthetic situation independent of the heroic essences attributed to authored objects. Moreover, this

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<sup>61</sup> Sylvia Lavin, "Just What is it that Makes Today's Architectural Exhibitions So Different, So Appealing?," in *As Seen*, 119, 122.



anonymous aura intensifies with quantity and variation, leading to a...single, albeit heterogeneous, logic.”<sup>62</sup> This approach has also been championed in the broader museum field by Gary Kulik—who advocates for the selection of objects based on their narrative value, rather than the associational or filiopietistic value that derives from their provenance—and Spencer R. Crew and James E. Sims, of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History—who laud exhibitions with objects that embody “larger traditions and cultural trends” and support “multiple authentic voices,” rather than being limited to “simple linear progress” of provenance-driven narratives.<sup>63</sup>

By showcasing objects that would have been encountered by consumers in everyday and local contexts, the Ransom Center exhibition will run counter to the still relatively recent tradition of architecture and design histories that glorify the hero-architect and his singular vision for society. Instead, it will present a microcosm of the movement, allowing twenty-first century visitors to witness a selection of the ideas, objects, colors, and textures as they were exchanged through books, lectures, pamphlets, and products in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In doing so, *Toward Everyday Design* will offer a contextualized and nuanced depiction of the Arts and Crafts movement to foster a richer understanding of its historical moment, and—by recasting the movement as a *living* one that existed through and between people, their ideas, and collaborations—will point to its lasting relevance.

### **Objects and absences**

Some of the materials desired for the exhibition are not represented in the Center’s collections. This is not a unique problem: exhibitions are typically developed from the constraints of collections, which are necessarily selective and offer an incomplete representation of the world around them. This resulted in “holes” in the object

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>63</sup> “Designing the Past,” 17; Spencer R. Crew, and James E. Sims, “Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian, 1991) (hereafter cited as *Exhibiting Cultures*), 160, 172.

list for *Toward Everyday Design* that might be filled through loans or other means of conveying otherwise absent information.

The Ransom Center collection includes books and documents that expound on the movement's guiding principles (like Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture* or Christopher Dresser's *Studies in Design*); that illustrate decorative arts, furniture, and architectural designs based on those principles (like Owen Jones's *The Grammar of Ornament* or Frank Lloyd Wright's Wasmuth portfolio); and that demonstrate the business practices that disseminated these principles and designs among broad audiences (like prospectuses for Kelmscott Press or Roycroft Press publications) (figs. 8, 15, 11–12). But with the exception of a small number of special collection rooms created to showcase the personal effects of donors or of individuals represented elsewhere in its holdings, the Ransom Center has not systematically acquired furniture or decorative arts for its collection. To feature examples of the physical manifestation of the Arts and Crafts movement in objects, it has therefore been necessary for the curators of *Toward Everyday Design* to seek loans from external entities.

Relevant objects have been identified at institutions whose decorative arts collections complement the Center's book and literary holdings—The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and Dallas Museum of Art—as well as through local collectors and enthusiasts, and even eBay and estate sales. These strategic loan and supplemental items will enable the exhibition to bring new dimensions to the story of the Arts and Crafts movement: by bringing discrete collections of design objects together with the Center's holdings, visitors will be able to compare Arts and Crafts ideas with their realization in the built environment in a way that would not be possible by viewing the respective collections in isolation. And because the supporting objects have been located primarily through local sources, the exhibition will illustrate regional legacy of the movement—its reception and value as demonstrated by area collectors—while also forging new relationships and a sense of shared interest in architecture and design history between the exhibition curators, the Ransom Center, and their neighboring institutions and communities.

Not all objects sought for the exhibition could be located. In her essay “What is the Object of this Exercise?,” Elaine Heumann Gurian, who has worked at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and branches of the Smithsonian Institution, reflects on the differences between “one of a kind” objects and those that are “an example of,” such as mass-produced objects which are more likely to be used by ordinary people than collected by museums. In cases where such objects cannot be easily procured for exhibition, she defends the practice of recreating or representing them through interpretive techniques, noting that these substitutes help to communicate valid histories that might otherwise go untold: “Most collections were created by wealthy people who acquired things of interest and value to themselves. The everyday objects of nonvalued or subjugated peoples were usually not collected.”<sup>64</sup> Crew and Sims echo this observation, adding that because the material culture of ordinary people is perceived as having little value, it is often traded in, thrown away, or used up. Because of the barriers to developing such collections, they call for exhibitions to be determined by historical themes rather than available objects.<sup>65</sup>

Precisely how such voids in the material record are addressed is a curatorial decision that can yield a range of effects. The interpretive substitute suggested by Gurian draws from a long held tradition in the museum field, from the contextual environments created for natural history and period room displays that date to the early nineteenth century and that become “an art object in its own right,” to the “full-scale buildings or parts of buildings that existed only for exhibition,” such as MoMA’s 1949 *House in the Museum Garden* commissioned to Marcel Breuer.<sup>66</sup> The creation of such interpretive objects is particularly instrumental for exhibitions of architecture and design that seek to illustrate intangible theories, or to imagine or re-present designs that were never built, that are no longer in existence, or that are located in distant places. These substitutes are

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<sup>64</sup> Elaine Heumann Gurian, “What is the Object of this Exercise?” *Daedalus* 128, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 173.

<sup>65</sup> Spencer R. Crew, and James E. Sims, “Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue,” in *Exhibiting Cultures*, 166–67.

<sup>66</sup> “Designing the Past,” 5, 16; *The Power of Display* 194.

what architectural historian Jean-Louis Cohen terms “meta-works,” which, along with exhibition texts and environments (the “montage of media” presented by an exhibition), provide the connective tissue that conveys complex ideas beyond those that could be communicated by original archival materials alone.<sup>67</sup>

*Toward Everyday Design*, too, will employ the interpretive substitute strategy. In lieu of original samples of wallpapers designed by William Morris and Frank Lloyd Wright, the designs will be represented as supergraphics, or large-scale reproductions, on the gallery walls—a plan that will lend to an immersive visitor experience quite distinct from the experience that might be achieved by the original but smaller-scale samples. Also under consideration is the digital reproduction, at large scale, of the photograph of the Arts and Crafts domestic interior, which will illustrate how the objects discussed in the exhibition were utilized in domestic settings, and which might be accompanied by supplemental data, such as historical prices associated with the objects depicted within. Residential interiors are often underrepresented in architecture and design histories given the private nature of these everyday spaces. The effect of providing a rare glimpse into an authentic household setting, combined with the added context of its contemporary market value, will reveal the ephemeral nature of histories of everyday design, and the value of preserving them through museum collections and exhibitions.

### **Objects and “traces of life”**

Finally, certain items selected for the exhibition are imperfect, showing signs of their use over time. This is part of the nature of research- and archival-based collections. In an essay considering conservation work at the CCA, architectural theorist and anthropologist Albena Yaneva observes that the conservators’ decisions are focused on preserving the “traces of life—of experimentation, deterioration, and decay” within

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<sup>67</sup> Jean-Louis Cohen, “Mirror of Dreams,” *Log* 20 (2010): 50–51.

objects, “rather than increasing [their] aesthetic value.”<sup>68</sup> Compared to fine art objects, objects from archival collections such as the CCA or Ransom Center may seem less suitable for display, but there is value to exhibiting these items and the subtle messages that they convey.

Two examples of such objects selected for *Toward Everyday Design* are a plate illustration from a first edition copy of A. W. N. Pugin’s 1836 book *Contrasts* and an American-made taboret, or side table, from circa 1910 (figs. 16–17). The former exhibits foxing, or spotting, which can be caused by the deterioration of traces of iron or other metals introduced into the paper during the manufacturing process, or by mold introduced by high levels of humidity or organic material like food, insects, or hand oil.<sup>69</sup> The foxing therefore reveal hints about the environment and conditions in and by which the book was made. That few of the book’s other pages are affected to the same degree might even suggest that one of its former owners (possibly British writer Evelyn Waugh; the book was acquired by the Ransom Center as part of his library) may have frequently consulted this page or displayed it over a prolonged period. The taboret, which will be loaned to the exhibition from a private collection, similarly carries signs of its age and use. It is made of oak wood that has become a deep, nearly purple hue over its hundred-year life; the wear on its slightly concave surface hints at the bodies and objects that have sat at its center and the hands that have grazed its peripheral edges; and the corners of its legs are scuffed by the walls and furniture it has been set against.

Although these “traces of life” may not communicate specific or conclusive information about an object’s past, the general depth of history that they evoke is nonetheless important. In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Walter Benjamin reflects on the value of understanding history as a series of authentic, unique moments rather than as a smooth and linear narrative, and observes the capacity of material objects to achieve the former by bearing information about the events and tensions that took

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<sup>68</sup> Albena Yaneva, “What “No!” Means for Architectural Conservation: The Secret Life of Drawings in Collections,” in *The Secret Life of Buildings*, Center 21, eds. Michael Benedikt and Kory Bieg (Austin: Center for American Architecture and Design, 2018), 161.

<sup>69</sup> On foxing, see [www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/caring-for-your-books-and-papers](http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/caring-for-your-books-and-papers).

place about and are crystalized within them, and thus “blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifetime.”<sup>70</sup> By featuring such historically-charged objects in *Toward Everyday Design*, the exhibition achieves a balance of a diachronic and synchronic approach to history, at once encapsulating particular instances in time and placing them in their broader historical contexts. Historian and geographer David Lowenthal similarly considers the power of present-day encounters with historical objects, observing that the depth and specificity of the histories that they carry are self-evident and accessible through direct, sensorial observation, in contrast to textual histories that must be absorbed more consciously.<sup>71</sup> In other words, an object’s patina brings a sense of a rich and textured past into the present before the exhibition visitors’ eyes.

In addition, the imperfections of well-handled objects remind viewers of the significance of the end-users of design, countering histories that focus on the creative impulse of architects and designers rather than the consumers who their work serves. *Toward Everyday Design* will open on Ruskin’s 200th birthday, reminding viewers of the age of the objects it features and of their original owners and users, who might be of the same generation as a visitor’s grandparents or great-grandparents. The personal narrative associated with one of the objects that will be loaned to the exhibition—a plant stand made by the great grandfather of University of Texas professor and design historian Carma Gorman—provides another opportunity for the exhibition to demystify the objects it features and to encourage visitors to consider the broader narratives associated with them (fig. 18). Crew and Sims observe this strategy as one that can enhance audience engagement: “Artifacts so framed make an immediate claim on the visitor’s time and can turn a museum visit into an encounter with past lives.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 263.

<sup>71</sup> David Lowenthal, “Relics,” in *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 238–48.

<sup>72</sup> Spencer R. Crew, and James E. Sims, “Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue,” in *Exhibiting Cultures*, 173; on other ways objects’ owners and users invest them with value, see Igor Kopytoff, “The

The objects selected for *Toward Everyday Design* will carry a range of different meanings, capable of engaging diverse audiences. The pervasiveness of the styles and motifs associated with the Arts and Crafts movement will make these objects familiar, lending to their ability to support contextualized, everyday histories that are also personally relatable to present-day audiences. The narrative value of the exhibition's objects can be strengthened by emphasizing their relationship with one another and the general context in which they were conceived and produced, or by emphasizing the evidence of a more particular history that they bear as material objects that have passed through authentic hands and uses over time. These narratives can be further enhanced through the display strategies that make up the exhibition environment.

## ENVIRONMENTS

### Arranging the exhibition narrative

Meaning is conveyed to exhibition viewers through the variety, representative content, and materiality of the objects they encounter; still more is conveyed through the objects' order and arrangement in space. Architecture and design histories employ a variety of methodological approaches—they might investigate the biography of those who design the built environment, the socio-cultural circumstances or technical and material processes that shape it, or the theory and interpretations associated with exterior iconography and formal qualities, to name a few. These approaches can be translated into the abstract space of the exhibition environment to articulate the curator's argument. This critical manipulation of space—the freedom to combine, emphasize, and disrupt traditional methodologies to reveal new patterns, relationships, and conflicts of history—is what Jean-Louis Cohen calls the “fruitful distortion of reality” or anamorphic process of curating.<sup>73</sup> According to Crew and Sims, the strategies employed in an exhibition's

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Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 64–94.

<sup>73</sup> Jean-Louis Cohen, “Mirror of Dreams,” *Log* 20 (2010): 51.

spatial organization—such as adjacencies, juxtapositions, framed views, and immersive environments—can convey meaning as powerfully as the featured objects and their accompanying label texts: “the *proximity* of things to one another perhaps has more authority, more readable meaning than the things themselves.”<sup>74</sup>

*Toward Everyday Design* will lead its visitors through a narrative that is predominantly organized chronologically and geographically—spanning the Arts and Crafts movement from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, from its founding ideologies in England to their dissemination to and translation in the American marketplace. The curators have considered several strategies for reinforcing this overarching organization visually and spatially in the Ransom Center’s gallery. Upon entering the Ransom Center, visitors pass through a lobby that abuts the gallery space, which is sunken approximately two-and-a-half feet below the ground level (fig. 19). The vantage point from the lobby offers visitors an overview of the entire exhibition before descending into its spaces, which in turn offers the curators an opportunity to introduce the exhibition’s overarching trajectory in visual terms. One of the strategies considered for seizing this opportunity is the development of a color scheme or pattern language for the gallery walls that emulates the progression of the movement from its nineteenth-century British origins to twentieth-century American interpretations (and the dichotomy between them), creating an introductory view of the exhibition that will intrigue its visitors and begin to unfold the exhibition narrative before their eyes.

Once inside the gallery space, however, the exhibition will convey its narrative through a series of specific stories and concepts, interspersed as “stops” along its chronological path. These vignettes will offer a deeper look into particular nodes of the Arts and Crafts movement, and will do so through a variety of methodological frameworks. Together, they will present a more complex and compelling picture of the history of the movement that might be described as a constellation of specific ideas, activities, and exchanges, rather than as a homogenous collection of objects whose style

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<sup>74</sup> Spencer R. Crew, and James E. Sims, “Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue,” in *Exhibiting Cultures*, 163. Italics in the original.



resulted from a single line of influence. For example, the exhibition will consider the movement's influences from and on the publishing industry through sections on Morris's Kelmscott Press and on popular women's and shelter magazines. These sections will consider the contributions that these enterprises made to graphic and book design, as well as the marketing and distribution strategies that they developed. Other sections will zoom into the local activities and exchanges that took place in specific communities like Elbert Hubbard's Roycroft in East Aurora, New York. This vignette will combine biographical details about the community's members with descriptions of its production and business methods.

By examining the particular conditions and activities of particular individuals, societies, businesses, and communities, these vignettes will reveal the specificity of the movement, while also foregrounding the less tangible processes that connect them, such as mass-production and marketing. Rather than displaying objects in the tradition of the early MoMA shows as aestheticized, consumable, and desirable, *Toward Everyday Design* will deploy objects in a broader narrative that asks how, why, and for or by whom they were made, marketed, sold, and received. This will be achieved to some extent by the use of portraits and letters that reveal the personalities, backgrounds, and opinions that drive these processes. It will also be achieved through the sheer array of printed materials that feature Arts and Crafts patterns, motifs, and design illustrations and advertisements in their pages (figs. 20–24). The abundance of examples will demonstrate the iterative aspect of mass-publications and their capacity to disseminate and popularize ideas and imagery among numerous readers. The examples will also allow visitors to trace the evolution of these patterns and designs over time, from early materials depicting natural forms and handcraftsmanship, to later ones exhibiting more abstract, machine-made forms. (Other strategies for foregrounding concepts related to manufacturing, marketing, and consumption include the incorporation—possibly in a digital, interactive space—of historical price information as a reminder of the economic scaffolding that informed and resulted from business decisions.)

## Arranging the visitor experience

By showcasing specific stories of the movement and the numerous examples of products generated by the media and market of the time, the exhibition layout lends a dynamic depiction of history that will be compelling for a wide range of audiences, from the casual visitor to the interested amateur to the expert. As Crew and Sims observe, in revealing the unexpected connections in history and the “intricate interplay between people and events,” exhibitions driven by ideas and historical themes are able to highlight the “aspects of history that excite historians and engage the public.”<sup>75</sup>

The exhibition layout and design can facilitate the discovery of such specific and unexpected connections. For example, *Toward Everyday Design* will demonstrate the process of translating ideals into design and designs into mass-marketed products through the side-by-side presentation of related texts, images, and objects, encouraging the visitor to visually trace the progression of an idea into its manifestation in a designed object. The exhibition path might also be manipulated to include built-in moments for surprise and serendipity. For instance, the otherwise chronological exhibition path might present opportunities—through strategic passageways or framed views—for visitors to compare and juxtapose objects from one exhibition section with those of another. To encourage engagement with the objects on a more personal and participatory level, the exhibition curators have considered introducing interactive areas that might include tactile activities (where fabrics and wallpapers can be touched, or products can be tested); digital media (such as the possibility of digitally embedding historical price information into the photograph of the Arts and Crafts domestic interior, or other supplemental digital content for visitors to explore); or family activities (such as coloring books and other hands-on “maker” stations where visitors can create their own Arts and Crafts designs).

These strategies will help keep exhibition visitors mentally engaged: the overarching visual scheme viewed from the entrance to the exhibition will dare visitors to anticipate the narrative before entering; the exhibition’s organization around “stops”

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 168–69.

highlighting specific stories and abstract processes will expose visitors to unknown and under-considered aspects of an otherwise generally familiar movement; and the dynamic and immersive exhibition path will create opportunities for visitors to discover complexities through active comparison between and engagement with exhibition objects and content. The curators have also considered strategies for physically engaging visitors with the act of viewing. From the beginning of the planning process, they sought to develop an object check list with a roughly equal distribution of small printed items to be displayed flat in cases, which visitors will view by looking down; of large printed items and artworks to be displayed vertically on walls, which will be roughly eye-level with most visitors when standing; and of objects to be displayed upright in vitrines or on pedestals, which visitors can view from multiple angles. This combination of display methods is intended to create a dynamic viewing experience, which—in combination with the repetitious display of printed materials that simulate processes of mass-marketing and -communication—achieves an effect akin to Bauhaus artist Herbert Bayer’s much-discussed “field of vision” or “sense-around” technique employed for early-twentieth-century exhibitions.<sup>76</sup>

The combination of display strategies within an exhibition enables it to engage diverse audiences by accommodating differing learning styles. Further, a variety of display strategies emphasizes the very fact that there are multiple ways of interpreting information. By placing ordinary objects—such as familiar magazines or household items—in new contexts—such as the aesthetic and pedagogical space of the museum gallery, and the theoretical space of the exhibition narrative—display strategies make evident the work of the museum and of exhibition curators, and of the fact that the exhibition is a constructed, authored interpretation of the world around us. Mary Anne Staniszewski observes, such “varied display methods...[make] visible the way institutional conventions create meaning” and make “an acknowledgement of the

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<sup>76</sup> On the engaging and immersive effect of this technique, see *The Power of Display*, 25–30 and Zoë Ryan, “Taking Positions: An Incomplete History of Architecture and Design Exhibitions,” in *As Seen*, 16; Barry Bergdoll additionally observes the capacity of this display technique to recreate the serial aspect of the design process in “Out of Site in Plain View,” Lecture V, 36:45–37:28.

institutionalizing processes part of the viewer's experience of the show.”<sup>77</sup>

By allowing the edges of distinct display strategies to remain visible, visitors are more likely to become aware of the underlying framework of the exhibition, and of the pedagogical project in which they are participating. This awareness instills the audience with a sense of critical distance that they can carry beyond the exhibition space and into the real world, as citizens increasingly engaged with the designed environment around them. This balance of providing expert knowledge to the visitor while also fostering their active interpretation of that knowledge is key. In *Toward Everyday Design*, label texts and an accompanying catalogue of thematic essays—authored and edited by the exhibition's historian-curators and other contributors—will expand on the exhibition narrative and serve as a means of delivering expert knowledge to its visitors; the exhibition environment will be the primary site where participatory learning is achieved.

A balance between expert and participatory knowledge can also be approached through the provision of spaces for pause within the exhibition, to foster moments of unmediated connection with and reflection on the objects presented within. Historian Stephen Greenblatt has considered the processes that drive individuals' connections with exhibition displays through the categories of “resonance” and “wonder.” The latter refers to a level of engagement that “stop[s] the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention.”<sup>78</sup> These moments of intense and personal engagement with the aura of an object—which might be prompted by its display and lighting, its inherent beauty and craftsmanship, or a sense of genius associated with its maker—in turn generate resonance: the visitor's engagement with the other levels of contextual information and meanings that the exhibition objects, display, and texts offer. Greenblatt's theory that wonder be employed to generate resonance is particularly compelling when considering the capacity of exhibitions to engage attention in the digital age. In an era when our lives are mediated by a proliferation of information and representations, exhibition environments that offer mesmerizing experiences lead

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<sup>77</sup> *The Power of Display*, 97.

<sup>78</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” in *Exhibiting Cultures*, 42.

visitors to be “absorbed by” content—grasping a sense of its ritual or social value, to use Walter Benjamin’s terminology—rather than to merely consume it in a state of distraction or passivity.<sup>79</sup>

Curiously, eliciting this level of engagement requires presenting information in a comfortable and unthreatening environment—one that follows the traditions established by familiar precedents. Staniszewski demonstrates the benefits of responding to audience expectations through exhibition environments in her explanation of the negative reception of MoMA’s 1938–39 exhibition *Bauhaus 1919–1928*, which she concludes “audiences could not ‘read’” because it “seemed chaotic, confused, didactic, gimmicky, illegible,” and effectively “destabilized the cultural codes of its viewers.”<sup>80</sup> MoMA’s 1934 *Machine Art*, by comparison, was made more palatable “through an installation that presented aesthetics as timeless,” and that was more in-line with the expectation that the museum had established (and would continue to strengthen) among its audiences: the expectation that the exhibition would support a “ritual of modernity in which individuals visit museums to contemplate creations, one on one, in neutral interiors that are arranged to emphasize the autonomy of the viewer and that which is viewed.”<sup>81</sup> To deny visitors this experience is to alienate them, jeopardizing the chance to engage the broadest possible public—the very opportunity that museum exhibitions offer.

*Toward Everyday Design* seeks to leverage visitors’ familiarity with the patterns and motifs of the Arts and Crafts movement to make its content accessible, compelling, and relatable. The display strategies under consideration and discussed above will encourage visitors to actively view and consider the meaning of the exhibition objects and their relationship to one another and to the past. Meanwhile, additional strategies can be employed to strengthen the sense of familiarity that welcomes visitors to apply their own personal experiences and interpretations to the project. To enhance the exhibition’s

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<sup>79</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217–51.

<sup>80</sup> *The Power of Display*, 145, 159.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 159, 293.

overall legibility, it will be designed as a total environment. A cohesive design scheme will extend across the gallery—through the colors and typography of the gallery walls and signage—and into other exhibition-related elements—such as the Ransom Center’s advertisements, brochures, and other marketing collateral. Design decisions will reflect the curators’ intent to present the exhibition narrative and its supporting objects in a vibrant, refreshing, and modern way that points to the Arts and Crafts movement’s lasting relevance and influence. To this end, typography and colors will investigate rather than replicate those contemporary to the movement. By drawing a historical color palette from a nineteenth century pamphlet or wallpaper design, for example, and then pairing it with a more modern, sans-serif font, an essence of the early Arts and Crafts period can be evoked in a manner that does not overwhelm or read as outdated to twenty-first-century audiences. Through such a balance, the exhibition design will subtly reintroduce and reinterpret visual elements of the Arts and Crafts styles, re-engaging them with our current cultural moment.

What is particularly interesting about exhibitions of architecture and design history is that they not only frame but also *demonstrate* information about their discipline. The exhibition environment is treated with particular importance as it reflects the multi-sensorial qualities that distinguish works of architecture and design, and with which the field’s historians and practitioners are well versed. Jean-Louis Cohen considers the reconciliatory effect of being able to fully articulate architecture and design histories—and their patterns, relationships, and conflicts—through the language of three-dimensional space and graphics.<sup>82</sup> The affinity between architecture and design and visual communication is longstanding, and is evidenced in the Bauhaus’s inaugural exhibition in 1923, which featured Marcel Breuer-designed display cases, a catalogue shaped by László Moholy-Nagy and students of school’s graphic arts department, and the Herbert Bayer sense-around display method discussed above.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Jean-Louis Cohen, “Mirror of Dreams,” *Log* 20 (2010): 52–53.

<sup>83</sup> “Out of Site in Plain View,” Lecture V, 25:10–25:51. See also Note 74.

This alliance between design practice and design history will continue with *Toward Everyday Design*, through a collaboration between its curators and the university's Interior Design program, which engaged students in a series of design exercises to generate ideas for the exhibition's display.<sup>84</sup> Such collaborations leverage the strengths of the design profession that are also quite compatible with the goals of museum exhibitions: the ability to express ideas through abstract and material media, through responses to local and universal conditions, and with the overarching objective to serve the public good.

## TEXTS

Museum exhibitions feature a variety of texts that frame and reinforce the exhibition's pedagogical objectives, and guide the visitor experience by providing insight into the displayed objects' original and acquired meanings and their relationship to one another and to the present. These texts include a title and introduction label that introduce the exhibition's topic and overarching goals; section labels that articulate the key points, and turning points, in its narrative; object labels that provide identifying factual information and descriptive and interpretive captions about their corresponding objects; as well as credit labels, wayfinding signage, and marketing and promotional texts that further explain the exhibition's making, organization, and significance. And in many cases, as in the case of *Toward Everyday Design*, a book-length catalogue that reproduces or expands on these texts is published to accompany the exhibition and to provide a document of the project that will last beyond its ephemeral display.

## Accessibility through precision

One of the biggest challenges associated with exhibition texts is to present information in a way that is both accessible and engaging for the diverse audiences of a

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<sup>84</sup> Bridget Gayle Ground, "School of Architecture students collaborate with Ransom Center to learn exhibition design," in *Ransom Center Magazine* (blog), February 6, 2018, <http://sites.utexas.edu/ransomcentermagazine/2018/02/06>.

museum, who might range from amateur to expert, from child to senior citizen, and whose interests and backgrounds will inevitably vary widely. Professional guides such as Beverly Serrell's *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* and the V&A's "ten point guide" to gallery text offer practical instruction on the level of information to provide in exhibition texts, and the tone and vocabulary through which to present it. These guides express consensus that texts must be succinct in order to be effective. For example, the V&A guide advises fifty to sixty words per object label, with the first sentence fewer than sixteen words, while Serrell sets the upper limit at about fifty words that can be read in ten seconds or less.<sup>85</sup> Exhibition texts must therefore be reduced to information that is essential, and be conveyed through precise terminology that neither resorts to overly-generic substitutes nor jargon only understood by those few already fluent in the subject at hand.

To illustrate this point, the V&A guide references one of the six rules for writing set forth in George Orwell's 1946 essay, "Politics and the English Language," which admonishes against the use any technical, foreign, or jargon term if it can be replaced with an "everyday equivalent." However, the guide elaborates, "We shouldn't altogether avoid specialist vocabulary...we have a responsibility to introduce visitors to the terminology that frames our knowledge. But we must show very clearly what these words mean."<sup>86</sup> (This strategy can be extended to exhibitions that employ bilingual label text, in which case difficult-to-translate terms can be retained in their original form and clearly defined.) This principle is certainly important for histories of architecture and design history, which are not typically addressed in mainstream, K-12 education. Gary Kulik demonstrates the consequences of failing to define terms, which occurred in the 1920s in the decorative arts displays of the Met's newly-opened American Wing: "Its labels were largely descriptive, the language often technical...without defining [terms] for the

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<sup>85</sup> "Gallery Text at the V&A: A Ten Point Guide," *Victoria and Albert Museum*, August 2013 (hereafter cited as "Gallery Text at the V&A"): 8, [www.vam.ac.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/238077/Gallery-Text-at-the-V-and-A-Ten-Point-Guide-Aug-2013.pdf](http://www.vam.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/238077/Gallery-Text-at-the-V-and-A-Ten-Point-Guide-Aug-2013.pdf); Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 1996) (hereafter cited as *Exhibit Labels*), 27.

<sup>86</sup> "Gallery Text at the V&A": 36-37.



uninitiated.” Although the wing was intended to “teach the true principles of design,” it did so “only to those visitors who brought with them considerable knowledge...Its subtle message was that it was far easier to inherit good taste than to acquire it.”<sup>87</sup>

The use of precise terminology enables the creation of descriptive texts that are rich but unambiguous, and that engage expert audiences while also drawing the interest of novices and raising their general consciousness of the field. Precise label texts not only offer a vocabulary through which to consider the subject, but also an understanding of the categories of information that are pertinent to it. For example, visitors to *Toward Everyday Design* will learn about the styles and movements related to the Arts and Crafts (Gothic, Aesthetic, Art Nouveau, Prairie School, Organic Architecture, and Modernism); the concept of “total design” (or the creation of cohesive and unified environments, a key concept for the Arts and Crafts movement); the means of translating designs into products (for example, through “cartoons” for stained glass or “patterns” for homes and furniture); and the media that enabled the dissemination of these concepts and designs (such as wallpaper samples, publishing “specimens” or “prospectuses,” mail-order catalogues, and “shelter” and “women’s” magazines). The texts will also enumerate the movement’s key participants and their activities: designers, makers, manufacturers, businessmen, and consumers who operated in the context of the workshop, factory, and home. In some instances, an object’s provenance might be described to demonstrate the mechanics of dissemination. For example, a copy of John Ruskin’s *The Nature of Gothic* inscribed from William Morris to Georgiana Burne-Jones, wife of Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones, will be transcribed and identified as evidence of the circulation of Ruskin’s ideology among a subsequent generation of Arts and Crafts thinkers. The incorporation of historical prices into label texts (or hypertexts in an interactive digital environment) will prompt visitors to actively consider the contemporary and present-day values of objects discussed (nurturing the role of the visitor as critical rather than captive consumer, in contrast to MoMA’s exhibitions of the mid-twentieth century).

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<sup>87</sup> “Designing the Past,” 16.

Through their brevity, precise exhibition texts also allow visitors the time and space to reflect on the ideas that they provoke. The V&A guide advises basing object label captions on features visible to the visitor, and then expanding on those features through description that refers to the other senses.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, Serrell advises the use of active verbs to bring objects to life in the imagination of the visitor.<sup>89</sup> These suggestions are especially pertinent for exhibitions of architecture and design history, which often focus on different times and places, and on objects and spaces intended to be experienced through movement, inhabitation, and such senses as sight, sound, and touch. Object labels can describe the multi-sensorial aspects of an object that are not otherwise perceptible through the exhibition encounter. By referencing an object's materiality or original location or use, labels can reconnect the object to its broader contexts by prompting the visitor to imagine its textures and the ways that it has or could be experienced. For *Toward Everyday Design*, the incorporation of such descriptive, active texts will not only define the objects and their role in the Arts and Crafts narrative, but also provide a more immediate sense of *how* they affected those who imagined, produced, purchased, and used them.

### **Texts as a basis for future discourse**

As educators, the curators of *Toward Everyday Design* intend to introduce visitors to basic information while also offering intellectually rigorous points to inspire interest and prompt future avenues of exploration. The process of distilling their research into concise exhibition texts will likely be made easier by the fact that they are also editing a collection of thematic essays to be published in conjunction with the exhibition, serving as the exhibition catalogue. The catalogue will provide a robust resource for visitors seeking more in-depth information about the concepts introduced by the exhibition. And in the same way that foregrounding display strategies in the exhibition environment contributes to an awareness of the exhibition as a work of subjective, multivalent

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<sup>88</sup> "Gallery Text at the V&A": 18, 29.

<sup>89</sup> *Exhibit Labels*, 26.

authorship, so too does the exhibition catalogue. This concept is made further evident by the other exhibition texts, such as the credit label that will appear at the entrance of the exhibition—identifying the institutions and individuals who contributed to the project—and the general voice and tone of other labels in the space.

The concept of the exhibition as a work of authorship is important to audience engagement. It lends a sense of accountability and authority to the project, as well as a sense of a subjective stance to which visitors can respond. This sense of subjectivity—and the limits to authority—can be foregrounded by admitting aspects of uncertainty in the interpretive label texts. The V&A guide considers the benefits of this strategy: “There is no harm in showing the boundaries of our knowledge. To do so dissolves the barrier between the ‘expert’ and the public, and engages the visitor in the debate that might exist about an object.”<sup>90</sup> Which is to say, exhibition labels can encourage visitors to consider their own thoughts and conclusions related to the exhibition narrative, forming a basis for a subsequent dialog generated by audience reception.

Exactly whose voices contribute to an exhibition’s reception is in part defined by the museum’s marketing and promotional texts. These texts—which appear on the museum’s website, advertisements, and print brochures—are written by marketing and public affairs staff in collaboration with the exhibition curators to describe the project and to appeal to its potential audiences. This strategic messaging influences who attends the exhibition, sets their expectations for their experience, and, in turn, contributes to the overall reception of the show.

The immediate and informal reactions of visitors might be captured through additional exhibition-related texts—many of which are also driven by marketing initiatives—such as guest book comments, exit surveys, social media comments, or participatory exhibition activities (like “voting” on or providing a response to a question posed by an exhibition label). Audience reception is also captured through more formal exhibition reviews. Despite being developed outside of the efforts of an exhibition’s

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<sup>90</sup> “Gallery Text at the V&A”: 20.

curators and hosting institution, the exhibition review serves as an important text. Reviews document the project and raise questions or ideas that connect the exhibition to local or scholarly contexts in new ways, stimulating further discourse among diverse audiences. In responding to and acknowledging the exhibition as a work of authorship, and offering an alternative perspective, the exhibition review serves as a medium for multivocal debate without obfuscating the role and stance of the exhibition's curator (as in-gallery participatory activities might). While the impact of reviews generally occurs during and immediately after the run of the show, their influence continues over a longer term: the sense of accountability that they establish contributes to elevated standards in the realms of curatorial practice and of the discipline that an exhibition represents, and the documentation that reviews provide can be referenced long after an exhibition's display, serving as a resource for future scholarship.<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, it is worth considering that all exhibition texts—whether gallery labels, a catalogue, marketing materials, or reviews—are easily reproducible in comparison to the exhibition's original objects and environments, and therefore provide a medium through which the project can be encountered and interpreted in future years, forming the scaffolding for its legacy, or what Zoe Ryan calls the “afterlife” of the exhibition.<sup>92</sup> An exhibition can be later reconstructed via the publications and ephemera generated during the preparations for and run of the show, enabling later generations to understand the project as conceived by its organizers and “as seen” by its original audiences.<sup>93</sup> Through its texts, *Toward Everyday Design* will contribute to future discourse not only about the Arts and Crafts movement, but also about architecture and design history *exhibitions*, perpetuating and elevating the practice of exhibition-making as a tool for public engagement with the discipline.

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<sup>91</sup> For a discussion about exhibition reviews as they relate to the field of architecture and design, see Penelope Dean, “On the Uses and Abuses of the Exhibition Review,” in *As Seen*, 113–115.

<sup>92</sup> Zoë Ryan, “Taking Positions: An Incomplete History of Architecture and Design Exhibitions,” in *As Seen*, 29.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

## PROGRAMS

This discussion has demonstrated how objects, environments, and texts contribute different levels of meaning to an exhibition; meaning is also formed through their synthesis in the completed exhibition, which is activated and interpreted by the exhibition visitor according to his or her own personal experiences, reflections, and reactions. The late art historian and former V&A curator Michael Baxandall illustrates this process of the exhibition drawing from history while also generating new meaning as the “space between object and label” where visitor interpretation takes place.<sup>94</sup> Crew and Sims similarly consider the visitors’ role in an exhibition project as “co-creators of social meaning,” concluding that the *event* of the exhibition—its performance for an audience in a particular place and time—is its primary source of authentic meaning.<sup>95</sup> While the exhibition “event” described by Crew and Sims refers to any encounter by a visitor—whether as an individual or group—it is worth considering how programs—such as lectures, symposia, tours, and receptions—generate the process of making meaning from an exhibition through the audiences that they draw, and the particular contextual information and questions that they pose.

### Investing in new audiences

Programs activate the exhibition for its local community, drawing specific audiences to the exhibition through specific investigations into its content. Like the catalogue, programs offer supplemental information to audiences seeking in-depth engagement with the exhibition, whether they have an established or burgeoning interest in its topic. But unlike the catalogue, programs occur on-site (or in some cases at local satellite locations), and therefore should take stock of, and respond to, the relevant audiences around the museum.

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<sup>94</sup> Michael Baxandall, “Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects,” in *Exhibiting Cultures*, 37.

<sup>95</sup> Spencer R. Crew, and James E. Sims, “Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue,” in *Exhibiting Cultures* 175.

For the Ransom Center, *Toward Everyday Design* serves as an occasion to engage community groups that might not be part of its typical audience. Given its origins as a rare book library, the Ransom Center has been best known for its literary collections: In 2005 the *Austin Chronicle* named it “best destination for literary groupies” and a *Travel + Leisure* listing focuses on its “enormous collection of literary manuscripts.”<sup>96</sup> But a 2017 article in *Texas Monthly* acknowledges, “while the literary assets have perhaps garnered the most attention, the trove is deep with materials related to theater, film, photography, and art.”<sup>97</sup> In extracting a history about the popularization of the Arts and Crafts movement from the Ransom Center’s vast collections, *Toward Everyday Design* has the potential to appeal to visitors with interests ranging from architecture and design to retail and lifestyle marketing, advertising, and publishing.

The Ransom Center might locate these audiences through community organizations and businesses, and engage them through invitations to attend established Ransom Center-sponsored programs, or to collaborate on the development of co-sponsored programs that draw from community members’ knowledge and expertise. For example, local artist collectives might be willing to present a public lecture or workshop about their creative influences and processes and how these connect to Arts and Crafts ideologies; local heritage and preservation groups might be willing to lead walking tours featuring Arts and Crafts architecture in nearby areas. While such community outreach efforts can yield new audiences for the Ransom Center, they also have the added effect of uniting and strengthening connections between like-minded community groups, highlighting their shared values and interests. Such community outreach efforts might achieve what special collections conservator Nancy Carlson Schrock has called the

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<sup>96</sup> “Best Destination for Literary Groupies: The Harry Ransom Center,” *Austin Chronicle*, [www.austinchronicle.com/best-of-austin/year:2005/poll:critics/category:arts-and-culture/harry-ransom-center-best-destination-for-literary-groupies](http://www.austinchronicle.com/best-of-austin/year:2005/poll:critics/category:arts-and-culture/harry-ransom-center-best-destination-for-literary-groupies); “Harry Ransom Center,” *Travel + Leisure*, [www.travelandleisure.com/travel-guide/austin/things-to-do/harry-ransom-center](http://www.travelandleisure.com/travel-guide/austin/things-to-do/harry-ransom-center).

<sup>97</sup> Michael Hoinski, “Held for Ransom,” April 21, 2017, *Texas Monthly*, [www.texasmonthly.com/travel/held-for-ransom](http://www.texasmonthly.com/travel/held-for-ransom).

“general consciousness-raising” activity necessary to foster architectural appreciation within a community, and identify the Ransom Center as one its supporting resources.<sup>98</sup>

### **Initiating new dialogs**

Programs not only draw visitors, but also foster their extended, in-depth engagement with the exhibition through repeat visits. As isolated, often one-night-only events, programs offer exhibition planners the freedom to explore specific aspects or themes that might only be introduced by the exhibition. For instance, *Toward Everyday Design* will feature a copy of *Baby’s Own Aesop*, illustrated by Walter Crane, to reference the role that children’s books played in the dissemination of the Arts and Crafts movement; this topic could be further investigated through a lecture discussing other Arts and Crafts illustrators and books that made their way into everyday households. Programs might also respond to timely occasions. The run of *Toward Everyday Design* will coincide with Valentine’s Day and “Explore UT,” the university’s all-ages open house event, both of which provide an occasion to activate the exhibition with family-friendly, hands-on activities that resemble Arts and Crafts traditions—like book- or Valentine-card making. It also coincides with the centenary of the founding of the Bauhaus school and with Black History Month, presenting opportunities to connect the movement’s relevance to the modern movement or to a particular demographic.

*Toward Everyday Design* has the potential to appeal to the public and to offer them a level of comfort by virtue of its subject matter alone. The Arts and Crafts movement is familiar, relatable, and lends itself to family-oriented activities, serving an important function of museums to engage broad, multi-generational audiences in learning and community-building. In the same way that the movement’s generally palatable and uncontroversial nature might be leveraged to introduce new lines of scholarly inquiry to its historiography (such as the narrative about the process of the dissemination of design ideas), it also provides an opportunity to draw attention to its more difficult and

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<sup>98</sup> Nancy Carlson Schrock, “Images of New England: Documenting the Built Environment,” in *The American Archivist* 50, no. 4 (Fall 1987), 485.

underrepresented aspects. For example, in her article “The Comfortable Tasty Framed Cottage: An African American Architectural Iconography,” Barbara Burlison Mooney considers the role that the Craftsman-style bungalow played in the development of an idealized image of African American domestic life in the post-emancipation era.<sup>99</sup> Traces of this legacy of the Arts and Crafts movement are present, but currently under threat, in the historically Black neighborhoods of east Austin, where examples of such bungalows are concentrated yet are increasingly being demolished to make way for new development.<sup>100</sup> A program exploring this local legacy of the movement would be particularly meaningful for Austin residents, providing insight into these homes and the historic fabric that they contribute to the community, and perhaps even inspiring activism for their preservation.

Such programs bring new perspectives to the exhibition and create reasons for visitors to return—essentially breathing new life into the exhibition throughout its run, and transforming it into a site for in-person interaction and learning. Elaine Heumann Gurian has considered the importance of the museum as a physical space, stating that its essence lay in it being “*a place* that stores memories and presents and organizes meaning in some sensory form” where “citizenry can congregate in a spirit of cross-generational inclusivity and inquiry into the memory of our past, a forum for our present, and aspirations for our future.”<sup>101</sup> Programs therefore play a critical role in the digital age: as people increasingly turn inward to private computers, the museum takes on heightened symbolic importance as a place for intellectual and cultural exchange, with its programs serving as the magnet that draws attendance. Such on-site public engagement also nurtures what Susan Crane terms an “excess of memory”—the “personal and yet publicly

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<sup>99</sup> Barbara Burlison Mooney, “The Comfortable Tasty Framed Cottage: An African American Architectural Iconography,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61, no. 1 (2002): 55–59, 61.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Cindy Widner, “East Austin Demolition Fight Highlights Preservation Issues,” *Curbed Austin*, May 5, 2016, <https://austin.curbed.com/2016/5/5/11605052>; Syeda Hasan, “East Austin Neighbors Call for Moratorium on Demolitions as the City Surveys Historic Properties,” *KUT Austin*, May 12, 2016, <http://kut.org/post/east-austin-neighbors-call-moratorium-demolitions-city-surveys-historic-properties>.

<sup>101</sup> Elaine Heumann Gurian, “What is the Object of this Exercise?” *Daedalus* 128, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 165, 181. Italics in the original.



formed” experiences and expectations associated with memory institutions such as museums and libraries.<sup>102</sup> Like Baxandall’s space between the object and label, Gurian’s and Crane’s concepts describe how exhibitions draw from and create new meaning for its visitors—and further, how that meaning is then carried forward into future encounters. Therefore, visits to exhibitions of architecture and design history not only strengthen individual knowledge about the content presented, but also incorporate those visits into our broader collective memory.

Programs also create opportunities for different iterations of the exhibition’s content. The timeline for researching, preparing, and installing an exhibition (and for writing and publishing a catalogue) spans multiple years—typically at least three to five years at the Ransom Center. Ideas about an exhibition develop throughout each stage of the planning process, meaning that each product—whether a catalogue essay, label text, or script for a tour—reflects the synthesis of cumulative knowledge. Because this process of research and reflection inevitably goes on even after the exhibition opens, programs provide a forum for the continuation of the discourses that the exhibition initiates.

As the preparations for *Toward Everyday Design* demonstrate, the very process of researching and creating an exhibition can function as a program for collaboration. As faculty-curators, Penick and Long recruited graduate students and emerging scholars from their field to explore the exhibition’s thesis through a series of thematic essays that will form its companion catalogue. The catalogue will therefore present fresh perspectives on a more than 150-year-old movement through the voices of a new generation of scholars, renewing discourse on the topic. This strategy of engaging emerging scholars through an exhibition publication is not unique: it was also employed for the Ransom Center’s 2012 exhibition catalogue, *Norman Bel Geddes Designs America* (to which Long and Penick contributed essays, demonstrating a secondary role of the catalogue of collected essays: to foster long-term relationships between museums and scholars) and for MoMA’s 2017 *Frank Lloyd Wright at 150: Unpacking the*

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<sup>102</sup> Susan Crane, "Memory, Distortion and History in the Museum" in *Museum Studies*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 46–47.

*Archive*.<sup>103</sup> This strategy might be further developed by museums in the twenty-first century further by incorporating scholars from across multiple fields (for an increasingly interdisciplinary perspective) and of different races and genders (for an increasingly diverse perspective).

*Toward Everyday Design* also provides a model for engaging emerging designers and museum professionals as part of the exhibition planning process. The collaboration with students of the university's Interior Design program to investigate potential approaches to the exhibition's display, on one hand, helped the curators to hone their ideas related to the exhibition environments. Ideas were proposed and tested throughout the semester-long studio, serving in many ways like a focus group that will ultimately benefit the exhibition's ability to appeal to and resonate with twenty-first-century audiences. Meanwhile, the collaboration also served to expose future design and museum professionals to considerations related to exhibition and museum practice and to history-making and pedagogy.<sup>104</sup> In addition to involving design students in the project through a series of design exercises, students of museum and information studies (including the author of this thesis) were invited to observe and discuss the resulting design proposals in the context of their field. As a result, the participating design students might become more engaged visitors to future exhibitions, or might even themselves design exhibition spaces that are increasingly engaging for those who visit them, while the participating students of museum and information studies might enter their field with a better understanding of the design field's contribution to the creation of interpretive environments. By forging an alliance between the design history, design, and museum communities, such collaborations open up opportunities for the development of new or strengthened strategies for promoting the significance of architecture and design history among broad audiences.

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<sup>103</sup> For a review of this catalogue, which observes that despite being promoted as authors by emerging scholars, many of its contributors are established in their career, see Martin Filler, "Twelve Ways of Looking at Frank Lloyd Wright," *The New York Review of Books*, August 17, 2017, [www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/08/17/twelve-ways-of-looking-at-frank-lloyd-wright](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/08/17/twelve-ways-of-looking-at-frank-lloyd-wright).

<sup>104</sup> See Note 84.

Programs enable the exhibition to operate dynamically, propelling the exhibition content into local and topical contexts, revealing points of significance to different local, scholarly, and professional communities that in turn inform community identities, discourses, and practices. Programs might therefore be considered a way of marrying the reflective history exhibition with Barry Bergdoll's proposal for the progressive contemporary exhibition, relating historical content to contemporary ideas and actions.

## Conclusion

In reflecting on the capacity of the museum exhibition as a means of engaging twenty-first-century audiences with histories of architecture and design, we can return to the concern raised by Dianne Harris that these histories have thus far been too insular. Histories of architecture and design have been largely created and debated by those practicing within the discipline despite their broader relevance to the public, and despite a growing interest among the public in them. As individuals are exposed to an array of imagery and choices in the digital age, with new possibilities to personalize and shape or “curate” the world around them, how might they be empowered to make decisions and form ideas and opinions about their surroundings that are grounded in an understanding of the rich history and theory embedded in design, and of the range of its impacts—social, psychological, economic, ecological—for our individual and communal lives? That is to say, how might public interest in architecture, design, and its history be harnessed and converted into meaningful discourse?

As I hope this thesis has demonstrated, museum exhibitions—through their various components and the approaches that shape them—can help to make architecture and design histories both accessible and meaningful to broad audiences, investing individuals and communities with a deeper knowledge of and appreciation for the discipline. Although it can be challenging to create exhibitions—particularly those relating to architecture and design history—that effectively convey complex and nuanced narratives that are legible and relevant for diverse audiences—ranging from the general public to the involved professional to the scholar—the strategies for addressing this challenge are the very strategies that help to increase overall engagement. By drawing from traditional conventions of exhibitions and their display, exhibition organizers can establish a familiar and therefore accessible framework into which contemporary methods and values and the specific concepts and qualities of the narrative can be inserted. Engagement derives from this balance of tradition with innovation, expectations with surprise, and authoritative information with personal meaning.

In the case of *Toward Everyday Design*, this pursuit to engage the public with a particular narrative about the Arts and Crafts movement—to make the narrative broadly accessible and meaningful—has been approached through numerous strategies, including (but not limited to) selecting objects that are alluring and informative on multiple levels, whether aesthetic, historical, or personal; embracing objects that indicate diverse perspectives through their variety and even their imperfections; creating moments of surprise and intrigue through juxtapositions or interactive spaces and events; and creating moments of pause—through the exhibition environment or through carefully restrained interpretive texts—for unmediated reflection and consideration of personal connections and opinions. The palette of strategies might also include, at every opportunity, foregrounding evidence of authorship and of the exhibition- and history-making process throughout the exhibition to foster critically engaged viewing. And finally, the project’s strategies have involved embracing the manifold exhibition approaches and methods that accommodate wide-ranging learning styles; and, perhaps most importantly, identifying opportunities to invite new audiences to be part of the exhibition, whether through research and planning activities or public programs, to engage new groups in new dialogs about the exhibition’s content and its lasting meaning.

The creation of engaging exhibitions of architecture and design history can be achieved—perhaps uniquely so—through the collaboration between architecture and design historians and museums that do not have a dedicated architecture and design department. Not only do such collaborations bring new insights to the museum’s collections—a boon for museums in the twenty-first-century—but they also attract new audiences for the museum *and for the discipline*. The audiences that *Toward Everyday Design* will engage include communities of design scholars, enthusiasts, and professionals, as well of communication and marketing professionals and of other artists and creatives. By uniting these communities around a narrative that represents their respective areas of interest in collaboration, the exhibition encourages interpretation through multiple perspectives, breaking through the insular cycle of single-disciplinary thought described by Harris, and revealing the discipline’s relevance to our understanding

of our society. Even if someone approaches the exhibition with an interest in advertising history, for example, they might gain an appreciation for the textured sense of place that can be conveyed by history when presented through the lens of architecture and design. Bringing architecture and design perspectives in dialog with those of other disciplines and audiences achieves what Jean-Louis Cohen describes as his aim to make architecture perceived, rather than as a “troublesome guest” in institutions dedicated to the arts, as a “hospitable discipline” that invites the participation of other perspectives in its interpretation.<sup>105</sup>

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the *Toward Everyday Design* case study demonstrates the many decisions that can be made during an exhibition’s planning process to enhance its capacity for engagement. Rather than being considered after the exhibition is installed and open to the public, opportunities for engagement should be built into the project at all levels and phases. And the case study model can provide a strategy for achieving this: beyond simply reporting on an exhibition’s implementation—which is certainly useful for institutional memory—the case study ties an exhibition to broader theories and themes in the museum field, or that of the discipline it represents, and considers their applications for practice. The act of developing a case study during the planning process encourages active reflection on the goals of the exhibition—such as enhanced opportunities for public engagement—and the possible approaches for pursuing them.

The efforts of planning for engagement are likely to have high payoff, with effects extending well beyond the run of the show. Exhibitions can be personally meaningful for individuals, and, through multiple individual visits, meaningful for a broader community. As this thesis has shown, the museum exhibition is recognized as a site not only for personal learning, but as a place of symbolic and civic significance, where collective memory is stored and—increasingly, as museums continue to appeal to diverse audiences in the twenty-first century—made. When introducing a history of architecture and design

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<sup>105</sup> Jean-Louis Cohen, “Mirror of Dreams,” *Log* 20 (2010): 53.

to new audiences through a public exhibition, museums also embed that history and the broader themes it represents into the collective memory and value system of their larger communities. Meanwhile, the interpretive activities that coincide with an exhibition—such as its programming, catalogue, or, in the case of *Toward Everyday Design*, collaborative planning process—forge new avenues for further discourse on the subject (whether public, scholarly, or professional). In this way, investments in an exhibition’s potential opportunities for engagement provide a means of forwarding and sustaining the future development of the architecture and design history discipline.

Exhibitions are a major undertaking, especially when collaborative, interdisciplinary, and aimed at contributing new scholarship. Because exhibition practice constantly shifts to adapt to the evolving needs and expectations of our society, those who take on an exhibition project essentially embark on an ever-renewed approach to history-making. Curators strive to identify histories that have broad relevance, and to enhance those histories by locating elements of nuance and surprise through their deep investigation and re-investigation of material traces of the past. What’s more: through their work to make these histories accessible and compelling for diverse audiences, they also generate interest in those histories for further, future exploration. We might consider, again, Barry Bergdoll’s observation correlating the subjects and figures of exhibitions with their prominence in the canon.<sup>106</sup> It follows that the exhibition curator functions in a way that is similar to the exhibitionary architect, who actively shapes his or her field as it is known to future generations. By taking a familiar movement, extracting from it a new story about the process of its popularization, and presenting this story through an engaging exhibition experience, *Toward Everyday Design* develops a new chapter of the history of architecture and design, and shares it with a broad public and scholarly audience, inviting their engagement through in-person visits and inspiring their continued discourse beyond the walls of the museum and the finite run of the show. This begins to achieve Dianne Harris’s aims. If the goal is to broaden and advance the discipline of

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<sup>106</sup> See Note 32.

architecture and design history, the museum exhibition provides an effective infrastructure for its renewed investigation and widened transmission, while also setting high standards for engagement.



## Figures

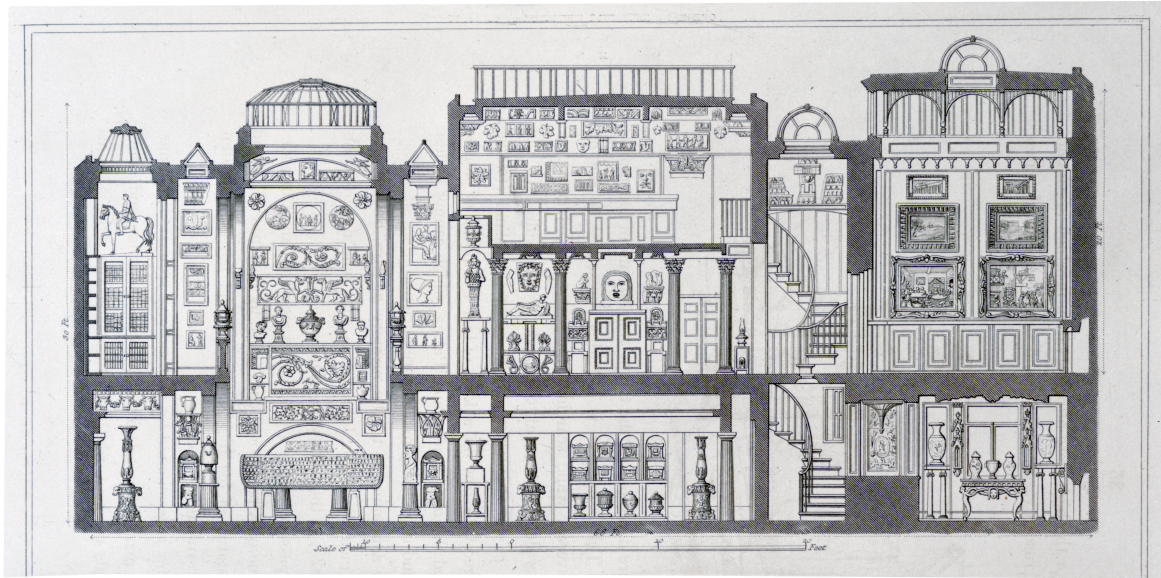


Figure 1. *Longitudinal Section through the Museum & Crypt*, detail of an etching from John Soane, originally published in *Description of the Residence of John Soane, Architect* (1835), © Sir John Soane's Museum, London.



Figure 2. John Absolon and William Telbin, *General View of the Interior* (from *Recollections of the Great Exhibition*, 1851). Lithographer: Day & Son, Ltd.; Publisher: Lloyd Brothers & Co., London. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976.664(3).



Figure 3. Installation view of the exhibition, *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* (1932). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photographer: George H. Van Anda. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.



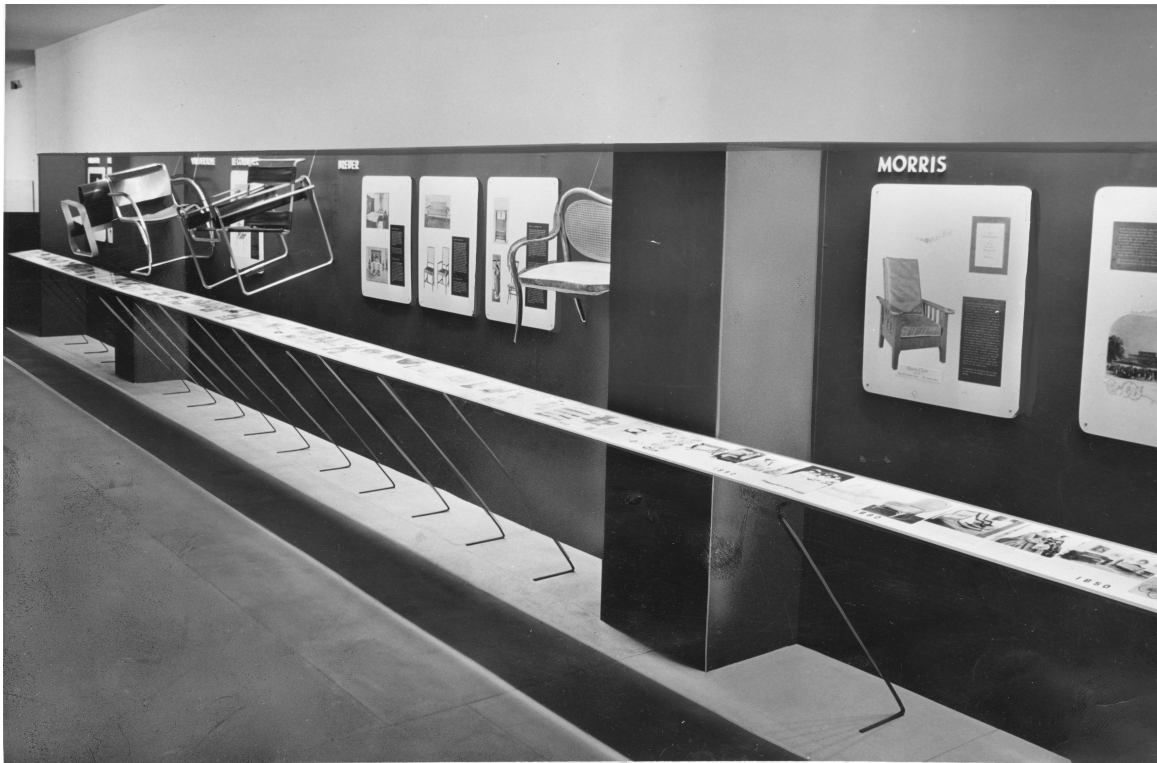


Figure 4. Installation view of the exhibition, *Organic Design in Home Furnishings* (1941). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 5. Installation view of the exhibition, *Civic Visions, World's Fairs* (1993), Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.



Figure 6. Installation view of the exhibition, *Collaborative Spirit: Prints, Presses, & Deluxe Artists' Books* (2004). Photo by Pete Smith. Harry Ransom Center.



# FORM **and** LANDSCAPE

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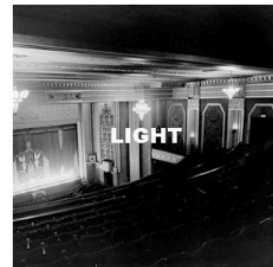


Figure 7. Page of online exhibition, *Form and Landscape*. The J. Paul Getty Trust. pstp-edison.com.

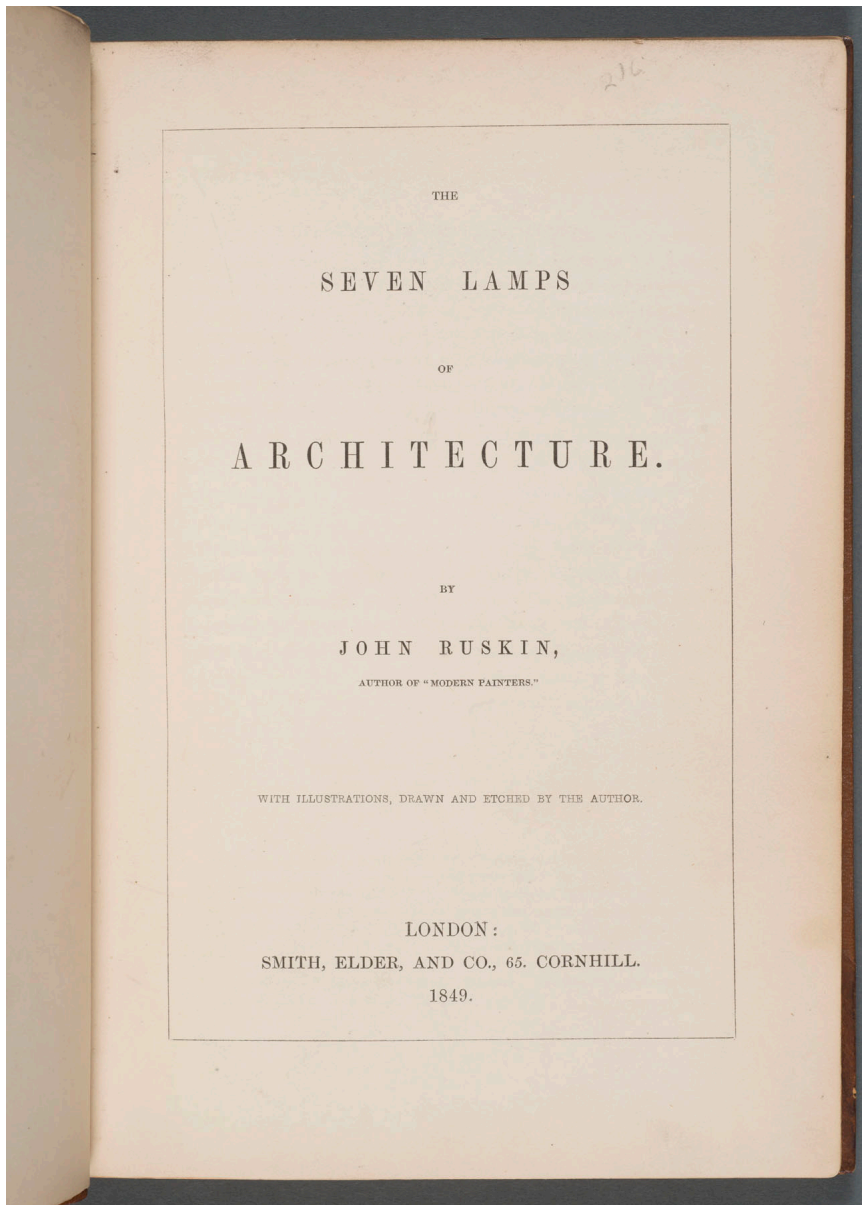


Figure 8. Title page of John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, vol. 2 (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1849). Harry Ransom Center.



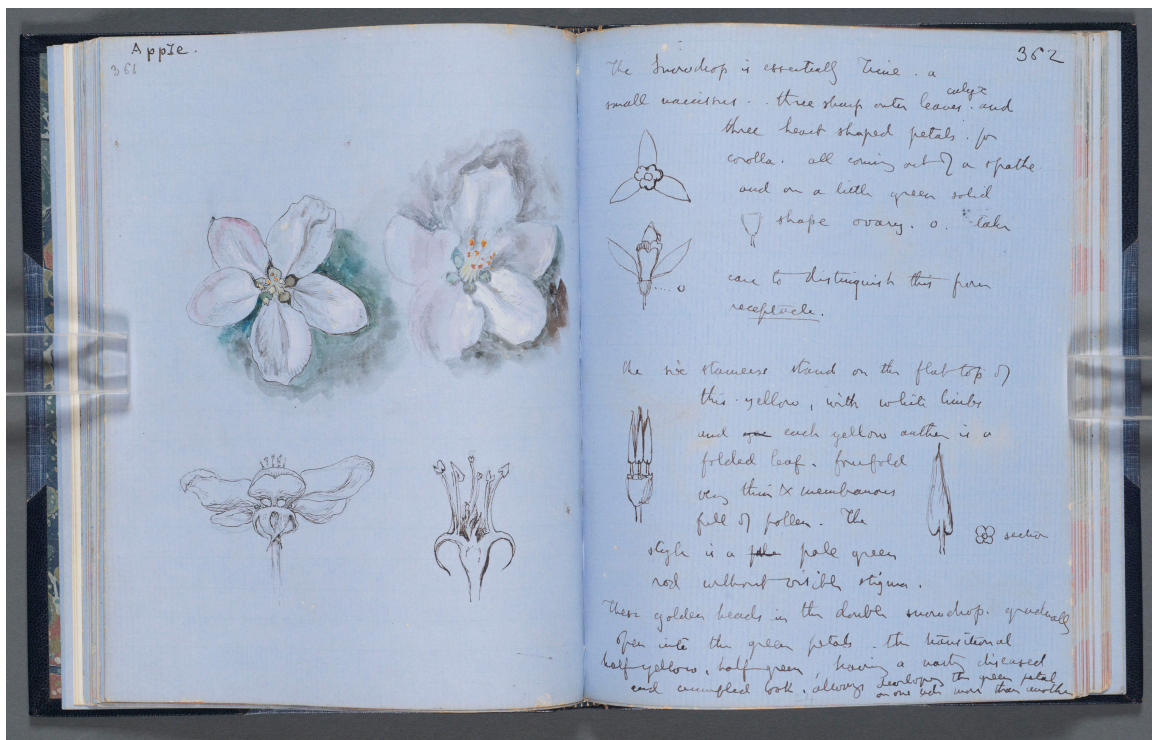


Figure 9. John Ruskin, sketchbook [botanical notes and drawings], 1861–62. John Ruskin Collection 1.2, Harry Ransom Center.





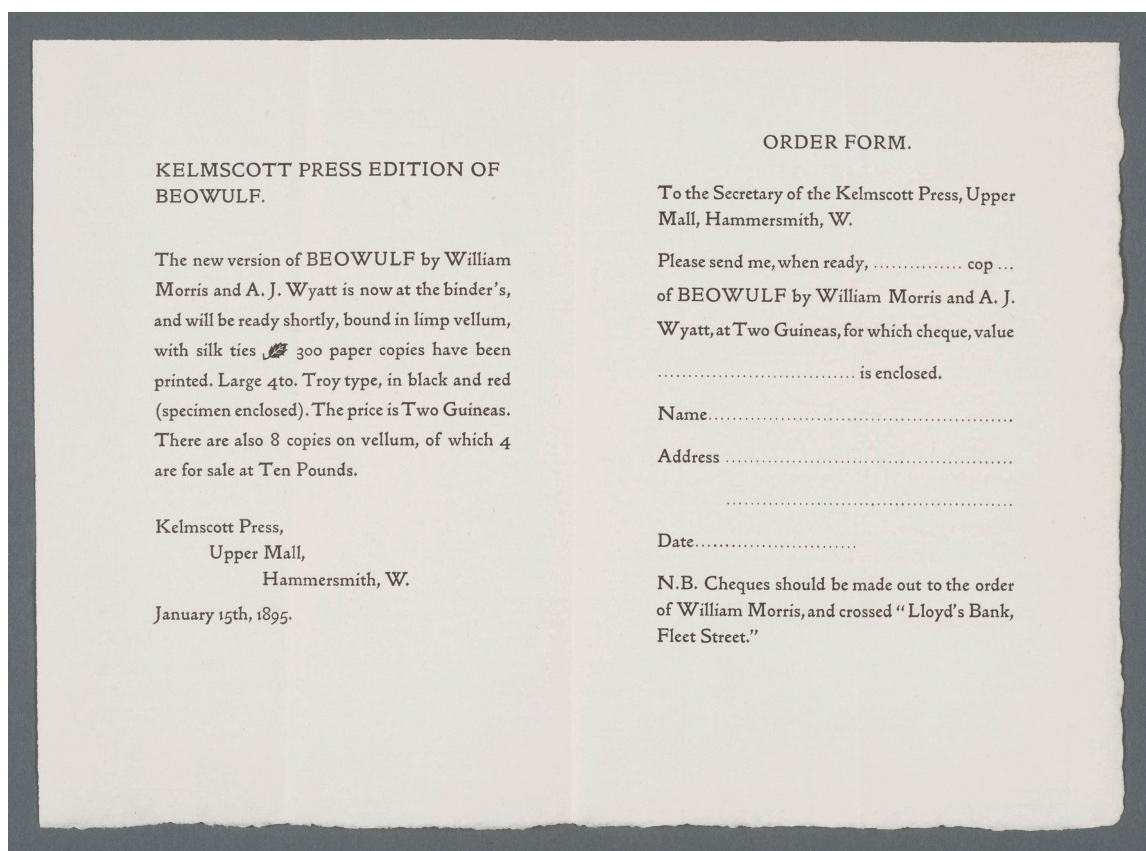


Figure 11. Order form for Kelmscott Press edition of *Beowulf* (January 15, 1895). Wrenn Library, Wp M834km WRE, Harry Ransom Center.



*The Roycrofters,  
East Aurora, New York:*

**Y**OU may send me, on  
Approval, express pre-  
paid, One Volume of the  
LITTLE JOURNEYS.

[With this book goes gratis a hand-press  
proof autographed etching on Japan Vellum]

If I am satisfied with the Book  
when received, I will at once  
send you Two Dollars, and then  
advise you as to my decision  
about taking the full set \* \*

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

DATE .....

*A volume is in reserve  
for Mrs. Everett Smith*

Figure 12. Order form for *Little Journeys*, c. 1910. Elbert Hubbard Collection 13.2, Harry Ransom Center.



Figure 13. Cover of *The Craftsman*, vol. 30, no. 4 (July 1916). Photography Collection Books, Harry Ransom Center.





Figure 14. L. & J. G. Stickley, dining chair, model 800, c. 1910. Oak and metal springs (upholstery replaced). Collection of Carma Gorman and Eric Peterson, Austin.



Figure 15. Plate XXII from Christopher Dresser, *Studies in Design* (London: Cassell, Peter and Galpin, 1876). Evelyn Waugh Library, Harry Ransom Center.







Figure 17. Taboret, manufactured by an unknown American maker, c. 1914. Quarter-sawn oak,  $19 \times 12 \frac{1}{2} \times 12 \frac{1}{2}$  in. (48.3  $\times$  31.8  $\times$  31.8 cm). Private collection.



Figure 18. John Puffer, plant stand, c. 1920–1935. Pine, 40.5 × 14 × 14 in. (102.9 × 35.6 × 35.6 cm). Collection of Carma Gorman, Austin.



Figure 19. Installation view (from lobby) of the exhibition, *I Have Seen the Future: Norman Bel Geddes Designs America* (2012–13). Photo by Pete Smith. Harry Ransom Center.



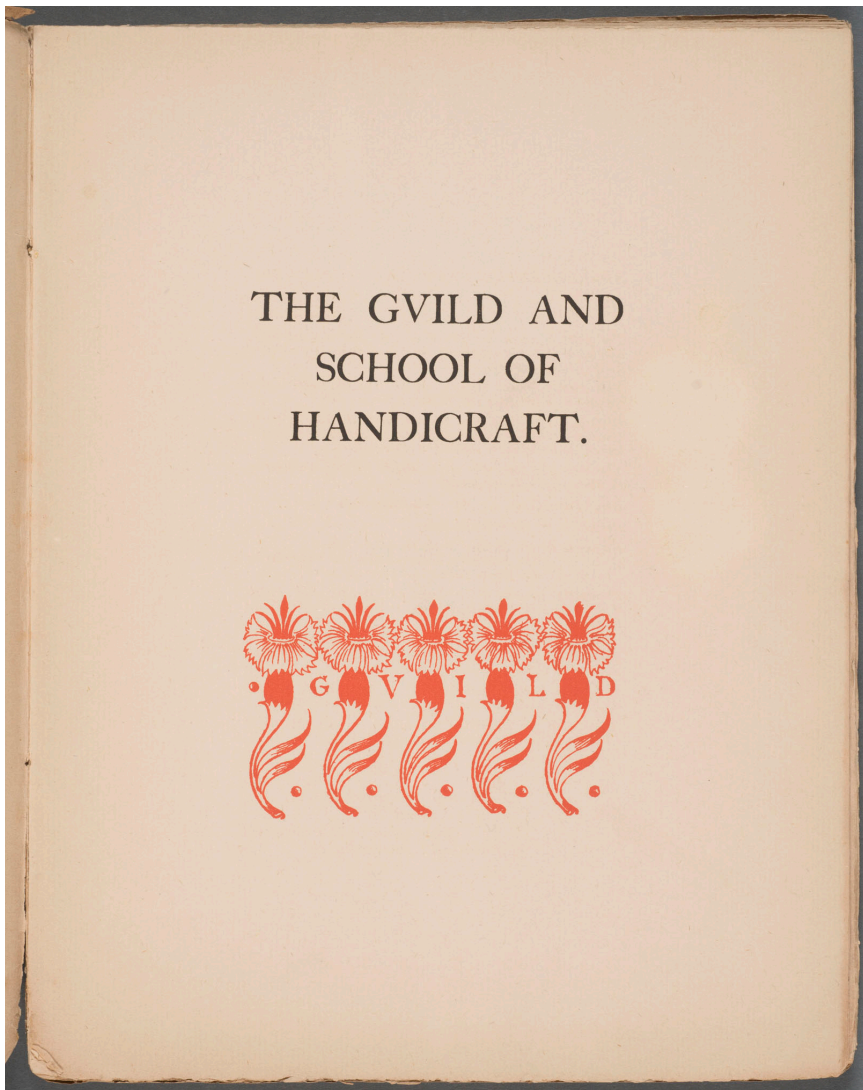


Figure 20. *Transactions of the Guild & School of Handicraft*, vol. 1 (1890). Harry Ransom Center.

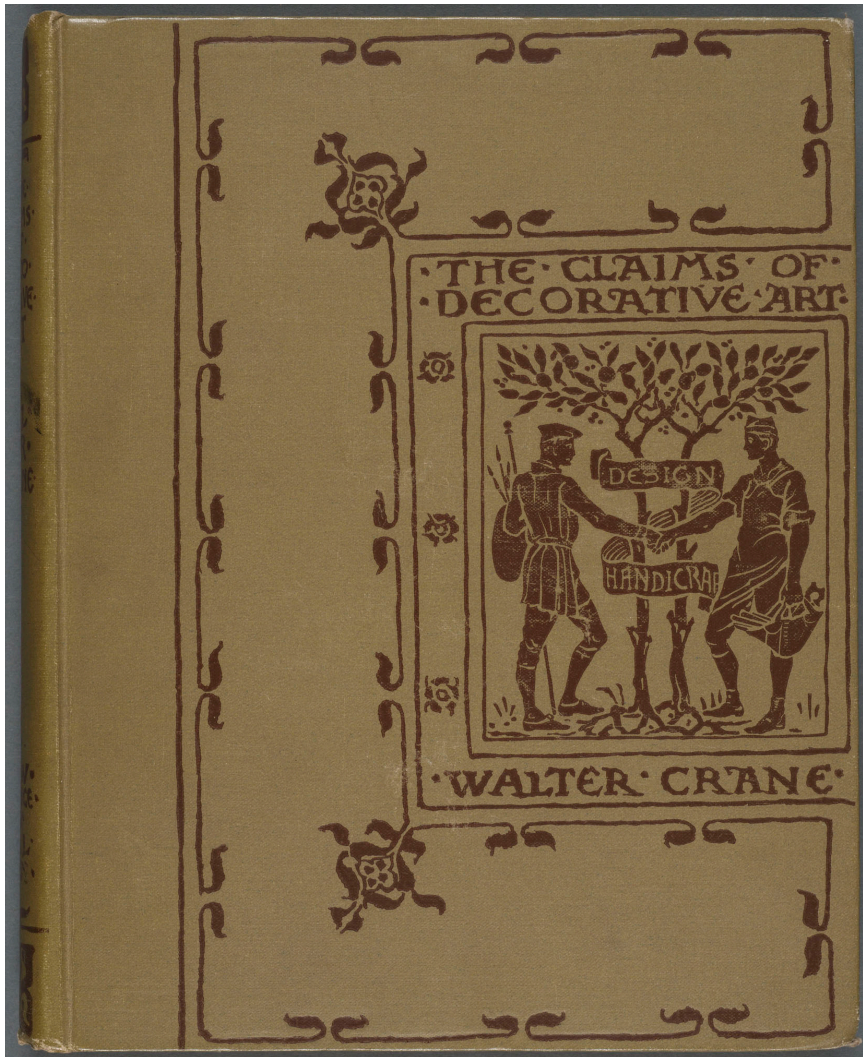


Figure 21. Cover of Walter Crane's *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1892). Harry Ransom Center.



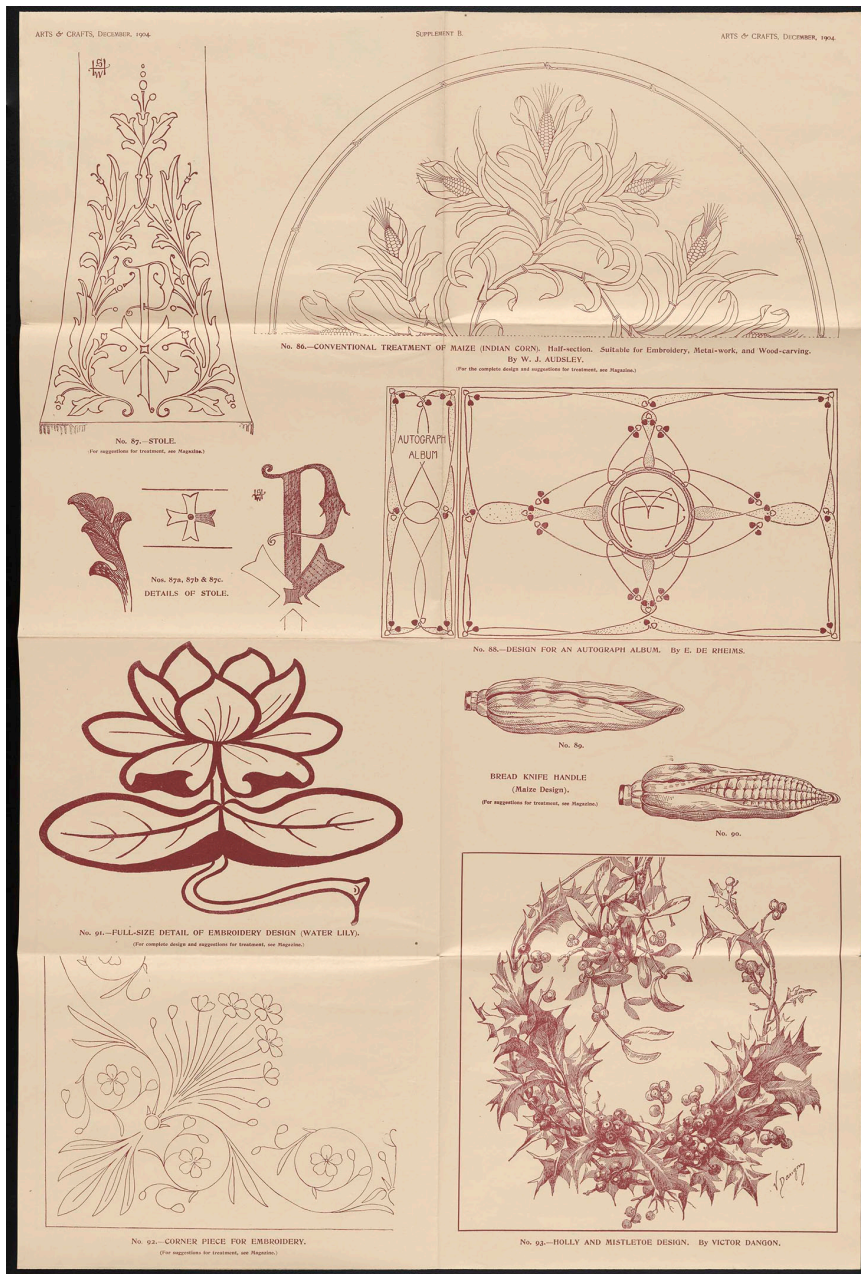


Figure 22. Supplement from *Arts and Crafts: A Practical Magazine for the Studio, the Workshop, and the Home*, vol. 2 portfolio (London: Hutchinson & Company, 1904). Harry Ransom Center.



Figure 23. "Will Bradley's Two Ideas for a \$1000 House: Presented and Designed by Will Bradley," *The Ladies' Home Journal* (February 1905), 35. Theater Arts Library, Harry Ransom Center.

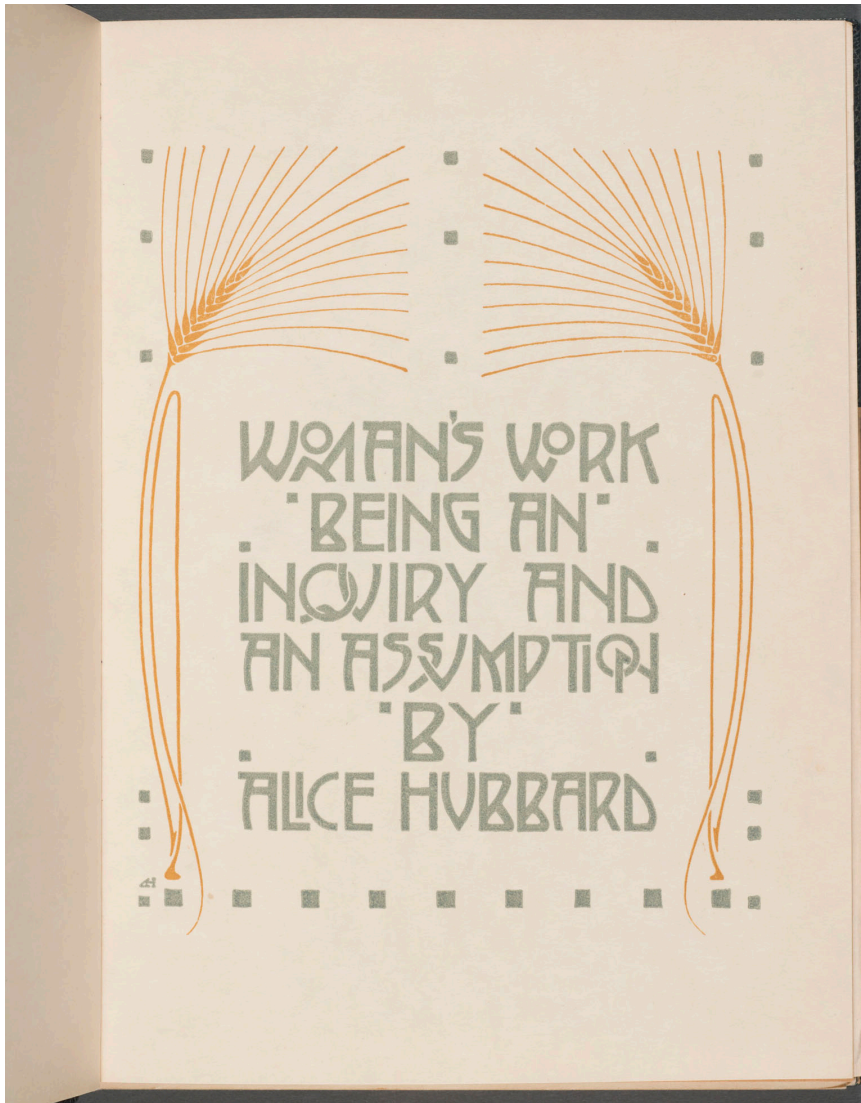


Figure 24. Title page of Alice Hubbard, *Woman's Work: Being an Inquiry and an Assumption* (East Aurora, NY: The Roycrofters, 1908). Elbert Hubbard/ Roycroft Press Collection, Harry Ransom Center.



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