

From Gallery to Storefront: The Interdisciplinary Dialogue Between Exhibition Design and Visual Merchandising

Akmal Hamed Abdelrahman

Associate Prof. Visual Arts program director at Galala University-Suez-Egypt
akmal.a.rahman@gu.edu.eg

Salma Hesham Kamal

Lecturer assistant, Interior Design Manager at IKEA-Karlsruhe, Germany
salmahkamal93@gmail.com

Abstract:

In recent years, retail environments have evolved beyond their commercial function, emerging as hybrid spaces where commerce intersects with art, architecture, and sensory design. This paper examines the integration of exhibition design principles into visual merchandising through a comparative analysis of two flagship retail brands—Gentle Monster and Aēsop. Drawing on concepts from the experience economy and servicescape theory, the study explores how each brand employs spatial storytelling, sensory engagement, and aesthetic strategies to construct distinctive consumer experiences. Gentle Monster's theatrical, installation-like environments contrast with Aēsop's minimal, site-specific architectural approach, yet both position the retail space as an experiential and cultural destination. The analysis highlights how these differing strategies not only influence consumer perception but also reflect broader shifts in retail design toward interdisciplinary, art-inspired practice. By situating these cases within the discourse on contemporary art's influence on spatial design, the paper contributes to an understanding of retail as a medium for cultural expression as well as commercial exchange. Through this exploration, the paper positions retail as a hybrid cultural-commercial sphere where the logics of art exhibition and consumer space converge, offering insights into the future of both disciplines.

Paper History:

Paper received July 9, 2025, Accepted August 29, 2025, Published online November 1, 2025

Keywords:

experiential retail, visual merchandising, contemporary art, spatial storytelling, sensory design.

References:

- 1- Bishop, C. (2005). *Installation art: A critical history*. Tate Publishing.
- 2- Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational aesthetics*. Les Presses du Réel.
- 3- Joy, A., Sherry Jr, J. F., Venkatesh, A., Wang, J., & Chan, R. (2014). Perceiving images and telling tales: A visual and verbal analysis of the meaning of the marketplace. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(2), 266–291.
- 4- McLean, F. (2020). *Marketing the museum*. Routledge.
- 5- Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (2019). *The experience economy* (updated ed.). Harvard Business Review Press.
- 6- Bitner, M. J. (1992). Servicescapes: The impact of physical surroundings on customers and employees. *Journal of Marketing*, 56(2), 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299205600205>
- 7- Dean, D. (1994). *Museum exhibition: Theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- 8- Hultén, B. (2011). Sensory marketing: The multi-sensory brand-experience concept. *European Business Review*, 23(3), 256–273. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09555341111130245>
- 9- MacLeod, S. (2005). *Reshaping museum space: Architecture, design, exhibitions*. London: Routledge.
- 10- Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The experience economy: Work is theatre & every business a stage*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- 11- Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (2019). *The experience economy, with a new preface by the authors: Competing for customer time, attention, and money*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- 12- Spence, C. (2020). Senses of place: Architectural design for the multisensory mind. *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications*, 5(1), 46. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-020-00243-4>
- 13- Spence, C., & Gallace, A. (2011). Multisensory design: Reaching out to touch the consumer. *Psychology & Marketing*, 28(3), 267–308. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20392>
- 14- McDonald, A. (2021, March). *The Aesop experience*. *Habitus Living*. Retrieved from

<https://www.habitusliving.com/projects/the-aesop-experience/>

- 15- Parsons, E. (2022, October 10). Snøhetta designs new Aesop London flagship. Wallpaper*. Retrieved from <https://www.wallpaper.com/lifestyle/aesop-snohetta-london-flagship>
- 16- Krishna, A. (2012). An integrative review of sensory marketing: Engaging the senses to affect perception, judgment and behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 22(3), 332–351. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2011.08.003>
- 17- Architectural Digest. (2019, April 4). Aēsop’s new Brooklyn store is designed by Frida Escobedo. Architectural Digest. Retrieved from <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/>
- 18- Indesign Live. (2017, March 6). Gentle Monster: The store as art gallery. Indesignlive. Retrieved from <https://www.indesignlive.com/>
- 19- Gentle Monster. (n.d.). Stores. Retrieved August 16, 2025, from <https://www.gentlemonster.com/au/store?country=sg>
- 20- Aesop. (n.d.). Store locator. Retrieved August 16, 2025, from <https://www.aesop.com>
- 21- At Issue Journal. (2018). Gentle Monster: Redefining retail through art installations. At Issue Journal. Retrieved from <https://atissuejournal.com>

CITATION

Akmal Abdelrahman, Salma Kamal (2025), From Gallery to Storefront: The Interdisciplinary Dialogue Between Exhibition Design and Visual Merchandising, *International Design Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 6, (November 2025) pp 315-326
