

The Visitor Centered Museum: Spatial Narratives and Experiential Design in Contemporary Practice

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Abstract

Museums are increasingly evolving from static repositories of objects to dynamic spaces of engagement, interpretation, and co-creation of knowledge. This paper examines the relationship between museum architecture, spatial narrative, and exhibit design as active mediators of cultural meaning and visitor experience. Drawing upon contemporary theories of spatial semiotics, participatory museology, and human-centered design, the study explores how built environments and exhibition layouts shape sensory interaction, cognitive interpretation, and emotional resonance in museum settings. Using case studies from the Gulf region and international exemplars, the research evaluates design strategies that integrate architectural form, digital media, lighting, and material texture to produce multisensory encounters with heritage objects. Particular attention is given to how design can foster inclusivity, engage diverse audiences, and support decolonial storytelling practices through contextual reinterpretation of collections. The paper proposes a conceptual framework for "architectural storytelling" in museums with an approach that situates exhibition design as both a spatial and narrative construct. This framework emphasizes adaptability, sustainability, and intentionality in the design of galleries, circulation pathways, visibility hierarchies, and interpretive media. The findings contribute to emerging dialogues on the future of museum space, advocating for design philosophies that move beyond aesthetic display toward experiences that are immersive, ethically grounded, and culturally responsive.

Keywords

Visitor experience, Spatial narrative, Museum architecture, Exhibition design, Inclusive interpretation.