Taking an audience-centred approach to presenting museum collections online

Audience Engagement: innovative digital approaches | ICOM Italia
17 October 2022
Kati Price | Head of Experience and Digital, V&A
The Victoria and Albert Museum
William Morris and wallpaper design

During his career, William Morris produced over 50 wallpapers. These designs – many of which feature in the V&A’s extensive Morris collection – adopted a naturalistic and very British take on pattern that was both new and quietly radical.

Remember that a pattern is either right or wrong. It cannot be forgiven for blundering, as a picture may be which has otherwise great qualities in it. It is with a pattern as with a fortress, it is no stronger than its weakest point.

William Morris
**Acanthus**

Object: Wallpaper

Place of origin: Great Britain (prints)

Date: 1875 (published)

Artist/Maker: Norris, William, born 1834 - died 1895 (designer)
Jeffrey & Co. (manufacturer)
Norris & Co. (publisher)

Materials and Techniques: colour block print on paper

Credit Line: Given by Mr Miles F. Vigers

Museum number: E.806-1916

Gallery location: Prints & Drawings Study Room, level C, case 2E, shelf DW, box 7

Summary

William Morris designed a number of wallpapers all with repeating patterns based on natural forms. This wallpaper was printed for Morris's company by the London firm Jeffrey & Co., who specialised in high quality 'Art' wallpapers. It measured thirty wood blocks to print the full repeat, and was printed in six different colours (more than any previous design by Morris). Acanthus was one of two colour combinations - one is shades of green and the other is predominantly reddish-brown tones.

'Acanthus' is a large-scale repeat which would appear to be most appropriate for large rooms. However Morris believed that a large pattern actually worked well in a small room. He explained that if it was well designed, a large pattern was more restful to look at than a small one. By the 1870s Morris wallpapers had become fashionable. When the wealthy Mander family furnished their newly built house, Wightwick Manor near Wolverhampton, they used Morris wallpapers in 13 of the rooms. 'Acanthus' was hung in one of the bedrooms.
Annually, we have over 5 million visits to our collections online

1.7 million sessions on *Search the Collections*

3.6 million sessions for collections content on the main website

During closure, our collections content performed extremely well with a 15% increase in page views
Who’s using our collections online?

Most people accessing our collections online are coming for ‘personal interest’ reasons (40%).

If you combine people coming for professional and academic reasons they share a similar proportion (39%).

Though there is a relatively high proportion of people using our collections online to help plan their visit (10%) this changes according to which collections site they’re using.

Relatively few users identified themselves as ‘just browsing’ (4%).
How do users describe their level of knowledge?

When asked to identify their level of knowledge of art and design we can see those with specialist knowledge are users visiting for academic and professional reasons.

Users with less specialist knowledge but more general or ‘enthusiast’ knowledge about art and design are likely to be visiting for personal interest, ‘just browsing’ or planning a visit to the museum.

Compared to other users, those who are ‘just browsing’ are most likely to have little or basic knowledge of art and design.
What is the purpose of their visit: People visiting for personal interest reasons

Across all sites there is a broad and varied use for people visiting for personal interest. Most people are there to look at or learn about art and design and being inspired for their own work.

They are also more likely to have followed a link than those coming for professional or academic reasons.
Who are we designing for?

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Our mission

Explore the Collections will bring together V&A objects and stories to inspire people to develop their own creativity, understand and research over 1 million eclectic objects.
Make the collections **accessible to all**

Encourage **creativity** and **making**

Present imagery in **new** and **better ways**

Help people **discover** more objects and stories

**Grow our audience** beyond our sector
Underwear
Online only

Often a hidden, secret layer, underwear can be completely functional or luxuriously sensual. Playful and provocative, washable and wearable, undergarments reflect changing attitudes to body image and personal assertiveness.

Where to find this collection
Online only

Search the Collections
SHARE


The Raphael cartoons are designs for tapestries and were commissioned from Raphael by Pope Leo X (1513-1521) in 1518. The tapestries were intended to hang in the Sistine Chapel in Rome, but by one of Leo’s predecessors, Pope Sisto IV (1471-84): The Chapel was primarily intended for the use of the Pope and the Papal chapel, no body of clergy and only immediately surrounding him. The redaction of the chapel under Sisto dealt largely with the theme of the Pope’s authority. The tapestries continued this theme, illustrating scenes from the lives of St. Peter and St. Paul who were seen as the founders of the Christian Church, and the sacrifices of the Pope’s authority and power. They had in addition seven scenes showing scenes from Leo’s life, also designed by Raphael: the cartoons for these have not survived.

In this cartoon Christ tells Peter to cast his net into the water whereupon he and his fellow apostles make a miraculous catch. The story refers to Peter’s role as “fisher of men,” who converts others to Christianity. It also demonstrates his humility as he kneels before Christ to acknowledge His divinity, and confesses his own ordinariness.

For further information on the Raphael Tapestries Cartoons please see the V&A website under: Collections, Paintings & Drawings, Paintings & Drawings Features, Raphael Cartoons.

The Raphael cartoons are designs for tapestries and were commissioned from Raphael by Pope Leo X (1511-1521). The tapestries were intended to hang in the Sistine Chapel in Rome, built by one of Leo's predecessors, Pope Sixtus IV (1471-84). The Chapel was primarily intended for the use of the Pope and the Papal chapel, the body of faith and duty immediately surrounding him. The decoration of the chapel under Sixtus dealt largely with the themes of the Pope's authority. The tapestries continued this theme, illustrating scenes from the lives of St. Peter and St. Paul, who were seen as the founders of the Christian Church, and the sources of the Pope's authority and power. They had in addition seven scenes showing scenes from Luke's life, also designed by Raphael: the cartoons for these have not survived.

In this cartoon Christ tells Peter to cast his net into the water wherever he sees his fellow apostles make a miraculous catch. The story refers to Peter's use as "fisher of men", who converts others to Christianity. It also demonstrates his humility as he kneels before Christ to acknowledge His divinity, and confess his own ordinariness.

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Cartoon for a Tapestry about 1515-1516 (made)
Content warning
Feedback from users
Design & UX

Alien Harvey @AllisonHappening • Feb 9
Explore in its truest sense - look something up, disappear down a rabbit hole, or wander off somewhere unexpected. Inspiring and playful discovery tool from @katerice’s Digital team 🤗

V&A @V_and_A • Feb 9
Stop searching, start exploring.
Discover the V&A from the comfort of your home with the new Explore the collections. With redesigned pages and new functionality, you can even filter the stories of over 1 million objects in 2021.

Kate Meyers Entry (she/her) @ktemeyers
Manely to @katerice and @V_and_A
This is amazing! It's so user friendly and really inspires some creative searching. It feels playful, which is so rare with these types of databases.
4:56 PM • Feb 9, 2021 • Twitter Web App
2 Likes

Dr. Liz Tragenza @billtragenza • Feb 10
Oh... have we all seen the @V_and_A new collections online platform? My mom says it's good. The search is so intuitive and it's so easy to find what you're looking for!

Linking through to one of my favourite things in the collection...

Fashion Design | Field, Marjorie | V&A Explore The Collections
Fashion design for dress by Marjorie Field for Matilo, 1945–48
collections.vam.ac.uk
You May Also Like

Wai @braincell_23 · Feb 9

Wow!

Thx @katioprice and team - such a game-changer and gives a much more enriched UX, especially being able to filter by what's on display, and location, as a volunteer, this will make helping visitors much easier.

And the "you may also like" bit, a brilliant added extra!

Inax wespehej @iames

Replying to @katioprice and @v_ynd_A

This is really a-ma-zing. Congratulations. ✨ All those assets show up like a charm and this sweet "you may also like"-UX is a real cherry on the cake.
A simple search for Cyprus...

From the Collections
From ancient Chinese ceramics to Alexander McQueen evening dresses, take an incredible journey through 5000 years of human creativity with our online collections.
Things I discovered searching for 'casts'...

Abbey Ellis @abbyinmuseums • Feb 9
Inspired by @cypriotartleeds's (most excellent!) thread earlier today, here are a few things that I discovered after searching for "casts" on the @V_and_A's new interface....

Simon Sladen @theatrecurator • Feb 9
Introducing.... Explore the Collections! Browse over 1.2 million @V_and_A objects via our brand new search engine vam.ac.uk/collections?y...
Show this thread

From the Collections
From ancient Chinese ceramics to Alexander McQueen evening dresses, take an incredible journey through 5000 years of human creativity with our online collections.

Abbey Ellis @abbyinmuseums • Feb 9
A plaster fig leaf which was once attached to the cast of Michelangelo's David. The cast was made by Domenico Braccioni in c.1837. The fig leaf was hung on the figure to protect the delicate eyes of Victorian ladies from glimpsing David's manhood.

collections.vam.ac.uk/item/085428/fl...

Abbey Ellis @abbyinmuseums • Feb 9
An obvious pick! Yes! But a very worthy one. Here is the cast of Trajan's Column, purchased in 1884. What I especially love about this record is the inclusion of historic photos, showing how the cast was constructed and displayed over its lifetime.
collections.vam.ac.uk/item/0102467/f...

Abbey Ellis @abbyinmuseums • Feb 9
And finally, an etching by Rembrandt van Rijn showing a man drawing from a cast, illuminated by candlelight. A lovely reminder of how plaster casts were used by artists to hone their skills.
collections.vam.ac.uk/item/0517036/m...

Abbey Ellis @abbyinmuseums • Feb 9
Now for something unexpected but wonderful, a plaster cast of a carnelian intaglio, set into the lid of a pendant case. An inscription on the cast reads 'KROMOS'. I wonder, therefore, if the two figures are Kronos and Zeus? Or maybe I'm missing something?
collections.vam.ac.uk/item/01153363/...
Eurovision fans rejoice...

Adrian Murphy @acediscovery  ·  Feb 9
Had an explore and found Sandie Shaw’s frock from @eurovision in 1967. How lovely! I never knew it was pink.

Theatre Costume | V&A Explore The Collections
Dress worn by Sandie Shaw for Eurovision Song Contest, designed by Parker Costumier Ltd, 1967. Pink silk, pink chiffon overdress with ...
collections.vam.ac.uk

Replies

Adrian Murphy @acediscovery  ·  Feb 9
Replying to @acediscovery @katiprice and 2 others
I've tweeted this just now and also shared on a Eurovision fan facebook page, and *love* the clear and simple social media preview image.
We even got a shout out for the data work

Seb Chan @sebchan · Feb 9
Really nice work! There’s so much complicated plumbing underneath museum collections that makes this sort of work too often under appreciated!

Kati Price @katiprice · Feb 9
We did it! Team Digital @V_and_A only went and launched Explore the Collections - our biggest launch in 5 years. Read more and do go have a rummage! vam.ac.uk/blog/digital/e...
Impact of Explore the Collections

- Views for our object pages are **up 53% on last year** and there has been a **15% increase** in object pages viewed per session.

- People love image led experiences: on an object page ‘image view’, ‘image carousel’ and ‘image download’ account for **79% of the interactions**. In the first two weeks after launch we saw image views double – from 134.0K to 274.3K.

- People are navigating through the collections using data tags – we have more functional ‘object tags’ on an object pages and we saw a **31% increase** in people clicking on tags on object pages from 6100 to 8000 (again, the first two weeks after launch).
Thank you

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Twitter: @katiprice