

**A STUDY OF THE NOTIONS OF IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE
IN MUSEUM BASED EXHIBITIONS**

RESEARCH THESIS FOR MASTERS OF DESIGN

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the notions of immersive experience in museum exhibitions, and examines whether the communication of the exhibition content can be transmitted more effectively to visitors through the creation of an immersive environment.

The study reviews the origins and changing interpretations of the term 'immersive experience', and draws upon the work of researchers including Heim (1998) and Bitgood (1990) to examine immersive experience in the context of museum exhibitions. The role of narrative in enhancing immersive experience in exhibitions is explored through the work of researchers including Hooper-Greenhill (2000) and the ideas of Joseph Campbell on myth, story telling, and the concept of 'hero'. Theories of effective communication and learning in the museum context are examined, as well as formal strategies that can be undertaken by museums to inform and facilitate communication and learning for the experience of the visitor.

The author employs the methodology of 'participant observation', using her experience as Senior Designer at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney to reflect on the aspects of multi-sensory stimulation required for the communication process in an exhibition, and on what is achieved by the implementation of new technology into museum exhibition spaces. A number of exhibitions designed at the Powerhouse Museum by the author are used as case studies.

The major outcome of the study is a theoretical framework on immersive experience that may be applied by museum designers and curators to enhance communication experience for visitors to exhibitions, or may be used by educators to enhance learning experiences for groups who use museums as learning environments.

The thesis concludes with some ideas for further research in the area of immersive experience in the museum, including the development of a methodology for evaluating the effectiveness of immersive experiences created by museum designers.

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