

ART & MUSEUM



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Bringing art collections to life and attracting new audiences

As cultural and exhibition design specialists, most of the work we do is about working with permanent collections within specially-designed spaces, or else creating new dramas for one-off exhibitions. These are usually designed as an experience, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, with visitors led on a carefully-choreographed linear circuit through the works.

It's also possible to cast the net wider and bring new audiences into your space by expanding this vision. Recently, we have been delighted to have worked with some inspired clients, who've taken a fresh approach to their spaces and found new ways to look at their art collections. These exhibitions or installations run through unusual spaces, either as a trail or via broken-up points of focus, creating an opportunity to resonate in a new and different way with their surroundings, an approach that also taps into the idea that people now gather experiences and share on platforms like Instagram.

Our exhibition 'House of Portraits' for the National Trust, for example, created a series of installations through Powis Castle, leading to a larger space centred around a new acquisition: a miniature of Edward Herbert by Isaac Oliver. This became a way in which a new focus could be created for the current collection, making you look again at the exquisite paintings and sculptures there, as well as adding new works within the installations. We used colour and texture (a particularly intense blue that worked as a spotlight onto the works), as well as a concept around framing. Visitors could enjoy the original room itself but also clearly understand the insertion.

The Wallace Collection in London is another example of a visionary gallery, who recently collaborated with footwear design legend Manolo Blahnik to create a fascinating fusion of fashion alongside the art that inspired it.



Manolo Blahnik at the Wallace Collection



Powis Castle



The angle of display of each shoe was also carefully considered



Pippa Nissen

We were lucky enough to be tasked with realising the project and loved the unusual synergy of high-fashion shoes with the Wallace's decorative lusciousness. The details and materials within the Wallace - full of shapes, colours, textures - all seem to tell stories, and there was something really compelling about this approach, meaning people are looking at a space they might already know and love, but in a completely different way. Like the concept of surrealism, it was about putting two things next to each other and renewing the meaning of each.

Our task at the Wallace Collection was to create something that showed off the shoes and kept them safe, but also put them in the right position – i.e. high enough, in the light, next to a particular detail. The answer was a series of bespoke glass bell jars, at varying heights. The material the structure was made of - industrial, consistent - runs through the whole collection without changing and becomes a cue for the visitor to search for in each room and look at as part of a sequence. With this pared-back solution, the beautifully-crafted shoes seemed to come alive and have a new and fresh reading.

Flexibility was something we needed to bring in from the beginning for this project. We were concerned that the resonances of the shoes themselves, when in the room, might read differently from the visualisations we had prepared. Just like in a fashion show - and part of a vision by Manolo Blahnik himself – we wanted to keep the sequencing of the shoes open until the last minute, to enable high-paced refinement just before opening. For this, we developed a simple system of layers that meant the top part of the bell jar could be adapted right up to the last minute.

We were also keen to create something that could imply movement within the display – almost as if someone was sweeping through the museum. The shoes, too, took on another reading when displayed in such a three-dimensional way. As a visitor, the tilted display angle enabled the shoe to be seen from above, whilst the way they then sat together created a three-dimensional energy. The domes became like mini-theatre sets, each one a composition, inserted into a story that runs through a place that already has its own strong character. The interplay of art, craft, and fashion was both implied and actual. The collection had long been a direct inspiration for the designer, a regular visitor there for many decades, with that creative and inspirational relationship now given new and real form.

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