ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN IN TRANSITION
AT
PENN MUSEUM

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in conjunction with the Bryn Mawr College Praxis Program

Further reading and references in PowerPoint notes.
Penn Museum

Self-Description

- Mission: The Penn Museum transforms understanding of the human experience.
- Experience the richness of the ancient past, gain an understanding of our shared humanity.
- Connect with the cultures of Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Mediterranean

History: an ever-changing institution

- Founded in 1887, Penn prepared an expedition specifically to provide artifacts for the building.
- 1899 – The museum finds a permanent home in a building built for them (pictured right).
- 1915-2002 – Five wings are designed and built.
Currently, the Penn Museum is undergoing a renovation of all their galleries, as a part of the rebranding of the institution. They hope to expand appeal from academics to the broader public.

Consider above, an older gallery. All artifacts presented on the same level, prominently placed in a grand room. There is a clear image of “here are objects on display.”

Consider to the right, a newly renovated display. Artifacts are varied in presentation, where their careful relation to each other allows for relationships to jump out. The cases blend into the walls.
Another prominent part of the renovation, the Sphinx has been with the museum since they acquired it from the British School of Archaeology in Egypt in 1913. For the renovation they made a public display of moving the sculpture from a local deep within the museum to the museum’s front hall.
Exhibits team.

- Exhibits works closely with...
  - Preparations team members: Zach Fay and Brian Zimerle.
  - A wide array of museum departments (Curators, Building Operations, IT, + more)

- My Field Supervisor, Joshua Lessard, fills multiple niches for the museum.
  - from realizing curator vision, to evaluating the building’s structural integrity in preparation for enormous artifacts.

Kate Quinn
Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs

Jessica Bicknell
Head of Exhibits

Lauren Cooper
Interpretive Planner

Joshua Lessard
Exhibition Architect and Designer
My Work

Surveying
Evaluating light and sounds levels, providing a physical record of the visitor experience.

3D Printing: Touch Tours
Collaborating with non-profit specializing in tours for visually impaired to fabricate replica objects.
Survey of Light and Sound

• **Why?** Informs future planning and design.
  • Internal design work.
  • External consulting on accessibility.

• **How?** Utilized different data-taking methodology and tools for each.
  • Sound data was recorded once or twice per room, with record of lowest level, highest level, and median level.
  • Light data was recorded by taking a measurement of light level every 5-10 ft within a room.
  • Had to be aware of how and why sound and light change in a space: number of visitors, room layout and size, presence of visitors in neighboring spaces, etc.

• **The Experience?** Unique opportunity to spend lots of time in the gallery.
  • Got to observe who inhabits the galleries and how they interact with the material.
  • Navigated being a position of authority. As a representative of the museum, I was viewed as a figure of authority – especially when carrying a clipboard. I was seen as knowledgeable, and occasionally made people uncomfortable.
Results were integrated into the building floorplans for future reference.
Touch Tours & Object Replicas

- Attended training by Philly Touch Tours
  - A guided training in leading touch-based tours. The primary takeaway was the ability to understand how the audience interacts with objects.
  - I learned that touch tours are a different experience, not a substitute for vision-based tours. The information learned is quite different and equally enthralling.

- Different sizes: Different purposes
  - Some 3D prints were exact replicas, to be used in place of objects that are too delicate to handle.
  - Other 3D prints were blown up in size, to highlight the details and intricacies of an artifact.
All of this informs and supports transitions...

...in an ever-changing institution.