

DESIGNING VISITOR EXPERIENCE THROUGH CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT



A CASE STUDY AT
NEW MEDIA GALLERY

/ DEVANSH PARIKH

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Abstract

This research study explores the role of visual identity with narrative methodology and visitor engagement in the exhibition design process. Literature suggests that the visitor experience in art exhibitions are still relatively passive; their interactions are limited to catalogs and wall texts, which offer few opportunities for personal input. Furthermore, art is especially difficult for visitors to interpret and engage in. This study is an attempt to address this gap by using experiential visual identity system in museum exhibitions and by introducing embodied physical cues as a way to engage visitors with art. The primary purpose behind this research is to identify issues involved in the relationship between exhibitions and audiences. The study suggests narrative methodology as a critical component in the exhibition-making process and how it helps visual identity facilitate an exhibition by evoking visitor participation. Two case studies worked at New Media Gallery grounds its findings by using narrative methodology with visual identity. The main goal of this study is to develop interactive exhibition graphics as a means to embody the thematics and mood of an exhibition as a way to engage an audience offering them a more holistic experience.

Key Words

Graphic Design,
Visual Identity,
Embodiment,
Experiential Design,
Stoytelling

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Introduction

An exhibition, is an organised presentation and display of a selection of items to public (Elena Filipovic). In practice, exhibitions usually occur within a cultural or an educational setting such as museums, art galleries, parks, libraries, exhibition halls, or world’s fairs.

Art plays a vital role in public welfare and wellbeing. It acts as a catalyst in a form of storytelling, to help the audience develop a narrative of their lives and relate to their own experience in a unique way. Art institutions are not just for educational purposes, but also help shape one’s personality. Evidence shows that engaging with art institutions provides positive social experiences, leading to reduced social isolation; opportunities for learning and acquiring new skills; calming experiences, decreased anxiety; increased positive emotions, such as optimism, hope, and enjoyment; increased self-esteem and sense of identity; increased inspiration and opportunities for meaning-making; and increased communication among families, and caregivers (Chatterjee & Noble, 2013). Such institutions are more than a collection of artefacts, they allow you to meet with neighbours, discuss thoughts, share opinions, and become an active part of the community. Exhibitions are regarded as the primary means by which, collections are appreciated and knowledge disseminated (Weil, Stephen E, 2002). At times, such institutions feel intimidating and are responsible for dividing society into different classes. Many people feel uncomfortable while wandering around in the gallery space, this is because the gallery aesthetics are turned into a kind of social elitism which makes the space look exclusive and unapproachable (O’Doherty, 1986). Similar to a commercial gallery, which is designed to accommodate the prejudices and enhance the self-image of the upper-middle classes, the modern museum emerges as a product of a capitalist consumerist approach to art (O’Doherty, 1986).

To change the perception and resolve this issue, over the years, more importance has been given to the interactions between exhibitions and their visitors. These exhibitions aim to stimulate social interactions amongst visitors. Exhibitions are driven by the direction of the visitors; the end-point is frequently outside the museum's direct control. Museums are in the midst of a basic shift, from a focus on the object to a focus on the visitor (Weil, Stephen E, 2002). Their goal is to meet visitors' expectations for active engagement, in a way that furthers the mission and the core values of the institution (Simon, 2010).

This situation brings the need for introducing innovative ways of experiencing exhibitions by making them visitor-centric. The visual identity of an exhibition is most likely to be the first point of contact, the audience will have with the show. It is a marketing technique for an image-making process that defines a unique voice for the show, which aims to attract visitors for the show. Experiential graphic design encompasses the emotional connection, which is an essential part of the identity-making process. This process is integrated into the exhibition-making model, which helps in developing visual, spatial and experiential cues. This involves the orchestration of typography, colour, imagery, form, technology and, especially, the content to create a communicative environment (Peter Dixon, SEGD). This study focuses on experiential graphic design as a component driven by narrative methodology and its abilities to engage with the visitors. The process of identity making helps in creating a system which is a

collection of elements working together, to create a unified design language that effectively communicates the values to the target audience. An identity system is content-driven, informative, interactive, educational, and experiential. Exhibitions can be in a place for decades, can travel around or are temporary most commonly lasting anywhere between three to six months. In general, identity-making techniques must engage all types of audiences. It involves creating a unique name, an image, or a symbol for space with a consistent theme. Marketers create such experiences, to gain public attention. Visual identity in the context of the exhibition is a process to create a unique design system for an environment with a consistent visual and sensory theme, communicating the tone of the show. It does not just mean a logo, it means how people see and experience the show. It can include a symbol, a tagline, social media accounts, or even whole new marketing guidelines (Coates, 2019). Designing experiential content for an exhibition may include campaigns with a consistent theme for several different platforms carrying the message of the exhibition to the public. These platforms may include digital collaterals such as screen graphics, website banners, social media images, motion graphics, email invites; print collaterals such as handouts, brochures, posters, post-cards; and environmental graphics for inside and outside the gallery space such as wall texts, labels, window facade, other vinyl applications, way-finding, billboards, display screens, and gallery space activations. The visual identity aims to establish a significant and differentiated presence in a museum setting that attracts and retains visitors.

Good design, like good storytelling brings ideas to life. Lupton, in her book *Design is Storytelling* showcases different ways to use narrative to create engaging graphics and experiences to lead the visitors on a dynamic journey. A museum exhibition inspires their visitors to devise their own stories from the artefacts and experiences they find (Lupton, 2017). Each visit can act as a unique path through the sensory world. Those paths might have peaks of intensity and points of rest. A tourist or a college student will have different museum experiences and a different story to tell than a high school kid. A well defined visual narrative makes an exhibition more contextual and noticeable. For institutions like museums and galleries, there is often a challenge to reach new audiences. Graphics help them to stay current and also to communicate with a broader audience (Coates, 2019).

Not that long ago, museums were staid places of culture. These formal and forbidding places sought to safeguard the treasures of civilisations. Today's museums are more open and participatory. People visit museums to look, learn, make and converse (Lupton, 2017). Lupton argues that part of exhibition-making process involves pattern making. People actively seek and create patterns as they navigate through experiences — they feel delighted, surprised and sometimes frustrated when the patterns break (Lupton, 2017). Storytelling can help in steering the experiences while crafting engaging narratives. Museum exhibitions are approaching and implementing new methods of user-centric design to communicate with a

newer and broader audience. Narrative methodology plays a vital role in informing the visual narrative, which helps in enhancing the visitor experience. A narrative methodology is an interpretive approach in social sciences, that is based on collecting, analysing, and representing people's stories as told by them based on a perception of the world our stories live in. Such narratives represent, constitute, and shape social reality (Etherington 2004, 75). Narrative Methodology in a gallery-setting encompasses several methods such as storytelling, public engagement, and visitor experience to form a successful exhibition. This study explores a collaborative approach to the exhibition-making process where designers, curators, and artists work together to craft interactive experiences for the visitors.

The research aims to understand different ways to look at how visual identity embodies an exhibition while engaging the visitors as participants. The intent is to study the theories and methodologies of storytelling with visual aesthetics as a cohesive form within an experiential space. This thesis limits its explorations and findings to the outcomes of visual identity in graphic design used for creating an engaging exhibition space. The outcome often refers to the visual languages, graphics, and forms, created to interpret the artist's work for an exhibition. This includes working within the interior and exterior of the gallery space.

Context

Historically, art institutions such as galleries and museums have served as important sites for cultural engagement. Despite the significant role they play in society, museums today are faced with several challenges. Some of these challenges stem from reduced funding, resulting in increased pressure to attract diverse audiences and a need to justify the public value of museums. Other challenges may be attributed to the rapidly changing society in which we live—changes in demographics, lifestyle, leisure time activities, and communication technology. (Goulding, 2000; Pitman, 1999.)

During the last century, there have been significant changes in the way museums function. They have been slowly restructuring themselves out of their traditional outlooks and workings to become modernised institutions with different purposes, which include greater service to public interaction (McLean, 1993; Falk and Dierking, 1992). Earlier in the 19th century, Museums were referred to as structures of unimagined luxury amongst wealthy patrons. It took years to change the functionality of the museums, from catering to elites to becoming public institutions. Public museums were known to be an educational institution for the masses. These institutes were quiet places where people would go and look at the works of art without interacting with them. These 19th-century ideal spectators were known as the ‘responsible citizens.’ Alfred Barr, founding director of the Museum of Modern Art, established an educational exhibition-making model in the 1930s.

This approach made the exhibitions more visual and spatial than discursive. He introduced the ‘white cube’ approach, whereby minimising visual distractions, he hoped to direct viewers towards a pure experience of the artwork. The bare spaces, white walls, and minimalist frames he used are now so common that we hardly notice them (Rodini, 2018). His model suggested the refining of aesthetic sensibilities of visitors to mould a mode of spectatorship based on educated consumers - in contrast to the responsible citizens. Today, Barr’s didactic model of “educated consumer spectatorship” can easily be identified in the operations of most major museums and other exhibiting institutions (Maria Lind, 2011). The mission of the contemporary museums has evolved from serving collectors and specialists to serving the public. Exhibition-making emphasises the selection of objects, the accuracy of texts, and, to a lesser extent, the design of spaces in an attempt to appeal to relatively knowledgeable audiences. Concepts such as audience draw, educational outcomes, and the quality of visitor experiences have joined, and sometimes even overshadowed, artefacts as critical issues in exhibition planning (Smithsonian 2002).

Problem Statement

This research identifies some of the issues involved in the relationship between visitors and their experiences in an exhibition. Sometimes visiting an exhibit feels overwhelming and intimidating. When walking into an art exhibit, visitors only expect to communicate with artworks and the theme of the exhibit, visually and mentally. Vision is useful for quick understanding but incapable of facilitating in-depth art interpretation. Additionally, these exhibits are typically aimed at adults because it is difficult to maintain children and teenagers' attention to passive content. However, museum interactivity and art education research has shown that hands-on activities and social interactions significantly improve the messaging of the exhibits (Beale, 2011). To provide social experiences, museums act sensitively towards the needs of the visitors. Art institutions are fundamentally concerned with visitors' ability to recollect and share their learnings from the exhibition. To make the visitor experience more memorable they can apply their findings into researching and crafting a more interactive and embodied visual narrative.

In-house marketing teams or outsourced professionals are often tasked with developing the visual narrative for an exhibition. Very little focus has been placed on collaboration between marketing and museum exhibitions, hence there is a lack of communication during the exhibition development process (Gilmore & Rentschler, 2002). Graphic designers are often involved in the implementation stage of exhibition-making rather than planning or conceptualising, where design can be highly influential.

They then work with the marketing department on designing exhibition collaterals to attract masses, rather than engaging with them. This is done with very little influence coming from the curators or the artists. Such a situation leads to a major disconnect in the institution's goals while showcasing and promoting the works. Despite the marketing team winning awards for their marketing strategies, visitors are often misled, or the message of the exhibit is misconstrued through their techniques (McLean, 2005).

Defining an appropriate visual narrative for an exhibition should be a highly collaborative process. This process could involve proper communication between the designer, curators, artists, and the marketing team so that the graphic elements to an exhibition are designed to embody the theme and feel of the exhibition as envisioned by the curator(s), offering a potential for a holistic experience for the visitor. This includes weaving the elements of design into the derived narrative to uniquely capture visitors' attention. Design uses form, color, materials, language, and planning to transform the meaning of everything from signages to interiors and brochure to billboards. Good design helps in developing an emotional journey from confusion to clarity and from disengagement to delight. At times, we find that many professionals try to impose their particular views of visitors and their desires, rather than take visitors' views and wants into account (Smithsonian, 2002). This leads to a situation where, oftentimes, the visual design for an exhibition do not effectively translate

the derived narrative visually. Hence, greater collaboration from the initial planning phase through final implementation is required to create a representative visual language that will attract and engage visitors (Jona Piehl, 2012). The graphics for an exhibition acts as a visual extension of the narrative, that has to communicate its outline by weaving the meaning and values of its content with a wide range of media. Communication designer Jona Piehl raises a question about the importance of a situation where the curators and designers set up a collaborative content-making process to co-author stories that are appropriate and cohesive on both a visual and a textual level. First, the curators share their thesis, then it's up to the designer to define a visual language that effectively translates the curator's vision, and lastly, the defined visual language is later passed on to the marketing department for the consistency in messaging across various applications.

For my thesis project a similar collaborative process was adapted to form a working framework with the New Media Gallery (NMG) in New Westminster, British Columbia. Here, I closely worked with the curators from the ideation stage till the final opening, to form a content making process to help define the narrative contextually as well as visually. New Media Gallery is a contemporary public art gallery dedicated to presenting provocative new media art from around the world. They present five exhibitions a year, each 8 - 12 weeks long. Exhibition development for the gallery typically includes research, documentation, and ongoing care and quality

presentation of a diverse range of loaned works from artists, institutions, and collectors worldwide. The gallery space is radically redesigned and rebuilt for every exhibition, carefully responding to the needs of each work in consultation with the artist, studio, or gallery. NMG is recognized for the caliber of its artists, unique and provocative exhibitions, active curatorial engagement style and radical exhibition rebuilds. As per the nature and size of the gallery, their current engagement strategy involves the curators exchanging dialogues with the visitors about the show, artists involved and technology used while walking them through the exhibitions. The gallery is trying out new means of engagement by using graphics design to embody the experience of the show. My role was to practice experiential graphic design by using narrative methodology and storytelling tools to capture the thematics of the exhibition, facilitating a holistic embodied experience for the visitors.

The Approach

Narrative Methodology

Art institutions are searching for new ways to attract, retain, and engage with the visitors (Michele Everett & Margaret S. Barrett, 2009). To address these issues, researchers have called for studies to help construct a complete understanding of the visitor experience. The narrative methodology is one means by which designers can help develop a multi-faceted relationship between exhibitions and visitors (Michele Everett & Margaret S. Barrett, 2009). Today, art institutions around the world are in the process of renewing and rebranding themselves. These institutes are doing this to be able to respond better to the evolving needs and wants of visitors, which change continuously as a result of the transformations that take place in the consumer culture. There is a growing commitment within art institutions to develop exhibitions that generate new forms of participation that contribute to the public’s understanding of arts. New tools and technologies have played an essential role in enabling designers, and curators to develop exhibits that facilitates embodied experiences and would allow visitors to engage in more complex forms of participation in the exhibition space.

This research examines the role of visual narrative within experiential design. It considers how visual narrative can be used as a tactic to embody the curatorial premise of an exhibition. By doing so, this research shifts the role of the visitor from passive spectators to active participants by

by facilitating an embodied experience. While visiting an exhibition, the learning outcomes at the end differ for all the visitors. Such a situation arises because they are often mentally and physically exhausted which makes them forget most of the information learned before. By using narrative methodology, it enables the visitors not just to view the exhibit in a directed path but also provides a means to recall, reflect, and share their thoughts easily. Good design connects people through shared experiences. Successful exhibition graphics help the visitor to navigate through both space and story; as they define the context and the atmosphere of the story, they create an experience, and through this, they can enhance the visitor’s intellectual engagement as well as appeal to their senses and imagination.

Storytelling Tools

This research studies the essential tools for developing a compelling visual narrative from literature authored by Ellen Lupton in Design is storytelling. Here the author demonstrates how storytelling drives and shapes great design narratives. The book acts as a toolkit for creative thinking and showing ways to use storytelling techniques to create satisfying graphics for experiences. Lupton organises this book in three acts — **action, emotion, and sensation**; each act is filled with research on the way people relate to narratives and how designers can use narratives to guide the users and provide them with memorable experiences. Lupton tells the stories behind the three acts and reveals a new way of thinking about the process of design. She investigates into the layers of narrative to make delightful, powerful and striking work. Lupton explores the psychology of visual perception from a narrative point of view. She presents tools and concepts that help in framing an embodied experience in an exhibition. These tools stir emotions, build empathy and convey action; to construct narrative arcs and create paths through space; and to evaluate the storytelling power. She briefly introduces a wide variety of storytelling ideas that can be successfully applied to thinking and problem solving involved in the practice of design. Lupton links how storytelling is an integral part of the design in public space by using tools from the three acts.

According to Lupton, **Actions** explore the pattern as well as forming a theme that navigates the visitors throughout the space. It drives stories which also drives the design process. Design touches the visitor's minds and bodies, while senses prompt out actions to fuel visitor's memories. Design is an art of planning ahead and predicting possible futures. Scenario Planning encompass a range of tools for imagining unknown situations and possible futures. Designing for **emotions** requires thinking about how visitors will anticipate an experience and how they will remember it later. It means recognising a fuller range of human experience and accounting for feelings of sadness, frustration, and anger as well as humor, delight, and surprise. **Sensation** focuses on perception and cognition. Stories hinge on the action, and so does human perception. Storytelling embodied in visual identity can help communications hook the imagination of visitors and invite actions and behaviours. Principles such as visual path, gestalt grouping, and multi-sensory design reveal that perception is a dynamic process of creating order and finding focus.

The three acts of storytelling play a vital role in my research while designing the exhibition identity and engagement techniques. Lupton explores the connection between storytelling and design, where stories depict action and stimulate curiosity, whereas design embodies values and illustrates ideas. Lupton's theory informs the design approach, process, and outcomes for my thesis.

To address the issues between visitors and their experiences, Lupton suggests practicing human-centred design, a methodology that combines rational problem solving with emotional storytelling. This helps in creating an inviting space, as a designer I can prompt the visitors to experience the exhibition by touching, wandering, moving, and participating. By doing so it addresses different ways to engage the visitors as participants and not just spectators. Co-creation helps in building a collaborative working framework, where the curators and designers co-author a content making process to facilitate an embodied visitor experience. Research in behavioural economics shows that small design cues can influence visitor interactions, and can turn passive visitor experiences into active engagement. Reaching beyond the design’s traditional focus on vision, the multi-sensory design incorporates a full range of bodily experiences. This technique helps in translating complex art interpretations into memorable and sharable experiences. The three tools suggested by Lupton embodies the meaning of the exhibition and encompasses the overarching process of exhibition-making to form a working methodology for this thesis. The following case studies apply these three tools to design exhibition identity as well as extending the identity system to make the exhibition engaging for the visitors.

Case Studies

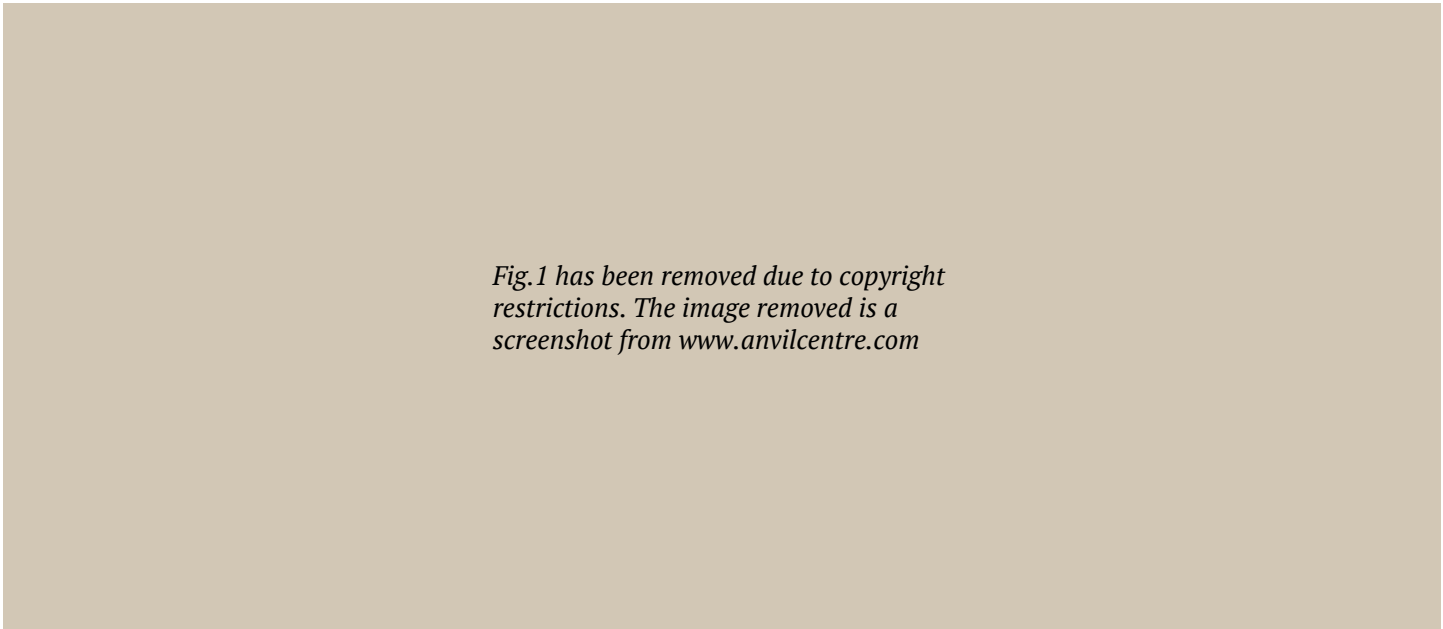


Fig.1 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The image removed is a screenshot from www.anvilcentre.com

This thesis research examines the process and outcomes of two exhibitions, designed and conducted at the New Media Gallery, New Westminster, BC. Here I explore the role of experiential graphic design in the exhibition design process as a means to engage visitors with the exhibition. During this process, I closely work with the curators in a defined framework to achieve the desired result. The two case studies have a very different visual and spatial approach. The first exhibition, Cartooney, is built on a narrative of cartoons, and the second exhibition, Currency, is a commentary on commodity, and value in the rapidly changing world of technology. Here, I have unfolded a collaborative process of exhibition-making, to illustrate my case for developing a working framework.

Fig 1: New Media Gallery, Anvil Centre, New Westminster BC

Cartooney oct 19 – feb 02 Mungo Thomson Jennifer Kevin McCoy Martin Arnold Andy Holden Jason Salavon Patten

Closed from Dec 9, 2019 – Jan 6, 2020

Fig 2: Graphic created for Cartooney at NMG (2019)

Cartooney:

‘Cartooney’ is a video exhibition at New Media Gallery that features six artists who explore consistent laws and systems through a cartoon landscape that relates to or supersedes the laws of the human world. These rules are often based on how cartoon characters view their world, rather than how we think things should work. The apparent paradox of cartoon world mirrors the instability of modern life where the meaning of things is perceived as contrasting to the real world. Martin Arnold’s work (Black Holes) exposed the psychoanalytic underbelly of family entertainment, which formed an overarching theme for the exhibition. Mungo Thomson’s artwork (American Desert - for Chuck Jones) romanticised scenes of the American west stripped of its characters. Jennifer and Kevin McCoy’s work (Every Anvil) was a direct contrast to Jason Salavon’s piece (All the ways - The Simpsons) as one suggested isolating everything into a singularity to understand it out of context and the other stated amalgamating everything into a singularity and trying to make sense of it as a whole. My role was to capture the feeling of darkness, ironic, political with some angst in the design for the exhibition.

The process for defining the visual language of this exhibition was highly collaborative. We began the process with working discussions about curatorial aims and the concepts that infused a wide range of artwork installations planned for space. It was important to carefully consider the

experiential goals that the gallery had outlined for each of the artworks. These aims became a part of my processes for evolving visual design and interaction. The process included several rounds of discussions and approvals between the curators and the artists. To define the scope of branding, it was necessary to work within the budgetary constraints. A list of deliverables was produced, which included graphics covering a wide range of roles from decoration to atmospheric treatment, from print collaterals to information design. The visual narrative had to precisely resemble the textual content of the exhibition, which was required to define a visual voice for the exhibition. Before starting with design and production, three weeks were dedicated to researching the artists and their artworks. Two of the significant research methods employed in this case study were Concept mapping and User Journey Maps. Concept mapping allowed me to absorb new concepts into an existing understanding of themes to draw new meanings. While defining a visual narrative for the exhibition, it was important to analyse individual artworks and draw parallels with the overarching theme for a cohesive design language. Journey mapping was essential for visualising the experiences of the visitors so they could be evaluated and improved. As this exhibition was depicting the dark, ironic and political side of the cartoon world, a user journey map helped in telling a story about an individual’s actions, feelings, perceptions, and frame of mind. This included the positive, negative, and neutral moments—as the visitor would interact with the different components of the exhibition.

Cartooney



The visual identity draws the character, play, and visual interest from economical use of a single and highly contrasting grotesque font, and a black and white colour palette contrasting the interiors of the gallery and nature of the show. This acts in contrast to a diverse and ornate exhibition of colour and texture, yet also shares something in common with the underlying and unifying intentions of the show. The typographic design plays out across posters and flyers where the type and space are well-balanced. Other highlights include the use of proportionality, with large text and finer organic compositions that effectively brand the venue. The visual language was extended to include a variety of print communications including leaflets, posters and postcards, animation, advertising, signage, and environmental graphics. The visual language is influenced by Lupton's principle of Emotions in storytelling which anticipates the visitor experience and learning beforehand. By doing so, the design taps into the visitor's emotion to trigger the feeling of darkness and angst. The logo-type's double 'O' expands to create an identity system that takes different forms, mainly as a motion trail (imitating the cartoon trails), an element of mystery, and a set of eyes. The digital graphics for screens across the centre, animations, and advertising use an austere colour palette different from print communications for a mobile experience while capturing the feeling of angst. A contrast between bright modern colour in the photographic treatment and bold typography makes a visually intriguing expression.

Cartooney
Jason Salavon
Andy Holden
Martin Arnold
Mungo Thomson
Jennifer & Kevin McCoy
Patten

Jennifer & Kevin McCoy
Jason Salavon
Martin Arnold
Patten
Mungo Thomson
Andy Holden
October nineteen. 2019
February two. 2020
New Media Gallery

Fig 3-7 (Page L&R): Graphics created for Cartooney at NMG (2019)

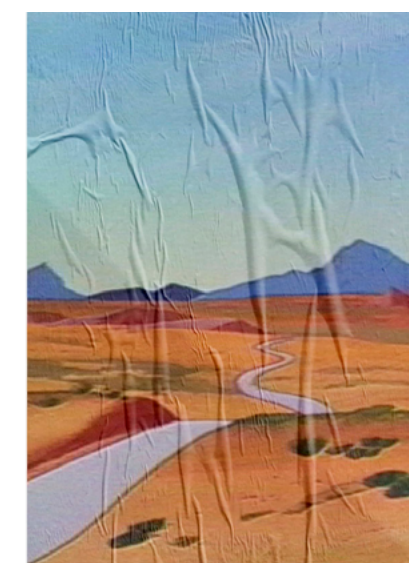
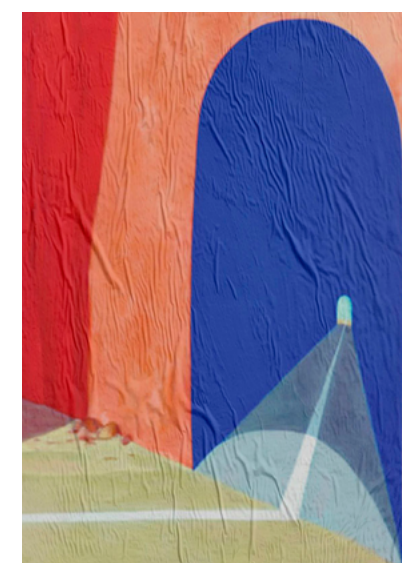


Fig 8-9: Anvil Screen Graphic for NMG

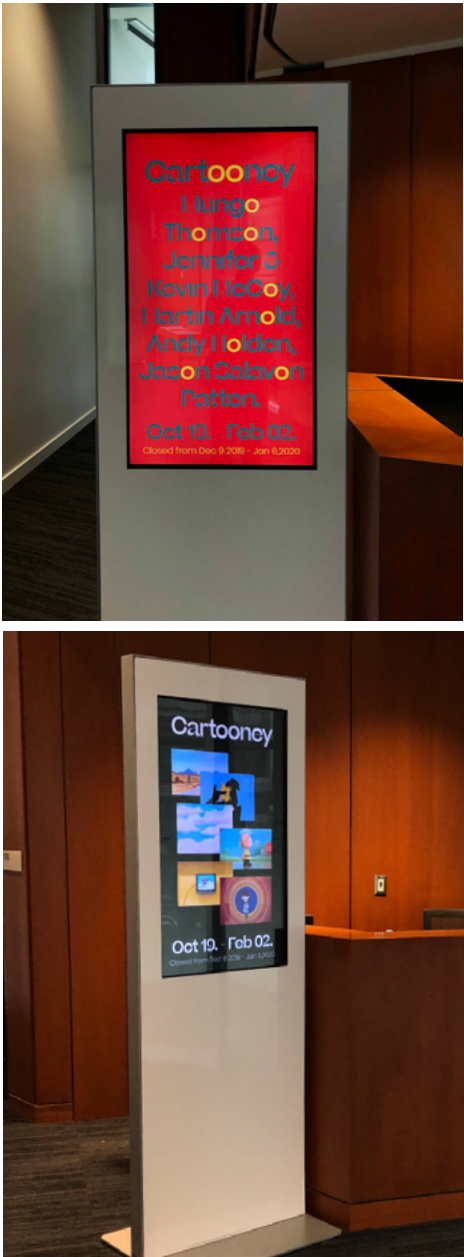


Fig 10: Collage showcasing graphics in digital colour palette for Cartooney (2019)



The application of branding involved not just visual graphics; it also had experiential cues, which encouraged visitors to be a part of the exhibition. Lupton's principle of Sensation driven storytelling informed the translating of visual design into the experiential design. It helped in altering the visitor's perception of the show by developing and achieving the overarching idea for the exhibition; which was to make the visitors feel small when they entered the space. As the exhibition was completely video-based, there were legibility concerns regarding artwork labels. To address this concern, I designed a large format poster informing details about artists, artwork, and exhibitions for the visitors as a tear-out sheet which was installed in the entrance of the space. The poster was 2ft by 3ft. portrait sized, it gave an exaggerated outlook when a person was holding or reading it. One the opening night a room full of people were holding giant posters which made them look small inside the exhibition. The main wall text panel at the entrance was 4.5ft by 6ft, significantly larger than average size, where the visitor had to follow through a large piece of text across the wall which made them a part of the show. A large glass facade near the entrance had a giant exhibition title, making it look like a photo frame where people could click pictures. During the design process, the main wall text had to be prototyped as with graphics on that scale, it was crucial to avoid visual and aesthetic missteps. The proposed exhibition takeaway included postcards. I designed a set of seven postcards — six with individual artists and their artwork and one show focused.



Fig 11: Poster for Cartooney (2019)



Fig 12: Poster sizing with proportions

The postcard had an artwork with the artist name, following the identity system, the letter O was removed from the names which left a blank space as an element of mystery. Similarly, after defining the identity system with letter O, the exhibition designer built circular stools instead of benches to stay consistent. As there were six video installations, the exhibition designer had to create a room for each. The doors were painted similarly, mirroring the cartoon houses. Lupton's principle of Action helped in developing the visual and experiential trail for visitors across various media.

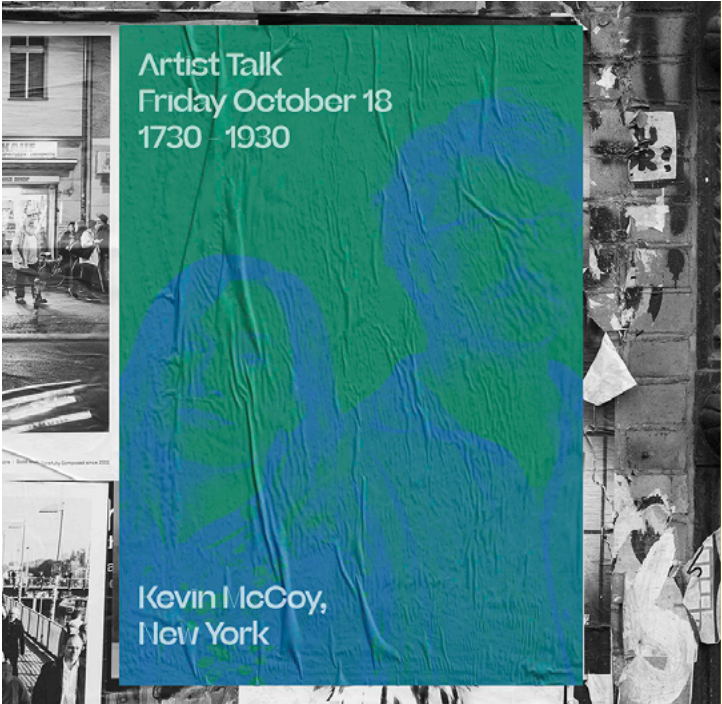


Fig 13 (right page): Hema reading poster content

Fig 14 (right page): Proposed talk poster for the opening night talk at NMG

Fig 15 (right page): Cartooney vinyl text panel



The design solution for the exhibition was seen as a unique approach, as I'd worked closely with the gallery throughout the entire project to constantly question, push and revise different ways to engage with exhibition visitors. The branding worked to capture the expression of the exhibition in both visual and experiential aspects by following the three acts of storytelling. One of the main concerns was to merge graphic design and branding with a traditional gallery environment while while designing the graphics to embody the thematic of the exhibition facilitating a more holistic experience for the visitor. The action-based storytelling tool helped in defining the design collaterals and interactions, whereas emotion and sensation based tools embodied the values and meaning of the exhibition. The graphics formed a cohesive visual language for people to experience, interact, and remember the show. As the project evolved many of the engagement points were customized to a greater level of detail. The design outcome exceeded both the expectations and goals that were initially set for the gallery.

<https://www.behance.net/gallery/87069047/Cartooney-Exhibition-Identity>

Fig 16 (right page): Person walking against window fascade

Fig 17 (right page): Proposed billboard mockup





Currency:

Currency is a mixed-media exhibition, currently on show at the New Media Gallery. In this exhibition, eight artists from around the world with diverse ideas and depictions relating to the perception of value, consider and critique the evolving symbolism in a rapidly changing world of technology. They offer diverse narratives and counter-narratives around a dominant notion of currency. Layered with symbolic references and skilful handling of complex information, these metaphoric works reflect the seductive, volatile and sometimes problematic relationships that develop between currency & value. The artists in the exhibition measure, critique and interpret currency through references to attention span, decision-making & psychology, corporate structures, historic & corporate symbols, art, luxury goods & design, real estate and economies of labour & exchange. In technological terms, the works function through the use of artificial intelligence, internet streaming, diagnostic gas chromatography, blockchain, banking systems; two of the works are interactive. The notes of a luxury fragrance reflects the volatile spikes of the biggest financial crash in history (Flashcrash - a perfume); a social media campaign directs bots to produce a cryptocurrency that tries to restore fair balance in data exchange (Bit-soil Popup tax and hack campaign); a surveillance technology measures the currency of human attention in the art (Value of Art); an ancient, apocalyptic narrative is used to reflect modern anxieties

Fig 18 (left page): Public space mock ups
Fig 19 (left page): Collage of artist artworks
for Cartooney at NMG



around currency (Out of the Abyss); a piece of ephemeral real estate is purchased with social media currency (Untitled); a psychological phenomenon that affects the buying & selling of securities is rendered monstrous (Animal Spirits). The exhibition questions the audience about ways to interpret, measure and assign value to objects, landscapes, and economies of exchange. The works give the audience opportunities to reflect on common interpretations of currency and conditions which affect value. My role was to visually translate and represent the notion of traditional value with modern-day surveillance technology.

The working framework was defined in the previous exhibition which made the process of ideation in the preliminary design stage easy. The curators shared the exhibition thesis with me after finalising the artworks. Through conversations with the curators, and as per the nature of this exhibit I learned that they were approaching the show with a white-box exhibition-making model. I also discovered that the installation would have a minimal amount of didactic information. The process for designing the interior of the space was initiated by the exhibition designer and the curator. For such an exhibit, they had to plan the floor layout and artwork placement. This traditional setting involved high ceilings, plain white walls, polished floors, and evenly spaced artworks lit from above.

Fig 20: *Flashcrash - a perfume* (2019) by Fabio Lattanzi Antinor (at NMG)

Fig 21: *The Value of Art* (2010) by Christa Sommerer + Laurent Mignonneau (at NMG)

Fig 22: *Animal Spirits* (2014) by Daniel McKewen (at NMG)



The curators took a greater interest in the graphic design process for linear messaging across platforms and engagement points. During the several rounds of discussions with the curators, it was very clear that the visual design had to be extremely sophisticated to match the tone of the show. The interior was designed to mirror a luxurious storefront. The curators wanted me to showcase the notion of traditional values and the effects of modern technology on it. During the research, I found ‘value’ for each individual was subjective. Some people found value in everyday objects whereas others saw value in luxury products (where the currency is the medium of exchange). There is a metaphorical layering in the conception of value and currency where the value is placed above the notion of currency. The process of layering became a key asset for the identity system which would instigate the design direction that would link a variety of assets including environmental graphics, print communication, and digital assets. One of the key research methods used was - Artifact analysis, which is a systematic examination of the material, aesthetic, and interactive qualities of objects. Before defining a visual identity for an exhibition, it is necessary to study the artworks in detail to get a sensibility for the design direction.

Fig 23: *Bitsoil POPup Tax and Hack Campaign* (2018) by LarbitsSisters (at NMG)

Fig 24: *Untitled* (2013) by Byron Peters (at NMG)

Fig 25: *Out of the Abyss* (2016) by Jonathan Monaghan (at NMG)

CURRENCY

MARCH - MAY 2020

A dynamic design approach is established around a serif typeface inspired by the mid-century modern aesthetics involving a rich colour palette of matte black over matte gold to form layers. This dynamic visual identity (animation) acts as an underlay which transforms a clear text to a blurred text (with almost 30 percent transparency) in a few seconds to reveal another text layer over it. This motion is looped and denotes the effects of modern-day surveillance technology on the notion of value. The design showcases an unusual and contrasting set of extended and condensed characters, moments of irregularity, gradation and the continuity from a shared mono-linear line weight, limited colour palette and a concept rooted in layers of affecting value. Both as static and in motion, the graphics have an individual, distinctive and expressive quality with a unique use of space, colour, and form. The visual language of the show is built on the perception, cognition, and anticipation which is driven by Lupton's Emotion and Sensation driven storytelling tools. This helps in visually depicting the metaphorical layer of value and currency with luxury under the surveillance technology.

One of the biggest challenges was to engage visitors in a white-box gallery setting. Usually, such exhibitions are overwhelming and visitors are afraid to move freely inside the space. The curators intended to make people feel welcomed in a luxurious yet approachable environment.

Fig 26: 'Currency' graphic identity created for NMG (2020)

Fig 27 (right page): Collage depicting dynamic identity design

Fig 28 (right page): Collage of Artist last name with their artworks

Fig 29 (right page): Proposed wall labels stickers

CURRENCY

NEW MEDIA GALLERY

CURRENCY

MARCH - MAY 2020

NEW MEDIA GALLERY

MONAGHAN

OUT OF THE ABYSS. 2016

Fabio Lattanzi Antinori, Italy

Flashcrash, a perfume

Smell is a language that has the power to reflect socio-political issues. On 6 May, 2010, the largest flashcrash to date, hit the U.S. financial market, burning through a trillion dollars in 36 minutes then rebounding. It has been described as one of the most turbulent periods in the history of financial markets.

Housed under a glass dome is a scent created by the artist that reflects this 36 minute event. The scent was created by analysing data from the flashcrash through a gas chromatography process. GC is used extensively in forensic science to detect criminal evidence; separating, analysing, quantifying and identifying volatile components of any mixture. Here the ethereal quality of the scent echoes the volatile spikes and financial anomalies of May 6, 2010.

CURRENCY

NEW MEDIA GALLERY

CURRENCY

MARCH - MAY 2020

NEW MEDIA GALLERY

MONAGHAN

OUT OF THE ABYSS. 2016

Christa Sommerer, Austria
Laurent Mignonneau, France

The Value of Art (Cat) The Value of Art (Lady)

The Value of Art links the economy and value of art with the economy and value of attention. It is an interactive work, that requires involvement from the viewer to increase it's value.

Two historic paintings; a traditional cat portrait and the portrait of a lady have been outfitted with technology that tracks the number and length of time a viewer looks at each painting. Every 10 seconds from a viewer adds one euro to the value of the painting. The ever-increasing value is then printed out on a scrolling paper receipt.

Lupton’s principle of Action driven storytelling helped in defining ways to incorporate luxury cues in print and spatial setting for the show. One of the first collaterals design was a *proposed* invitation postcard. The front side had the blurred title in matte gold ink with the dates of the exhibition embossed over it with matte black on an extra white, 8pt silk cover paper. The backside had general information about the show and space to write. Due to the sophisticated design of the postcard, and as a first point of contact from the gallery, the visitors would feel honoured and excited for the show. One of the other collaterals using similar paper and print technique was the main exhibition brochure. When the visitors entered the space they could pick a square tri-fold brochure with detailed information about the show and the works. To maintain the luxurious feel, I added gold foiling to the artist’s names mentioned inside. Visitors felt like they were taking a part of the exhibition back with them. The identity font was used to cut out the artist’s last names in gold metal (3in thick and 8in high) which was placed right above their artworks (*proposed treatment*). This was to build on the luxury storefront concept while still maintaining the overarching theme of a traditional white-box gallery. The glass facade was designed to mirror a window signage of a luxury store. The main wall text panel title was matte gold vinyl to keep the feel consistent. The screens around the gallery would play the animation of the artwork title above the blurring artist names.

Fig 30 - 33 (right page): 7”by 7” tri-fold brochure for NMG (2020)



CURRENCY

... desire is present wherever something flows and runs, carrying along with it interested subjects — but also drunken or slumbering subjects ...

- Gilles Deleuze

Eight artists from around the world consider the multiple narratives and symbolic systems that have accumulated around contemporary notions of currency in a rapidly changing world of technology. Six works reflect the seductive, volatile and sometimes problematic relationships that develop between currency & value.

Currency represents a symbolic system of exchange (such as shells, tokens, tulips or money) as well as a way of being current in the world. If something 'has currency' it has become relevant in some way, and has acquired a certain consensus of value in society. The Latin root speaks to a sense of flowing from one place to another; for example, two currents of water combining and moving forward in a stream 'become current'. Currency is also commonly understood as something circulated; a medium of exchange. Currencies normally exist within strict boundaries and it is these boundaries that denote value. But, as the works in this exhibition suggest, value and boundaries can change quickly; become contradictory and ephemeral, incorporating liminal notions of place or time.

The artists in the exhibition measure, interpret and critique a world dictated by currency. The works describe a structure or system that has an all-encompassing reach. The notes of a luxury fragrance reflects the volatile spikes of the biggest financial crash in history; a social media campaign directs bots to produce crypto currency that tries to restore fair balance in data exchange; a surveillance technology measures the currency of human attention in art ; an ancient, apocalyptic narrative is used to reflect modern anxieties around currency; a piece of ephemeral real estate is purchased with social media currency; a psychological phenomenon that affects the buying & selling of securities is rendered monstrous. Together, these work offer a fascinating glimpse into the perceptions and meanings of currency in the early 21st century.

Artists and Works

Christa Sommerer + Laurent Mignonneau, Austria + France
The Value of Art (Cat) 2010 The Value of Art (Lady), 2010

Byron Peters, Canada
Untitled, 2013

Jonathan Monaghan, USA
Out of the Abyss, 2018

LarbitsSisters, Belgium
Bitsoil POPup Tax and Hack Campaign, 2018

Daniel McKewen, Australia
Animal Spirits, 2010

Fabio Lattanzi Antinori, Italy
Flashcrash, a perfume, 2017

Thanks

The Artists | Galerie Charlot, Paris | bitforms, New York | McaM, Shenzhen | Devansh Parikh

There were a few shifts in the interaction and design approach. These shifts were a radical departure from what the gallery had originally intended. With the current situation related to COVID-19 and it's safety protocol, the gallery had to halt it's operation immediately after the opening weekend but they are planning to re-open when possible and extend the show till fall.

Fig 34 (left page): Exhibition vinyl text



Fig 35 (top): Visitors engaging with artworks,
image credits: NMG

Fig 36 (bottom): Proposed blind embossing

Fig 37 - 40 (right page): Proposed -
Tote bag,
Stickers,
Pin-up badges,
Take away card with black blind emboss
mock



Conclusion

This study has discussed how principles of narrative methodology and storytelling in an art institution can facilitate to a holistic embodied experience for the exhibition visitors. The thesis has argued that graphic design has an important role in mediating communication and visitor experience throughout the physical gallery space. The thesis has made a range of claims regarding the significance of a collaborative working framework between the artists, curators, designers and marketing professionals and their contribution to exhibition-making. This thesis also builds a case where designer's role in the exhibition design process is limited to implementation rather than planning and conceptualisation, arguably where design could have a beneficial influence. Graphic design has an important role in framing visitor's perceptions of exhibitions while engaging and encouraging people to visit.

This study illustrates the rich understanding that may emerge when narrative inquiry approaches are employed to investigate questions in the field of visitor engagement. Modern institutions emphasises on design for the visitor experience and to attract visitors from all ages and cultural backgrounds. Visual identity can be utilitarian but it can also play a bigger role in experientially translating the true meaning of the exhibition to audiences. The narrative methodology adopted for this study provides a deeper understanding of the exhibition experience and highlights the unique qualities of visitor engagement with museum institutions.

Storytelling acts as an essential component of narrative methodology to develop visual narratives. Lupton illustrates creative storytelling and makes the invisible pattern visible. Her principles help to uncover the layers of narrative to design embodied experiences. The tools help in designing experiential cues by asking questions about evoking emotions, engaging senses, building participation, and defining visual journeys to amplify the storytelling potential of an exhibition. This approach also provides a unique opportunity to explore the exhibition visitor engagement relationships over time and to place a museum visiting in the context of individuals' lives. Insights gained from the study's narrative research design reveal important features of museum experiences that may facilitate greater retention of visitors while also reaching out to new audiences.

The two exhibitions presented in this thesis are selective, offering only a partial view of the diversity of exhibition graphics. They do, however, begin to unfold some of the various project characteristics and processes through which graphic solutions emerge and within which graphics function in very different ways. "The variety of these roles and possibilities is to be acknowledged in a field where creative processes are often closed down by overly hierarchical and structured exhibition development practices" (Jona Piehl 2012, 264). Stories, audiences and engagement methods will vary greatly, and it is possible that a sophisticated narrative generated to actively draw the visitor might be developed by a curatorial team and then set out in space with minimal detailing by the designer; as seen

in the case study of Currency. On the other hand, the Cartooney exhibition posed an open invitation to the graphics to take a more active part in the storytelling while engaging with the visitors. The greater the awareness of the range of possible positions and contributions of a graphic language, the more confidently these can be played out, which in turn will make the interpretive use of experiential graphics more focused.

Museums and galleries are continuing to acknowledge the great potential of design to generate new content and enhance the interpretive scope of exhibitions. As public spaces, museums and galleries have the chance to offer up interesting and stimulating experiences to a range of visitors; subtle, context- and content-driven displays and interpretive environments that are informative as well as uplifting and emotive. Such design projects can help define and open up new possibilities and collaborations between various professionals to create more engaging experiences.

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Appendix

Testimonial from Sarah and Gordan, Directors and Curators at New Media Gallery, New Westminster, BC. (on P53).

NEW MEDIA GALLERY

**GRAPHIC DESIGN PRACTICUM - Devansh Parikh, (MA Design), ECUAD
2019-2020**

Introduction

In March, 2019 MA student Devansh Parikh contacted New Media Gallery and proactively offered his services in exchange for experience. We receive a great number of requests and his request stood out. After an interview, we agreed to offer him a practicum doing some graphic design for our next exhibition. After reviewing his design proposal we made the decision to give him responsibility for the entire graphic design portfolio of our international exhibition *Cartooney*. This was a calculated risk, given that we were not familiar with his work habits.

Devansh worked on two exhibitions at New Media Gallery: *Cartooney* and *Currency*. This paper discusses *Cartooney* as a better example of his capabilities, because he had more time. *Currency* closed after two days due to the Covid Virus and will likely not re-open until Autumn 2020. Both exhibitions featured significant, award-winning international artists. The *Cartooney* graphics have now gone out around the world and we have had very positive feedback from the artists. We believe the practical experience Devansh gained completing these projects was invaluable.

Devansh was asked to work within strict time constraints and adhere to a budget. He was asked to demonstrate a firm grasp of our curatorial statement, selected artists and works before seeing the exhibition installed, and to respond to the exhibition design developed at NMG. He worked directly with NMG Directors who gave him the brief. He was required to be in constant contact with us and the Trades, manage numerous schedules (installation, printing, production, meetings, his own class requirements) as well as amend schedules and the design along the way. He produced production-ready design for vinyl wall texts, label copy, window text, a large poster, social media graphics, digital screen graphics and GIFS. Throughout the process, and working with large amounts of information and change orders, Devansh was unfailingly courteous, professional, very clear, measured and organized in his approach: an absolute pleasure to work with. The work he produced for *Cartooney* was professional, very creative, answered the brief and the budget, and the results were of a very high standard. His contributions as a graphic designer affected how visitors approached, perceived and were attracted to the exhibition. The results were quirky, fun and sophisticated. A good example of how Devansh captured nuance and exhibition meaning is exemplified in his poster. This oversize sheet of displaced scale was immediately read as cartoon-like, making even very sophisticated visitors smile and feel the power of childhood cartoons again. We had excellent feedback on the graphic design and were pleased with how well he responded to the meaning of the exhibition itself through his designs. The attendance for *Cartooney* was about 8000 which is in line with other exhibitions. A further 3-4000 likely experienced his design through Social Media and the Digital Boards at Anvil.

Graphic Design is like a soundtrack to a film; it should help to set the overall mood and tone of an exhibition. Graphic Design for Contemporary Art Exhibitions can be perceived as risky. In the contemporary art world there are ways of doing things and if conventions are broken...it must be for a reason. Because of this graphics for contemporary art galleries can be overly conventional. At NMG we think graphic design should break a few boundaries. But there are some things graphic design should and shouldn't do: it must support the exhibiting artists without competing. The designer must always keep the works in mind ; never using them as backdrop to the design or changing them at a whim or giving a false impression. For public galleries with broad audiences like ours, the design must be legible and connect with various audiences, and age groups. Graphic design ties the physical and online elements of the exhibition together; a thread that gives visual cohesion. Design has the potential to attract audiences to an exhibition and communicate something important about the artists, their works, the gallery and the exhibition itself. Done well graphic design can captivate, spark interest and reveal something important. But if a designer misses the point, graphics have the power to mislead and obscure. At their most effective, graphics have the power to draw an audience in and allow them to feel or understand something about the exhibition before they arrive...and afterwards, to recall in a memorable way.

Sarah Joyce (Director-Curator) + Gordon Duggan (Executive Director)
New Media Gallery
newmediagallery.ca

