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# The Theory and Practice of Display

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The Theory and Practice of Display

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requirements for the Honors Degree

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## The Theory and Practice of Display

### **Introduction**

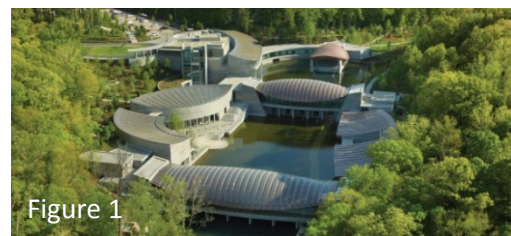
The *Study on Exhibit Design* is a thesis paper that approaches the theory and concepts of display in a comparative method. Within the thesis there are three case studies mentioned that look at structure, layout, lighting and art. These three case studies help explore an individuals experience through different museum settings.

Later in the thesis an experimental study is done in Southern Illinois University Carbondale's (SIU) Quigley gallery. This study shows an individual's approach to forming small scale exhibit displays. The thesis is concluded with an analysis and comparison of all of the studies.

### **Case Studies**

#### ***Crystal Bridges:***

Crystal Bridges is an art museum located in Bentonville, Arkansas. It is surrounded by wooded areas and has a creek running through the center, as seen in figure 1. There are trails around the exterior of



the building that display the outdoor art work and sculptures. The architect, Moshe Safdie, designed the museum for the Waltons (founders of the Wal-mart chain).

The layout of the Crystal Bridge Museum is generally very open. Many walls in the museum are not full height which gives the space a larger feel. The different parts of the building can range from one to four stories in height. Although there are different levels, for the most part the exhibit space is at the ground level.

Structurally, Crystal Bridges is very exposed. The museum was constructed with a variety of materials: wood, metal, concrete, and glass. When viewing the museum from both inside and out the structure can be seen, with the exception of a few galleries that are protecting

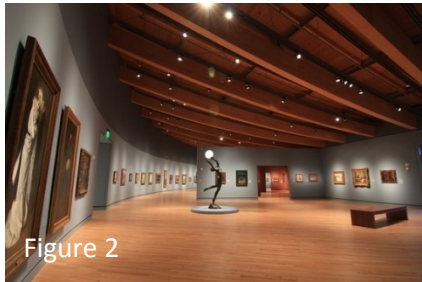


Figure 2

the work from harsh natural light. The curved wood that serves as the roof structure can be seen inside several parts of the museum, as seen in figure 2. The metal that holds the building together can be seen in the form of hardware and

support for the curved wood. The glazing that serves as walls provides viewers to experience the inside and outside of the building at once.

The lighting in Crystal bridges is both natural and artificial in many spaces. Since there is so much glazing in the museum, natural sunlight penetrates several areas of the museum, as seen in figure 3. Sunlight also reflects off of the creek that cuts through the structure. Artificial lighting is used in the few closed off galleries. It is also used in the form of spotlights that focus the viewer's eye to an area of art.

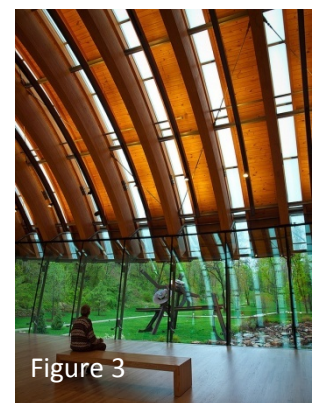


Figure 3

The art in Crystal bridges takes a few forms: painting, sculptures, and works on paper. These pieces are spaced with enough space to be separated by



Figure 4

shadows, as seen in figure 4. The spacing allows each artwork to be viewed as an individual piece of art. There are very few doors in the museum to stop the flow of circulation. As a viewer moves through the museum, they proceed in types of work (ex. paintings). There is organization to the galleries but for the most part they conform to one form of art.

### ***The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art:***

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art is located in Kansas City, Missouri. The museum is inside of the city but is encircled by green area, as seen in figure 5. There is a sculpture garden, underground parking, and a renovated museum on this green space.



Figure 5

The Beaux Art building section opened in 1933 and within the past ten years has been added onto. The Bloch

building addition was added to the east side of the property in 2007. The architect of the newest section is Steven Holl.

The layout of the Nelson-Atkins can be seen as two different pieces. The layout to the Bloch building is very clean cut with a variety of angles that flow. This portion of the building has a large section of underground space. The above ground sections are only attached through the underground level. The different levels are easy to view from many different perspectives because of the lack of walls breaking up the space. The Beaux Art building has a very box-like structure. There are many ninety degree angles and symmetrical areas in the building. There is

very little opportunity in this section of the building to see several spaces ahead or to see different levels. The older section has two main gallery levels with the lower auditorium level.

The connection between the two buildings is at the lowest level.

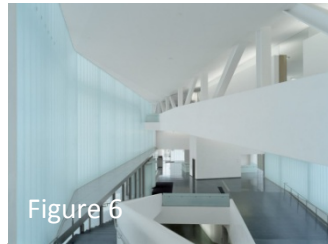


Figure 6



Figure 7

Much of the structural elements in the Beaux Arts section is hidden with the exception of the heavy stone columns in the center of the building. Walls cover up the elements in this building. In the Bloch building the structure is somewhat visible. The concrete angles show where the heaviest support is needed. The material choice also represents the building structurally. The old building uses heavy stone

and masonry as to the new building that uses white glazing, concrete, and smooth metals, as seen in figures 6 and 7.

Both of the buildings use lighting in different ways. The Bloch building has natural light leaking in from the frosted walls. This section also makes use of night lighting to emphasize the different sections of the building. The Beaux Art building uses artificial lighting to show of the art work but has sky lights that illuminate the large center halls.

The art in the Beaux Art building is very traditional and mostly the permanent exhibits. From one room to the next, a change in theme can be seen. The rooms change color and materials for each area, as seen in figure 8. The type of art can fit into several different groups: paintings, historical pieces, sculptures, photography and more.



Figure 8

"The art of Expressionist, Fauve, Cubist, Bauhaus, Dada and Surrealist artists working between 1900 and 1945 is presented in the Nelson-Atkins Building (The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art,

2015)." The newer building shows off more recent art. "The Museum's highly respected post-



Figure 9

1945 collection is presented in the new Bloch Building. (The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2015)" The Bloch building has the space to do temporary exhibits in the long circulation space. It provides a white background to highlight the exhibits, as seen in figure 9.

### ***The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:***

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) is located in the nation's capital of Washington D.C. The museum is boarded with several of the national museums. It is just south of the national mall. James Ingo Freed is the architect that designed the building.



Figure 10

The USHMM has two entrances for guests, both have different feels, as seen in figures 10 and 11. The main lobby is connected to the three areas of the museum. The memorial section



Figure 11

is at the back of the museum at the second level. In the memorial section is white, clean, open space. The adult permanent section is entered off the side of the main lobby through an

elevator lobby. In the adult section, visitors walk through multiple levels in a loosely guided direction. The dull colors in this section are a pallet that represent the space emotionally. The children's section is across the main lobby from the adult section. The viewers enter the

children's exhibit from a stair well and closed doorway. When they enter, they follow a guided, colorful path until the end of the section.

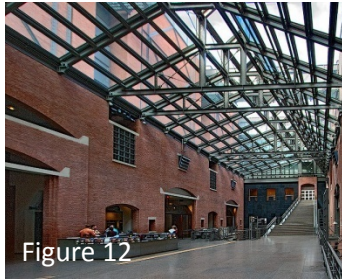


Figure 12

The structure of the museum is most apparent in the main lobby where viewers can see the trusses and exposed metal that supports the glass roof as seen in figure 12. The materials in the lobby show the weight of the structure (concrete, metal, and brick).

The other spaces within the museum do not show off the structure as much.

Within the main lobby is the most natural lighting from the glass roof. The memorial space has natural lighting that enters the space from both the top and the sides. There is also candle lighting around the edges of the space. The adult and children's areas have mainly artificial lighting to protect the art and to better focus on the work. Much of that lighting is spot lighting similar to that in image 13.



Figure 13

The art in the USHMM is primarily historical pieces, replicas, videos, audio recordings and photographs, as seen in figure 14. Within the museum there are some sculptures and other types of art but they are less numerous. There are large replica pieces that are used as interactive art that the guests can touch and experience at full scale.



Figure 14

The movement through the art work goes in the chronological order starting at the top floor and going down. The vertical circulation marks a change in time. The only doorways that are present, exist in order to block circulation in the wrong direction. The entire adult section



journey is accompanied by a personal story and booklet. The children's section is a verbal story that leads guests through the space in order of the events.

## **Personal Study**

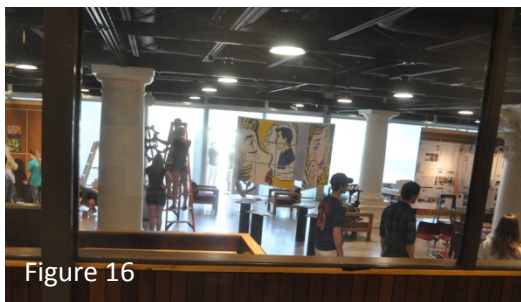
### ***SIU Quigley Gallery:***

SIU's Quigley Hall is located in Carbondale, Illinois. The building is surrounded by campus buildings, small restaurants, and green space. The university property is covered by grassy areas and wooded areas, as seen in figure 15. This gallery



space in Quigley serves the School of Architecture (Fashion, Interior Design, and Architecture majors), Culinary Arts, and Human Services. The gallery itself is in the center of Quigley.

The layout of Quigley as a building, has three major components (the auditorium, classroom stacks, and the single floor area). The gallery is boarded by the courtyard, classrooms, offices, and the main student circulation of the building. It is at a sunken level in comparison to the adjacent building and is level with the courtyard. The gallery has four entrance points (one in every direction).



Structurally Quigley's gallery is out in the open. The white columns are visible and connected to the black beam system. Two of the short walls are covered with wood paneling while the other two are

glass walls, as seen in figure16 . There are removable wood panels that can be hung by the beams. These panels are used for temporary arrangements of the gallery to display different projects and art, as seen in figure 17.

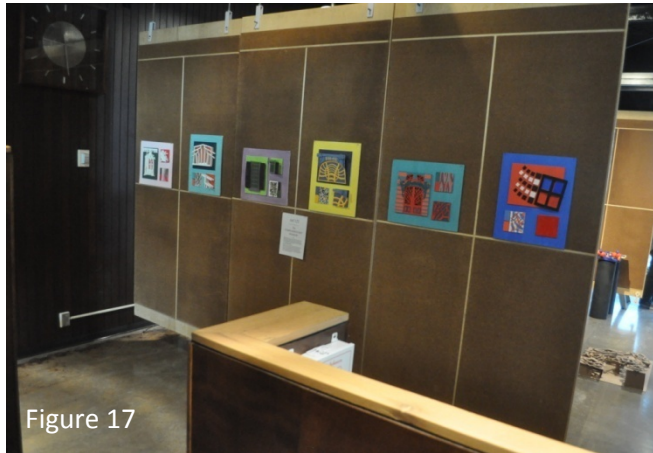


Figure 17

The lighting in the gallery is natural from the glass wall that covers the courtyard side. Some natural and artificial light leaks into the opposite side where the long circulation hallway is. When the natural light is blocked by the removable panels,

spot lighting is used. The spot lighting is moveable to fit the ever-changing needs of the gallery.

The art in this gallery is mostly student work. Much of the projects that are displayed are scaled architectural models, large drawing sets, photographs, and fashion lines. The art displayed in the gallery is not permanent but depending on the work, can be displayed anywhere from a day to a full school year. On many occasions, the gallery space is extended into the adjacent hallway in order to have more surface area.

## **Analysis**

### ***Comparison:***

In comparison all of the spaces have a different feel. Crystal bridges is open and warm because of the material use and layout. The open feel to the building is also enhanced by the connection to nature through the transparency in the building. There is no one path that must be taken to navigate the museum. The lighting in the building works with the art work to clearly define each piece.

The Nelson Atkins museum is a merging area between the old and the new. There are many different pieces to see with no path that leads people through. Both buildings give guests a different experience: one of a new, clean display and one of a heavy history. Where the structure is exposed in the Bloch building, it is used to display work.

The USHMM gives the feeling of openness when entering the main lobby. With each new section of the museum, a new feeling is evoked. The adult section is very dark and painful. The children's section has the story and colors of happiness at the beginning and slowly gets dark. The memorial section reads as a resting place that is clean, quiet and pure. Going through the different areas of the building in a different order can also change the experience.

The SIU gallery has a warm feeling with the wood and natural light. The experience feels temporary and unfinished because of the lack of permanent features. This space serves several purposes and many needs. The lighting is not controlled to the degree of a standalone structure.

*The experiment:*



Figure 18

When trying to find some of the features that Quigley's gallery replicated (in comparison to well thought out museums), Quigley had met up with a few. Quigley's structure proved useful to the display much like the Bloch building's entrance area, as seen in figure 18. The structure is being used to display the art that is hung from it. The steel beams serve as both structure and display support.



Figure 19

Quigley also was comparable to the lighting situations in Crystal Bridges. In figure 19, the shadows projected by the natural light help the viewer experience the art as a three dimensional piece. The experience is provided by natural light and gives the art a different visual quality.

In comparison to the USHMM, the gallery uses similar techniques in separation of spaces. The panels provide the opportunity to organize an area to fit one topic. The different works are spaced to optimize the lighting and the viewing height. This can be seen in figure 20.

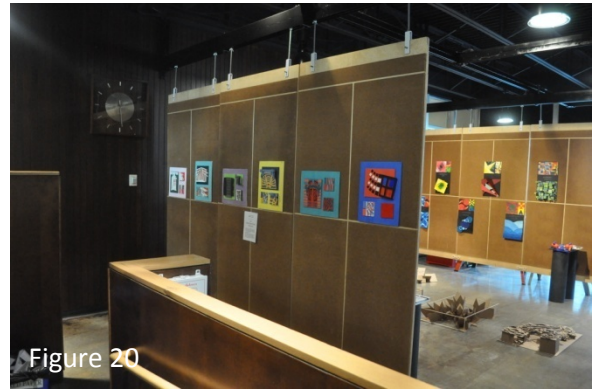


Figure 20

## **Conclusion**

Using Quigley's gallery to help analyze the theory and practice of display provided information that also helped compare the three museums. While all three of the museums show different art, they each have important qualities when it comes to lighting, structure, layout and artwork. In some ways the quality of the experience can remain the same but have completely different emotions attached to the museum space.

The four studied spaces helped me conclude that the experience in a space can be simply changed by adjusting just one of the features. To better understand these different features and other additional features, museums with other art topics can be studied.

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