

**MAKING SPACE: NEW AESTHETICS IN THE MASTERWORKS GALLERY AT THE
UBC MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(Anthropology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

March 2018

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Abstract

In the twenty-first century, museums are becoming increasingly interested in the immaterial—the affective and sensorial—qualities of exhibition spaces like sound, light, and movement. These expanding aesthetic qualities or ‘atmospheres’ offer new ways of communicating narratives, meaning, and value in the exhibition context. They can therefore be mobilized to honour Indigenous ways of presenting information, like storytelling, which also enriches audience experience. In effect, they have the potential to become atmospheres of reconciliation which foster new intercultural understanding, dialogue, and healing. This thesis aims to illuminate the relationship between space, objects, and people in museum exhibits and the processes that collaborative teams embark upon to curate and shape exhibition content, narratives, and the messages they communicate. I explore the system of staged arrangement of atmospheric components—light, colour, materiality, new media—in museum settings by considering the newly constructed Masterworks Gallery and its inaugural exhibit, *In a Different Light: Reflecting on Northwest Coast Art*, at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. The significance of MOA’s twofold project—the design of a new gallery and the development of its first exhibit—is its potential for communicating institutional philosophies, priorities, and future goals in concrete form.

My research will contribute to the fields of museology and design studies by illuminating how space and the sensorial might come together to create atmospheres of reconciliation using technology and new media not only as a *product* but also as a *process*. It will show how making space for multiple perspectives, through culturally diverse ways of remembering, communicating, researching, and learning, works toward advancing a decolonized methodology

by challenging outdated museum prescripts and developing a new curatorial model. By claiming authority and space within the museum, Indigenous storytellers reclaim their right to self-definition and demonstrate ownership and authority over their own material and intangible cultures. By recalibrating sensory inputs in exhibits, like touch and voice, museums are building new kinds of connections, fostering understanding, and ultimately promoting reconciliation with Indigenous people through these new forms of aesthetic action.

Lay Summary

Museums are highly regarded institutions in Western culture. They convey meaning to the broader public through the exhibition of objects and stories. Those objects and stories are displayed in intentionally designed spaces that also communicate meaning and value. This thesis explores the process one museum, the Museum of Anthropology, undertook to shape a space that could include multiple perspectives and different ways of looking at First Nations art. To do this, the curators collaborated with a diverse team: a designer, architect, and 30 Indigenous artists, curators, knowledge-keepers, and community members. By incorporating multisensory elements, like touch and voice, the team worked to create an atmosphere of intimacy where visitors could connect to historical Indigenous art by listening to contemporary Indigenous voices. This multivocal, multisensory approach challenges the authority of the museum by prioritizing Indigenous ways of knowing, teaching, and learning and helps us to rethink how and what *space* communicates.

Preface

This thesis is an original intellectual product of the author. The research procedures of this study were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects on June 29, 2017 by The University of British Columbia Office of Research Services, Behavioural Research Ethics Board, and received a certificate of approval for minimal risk, certificate number H17-00797. Funding for this project was awarded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) through the SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship–Master’s Award (award #6566).

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List of Abbreviations

BC	British Columbia
Masterworks Gallery	The Gallery of Northwest Coast Masterworks
MOA	Museum of Anthropology
UBC	University of British Columbia

Acknowledgements

This project was funded through Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and I wish to express my gratefulness for the opportunity to contribute to the fields of museum and design research. I also extend thanks all my participants at MOA and beyond for giving me their time and for helping me to see things in a different light.

I offer my enduring gratitude to the faculty, staff, and my fellow students at UBC, and my colleagues, students, and Dean, Carolyn Robertson, at the Wilson School of Design who have inspired me to continue my work in the intersection between design and anthropology. I owe particular thanks to Dr. Nicola Levell, whose penetrating questions taught me to question more deeply. Her depth of knowledge, kind nature, dedication to, and genuine interest in students has made her my mentor. I also would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Kramer whose frank and decisive comments helped to focus this project more succinctly. I also want to thank Naomi Wittes Reichstein for her energy and dedication to helping me to become a better writer.

Special thanks are owed to my mother, Iris Balcombe, who has supported me throughout my years of education, and to my children, Ray and Jane Goodman, with whom I hope to do the same. Lastly and importantly, my husband and best friend Mark Goodman who deserves a very special place in this list of acknowledgements. His support (emotional, administrative, and financial) has allowed me to pursue an unconventional life, which I acknowledge is both a privilege and a responsibility. Thank you for always being so proud.

Dedication

This is dedicated to my dad, Gary J. Balcombe, for his infectious love of learning and teaching.

Introduction

On Aboriginal Day, June 21, 2017, the internationally recognized Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, located on the ancestral and unceded territory of the hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ speaking Musqueam people, inaugurated the Masterworks Gallery, a new exhibition space.¹ The debut exhibit, *In a Different Light: Reflecting on Northwest Coast Art*, sets out to engage visitors in an innovative way by combining historical and neo-traditional First Nations carvings and weavings with an expanded aesthetic that includes Indigenous voices.

Museum exhibitions generally privilege objects. Possessing a certain kind of potency, objects can remind us of the past, elicit emotion, tell a story, foster empathy, make connections, or spark imagination (Dudley 2013, 4). The ‘material turn’ in anthropology ignited new (theoretical) interest in objects, recognizing that they have both agency and affective potential (Bennett 2010; Coole and Frost 2010; Dudley 2013; Howes 2003, 2005; Latour 2007; Conn 2010). This return to material culture has the potential to reinstate museums as important sites for research and inquiry (Bjerregaard 2015) and to open up new opportunities for object-based exhibitions and visitor experiences. Although recent literature has emphasized the power of objects to create experiences, Peter Bjerregaard (2015, 74), a museum anthropologist, advocates for going beyond the material object itself and suggests that “the root of museum experience is atmosphere—the in-betweenness of objects and subjects.” Atmosphere, in this case, departs from the scientific characterization of the layer of gases that surrounds us. Rather, the term forms a

¹ The public reception was held on June 22, 2017, with the exhibit scheduled to run until spring 2019.

part of an aesthetic discourse that describes the intangible: the character or ‘feel’ of an event, place, or space. Philosopher Gernot Böhme (1993) concedes that defining the term ‘atmosphere’ is difficult as it is by nature elusive, intangible, and unmeasurable and therefore can only be described conceptually. The concept of atmosphere is also explored in architectural theory as it relates to the overall impression a building makes on visitors. Architects Peter Zumthor (2006) and Juhani Pallasmaa (2012) attempt to qualify the term atmosphere and focus on materiality and sensorial experience. To adequately evaluate atmospheric aesthetics and its affects, it is necessary to interrogate it from an interdisciplinary perspective, drawing on theoretical frameworks from philosophy, architecture, museology, anthropology, and critical Indigenous studies.

Dylan Robinson, Stó:lo scholar, and Keavy Martin, professor of English and Film Studies, (2016) explore the role and power of aesthetics and atmosphere in addressing reconciliation and anti-colonial activism in their book *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action In and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. The editors, Robinson and Martin, and contributors call for greater inquiry into new forms of aesthetic action, which include the sensory. Expanding aesthetic experiences in public spaces such as museums has the potential not only to enrich audience experiences but also to honour Indigenous ways of presenting information, like storytelling in its many forms: song, dance, oral stories, and symbolic representations (Hare 2017). By attending to the immaterial aspects of exhibitions through an expanded aesthetic, museums are shaping what might be considered atmospheres of reconciliation.

Bjerregaard (2015, 75) explains that the process of curation (the selection and rejection of objects) and design (the intentional shaping, ordering, and arranging of the space) work together

to create an atmosphere; stating, “[t]he curator selects and installs works that for one or the other reason are capable of generating something (an idea, a concept, a reality) that transcends the individual works.” Anthropologist and curator Henrietta Lidchi (2013, 168) similarly supports this idea of generating multilayered messaging through selection or exclusion:

[E]xhibitions are discrete events which articulate objects, texts, visual representations, reconstructions and sounds to create an intricate and bounded representational system. It is therefore an exceedingly appropriate context for exploring the poetics of exhibiting: the practice of producing meaning through the internal ordering and conjugation of the separate but related components of an exhibition.

Lidchi and Bjerregaard both point out that the processes of curation and design is deliberate and creative and work together to create meaning beyond the discrete objects themselves.

From this perspective, the objects in *In a Different Light* offer complex layers of meaning as they are represented by the co-curators and First Nations collaborators as a thoughtfully crafted narrative linking ancestral art with contemporary voices within a space designed to communicate value: historic and continued cultural relevance as well as reifying social and cultural capital for a broader public (Bourdieu 1977). While the objects themselves have agency to stimulate audience reactions, the role of atmosphere in the transmission and reception of these experiences is often underestimated (Bjerregaard 2015).

In this thesis, I explore the complex processes by which curators, designers, and museum staff address this powerful ‘in-betweenness’ of visitor and object (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015; Bjerregaard 2015; Böhme 1993; Böhme and Thibaud 2016) and the tension between the material and immaterial (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015, 31). To do so, I look past the concrete object as the central subject of inquiry and ask: what role do intangibles such as *space* and the *sensorial* play in creating meaning and value? Can the recalibration of

sensory inputs in exhibits build new kinds of connections, foster understanding, and ultimately promote healing?

In this thesis, I preface the established scholarly literature that concentrates on material culture to champion the non-concrete aspects of spatial design and its power to create meaning and value. I explore the system of staged arrangement of atmospheric components in museum settings by considering as a case study *In a Different Light* at MOA, which is well known for its scholarship on and practice of collaborative museology. My research reveals that in contemplating new exhibitions, curators and designers collaborate to conceive an ‘exhibitionary order’² (the meaningful and purposeful arrangement of spatial or environmental elements) and, however unwittingly, the atmosphere. The atmospheric components—lighting, acoustics, colour palette, materials, new media and technology, spatial arrangement, circulation or flow, temperature, didactic information, sensory inputs, and display techniques (including proxemics of objects)—all play a part in producing an environment for encounters between audience and artifacts and for ascribing meaning and value to the intangible aspects of exhibits.³

I begin by outlining the methodology used to address my central questions. I then describe the institutional context of MOA, a leader in progressive museology, by illustrating its history of collaborative practice and the evolution of its interior space. I then provide context for

² Timothy Mitchell uses the term ‘exhibitionary order’ to characterize the systematics of display that in effect reify notions of ‘otherness’ (1989). The ‘exhibitionary complex’ is a concept wherein Tony Bennett in *The Birth of the Museum* (1995) draws parallels between museums and prisons, using a Foucauldian framework, to reveal institutional formation of knowledge and power. Both authors use the term ‘exhibitionary order’ to describe a systematic ordering of objects for public scrutiny, but I use the term to define an intentional or designed approach to display and exhibition without the connotation of a systemic othering characteristic of these writers’ interpretations.

³ While both production and consumption are important parts of the museum experience, I focus primarily on the production of an atmospheric exhibition. Future projects could analyse the significant aspect of visitor reception, reaction, and experience (Krmpotich and Anderson 2005).

In a Different Light by considering the bequest that inspired the exhibit. A description of the gallery's transformation, organization and thematics provides a framework for the higher-level curatorial decisions around expanding aesthetics and the production of atmosphere. I go on to demonstrate how the curatorial team and collaborators achieved a new aesthetic with *In a Different Light* through haptic and auditory approaches. This exploration informs the final section on atmosphere, which addresses how light, colour, and new media contribute to the phenomenological and affective qualities of the space and, ultimately, to the multilayered messaging of the exhibit from multiple perspectives.

Methodology

To address my questions, I conducted archival and library-based research. I also employed traditional methods of anthropological inquiry: participant observation and both structured and semi-structured interviews. My research occurred over three different phases: Phase 1, installation: In mid-June 2017, I engaged in participant observation at MOA where I observed interactions, studied museum processes, and engaged in ongoing conversations with curators, collections management, design team members, the marketing manager, and other museum staff.

Phase 2, exhibition opening: I participated in uncontrolled observation of the exhibit's opening ceremonies and public reception on June 22, 2017. I followed up with a series of semi-structured, individual interviews with the museum director, architect, exhibit curators, the exhibit designer, and museum staff to gain insight into the exhibit's context, process, goals, challenges, and significance. Interviews took place between July 11, 2017 and September 26, 2017, each approximately one hour with some follow-up emails.

Phase 3, review and reflection: Participants were afforded the opportunity to read my report synthesizing our conversations and were asked to redact or clarify anything they felt uncomfortable with prior to publication. Each had one week to review the document and submit clarifications, which I incorporated into the final report.

Institutional context

Collaborative museology

For the past 60 years, according to current director Anthony Shelton, MOA has endeavoured to create collaborative relationships with Indigenous communities, to engage politically with First Nations issues and to further critical scholarship, becoming “one of the towering institutions of Canadian liberal thought and progressive practices” (Shelton and Houtman 2009). This legacy goes back to the institutional philosophies and culture established through its directorial lineage. The first museum, under the directorship of Harry Hawthorn (1947–1974), established this tradition of political engagement (Ames 1999; Clapperton 2010; Shelton and Houtman 2009).

MOA’s construction as a purpose-built museum began under the leadership of Harry and Audrey Hawthorn and in 1976, opened its doors. Some have argued that this was the beginning of a new kind of anthropology museum that paid homage to the formal aesthetics of First Nations cultural expressions and belongings, designating them as ‘fine art’ with minimal textual interpretation (Ames 2014; Clifford 1992). The Hawthorns’ practice of ‘useful’ museum scholarship would continue under their successors Michael Ames (1974–1997 / 2002–2004), Ruth Phillips (1997–2001), and Shelton (2004–present). MOA’s 2014–2015 annual report outlines a vision that rearticulates some of these institutional values moving forward:

The Museum of Anthropology will become one of the world’s principal hubs for exhibition, teaching, and research of international visual, intangible, and performative culture. It will provide a transformative environment for visitors to learn about themselves and others, and to consider contemporary and historical events and issues from multiple perspectives. It will enhance its international profile while working locally, maintaining and strengthening its focus on First Nations peoples of British Columbia as well as diverse cultural communities. It

will embrace interdisciplinarity and champion collaboration. It will provide innovative and imaginative exhibits and programs, and encourage full academic and student participation while promoting UBC's values, commitments, and aspirations. (Museum of Anthropology [MOA] 2014)

From 2006 to 2010, MOA immersed itself in A Partnership of Peoples, a multi-million-dollar renewal project that aimed to exemplify MOA's commitment to collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and innovation. The most significant components of this project were the construction of a 450-square-metre gallery for temporary exhibitions (the Audain Gallery); a conversion of the gallery originally known as the Masterpiece Gallery into the O'Brian Gallery; and an expansion, extensive renovation, and significant reorganization of the Visible Storage area.⁴ The reorganization of Visible Storage into the Multiversity Galleries was informed by the collaborative efforts of source communities and demonstrates the contemporaneity of First Nations groups and their right to self-representation (Kramer 2013). These reimagined spaces not only illustrate MOA's collaborative framework but also support culturally diverse methods of teaching and learning, thus preparing MOA for the 'second age' of museums (Phillips 2005).

MOA's spaces

MOA's original design by renowned Canadian architect Arthur Erickson was inspired not only by the towering totem poles that would come to animate the Great Hall at the museum's heart but also by the elemental shapes and traditional structures of Haida and Kwakwaka'wakw built spaces, notably the post-and-beam structure. The marriage of contemporary forms with traditional First Nations structure, seamlessly integrated with the natural landscape and

⁴ Other amenities were added as well, including a café and a new, enlarged gift shop. Aside from these architectural changes, the museum undertook a large-scale technological expansion that made its digitized collection accessible to outside audiences and was developed in collaboration with a number of First Nations communities (Kramer 2013; Rowley 2013).

celebrated in Canadian discourse, situates MOA as an iconic structure emblematic of national values of past, present, and future. With this come certain expectations from visiting audiences, whose mood and feelings are to some degree calibrated even before they enter.

Architectural theorists Pegah Zamani and John Peponis (2010, 854) explain how museums reimagine their interior spaces through architectural renovation and that in the rearrangements of their collections they reinform our understanding of “different paradigms of museum space.” Over the past 40 years, each substantial architectural production, renovation, and/or expansion has marked a significant stage of transformation for MOA, an opportunity to realign, reaffirm, and recommunicate values and objectives. The conversion of the former lecture theatre into a new state-of-the-art gallery, The Masterworks Gallery, marks a particularly important moment for the museum. Affirming the significance of this project, Shelton explains that it “will reaffirm our commitment to MOA as a living museum, extend our growing school programs, and provide facilities for a major new focus on young people as well as family- and community-based programming” (MOA 2017). In addition to facilitating diverse programming, the new design and infrastructure will allow for innovative temporary exhibitions on a two-year cycle.

Henri Lefebvre (1991) explains that space is not simply a container to be filled but rather a political field that creates, imposes, and defines social structure. He likens the production of space to the construction of values, and in this way connects mental ideas to physical entities. He argues that space is closely related to power and that its production reflects particular ideologies, with the ability to shape our ways of being, without our notice or reflection. While primarily focused on capitalist structures and the urban scale, Lefebvre’s theories on space as a complex

system based on the creation of value and the construction of meaning are also relevant to the production of museum spaces.

MOA's twofold project of the new gallery and its inaugural exhibit is significant in its potential for redefining institutional goals, priorities, and vision in concrete form. The conception, design, and development are rooted in a consultative framework that brings together the perspectives of key stakeholders including museum administrators, curators, exhibit designer, an architect with a longtime relationship with the building, and a diverse representation of First Nations knowledge-keepers and artists. The space produced reflects these different priorities and points of view, tangibly representing MOA's commitment to collaboration and polyvocality.

Over the years, MOA has shifted its attention to different areas of concern both philosophically and architecturally. These projects have changed the relationships among objects, spaces, stories, and people, as evidenced by the types of exhibits and the experiences they have produced at each phase of architectural renewal. The Masterworks Gallery reinvigorates MOA's capacity to deliver innovative technology-enhanced shows; *In a Different Light*, meanwhile, tests some of these capabilities, providing new opportunities to consider how, when, and why to include cutting-edge technological mediations.

The bequest of objects

In October 2016, MOA received an anonymous bequest of over 400 historical and contemporary First Nations artworks.⁵ Aside from its monetary value of reportedly \$7 million,

⁵ Karen Duffek in conversation with author, March 11, 2018.

the collection possesses great historic, academic, and cultural value (Burnham 2016; Windspeaker 2016).⁶ Thought to be one of the largest Northwest Coast First Nations art collections ever to be returned to BC (Burnham 2016), the group includes the work of such well-known artists as Bill Reid (Haida), Charles Edenshaw (Haida), Robert Davidson (Haida), Isabel Rorick (Haida), and Dempsey Bob (Tahltan, Tlingit), among others. The rarity of some of these unique and valuable historical pieces have helped to convey the status of this collection⁷ based on the art market and fields of cultural production (Duffek 1983; Townsend-Gault, Kramer, and Ƙi-ƙe-in 2013; Bourdieu 1993).

Accepting this donation provided the potential for more display opportunities and was the impetus for the construction of the new gallery and the design of an exhibition to present it to the public.⁸ Renovating or adding to Erickson's iconic architecture would prove a challenge.

However, after negotiations among Shelton, UBC president Martha Piper, architect Noel Best of Stantec (a longtime collaborator of Erickson's), and Phyllis Lambert of the Board of Directors for the Arthur Erickson Foundation, an acceptable location was identified: the Michael M. Ames Theatre. The theatre would provide the necessary square area (210 square metres), and its slope would allow systems and infrastructure to be housed under the floor. Modifications of its existing architectural envelope would not be necessary, other than a window installed in the northwest corner and some minor concrete reworking. Renovations to the windowless, interior

⁶ As stipulated, the donor's name, Elspeth McConnell of the Doggone Foundation, could only be revealed posthumously at which time the objects would be donated to UBC. Objects selected for the exhibit were loaned to MOA in the interim. McConnell died on August 12, 2017 and the collection donated in November 2017. The Masterworks Gallery's name will be extended to include hers: the Elspeth McConnell Gallery of Northwest Coast Masterworks.

⁷ Karen Duffek in conversation with author, March 11, 2018.

⁸ Ibid.

space gave the architect greater control over environmental factors (daylighting, artificial lighting, humidity, seismic activity, and acoustics) to give it physical and conceptual distinction from the rest of the museum.⁹

The exhibition: arrangement of objects in space

The curatorial collective, which worked on this project, consisted of Bill McLennan (MOA curator emeritus, Pacific Northwest), Karen Duffek (MOA curator, contemporary visual arts & Pacific Northwest), and Jordan Wilson (Musqueam First Nation, Canada Council of the Arts Curator-in-Residence). While having three curators for a single exhibition at MOA is unusual; the unique situation of the construction of a new gallery, the receipt of a substantial donation, a new exhibit scheduled within a tight timeframe, and the opportunity to mentor Wilson, an emerging Indigenous curator, prompted the decision. Together the three curators represent a diversity of backgrounds, insights, community connections, and expertise. They worked together with diverse participants that included 30 First Nations artists, curators, educators, storytellers, and knowledge-keepers on the project. All three curators agree that working together generated positive debates and discussions while fostering critical reflexivity.

In a Different Light presents approximately 110 historic artifacts¹⁰ in a monochromatic 210-square-metre gallery located off the Crossroads corridor bisecting the museum. The gallery is accessible through large glass doors that segregates it within its own climate-controlled environment from MOA's other spaces. The lowered ceiling, dynamic lighting, subdued palette, cooler temperature, and anechoic surround define it as a singular space that can, by its very

⁹ Noel Best in discussion with the author, July 18, 2017.

¹⁰ A number of these artifacts are outside the gallery in the adjacent corridor.

nature, influence visitor behaviour and attitudes. The intimate atmosphere temporarily suspends visitors from everyday life, immersing them in another worldly dimension while still honouring Erickson's architectural vision.

The gallery feels compact but not cramped. Sixteen display cases of non-reflecting glass fill the space: some are arranged in a circle and others are set in relation to the circle along the walls.¹¹ This composition encourages visitors to meander without a prescribed route or narrative path. This idea of movement is strengthened through weightless mounting techniques that seem to suspend objects in mid-air at unconventional orientations (Figure 1). Objects are arranged thematically; the groups labels are action words—verbs in the gerund form—that relate both to movement and to thought: locating, feasting, seeing, resonating, belonging, transforming, witnessing, transcending, declaring, accumulating, revealing, connecting, sustaining, listening, converging, indigenizing, expanding, reinforcing, embodying, refining, and thanking. Didactics and new media convey the voices of more than 30 Indigenous collaborators, presenting the objects from multiple perspectives at once. The gallery feels high-tech but also comfortable and welcoming.

The gallery's robust data and electrical infrastructure supports its five film projections, two audio-transmitting 'Idea Chairs'¹² and six speakers throughout. Yet as MOA exhibit designer Skooker Broome explains, the space only uses about one-tenth of its technological capabilities, its potential not yet fully realized.¹³ Shelton points out that "the space is anathema to

¹¹ Karen Duffek in conversation with the author, March 11, 2018.

¹² The audio-integrated chairs were designed by Niels Bendtsen of Bensen, and the audio components were engineered by Hfour, both local design companies.

¹³ In discussion with the author, July 11, 2017.

the traditional precepts that govern classical masterworks galleries” in its application of technology (MOA 2017). As compared to MOA’s former Masterpiece Gallery, this approach is divergent in using technology to augment the experience, arguably taking away the exclusive attention from the objects.

Although technology can educate and entertain, Alberto Garlandini (2018), vice-president of the International Council for Museums (ICOM), emphasizes that it is “a means, not an end. Museums are information providers. They shall control technology, not let technology decide for them.”¹⁴ Garlandini reminds museum workers that curating technology is yet another responsibility when developing exhibitions; its application must be judicious. The Masterworks Gallery with its impressive technical capacity and built-in flexibility (it is completely reconfigurable and customizable) opens major possibilities for future exhibitions and for curatorial teams to experiment with in exhibitions based on or enhanced by technology. In this case, the curatorial team used technology strategically rather than ostentatiously.



Figure 1. North view of the Masterworks Gallery, MOA, March 11, 2018, photo: E. Balcombe.

¹⁴ Garlandini made the statement on ICOM’s Facebook page to provoke conversation leading up to International Museum Day 2018 in support of its theme, *Hyperconnected Museums: New Approaches, New Publics*.

A new aesthetic

Böhme pushes for a new aesthetic that accounts for the relation between the environment and human states and considers atmosphere to be the intermediary between the two. He differentiates this new aesthetic from what he considers the old in three ways: it favours experience and the sensuous over *a priori* Kantian judgements which are based solely on *reason*; de-emphasizes language and semiotics; and widens the field beyond fine art to include other forms of aesthetic production, like craft, applied art, and utilitarian objects (Böhme 1993; Böhme and Thibaud 2016). The new aesthetic opens possibilities for understanding, appreciation, and insight by layering experiences with sensory engagements beyond the visual. *In a Different Light* introduces haptic and auditory experiences, both in process and in product. This approach not only enriches experience but also, perhaps more importantly, mobilizes different perspectives through layered messaging. Many of the curatorial and design decisions made to foreground the sensuous exemplify the new aesthetic for which Böhme advocates.

While the show certainly has a strong visual aspect, it is presented at the same level as the haptic and the aural. Multiple video projections of hands exploring and creating carvings, weavings, graffiti, and tattoos line the perimeter walls. Ninety-minute loops of audio narration fill the space. Meanwhile, the audio system of the Idea Chairs plays four different stories softly into the ears of listeners (one at a time). As communicated to me by all three curators and the

designer, the show's guiding concepts include looking close, intimacy, and listening-in, achieved through clever use of new media and atmosphere.¹⁵

Haptic

Throughout my research, I was struck by the way different people held and spoke about the objects. Privileged touching certainly conveys museological authority, but for this exhibition, more importantly, it promulgates Indigenous authority. The right to touch is assigned by museum administration, so witnessing Indigenous hands on ancestral objects challenges institutional protocol and confronts the notion of curatorial authority.

In March 2017, Shelton appeared in a video posted on the YouTube channel of the UBC Faculty of Arts, sitting at a table in white fabric gloves and holding two different objects from the collection. Delicately, one by one, he turns them over and around mindfully as he discusses their formal qualities and iconography. On a horn spoon, an emaciated carved figure with a visible ribcage seems to beg for food; and on a bowl, he interprets, a seal transforming into a bird. Shelton always has two hands on the objects, picking them up and putting them down with cautious precision, in line with stringent institutional guidelines and expectations. This proximity and meticulousness communicates expertise and authority.

Having similar access to artifacts, museum conservators are also permitted to touch them with gloved hands. As part of conservation, every corner and crack are inspected and recorded in an attempt to halt the deteriorating effects of time through careful intervention (Canadian

¹⁵ Broome used the term 'eavesdropping' to describe the exhibit's acoustic conception, as communicated during our interview on July 11, 2017.

Association for Conservation of Cultural Property 2000; Clavir 1994, 2002). Staff in collections management and conservation use surgical-like tools in laboratory-like settings; their engagement with artifacts decidedly clinical. During my field work, I observed them install these objects in the display cases. I was struck by the similarity to an Intensive Care Unit or obstetrics ward in the extreme deliberation and attention given to objects and the agility of the operators' choreography. Although the objects were the primary concern, little evaluation of beauty, form, or cultural significance occurred during this process; conversations centered on gauging their condition, deciding how best to position them, identifying possible hazards, dispensing collegial advice, and providing encouragement during this precarious operation. The atmosphere was one of quiet, controlled tension, especially during the installation of the trunk filled with carved horn spoons, which had to be forklifted with expert precision into their narrow glass case with little to no tolerance for error. The room fell silent, and one got the sense of time in suspension until the objects were safely laid on their mount, at which point I heard a collective sigh of relief.

These touch experiences are only afforded to a select few, and as a researcher, I was not among them. As an outsider, I found it difficult to coordinate access to the objects, given MOA's stringent procedures. However, after some negotiation and personal assurances, I was able to view some of the objects on May 23, 2017 in the Ethnographic Research and Documentation Laboratory. During a two-hour period, I studied them up close, just before their removal into the exhibition that would order, contextualize, interpret, illuminate, and encase them. I was told that I could not touch them, a standard museum protocol. Again, a clinical atmosphere descended upon them. Being this close was an affective experience as I was keenly aware of my proximity to such old, powerful, and significant artifacts as well the potential imminent danger that could befall them. I wanted to touch them, to sense their weight in my hands, to feel their texture and to

discover otherwise invisible parts of them by turning them around and upside down. Instead, I could only draw them, which helped me to see them in greater detail and which also, conveniently, gave me a reason to linger in the room with them a little longer. Drawing bridged the distance between the objects and me by activating my own haptic sense. Translating vision into image by moving my own hand offered a kind of embodied experience as I traced the original artists' works. Ingold (2011) reflects on this power of drawing and its potential as an ethnographic method, advocating for a 'graphic anthropology,' suggesting that drawing is a way to engage and reconnect ethnographers in observation and description beyond the visual. On reflection, it was the denial of experience, the prohibition of touch, that left the deepest impression on me. The haptic experience of drawing was a means of knowing not only the objects but of connecting, in some way, with the artists' hands that had made them.

Observing museum professionals touch objects reaffirms the institutional privilege of staff but witnessing bare-handed encounters by First Nation artists and community members on film, communicates that it is the Indigenous interactions and interpretations that have primary authority and foundational meaning. Duffek is careful to point out that the film in the exhibit contains close-ups of many experienced hands exploring and creating objects in especially nuanced ways. She describes their ways of looking and handling as demonstrative of their knowledge and as different from the practices of museum staff.¹⁶ They touch as if remembering, turning them over, looking closely, caressing them until memories and stories emerge. As voyeurs of these intimate encounters, the audience almost experiences through the eyes and the hands of others the weight, balance, texture, warmth, and presence of the objects. As Heidegger

¹⁶ In discussion with the author, July 18, 2017.

(1977) suggests, hands are tools not just for making and discovering but also for thinking. He theorizes that “[e]very motion of the hand in every one of its works carries itself through the element of thinking, every bearing of the hand bears itself in that element. All the elements of the hand are rooted in thinking” (1977, 357). This assertion complicates the haptic as a discrete sensation, calling for an integrated understanding of touch in cognition.

Indeed, psycho-neurological research has made insightful scientific contributions to understanding the operation of our haptic sense. Research identifies touch as an integral part of our multisensory system and has the ability to elicit emotion, trigger memory, access remote feelings, satiate curiosity, engage, and also augment the visual sense (Chatterjee et al. 2008; Pye 2007). Chatterjee et al. (2008) suggest that anthropologists have an opportunity to further this scientifically oriented research by considering the role and impact of touch in museums. Often museums mobilize touch as part of the visitor experience of exploring, learning, and experimenting with material culture (Chatterjee et al. 2008; Pye 2007). Ethnographic and historic art collections housed in museums have the potential to reconnect communities with their heritage and cultural identities (Pye 2007), and the embodied experience of sensation through these encounters can provoke conversation, memory, and often emotions.

Although touch in art and anthropology museums, especially with old, fragile, or particularly valuable or powerful objects, is considered taboo,¹⁷ many forward-thinking institutions are increasingly restoring this kind of proximate access to source communities (Clavir 1994, 2002). Handling or borrowing objects for ceremonial use inside and outside museums runs against standard institutional policies, especially in conservation and collections

¹⁷ Touch is more commonly used as a learning method in science and children’s museums.

management. However, this practice is progressively being implemented as museums reconsider their mandates and responsibilities to living communities. Inviting community members to examine cultural objects is not only a valuable learning and sharing opportunity but also a fundamental justice issue. Handling them helps participants not only to remember and share, clarify or correct information, but also to rediscover traditional design skills and cultural practices (Pye 2007, 23). While having communities of origin use touch in museum collections is not an entirely new practice,¹⁸ the strategies used in this exhibit are noteworthy. Beyond summoning memory and story, touch serves as a means to illustrate other ways of knowing beyond the visual and textual modes so familiar to museum audiences.¹⁹ Showing many hands (and only hands) manipulate important objects demonstrates the ownership and authority of Indigenous peoples over their own material and intangible cultural heritage.

Spence and Gallace draw attention to the deficit of language around the haptic as compared to the visual (Chatterjee et al. 2008) or the auditory, illustrating how minimally we distinguish among different haptic experiences. The traditional Western perspective considered the visual and auditory as ‘higher senses.’²⁰ Not only is our English lexicon insufficient to describe this sense, but so too, according to Howes, are our methodologies: “[A]nthropologists don’t know how to communicate the kinds of things we want to communicate through smells and tastes and textures. We lack the necessary codes not to mention techniques” (2003, 58). Howes illustrates the difficulty in understanding, documenting, and disseminating information

¹⁸ For more on source community sensory engagement, including the haptic, see Fienup-Riordan (2003).

¹⁹ Touch was used as a form of engagement during the audio recording sessions. Objects were presented to artists and community members to handle and examine, which helped initiate conversations that would become the audio tracks for the exhibit.

²⁰ This now outdated term described a hierarchy of different bodily senses. Visual and auditory were considered higher; gustatory, olfactory, and haptic were lower.

that is not easily reproducible, which could be considered a call to increase haptic literacies through non-Western methodologies. Haptic illiteracy is not universal; citing Saito's research, Spence and Gallace assert that there are "differences in the pattern of brain activation between individuals who have different levels of tactile expertise" (in Chatterjee et al. 2008, 27). This means that some people have better developed faculties when it comes to touch and its neurological pathways, perhaps artists and people who work with their hands. Possibly the haptic capacity and its connection with the visual cortex could be improved and optimized through more exposure. Improving haptic literacies might, by extension, expand ways of seeing. One of the exhibition concepts, close looking,²¹ is conveyed through the depiction of bare hands touching objects in extreme close-ups and, in effect, connects the haptic to the visual.

The exhibit engages touch as a means of exploring and examining ancestral objects, soliciting conversation, producing narrations, and communicating value, authority, and meaning. While mainly witnessing these touch experiences, visitors have only one direct opportunity of their own to deploy the haptic sense. The house boards installation, featuring remnants of an over 200-year-old Tsimshian house front, has a touch component. Visitors gather around this 'revealing' installation, eagerly awaiting turns to touch the hand-shaped sensor that activates a dramatic lighting effect. A light strip at the base of the vertical boards illuminates upward, grazing the wood surface to reveal its otherwise invisible texture. Bill McLennan, coauthor with Duffek of the book that inspired the installation,²² explains that it cycles through changing light temperatures and intensities in order to highlight different relief patterns etched by generations of

²¹ Jordan Wilson in discussion with the author, Sept. 26, 2017.

²² *The Transforming Image: Painted Arts of Northwest Coast First Nations* (2000)

wind erosion.²³ Perhaps what makes this installation so attractive, in addition to the kinetic lighting, is that it is the only artifact not behind glass, the ultimate signifier of ‘Do not touch.’ *In a Different Light* engages the sensuous through mediated experiences while prioritizing intimacy through close encounters with displayed objects and a least one opportunity to touch.

In *In a Different Light*, the curatorial decision to offer multiple voices and different ways of knowing reframes ideas about the body and the role of the senses in communicating deeper meaning. Both Duffek and Wilson reason that showing the hands of artists and community members touching these objects intimately symbolizes not only their authority but also their wealth of knowledge.²⁴ “Community members have this ongoing relationship,” explains Wilson, “and they look at these things in a different way and physically engage with them and they have the right to do so.”²⁵ In illustrating that community members, especially artists, have particular ways of interacting with objects that are informed by experience and knowledge,²⁶ the exhibit exposes the audience to a set of messages and meanings apart from the curatorial. By claiming authority and space within the museum, these storytellers reclaim their right to self-definition, which Kramer calls ‘figurative repatriation’ (2004), an important step in decolonizing museum practice.

The tactile approach to meaning is an example of the museum’s deference to a First Nations understanding of preservation through new approaches that go beyond conservation protocols to reconnect objects with communities. This is “an essential step in cultural

²³ In discussion with the author, July 13, 2017.

²⁴ In discussion with the author: Duffek, July 18, 2017; Wilson, Sept. 26, 2017.

²⁵ In discussion with the author, Sept. 26, 2017 and March 12, 2018.

²⁶ Ibid.

preservation” (Hill in Clavir 1994, 72). Tactile encounters remind us of Indigenous peoples’ ownership of their own cultural heritage (Clavir 1994, 81), their different notions of cultural preservation, and the continued need to evolve traditional museum practices.

Auditory

Objects made by the artists of generations ago are linked to their living cultural descendants of today through the power of voice. Storytelling is a primary mode of learning in Indigenous education and reveals the significance of oral traditions: narratives, songs, and dances (Hare 2017). Aside from the objects on display along with maps and contemporary and historic photographs, *In a Different Light* incorporates a video montage and several audio recordings. The exhibition’s working title, *Ancestral Art and Contemporary Voices*, conveys MOA’s interest in connecting material and intangible culture²⁷ and the historic with the contemporary. Educator Jan Hare elucidates the important role of stories in the Indigenous context, stating that it “promotes oral language development, listening skills, and comprehension, as well as introduces learners to the literary strategies of metaphor, prediction, foreshadowing” (Hare 2017). The exhibit demonstrates this idea of multi-literacy through oral tradition and the narratives that fill the space give the audience access to dimensions of meaning from Indigenous perspectives.

²⁷ ICOM defines a museum as “a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (2007). The definition of cultural heritage has been expanded to encompass the non-material aspects of culture, including oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge of the universe and nature, and knowledge and skills for producing traditional crafts (UNESCO).

The presence of voice situates historic objects in the present. Contextualizing the objects using story, the voices of artists, knowledge-keepers, teachers, elders, Indigenous curators, and community members link the tangible to the intangible and the past to today. In this way, they reveal the continuity of culture, the role of story, and the continued significance of the objects to chronological family history, as forms of legal documentation, and in ceremony. Discussing the power of voice to bridge the historic and the contemporary, Duffek and Wilson have expressed a wish for the exhibit to present voice on the same level as the objects themselves.²⁸

Besides challenging Western notions of historical documentation by providing evidence of the past, oral narrative reveals the social constructions of the present, linking history to today (Cruikshank 1994, 407). The curatorial decision to foreground voice not only challenges the primacy of objects by presenting the auditory and other intangibles with equal importance but also makes space for Indigenous ways of knowing. Multivocal approaches unseat the authority of the museum and in effect hasten the erosion of institutional privilege (Shelton 2000; Phillips 2011). Expanding the aesthetic toward the sensory produces an experience of presence of people (past and present, material and the immaterial) and invites the visitor to engage by active listening.

Interestingly, the exhibit links history with the present through new media (audio and video) to disseminate oral traditions, dance, ceremony, and the techniques of art and craft. The interface of new media with the old—traditional, low-tech, or analog—creates a bridge between the historic and contemporary. Though mediated by technology and disseminated to a broad audience asynchronously, storytelling is an affective experience in the exhibit. Architect Juhani

²⁸ In discussion with the author: Duffek, July 18, 2017; Wilson, Sept. 26, 2017.

Pallasmaa describes the feelings of intimacy and immediacy associated with sound: “Sight isolates, whereas sound incorporates; vision is directional, whereas sound is omni-directional. The sense of sight implies exteriority, but sound creates an experience of interiority” (2012, 53). Considering sound in this way establishes intimacy between the audience and the stories presented in the exhibit. Jennifer Bonnell, historian of public memory, and Roger Simon, education scholar (2007, 69), explain that “intimacy involves a sense not of ‘knowing’ the other, but of receptivity to the relation between the viewer and the experiences of others,” going on to state that “intimacy suggests an act of acknowledgement—an openness and acceptance of the other as such—that resists attempts to reduce the other’s experience to something graspable or containable.” They suggest that these kinds of intimate encounters can provoke new insights and even lead to a “transformative critique of one’s way of understanding the world” (2007, 69).

Sound artist John Wynne (2010, 62) describes the capability of recorded voice in his sonic installation of First Nations narratives, *Hearing Faces, Seeing Voices*, as it worked to “convey meanings and reveal characteristics hidden from the senses in the context of real-time experience.” He suggests that voice, as a paralinguistic strategy,²⁹ can express cross-cultural experiences that written language alone cannot (2010, 62). The sonic experience also differs from the textual or visual in that its vibrations are embodied experiences. Ethnomuseologist Beverley Diamond tells us that “sound, like movement, is experienced as vibration. Sound enters our body, enlivening and energizing” (Robinson and Martin 2016, 243). In connecting listening to feeling, Diamond’s distinction reveals sound’s dynamic aspect and affective potential. In *In a Different Light*, audio transmits the sonic vibration of narration, music, and song. Importantly, it

²⁹ Paralinguistics refers to the expressive aspects of speech: tone, cadence, emphasis, loudness, etc.

captures the nuances of spoken language—emotion, inflection, thoughtful pauses—that text transcription would otherwise obliterate.

Long loops of expressive, unrehearsed audio mean that visitors who spend an average of 30 minutes³⁰ in the space can revisit the exhibit and hear an entirely different narrative, which encourages multiple visits and lengthier visitor engagement.³¹ The Idea Chairs, with activated audio, offer a more intimate listening experience. In one chair, we hear “We Begin and End with a Prayer” from Nuxalk knowledge-keeper Clyde Tallio. In the other, we hear “Red Lineage” by Homalco Nation spoken-word poet Mary Billow, “On Teaching” from Coast Salish curator Sharon Fortney, and “Learning Basketry” from Stó:lō artist Rena Point Bolton. Visitors become participants who listen actively while nestling into the contemporary wingback chairs that swivel around. The experience is relaxing, almost hypnotic: the chair conforms to and envelopes the body, the voices are soothing and powerful, and the stories link to the objects in the space, which visitors can see by swaying back and forth (Figure 2, Figure 3). These somewhat personal encounters forge connections with the narrators, the stories, and the objects because they communicate context and meaning in ways that engage the listener. Although didactic text supports the objects, the audio elements stand out as primary sources for information and engagement.³²

³⁰ The 30-minute average is an anecdotal approximate based on observations by exhibit designer Skooker Broome, as communicated in discussion with the author, July 11, 2017.

³¹ In discussion with the author: Broome, July 11, 2017; McLennan, July 13, 2017; Duffek, July 18, 2017; Wilson, Sept. 26, 2017; Wilson, March 12, 2018.

³² The didactic texts are mutivocal; they include Indigenous commentators describing the objects in their own words and are primary sources for meaning and interpretation.

The textual revolution of the late twentieth century in anthropology influenced museology and exhibition practice. Clifford Geertz, the father of hermeneutical anthropology, emphasized “thick descriptions”—lengthy accounts of ethnographic minutiae—and his “culture as text” metaphor indicates a newfound emphasis on interpretation, translation, and description (Geertz 1973). This textual turn altered the field for anthropologists, charging them with the responsibility for making sense of complex and multilayered “cultural texts” through literary modes (Hoffman 2009). The task of writing would become a new methodology for the interpretive anthropologist and a defining characteristic for the discipline. This long-held privilege of written language, however, is complicated by the significant and longstanding role of oral traditions in Indigenous cultures. Cruikshank (1994, 403) explains that Indigenous “narratives are better understood by absorbing the successive personal messages revealed to listeners in repeated tellings than by trying to analyse and publicly explain their meanings,” which as she explains conflicts with the ‘scholarly’ approach favouring close reading of text.

While *In a Different Light* promotes lengthy didactic descriptions, they are designed to be unobtrusive. The design team experimented with several iterations of graphic systems and materials before settling on a clear, plexiglass panel with a soft, silvery backing. These lightweight panels adhere to the walls and to the slender stainless-steel mounts within the cases using magnetic fasteners. In colour and light reflectance, the fasteners match the minimalistic silver mounting systems, both the ones integral to the cases and those custom-designed for many of the objects in the show. Interpretive text is in small font, while the group labels (thematic verbs/gerunds) are larger, in caps, with wide tracking³³ and generous white space surrounding it.

³³ Tracking is a typology term referring to the spacing between letters.

Panel graphics are applied to the clear, top surface of the plexiglass to create a floating effect when illuminated: text (and in some instances photos) seem to levitate off the surface above a subtle shadow. The captions and museum identification numbers are much smaller and adhere directly to the mounting system, which are equally discreet.

Everything about the display system, including all levels of labels, is weightless and light, which was not an easy task because of the volume of interpretation: orientation panels (maps, acknowledgements, introduction), group labels (21 thematic action words and explanatory text—First Nations voice in italics, curatorial voice in roman), artifact labels (catalogue number and description), and captions (interpretation or elaboration on the object or theme by First Nations artist, community member, or knowledge-keeper, in italics). The ordered graphic system minimizes the presence of written information, deferring to the aural interpretations instead.

With several audio elements and many reflective surfaces—16 glass display cases and five large video screens—acoustics were a significant concern. The design supports the sonic experience by dampening ambient noise and minimizing reflected sound. The importance of the auditory elements dictated design decisions regarding acoustic treatment: fabric panels on the perimeter walls attenuate airborne sound; wood flooring is used instead of concrete because of its sound-reducing properties; and the stretched Barrisol ceiling, installed primarily for its lighting effect, also has an acoustic advantage. These interventions minimize ambient noise, creating an anechoic environment and an intimate atmosphere distinct from all other spaces in MOA.

An expanded aesthetic

In a Different Light initiates an expanded aesthetic through its combination of moving image, voice, and music, and its implication of the haptic through imagery and description.

Together, these create a synaesthetic experience, a union of the conventional five senses, along with other non-Western ontologies and notions of the senses (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1999; Sutton 2001). New media rather than text become the framework for communicating curatorial priorities: presence, continuity of culture, cultural significance, connection, and perspective. New media also elicit introspection, contemplation, and empathy from the audience.

This approach turns the exhibition into what Bjerregaard (2015, 74) might term “a sensate, even emotional encounter, rather than a didactic or critical exercise,” transforming the atmosphere from one of just looking to one of listening and feeling. The storytellers express a wide range of emotions: joy, anger, pride, sadness, love, indignation, and hope. Celebration and lamentation fill the space through narration. Revealing the multiplicity and range of sentiments from different points of view communicates the complexity of historic and contemporary issues faced by Indigenous people. This kind of storytelling—circuitous, unresolved, partial (Hare 2017)—works against privileged literacies of Western culture. Presenting this powerful oral tradition in the museum space within this institution of learning has the potential to foster empathy and new understandings through a different kind of literacy.

According to anthropologist Wilfried van Damme (1996), emphasis by museums on visual and textual indicates a Western partiality in aesthetics theory that has a metaphysical and moral basis. Van Damme (1996, 53) concludes that traditional definitions of aesthetics have emphasized the idea of beauty, the philosophy of art, and the “emic study of non-Western art form.” Philosophy of the beautiful became a standard for judging aesthetics, as did the definition of art itself. Aesthetics, van Damme explains, is not easily defined, since as an idea it is so rooted in European Enlightenment thought. He feels, however, that the concept could and should be modified and enlarged to encompass olfactory, gustatory, kinetic, and haptic experiences and

their combinations. Such synaesthesia would expand the field of study and make room for other modes of aesthetic expression, recognizing value and increasing interest in a larger body of arts and culture. Expanding aesthetics to include a range and combination of senses could broaden the appeal of museum collections, exhibitions, and programming for a more diverse public while initiating new theoretical approaches to materiality and visuality that could deepen understanding, respect, and empathy.

The exhibit's curatorial strategy seems to favour Böhme's new aesthetics as it promotes experience and the sensuous, positioning voice at the same level as or even prioritizing it over written language. Elevating the presence of oral tradition, albeit through new media, unseats the textual and ocular privilege characteristic of exhibition practice. Indigenous educator and social justice advocate, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2013) explains the inadequacy of standardized Western academic methods for understanding and representing Indigenous cultures and advocates for Indigenous perspectives on research that acknowledges different ways of knowing, teaching, and learning.

The decision of the National Museum of the American Indian to foreground Indigenous voices and perspectives over written interpretation and contextualization met with accusations of perceived lack of research and scholarly rigour during the institution's 2004 opening. Elizabeth Archuleta, literary scholar and professor of ethnic studies, contests this criticism by pointing to the inherent scholarship in Indigenous literary techniques that exceeds mere entertainment (2008, 195). She argues that presenting information using storytelling, while enjoyable, is primarily an engaged methodology leaving space for questioning, debate that opens up dialogue, and understanding beyond stereotypes. She explains that "this method of organization requires visitors to set aside notions they previously held about museums and Indians, 'listen' to the

stories being told in the exhibits, and trust that meaning will be made if they become involved as participants in the storytelling process” (2008, 191). She suggests that this Indigenous model includes visitors in the conversation and encourages them to “engage in their own research to learn more” (2008, 204).

Prioritizing Indigenous methodologies and community collaboration processes decenters Western perspectives and museum authority, opening new ways of understanding through added layers of complexity or even uncertainty. Mobilizing an expanded sensory aesthetic, *In a Different Light* produces an experience of presence—of persons, objects, and environments—and de-emphasizes objects and visibility. In achieving this effect, the diverse curators, designer, architect, artists, and community members address the in-betweenness of the material and the immaterial, which Böhme (1993, 14) refers to as ‘atmosphere.’



Figure 2. View of Idea Chair, facing East, March 11, 2018, photo: E. Balcombe

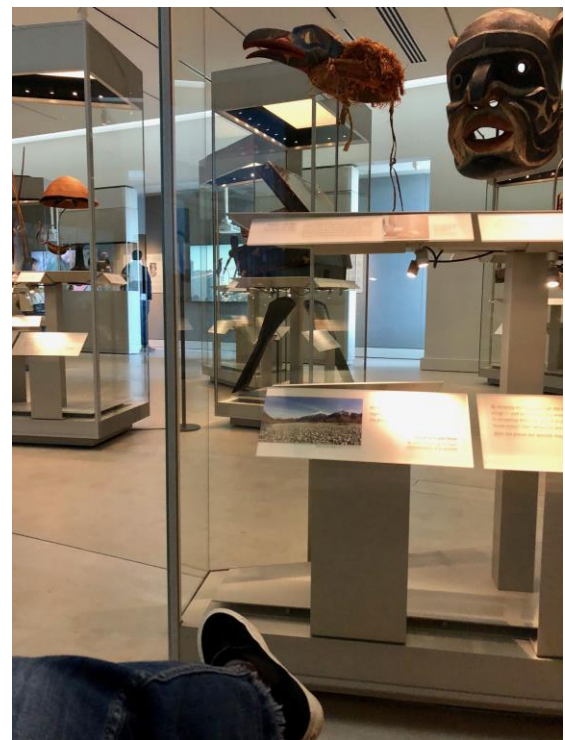


Figure 3. View from Idea Chair, facing West, March 11, 2018, photo: E. Balcombe

Atmosphere

Curation and design of exhibits entails collaboration by many specialists on spatial and environmental elements. Lighting, acoustics, colour palette, materials, new media and technology, circulation/flow, temperature, didactic information, and display techniques all play a part in producing an experiential environment. This purposeful ordering of space works to define and redefine the relationships among visitors, objects, stories, and space, thereby creating an atmosphere, sometimes inadvertently.

Definitions of atmosphere and its affects are often abstruse. Architectural discourse attempts to qualify it by pointing to materials and how they are used strategically in the built environment. Böhme suggests that materiality has the power to elicit emotion, generate feeling, and create a mood through a synesthetic experience (the way a material looks, feels, and sounds) and that it is these corporeal sensations that defines atmosphere (2014 para 9-10).

For cultural-political geographer Ben Anderson (2009, 78), it is this uncertainty and ambiguity that have come to define these terms. Anderson describes “atmospheres as collective affects that are simultaneously indeterminate and determinate.” Together, these non-specific contextual factors of place and happenings can generate both emotive and phenomenological affects, but as sociologist Tim Edensor points out, these responses are not universal. Edensor explains that aside from sensual elements, they are also composed of “the social and cultural contexts in which they are consumed, interpreted and engaged with emotionally as well as affectively” (Edensor and Sumartojo 2015, 252). Edensor believes that an atmosphere has the power to elicit emotive, sensory, and affective responses but is dependent on the individual subject. Designing or manipulating an atmosphere for effect will consequently convey the

producers' epistemological and ontological perspective which is neither neutral nor objective. Edensor (2015, 234) explains that "within an atmosphere, we are immersed within a flow of experience in which affects, emotions, sensations and meanings are inextricably mingled." In other words, atmosphere can be orchestrated up to a point, but responses are subjective and vary with the individual.

People's responses to atmosphere vary with their cultural values, past experiences, and personal backgrounds (Edensor and Sumartojo 2015, 252), as well as on the museum's historic and cultural context, suggesting that atmospheres are subjective and co-constituted experiences. A place can take on multiple meanings depending on who apprehends them (Anderson, 2009). Visitors have certain expectations of experience when they go to museums, including MOA; their moods, expectations, and states of mind are already tuned to the atmosphere before they even enter.

Light

"Light is more than just a medium; it evokes agency" (Bille and Sørensen 2007, 264). This provocative statement exposes light's complex interrelationship with people and objects, which Bille and Sørensen characterize as socially and culturally determined. In examining illumination—qualities, associations, and applications—from an anthropological perspective, they complicate traditional notions of material culture by introducing light as a material agent. They argue for an expanded understanding of light; one that reveals in this way "a whole new set of social boundaries and power relations omitted by more tactile and obvious material markers" (2007, 280). They upset the idea of light as a mere means to illuminate objects by

conceptualizing it as cultural construction and affective force with the agency to transform human experience.

For *In a Different Light*, the lightscape is an agent that communicates meaning and supports curatorial intent, emerging as a significant aspect of the exhibition experience. For Noel Best, the gallery's architect, emulating natural light—its colour and dynamism, and variable rhythms of intensity—was important for establishing a context for the objects. Best wanted to reproduce a feeling for the environment where these objects were made and used without resorting to dioramas, which meant bringing daylight into the gallery.³⁴ The first intervention was to cut a slot window into the existing concrete walls of Erickson's envelope, an intense and expensive undertaking. This connection to daylight is also reinforced figuratively through the installation of a Barrisol ceiling—a stretched, white PVC fabric sheet—that creates a soft, glowing, sky-like effect. The variable circadian lighting rising and falling on the fabric mirrors the conditions outside and makes the space feel luminous and fluid, much like an overcast sky above. In this way, the architecture enriches the sensory dimension of the space.

The sky-like effect repeats in the display cases, producing a continuity of shadowless glowing light everywhere. This soft, ubiquitous light is “unusual”, as Duffek describes it.³⁵ Although it conveys a natural feeling, the lighting design reinforces our presence in an important gallery³⁶ far removed from any original context. In Edensor's words (2015, 332), light “is a property that extends across space to provide a medium or field within which objects are perceived,” and “different kinds of lighting and the ways in which they are applied produce

³⁴ In discussion with the author, July 18, 2017.

³⁵ In discussion with the author, July 18, 2017.

³⁶ Best in discussion with the author, July 18, 2017.

myriad, distinctive illuminated landscapes that solicit multiple conditions for feeling.” Attending to lighting, as Edensor proposes, is a means of producing specific kinds of atmosphere. In the Masterworks Gallery and its first exhibition, the curators, designer, and architect articulated a specific program for the space. Their lighting concept plays a central role in defining the spatial aesthetics and the atmosphere emerging from it. The title and subtitle of the new gallery’s first exhibit, *In a Different Light: Reflecting on First Nations Art*, are as much literal as metaphorical.

Using natural light in this way creates an atmosphere of intimacy rather than theatricality. The curators, designer, and architect worked against the lighting paradigms of ethnographic dioramas and historic masterworks exhibitions, as well as of contemporary art gallery installations. Dioramas, sometimes characterized by use of imitation flickering firelight, can reinforce romantic visions of cultural pasts. The curatorial team wanted to avoid this kind of mimetic representation,³⁷ while also steering away from outdated exhibit styles that display masterworks in very low-level ambient light with a dramatic spot directed precisely at each object,³⁸ a technique often called a *black box*. Clifford (1992, 221) has recalled seeing this type of lighting during a visit to MOA’s Masterpiece Gallery (now the O’Brian) in 1988, describing the atmosphere as a dark space where “objects are displayed with boutique-style lighting and minimal labels, all emphasizing the message that these are fine-art treasures.” The decision by the curators and designer to avoid the lighting approach of the previous Masterpiece Gallery indicates movement away from upholding standards of the past and from defining masterpieces through environmental semiotics. The exhibit similarly avoids the archetypical fine art exhibition

³⁷ Wilson in discussion with the author, Sept. 26, 2017.

³⁸ Broome in discussion with the author, July 11, 2017.

style with bright ambient light illuminating stark white walls and a glossy concrete floor: a *white box*. The strategy for this exhibit lies somewhere in between—perhaps we might call it a *grey box*. The lighting, colour palette, and material choices reinforce the greyness of the environment. In doing so, they defy exhibitionary prescriptions, creating a welcoming, soft, mysterious, and engaging atmosphere.

Colour: The grey box

Anthropologist Diana Young argues that colour, like Bille and Sørensen's light, has agency, but she is interested in its relationship to material culture. She explains Western science's dematerialization of colour, "the reduction of colour to a measurable 'stimulus' in colour science and the dematerialization of colour as language and colour as symbolic meaning in anthropology" (Young 2006, 10), which has led to anthropology's reductive position. The narrow focus on linguistic and sensual/perceptual dimensions has arguably disassociated colour from our relational experiences.

Edensor (2015, 334) points out that attitudes toward certain levels of illumination are also culturally determined and that these attitudes can contribute to the production of atmospheres. Museum culture expresses attitudes toward lighting and colour through curatorial and design approaches to display and visual representation. The attention afforded by museums to lighting conditions, qualities, and schemes at considerable expense and through collaborative effort emphasizes the agency of light and colour to signify meaning and effect social relations. Sociologist and theorist Jean Baudrillard asserts that colour in interior spaces exposes a cultural system of signs, whose use and application are a matter of deliberate curatorial decision-making in museums. Baudrillard (2006, 30) suggests that "the technical need for design is always

accompanied by the cultural need for atmosphere” and that these two forces “mobilize the values of play and calculation—calculation of function in the case of design, calculation of materials, forms and space in the case of atmosphere.” For Edensor and Baudrillard, the elements that contribute to atmosphere are both culturally defined and functionally necessary.

For artist and writer David Batchelor (2011), the Western tradition of avoiding colour in architectural space demonstrates its own cultural bias, as evident in the eradication of colour in modernism. Noting the systematic marginalization of colour in modern discourse, scholars suggest that the impulse to purge it derives from the notion that it is a secondary or cosmetic/superficial attribute lying within the realm of “the other”: the primitive, feminine, infantile, vulgar, or pathological (Batchelor 2011; Taussig 2006; Young 2006). They believe, as Batchelor (2011, 239) states, that “the rhetorical subordination of colour ... is learned, ordered, subordinated and tamed.” These cultural biases regarding colour and illumination frame design choices and contribute to meaning and message in exhibition space. Edensor (2015, 334) reminds us that “[c]ultural attitudes towards particular designs, colours and levels of illumination influence responses that may feed into the production of atmospheres characterized by sorrow, hostility, discomfort, excitement or conviviality.” In other words, exhibition teams mobilize light and colour to reinforce narratives through both signifying and emotional elements. The semiotics of light and colour enrich the curatorial message; within a multidisciplinary and collaborative framework, they allow for experimentation with display and meaning-making from different perspectives. Interestingly, the Musqueam people’s specific conceptions of colour are standardized in a reference guide for interpreting and representing their culture. Recognizing the significance and implication of colour in their own cultural system, they have developed an

interpretive guide that contextualizes the significance and origin of different hues,³⁹ among other symbolisms, and a style guide that outlines appropriate use and applications (Musqueam 2006).⁴⁰

The application of specific lighting patterns and the muted colour palette in *In a Different Light* reference the regional environment, rather than conforming to some austere modernist standard. The quiet palette, a choice made in service of communicating atmosphere and context, defers to the objects and media in the space and is consistent with Erickson's architecture. Best describes the palette of soft greys in the gallery as characteristic of Vancouver.⁴¹ The colours appear all along the Northwest Coast, with its cloudy skies, its grey light, and the natural silvering of logs scattered on sandy shorelines. The whitewashed hemlock floors reference timeworn driftwood. The walls are painted soft grey on the lower half and upholstered in sound-absorbing, wool felt panels on the upper portion, enveloping the audience and objects in a blanket of quiet greyness. The cases, predominantly glass, have bases finished in yet another shade of grey. In combination with the variable lighting, the tone-on-tone palette takes on different character and hue with each change in outdoor conditions, connecting the historic objects to this place and to the places of their origin in a dynamic tableau.

New media

The exhibit strengthens the concepts of *presence* and *connection to place* through new media. Multiple video projections cycle through imagery of the region's natural and industrial

³⁹ For example, the colour Turquoise (Pantone 3115—C-63, M-O, Y 1-18, K 0) is to be used exclusively for the Musqueam logo and should not be used to render anything else by the Musqueam.

⁴⁰ While this style guide was not deployed in this exhibit it is worth noting that colour plays an important role in cultural expression and can be considered a semiotic device.

⁴¹ In discussion with the author, July 18, 2017.

landscapes, not only referencing local places but also tying the exhibit's historic objects to the present and to contemporary, living cultures. The interpretation of historic artworks through high-tech mediations calls attention to the transgenerational continuity of meaning and relevance, and also to the expansion of productive technologies over time: both tradition and innovation.

The decision to capture imagery in celluloid film rather than digital video was a stylistic choice. Broome explains that MOA could have captured footage in super-high definition but decided on analog instead (at 24 frames per second) because it would be slower, softer, and less saturated; in our digital world, the team wanted an element of the natural.⁴² The challenge for Wilson was how to provide context without being too literal. He explains that the team wanted the exhibit to offer a different experience, one not dated by cutting-edge technology.⁴³ It was important that the technology not distract from the objects or ideas presented, and film emerged as the most fitting medium for conveying moving imagery. Unlike digital, film is expensive and finite; therefore, the approach to filming must be deliberate and conscious.⁴⁴ Knowing that there is limited film stock and a limited number of takes to get a shot changes the feel of the shoot for the director, curators, and participants and adds to the natural character of the segments. This kind of media also possesses something tangible and honest, with a materiality of its own—the grainy quality and natural blending of colours and light but also the physical tangibility of the celluloid itself—that conveys a kind of elevated importance, artistry, ponderance, and permanence. Critic and curator Laura U. Marks (2000, xi) uses the term *haptic visuality* to

⁴² In discussion with the author, July 11, 2017.

⁴³ In discussion with the author, Sept. 26, 2017.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*; Wilson, in discussion with the author March 12, 2018.

characterize film's unique materiality and its ability to trigger memories and bodily senses by providing a framework of contact between the perceiver and the person or object represented.

The number of screens with multiple unsynchronized moving images depicting the production and handling of objects could have had an overwhelming effect but presenting it without sound (except during the dancing segment, when the screens synchronize briefly) makes it a secondary element rather than main event. There are also intermittent stills that depict landscapes, providing repose and recalibration of the energy in the gallery. This scrolling background of kinetic and still images projected into the space from the perimeter serves as a backdrop to both the objects and the orations which make connections to the politics of land and place. Charlotte Townsend-Gault (1998), anthropologist of art, explains that First Nations culture cannot be understood without acknowledging the interconnection of land, territory, place, and their stories. The inclusion of moving imagery acknowledges cultural land connections from a spatio-temporal viewpoint.

Interestingly, the team chose not to include interactive media, augmented reality, or virtual reality. Rather than pushing for an entertainment model, the team integrated technology subtly to connect objects with stories of past, present, and future. In doing so, they created an atmosphere of presence, engagement, and contemplation. Shelton remarks that while technology is increasingly an option for curators it should always be used as a backdrop to enhance the objects.⁴⁵ *In a Different Light* uses new media in a discriminating, restrained way to create a

⁴⁵ In discussion with the author, Aug. 21, 2017.

backdrop, as a communication tool, and a means of conveying emotion.⁴⁶ As Broome reflects, “the exhibit has sincere content; kids are listening; it absorbs you; it becomes relevant.”⁴⁷

Because the audio and video elements run at different lengths, the synchronization will always be different, offering new contextualizations on subsequent visits and hence new experiences and insights. For the contemporary museum, this approach offers potential for thinking about the visitor experience. Bjerregaard (2015) emphasizes the capacity of museums to create presence by opening up space for recontextualization and asserts that museums can be considered as ‘technologies of the imagination.’⁴⁸ The museum’s capacity to sharpen imaginative capabilities through innovative design “allow[s] us to imagine potential futures outside the reality of the common-sense” (2015, 80). In other words, although objects play an important role in exhibitions, they need not be presented only as “isolated entities storing value and meaning” (80) devoid of contextualization. Rather, Bjerregaard points to the significance and potential of the *mediation* of those objects and the staging of atmosphere for affect and enrichment of experience from perspectives outside the Western-centric construct.

The in-between

When considering atmosphere, we should remember that it is not formed of one element alone; rather, as Edensor (2015, 333) contends, it “continuously emerge[s] out of an amalgam of forces, affects and happenings.” Edensor furthers this notion by insisting that we “conceive

⁴⁶ Broome in discussion with the author, July 11, 2017.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ This is a term coined by Sneath, Holbraad, and Pederson (2009) in their anthropological research into the concept of imagination and the different technologies and modes used to shape imaginative capabilities, which Bjerregaard refers to in his article.

atmospheres as relational phenomena that enrol different configurations of objects, technologies and (human and non-human) bodies in an ongoing emergence” (2015, 333). From Edensor’s perspective, the components of atmosphere are distributed with no one element solely responsible for defining it. Hence, we must take together all elements of a space or place, including the conditions, processes, and methodologies of their production, when contemplating atmosphere: tangible and intangible, material and immaterial, past and present, subject and object: the *in-between*.

The materials, colour palette, window with a view to the natural landscape, new media, and dynamic lighting techniques in *In a Different Light* aim to make connection to place. The effect evokes the conditions of the objects’ provenance and also the museum’s surrounding environment. Yet these components in combination with the sleek display cases remind us that we are not exactly in nature or in the places where the objects originated but rather in a museum. One might also interpret the objects’ suspension in this pale, grey luminosity as industrial, high-tech or even surreal, sanitizing the earthy or homey atmosphere that the team aspired to recreate. Perhaps it might even be perceived as feigned neutrality. Being in a museum behind glass and outside of their original contexts conveys another kind of value and importance in Western culture. Anthropologist Corinne Kratz (2011) shows how social values are communicated in such exhibition spaces. She states that “if museum objects are removed from market circulation, when they are used in exhibitions recontextualized and combined with other objects, texts, narratives, lighting, and other design features they become part of the circulation of other social value” (2011, 22–23). Kratz elaborates on Clifford’s notion of the art-culture system of value production (Clifford 1988), which theorizes that art and ethnographic exhibitions can not only convey but can actually create value by virtue of occurring in cultural institutions in the first

place (Kratz 2011, 22–23)—for many audiences, this valuation translates into a kind of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977).

According to Anderson (2009, 79), the atmosphere of the aesthetic object “creates a space of intensity that overflows a represented world organized into subjects and objects or subjects and other subjects.” Anderson’s theories on the affects of designed atmospheres and the role of objects clarify how these seemingly inert artifacts come alive in a space as they are animated conceptually through their dialogue with the audience: implicitly through their seemingly weightless suspension in dynamic positions and nearly imperceptible mounting systems, and literally through the accompanying media component featuring orations by contemporary First Nations people. The objects in this exhibition have agency to elicit audience reactions, but the atmosphere, the in-betweenness, is also a component in the transmission and reception of these experiences. In this way, the objects themselves defer to the cacophony of feelings, sensations, and ideas in the space. The gallery certainly has a feel unlike any other in MOA, and it has a distinctiveness that is hard to describe. The reference to daylight and place may not be readily understood by the visitor; however, its effects/affects are experienced on the margins of consciousness and reinforce a kind of presence.

Conclusion

The production of the new gallery afforded MOA and their collaborators the opportunity to reimagine the exhibition environment and, by extension, museum practice in its second age, from a multidisciplinary and multicultural perspective. In this ‘new museology,’ the gallery and its first exhibition are physical embodiments of institutional goals, priorities, philosophies, and vision, marking a continuation of MOA’s core values: collaboration, authority of Indigenous voice, commitment to contemporary living cultures, with a focus on teaching and learning within an inclusive, multicultural, and welcoming environment.

In the staged arrangement of atmospheric components within museum settings, the non-concrete and the immaterial—the in-betweenness—emerge as important aspects of creating meaning and value from perspectives and practices outside a strictly Western construct. While much of the established literature supports the reinvigoration of material culture, Bjerregaard (2015, 74), among others, proposes attending to the intangible aspects of exhibitions:

In all of our concern with objects we have to a certain degree neglected the role of space as a focal point for understanding museum experience. Attending to space we are led to consider the power of atmosphere and accordingly the status of the museum object changes from a concern with what the object may tell us or what it may express to a concern with how the object may fill a space.

Recognizing the power of the non-concrete aspects of spatial design to create meaning and value, the curators, architect, First Nations participants, and designer addressed the in-betweenness of subject and object (Bjerregaard and Sørensen, 2015; Böhme, 1993) and the tensions between material and immaterial (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015, 31), and between past and present.

In a Different Light is an apposite case study for examining how one leading anthropology museum is placing increased emphasis on atmosphere and the sensory dimension of exhibition design, thereby expanding the field of aesthetics. The new aesthetic unseats the ocular-centric paradigm—the textual and visual privilege typical of museums—and makes new space for Indigenous knowledge by foregrounding oral traditions as important teaching and learning technologies. Additionally, confronting the concept of the masterwork by presenting utilitarian artifacts as works of fine art further expands the field of aesthetics to bring a wider base of makers into the realm of conversation. New aesthetics, First voices, and the tuning of atmospheric components expand the audience experience and enrich cultural understanding by promoting other ways of seeing.

In the skein of 21st-century technologies, museums must reimagine paradigms of practice when it comes to exhibition: not only their *products* but also their *processes*. Curators and designers must make many decisions about space: colour, lighting, materials, and composition, and now, increasingly, different kinds of media and technological interventions. While technology affords much by way of both environmental control (lighting, humidity, security, temperature, acoustics, remote adjustment) and interpretation (new media including audio and video), it must be used appropriately. The technology infrastructure of the gallery has allowed curators to explore new ways of presenting information and new processes for eliciting collaborators' contributions. The use of multimedia allows for plural perspectives—seeing objects in different ways, past, present, future—that co-occur, enabling many conversations to happen at one time in one space. In doing so, *In a Different Light: Reflecting on Northwest Coast Art*, as the title articulates, casts new light on art from the Northwest coast by presenting it from many perspectives. Through different reflections on art, audiences are introduced to how

Indigenous histories unfold intergenerationally and continue to be significant in contemporary culture.

By expanding traditional notions of aesthetics, *In a Different Light* upholds MOA's institutional goal of collaboration and the centering of Indigenous voices. Making space for multiple perspectives through culturally diverse ways of remembering, communicating, researching, and learning works toward advancing a decolonized methodology by challenging outdated museum models and renegotiating the curatorial prerogative. Perhaps this re-sensualizing of museum spaces will contribute to new forms of aesthetic action geared toward strengthening connection, fostering understanding and, ultimately, moving us closer to reconciliation.

MOA was fortunate to have received such a bequeath and with it generous financial support. The question for institutions moving forward is how to achieve these kinds of outcomes without similar monetary advantage. Reshaping the processes and practices of exhibition making—both curation and design—may be one place to start. Collaborative teamwork and polyvocal interpretation are certainly approaches many museums are already employing to address decolonization; however, making more space for Indigenous leadership—design, curation, and museum directorship—would hasten these efforts, making way for new voices and new kinds of atmospheres.

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