



MCA Store exterior, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (1)

Photo: Peter McCullough

Engaging & Provoking Action

Robert Urquhart looks at innovative new solutions for wayfinding in exhibition design.

The breaking of the 'fourth wall' (the theatrical term for the traditional stage boundary between audience and performer) is something that could arguably be applied to current thinking and practice in exhibition design.

Combining architectural, theatre and exhibition disciplines, Nissen Richards Studio recently completed work on the 100 year anniversary exhibition of the birth of one of the fathers of computing, the genius Alan Turing, at the Science Museum in London (until July 2013). Co-founder Pippa Nissen combines an understanding of theatre with design thinking. "Right from the beginning the whole team was interested in a theatrical approach to the exhibition; acknowledging the history behind the objects without being a pastiche," she explains.

Nissen adds: "It was a very moving exhibition to work on, as it demonstrated what an extraordinary life and legacy Turing had. We felt that we needed to respect the complexities of the topics that were being talked about by the curators, but also add a layer of interpretation to enable people to engage in an emotional way."

With the help of lighting designer Zerlina Hughes of Studio ZNA, the whole space was anchored towards a photo of Turing relaxing



James Goggin

Photo: Hoon Kim

(1) MCA Store exterior, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Photo by Peter McCullough. (2) Monika Sosnowska, The Fire Escape, 2012, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Commission, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Gisela Caplan, Cologne, Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago, 2012. (3) Martin Creed, Installation view, Martin Creed Plays Chicago, MCA Chicago, 2012. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

Monika Sosnowska, The Fire Escape, 2012 (2)

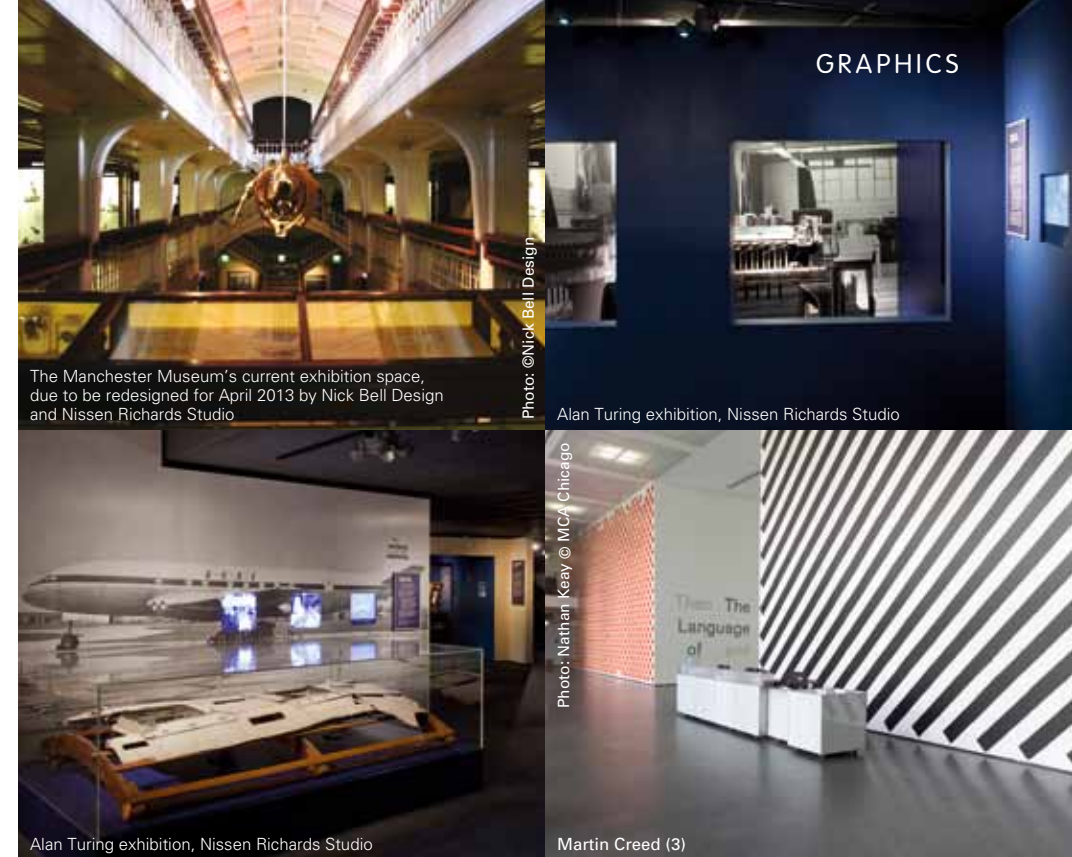
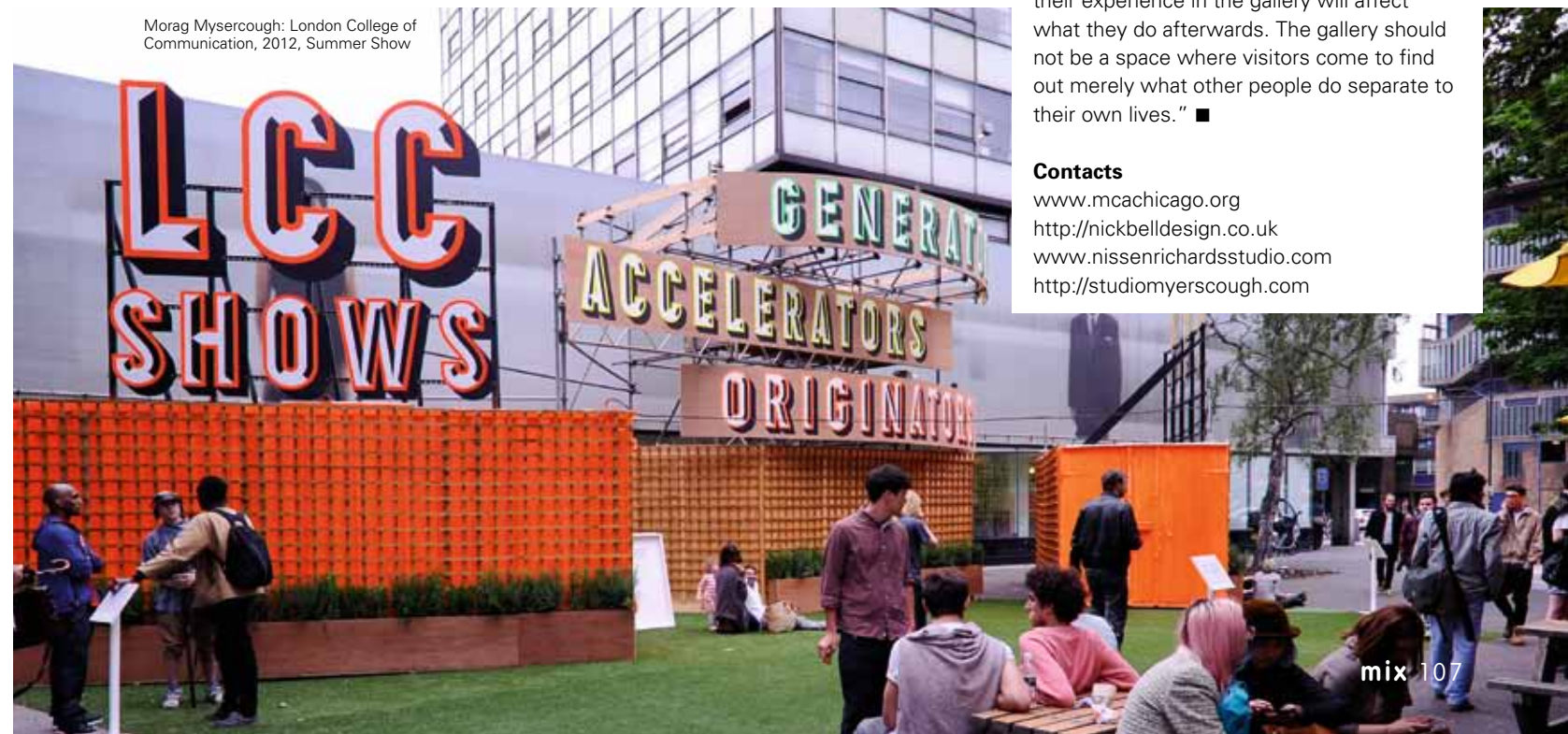
in his mother's garden. "It has different readings, it is like a road, or a room, or a stage in the theatre," explains Nissen.

James Goggin, director of design, publishing, and new media at Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, USA, is launching a new identity for the museum this Autumn, although he has in fact been easing in the new identity since he took on the position two years ago. Believing that design is in the fabric of everything the museum is and does, Goggin looks to design to embrace art and architecture.

"For me the ideal signage is not a piece of graphic design but artworks out on the plaza," explains Goggin. "That's the kind of signage that tells people we are a museum of contemporary art," he adds. Goggin also believes in fluid evolution of graphics, changing with the curators and artists that use the space. He says: "The wayfinding is really going hand in hand with a fairly loose approach to the identity for the museum itself. The idea is that each exhibition will maintain its own identity and for me the exhibition graphics are part of the overall wayfinding."

Back in the UK, Morag Myerscough of Studio Myerscough created the London College of Communication Summer Show exhibition design this year. She shares Goggin's ideas about bringing the show to the people: "It's about interaction, discovery and communication," she says. "Elephant and Castle [the area of London where London College of Communication is based] is a very inward facing area, using underpasses to move from one place to another, people move within internal spaces, there are not many outward facing buildings." She continues: "And although there was a whole wealth of creativity, the students were mostly behind closed doors. So bringing the students out into the streets made the local community aware of the

Morag Myerscough: London College of Communication, 2012, Summer Show



The Manchester Museum's current exhibition space, due to be redesigned for April 2013 by Nick Bell Design and Nissen Richards Studio

Alan Turing exhibition, Nissen Richards Studio

Alan Turing exhibition, Nissen Richards Studio

Martin Creed (3)

as a 'live organisation' where the collection is being actively used by a wide range of different people," explains Bell. He asks: "How do we communicate the purpose of the museum (why it hoards so many objects) without appearing to be worthy or promoting the survival of museums as institutions over and above the benefits their resources bring to the public? The key I suspect is presenting and interpreting all content in a way that makes its relevance to people's own lives completely clear; that it engages and provokes action."

students and the students aware of their surroundings and the people."

Myerscough's trademark fun, oversized circus billboard graphics livened up an otherwise visually impoverished part of London. The studio is also currently focusing on the permanent exhibition space for the new Design Museum in Kensington, West London and promises to be equally eye catching and enticing.

Nick Bell Design is currently working on a new permanent exhibition space at The Manchester Museum, UK, due to open in April 2013. Lead consultants for the project is Nissen Richards Studio, which is working on the 3D exhibition space, while Nick Bell will work on all 2D design and will help devise the strategy and art direct the digital interactive media.

"The gallery must represent the museum

Engaging and provoking action is something that Nissen, Goggin, Myerscough and Bell all share as a common goal. Bell sums up current thinking on exhibition design succinctly when he states: "Our challenge is for the design interpretation to help the visitor become the researcher; how their experience in the gallery will affect what they do afterwards. The gallery should not be a space where visitors come to find out merely what other people do separate to their own lives." ■

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