

Text: Lyndsey Dennis



CULTURE CLUB

What makes museum shops destinations in their own right? Retail Focus finds out.

Museums are using their retail spaces as a more accessible art and culture experience for visitors. It is a vibrant and profitable industry that has consistently appealed to a wide audience who love museums and want to take a memory of their visit with them.

Pop-ups are a favoured avenue for museums. The V&A has collaborated with Carnaby on its Christmas lights, inspired by its 'You Say You Want A Revolution? Records and Rebels 1966 - 70' exhibition, and opened a pop-up in Carnaby, where it is selling tickets for the exhibition.

'We find that visitors are looking for unique or harder-to-find products either for self purchase or gifts. When you purchase from a museum or gallery you have access to additional provenance of where the product has derived from: you have the opportunity to find out more about the archive or the exhibition that you have recently visited. Also, it is an opportunity to feel that you are supporting the museum or gallery that you have chosen to visit,' says Sarah Sevier, head of retail at V&A.

The shop at the V&A in Kensington is undergoing a redesign by

architectural firm Friend and Co. as part of its ongoing restoration and redesign known as 'FuturePlan'. The practice will be working with RA Projects and Millimetre on the project, which will transform the museum's main shop into a new flexible and dynamic space with better connections to surrounding exhibition spaces.

London Transport Museum trialled a pop-up in South Kensington last year, and the Natural History Museum is currently running a pop-up in Leeds for the festive season.

Elsewhere, British artists the Chapmans Brothers and Galerie Gabriel Rolt have worked with UXUS to design their first ever store, a pop-up in Amsterdam's Red Light district.

'Functioning as both an exhibition and retail space, it was important for the UXUS design team to maintain the creative duo's hardcore artistic expression. Both the location, a former massage parlour with old massage tables, and worn out interior and the name of the store, 'Jake and Dinos F**king Hell Das Shop', inspired UXUS in creating the design,' says George Anthony Gottl, CEO of UXUS.

The agency applied its 'Art X Design' philosophy by using leftover objects at the site and repurposing them to stage Chapmans' provocative art pieces, complemented with limited edition merchandise. All original hardware was left untouched >

Above: UXUS repurposed left over objects for the Jake and Dinos F**king Hell Das Shop in Amsterdam.

Left: Lumsden Design created a refreshed look for MoMA Design Store in New York, enhancing its role in celebrating the museum's mission of making great design accessible to everyone.



except for being spray painted bright white. The Brothers' signature smiley faces brand the space chaotically and also accent the facade, inviting curious passers-by inside. The main retail area is accented with rough materiality, metal chains support fixtures and contrast the stark white furniture, while metal wire hangers hold t-shirts displayed on racks and walls.

'In a world of ever-changing trends and social media savvy millennials always looking for the next great thing, museums are keeping up with the current zeitgeist by using their retail spaces as a more accessible art and culture experience vs. their main galleries. Retail allows them to appeal to a wider public, adapt to latest cultural trends and generate non-funded revenue,' believes Gottl. 'Artists translate their values into temporary pop-up shops while keeping the exclusive factor because of the limited amount of goods that are being sold and limited time frame during which the pop-ups are active. Following this strategy, many museums and artists are successfully reaching the masses, while still appealing to the cutting-edge consumer and devoted collectors.'

In terms of visual merchandising, PLANarama has seen standards improve massively in the museum sector. 'I think it is because museums need to entice their customers to spend that bit of money in the shops as museums are generally free to enter - they have to give a great visual impact so people are excited to take away memories with them and spend money in supporting the museum,' says Ben Alder, managing director of PLANarama, which has worked with The British Museum, The Tate and currently on projects with the V&A.



Top: The V&A has collaborated with Carnaby on its Christmas lights and opened a pop-up in Carnaby to promote its 'You Say You Want A Revolution? Records and Rebels 1966 - 70' exhibition. **Middle:** London Transport Museum's pop-up in the South Kensington tube arcade last year juxtaposed historic artwork from the museum's in-house poster collection with modern design and playful colour schemes. **Bottom:** The Natural History Museum is currently trialling a pop-up store in Leeds for the festive season.



'It's important for gift shops to invest in VM to excite their customers and visitors to buy souvenirs which remind them of their experience. It's important because the customers are the supporters of the museum and without them there wouldn't be museums - it's like any retail store really, if a store didn't invest in their VM then they wouldn't get customers, retention customers or the footfall they strive to get. They wouldn't create a buzz and wouldn't be a viable business,' says Alder.

The MoMA Design Store has reopened in New York following a three-month renovation. Located across the street from The Museum of Modern Art, the store has a light and airy new look, showcasing the best of contemporary and modern design.

Lumsden Design created a refreshed look that reflected the design-led inspiration of the products, which MoMA is so well known for. The renovation increases the natural light highlighting several custom-design elements. The store features a new sound system by Teenage Engineering and an iPad-based sales system. It had to appeal to a wide demographic and focus on the stories and presentation of the merchandise which consistently surprises and delights visitors.

'The material palette is simple, refined and contemporary. Maple timber, white Durat surfaces, bead blasted steel and etched glass have all been used to give a sophisticated backdrop for the products. The specification was selected to ensure product standout on the merchandise system, which we designed specifically to cope with the multitude of product categories, shapes, sizes and colours - typical of most museum stores and particularly prevalent at MoMA,' says Callum Lumsden, director of Lumsden Design.

'Museum retail is not cookie cutter retail, it is individual, compelling and the very best examples are delighting their customers with products which cannot be found in mainstream retail outlets,' continues Lumsden. The very best museums are able to develop great products that reflect their individual brands and cultural stories, and which makes them a 'go to' retail destination in their own right. **RF**