



**UNIVERSITY MUSEUM
OF CONTEMPORARY ART**
University of Massachusetts Amherst

NEWS RELEASE

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THE ART OF EXHIBITION DISPLAY

Roundtable, Careers in Art and Art History

March 29, 2011

4:30pm; Cape Cod Lounge, Student Union Building

A recent article in the *New York Times*, entitled “*Invisible Hand in MoMA Shows*”, describes the role of the museum exhibition designer as a job “that often goes unsung in the museum world and, particularly if done well, unnoticed by the public.... serving as a kind of mediator between the visionary (the grand dreams of curators and artists about how a show could look) and the practical (how the show will fit within walls, some of them load bearing).”

The role of exhibition design and its complexities has expanded greatly in the museum world within recent years. *MoMA* chief curator Klaus Bisenbach calls the exhibition designer’s role one of “double translation”, in which he translates a curator’s sometimes abstract vision of how to present the artworks to the public into sheetrock and spotlights. “The goal is something that comes together in a design as if there was no other way to do it, as if there was no other alternative,” Bisenbach said.

Innovative exhibition design involves collaboration among the curatorial, education, and installation staff, underscoring their individual roles and their efforts as a team. The concept and organization of an exhibition can also take a more theoretical approach. For example, the Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal's book *Looking In: The Art Of Viewing* (2001) has helped change the way we look at art exhibitions. In her chapter "On Grouping," Bal discusses how the juxtaposition of artworks in a museum can create meanings and connotations which never would have existed otherwise. This approach opens up unusual perspectives, offering new readings of the exhibited works, enabling them to be seen in fresh and often profound ways.

The Roundtable will raise questions about the practice of exhibition design and the methods used to make viewers think critically about the objects on display. Panelists will be encouraged to discuss the influence of elements as lighting, layout, labeling, and wall color on the impact of an exhibition, and the process of making such choices. Relating these influences to the conceptual and theoretical interests of the museum professionals involved, this discussion will broach current issues in exhibition design.

The Art of Exhibition Display is of even greater significance today in light of discussions surrounding *Boston MFA's* new Art of the Americas wing, which uses groupings of objects to speak of trade and cultural interchange between the old and new worlds. Other museums, too, such as *The Menil Collection* in Houston, have an institutional philosophy that aims to allow its art objects to speak for themselves, with limited use of labels and conservative aesthetics in their exhibition display. Pairings and juxtapositions can generate visual and intellectual dialogues, expanding possible connections beyond any single concept.

Panelists include:

Tomomi Itakura, Designer in the Exhibitions Department at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. She has designed and overseen over a hundred object installations, galleries, and exhibitions including *Scaasi: American Couturier*, *A "New and Native" Beauty: The Art and Craft of Greene and Greene*, and *Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum*. One of her most recent projects was the installation of the *New Art of the Americas Wing* at the MFA. She also consults for private collections.

Veronica Jackson, Principal and Senior Designer at The Jackson Design Group, is an independent interpretive exhibit design firm. Veronica has worked for and consulted with several museums within the Smithsonian Institution's network in Washington D. C. She is consulting with the UMass W.E.B. Du Bois Center and Homestead Site.

Dennis Kois, Director of the De Cordova Museum, Lincoln, MA. Was Chief Designer for the Freer and Sackler Galleries at the Smithsonian; taught exhibition design to graduate students in the Museum Studies graduate program at George Washington University; and worked on the newly installed Greek and Roman galleries during his tenure at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY.

Joseph Krupczynski, moderator of the panel, is a professor in the UMass Architecture + Design Program. He is an interior and architectural designer, artist and educator. He is the principal of Joseph Krupczynski / studio design projects, an interdisciplinary design studio focusing on the links between design, culture and art through public and private design commissions, installations, activism and research.

Museum Hours: Tuesday – Friday, 11:00 AM – 4:30 PM, Saturday/Sunday 2 – 5 PM
 Closed Mondays, holidays, and during spring break, March 12-21

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