

Audentia: An Archeological Discovery
A Thesis by Emily Sneideman
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Introduction

My initial interest in museums is rooted in my parent's fascination with information. We would visit local museums wherever we vacationed to allocate this interest. While I eventually shared this love, the first things I noticed about museums were visual. I enjoyed the small dioramas and scale models that gave you a glimpse into history, the images that covered the walls, and the spotlights illuminating the art. I could understand a history better if there were more than just words on a page, but small visual pieces put together as a sequential model.

As an art school student, I have been learning the basic elements of making a creative piece such as content, form, hierarchy, and countless others. Learning these artistic ideals has put museums in a new perspective for me. I now look for these elements in the exhibits that I visit. On the other hand, my Classical Archeology minor demands the focus of detailed history, evidence, and facts. Combining art, archeology, and museums eventually lead me to develop an archeological exhibit of my creation.

For this project, I have integrated my two academic concentrations. I created my own fictional city called Audentia. I researched Roman colonies, traditions, architecture, artifacts, and history to usher specific details for my city. I then used this information and created a new history. I chose to invent my own history because it gave me the liberation of creativity without being bound to historical accuracy. I then created 16 artifacts that resemble those found on an archeological dig, and displaying them in my exhibit. On these artifacts, I painted images and carved reliefs of my invented history in a Greco-Roman style of ceramics, which often depicts stories on their pottery. The following sections explain in detail my process of creating this project.

Contextual Background

In May of 2015, about four months before the official start date of this project; I studied abroad in Paris, France. While visiting, I knew that I had a unique situation: full disposal to some of the world’s best museums. I took the opportunity to visit every one I could. I visited a new museum at least three times a week, only returning to the Louvre with my free student pass. In my sketchbook, I wrote down specific details I noticed about the layout, aesthetic, and visuals of the museums, accompanied with pictures (figure 1). This was my initial research.

Visiting the museums over the summer was helpful for my artistic side, but I was falling short on learning more specifics about archeology. When I returned in the fall, I knew that I had a lot of research ahead of me. I checked out books from the library, talked to my archeology professors, and read countless online articles about Roman daily-life characteristics, and how they differ from any other civilization. All of this information that I gathered is how I began to craft my own city.

I started by collecting information on how Roman cities develop. Starting with the early huts scattered on a hillside, to orthogonal layouts inspired by Roman army camps. The next step is fortification. Many cities are placed in locations with natural fortification such as hilltops and rocky cliffs, but these cities often build walls for precaution. I then moved on to Architectural details of public and private buildings, familial versus public religion, local government, and the

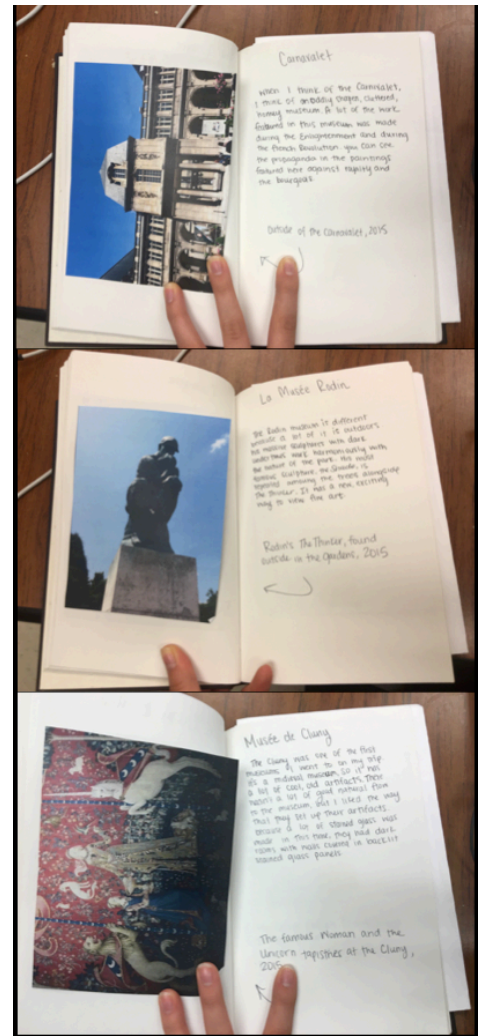


Figure 1: Spreads from Museum Visits

list goes on. This research took up a large part of the first semester. Once I found all this information, I didn't know what to do with it. My professors advised me to take a step back and do some research on other artists who work in the museum field or use museums as their inspiration.

I found three interesting books on creating exhibits as an artist, and my review panel pointed me in the direction of Fred Wilson, Andrea Fraser, and Susan Miller. Fred Wilson's work is an interesting combination of art and history. He places art pieces and artifacts in his own installations. Wilson unexpectedly juxtaposes pieces in ways that give them new meanings. For example, in his piece "Liberty/Liberté", Wilson places two busts of George Washington behind a gold fence where he made his inaugural speech. The bust on the higher pedestal, seen over the top of the fence, is the public figure of

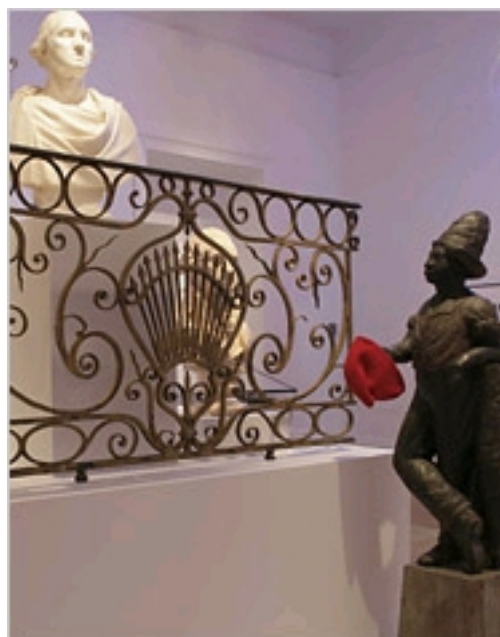


Figure 2: Wilson's three figures arranged around the Inaugural fence

Washington. The second bust is placed lower, peering through the fence. This bust makes Washington look menacing, and is meant to represent Washington as a slave owner¹. He also places a traditional African sculpture nearby, looking at the scene (Figure 2). Wilson brings his scholarly interests together with his artist's eye to create installations that are charged with nuance. Looking at his work, I realized that what I place in my exhibit and where I place it is indicative of the narrative I am going to tell.

¹ *Liberty/Liberte* by Fred Wilson. Perf. Fred Wilson. New York Historical Society, 18 Jan. 2012. Web. <nyhistory.org>.

Methodology

I started this project by redesigning a pamphlet from the Kelsey Museum of Archeology. Because of this quick assignment, I learned that graphic design was not the aspect of museums that I wanted to focus on. Instead, my interests are in the Education, design, and collection of museums, not just the graphic design aspect of them. I began doing research on possible subjects and museum theory. I needed to take a step back and focus on the subjects that interest me. I checked out several books on various subjects within Roman Archeology and started reading.

After gathering the information received from my classes, research, and professors, I was unsure on what to do with it. I had over one hundred details of a typical ancient Roman city written down, but none were site-specific. Using this information, I decided to invent a fictional but typical example of a Roman city. I named it Audentia, a Latin word meaning bold or courageous, and I crafted its history in my sketchbook.

As I read, I sketched some of the architectural elements and artifacts that interested me, including burial methods, arch construction, and column capitals. I wanted my sketches to look like they belong in an archeological museum, but I was unsure how to do this. I went back to the Kelsey Museum of Archeology and looked at how they incorporated illustration with their exhibits.

The Kelsey uses line drawings as tools to help visitors understand what is happening on the surface of an artifact, a technique I have seen in archeological museums before. If there are markings or illustrations that are worn or hard to see, the illustrations act as a guide to the audience so they are able to understand the full content of the artifact. I decided to take my sketches and recreate them by using a Wacom tablet in order to make them look like museum

illustrations. This way, I was able to quickly sketch my thoughts and ideas out and edit them easily and effectively.

My very first attempt at an illustration on the Wacom tablet did not turn well. I thought that starting with an illustration of a city layout would help me gain my bearings, since city layouts are often the first thing you describe about a new city when teaching archeology. I didn't know how to show the detail needed in the layout, so it looked like a bunch of square blocks and city walls without interest or hierarchy.



My next few illustrations were of a vase and a pillar capital (figure 3). These are two common elements we see in an Ancient Roman city. I wanted to try some illustrations full color, thinking it would make them more detailed. I found that using black and white line drawings was just as efficient at displaying the information I needed the viewer to understand without the distraction of full color. From here, I went back to line drawing.



Figure 3: the evolution of my illustrations, the city layout and the Roman vase

The next illustration was of a Roman temple. I pulled inspiration from a few of my favorite architectural antiquities, and I created a full Roman temple that I dedicated to the patron gods of my city, Apollo and Diana. Because this illustration turned out well, I gained the motivation I needed to push forward with my project.

At this point, I knew I wanted to use these illustrations as the basis of my project. I was inventing

my own city, and I needed illustrations to depict visuals of details. I designed how the display would look: 20-24 illustrations hung on a wall in picture frames, with wall labels to caption each image. However, my IP review told me that it didn't feel like a museum. A museum shows you evidence and artifacts, and my project lacked this.

Coming in to the second semester, I quickly realized that I needed to get back in the ceramics studio to make artifacts to accompany my illustrations. I made two sets of ceramic test pieces. The first set was used to shatter. I wanted to break the pots and put them back together as if they were found, so I quickly threw a few vessels and fired them to test this. I put the vessels back together using a two-part epoxy to mimic the process a museum would use to reconstruct ceramics. The second set of test pieces were made to test finishing strategies. I used slips, glazes, washes, and burnishing on the outside of the pot to mimic the ancient roman pottery I used as inspiration.

In the end, I decided not to shatter the pieces. In my tests, the shattering exposed the inside of the clay body, which was inauthentic to real artifacts since the fabric



Figure 4: A sherd from a Roman ceramic piece from the Kelsey compared to the studio clay I used to make the artifacts. Note the difference in the fabric.

of the clay differs from Roman artifacts (Figure 4). Also, I was unable to control the shattering to my liking. A lot of the pots turned into small, dusty sherds, which made full reconstruction impossible. The artifacts typically on display in archeological museums are complete, and

shattering the pieces broke this illusion. Moving forward, I made a large vase constructed out of three thrown pieces to explore this process of assemblage typically done by potters of the time. I also made four calyxes, a bell krater, and many others. I included sixteen of the artifacts I made in the final project. I chose the ones that showed the story on their surface and had the most traditional shapes.

After making the artifacts, I made posters with illustrations, which highlighted some of the more important artifacts, accompanied with information that gave more of an insight into the history of the city. I wrote the wall copy, and edited it several times with students and Jennifer Metsker. I wrote the wall copy with a tone of authority, making the information seem factual.

After consulting many fellow students and moving the posters and display case around several times, I decided on a formation that worked well for my exhibit. I painted the walls, hung my work, and placed the artifacts.

Creative Work

My final piece is a miniature archeological exhibit of a fictional Roman city. A large display case is the focus. The color of the walls, a chromatic cool grey, makes the earth tones and oranges in the artifacts stand out. On the left side of the display case, wall labels show information about each artifact using corresponding numbers. The information on the labels includes a description, approximate time period, and collection information of the piece.

To the right of the display case, there is a wall panel of text, explaining the context of the exhibit, accompanied by vinyl with the title and subtitle of the exhibit: “Audentia, An Archeological Discovery”. The vinyl is white, making the title text stand out on the grey wall. On the corner wall, a series of six illustrations accompanied by text are hung, which explain the

illustrations in detail. I hung the wall labels, wall text, and posters of illustrations using screws and magnets, which prevent the paper from being pierced or permanently mounted. Small tags with numbers are placed inside the display case, which correlates to the numbers on the wall label to the left of the case (Figure 5). The wall labels give us a brief description of the piece, the medium, time period of production, and collection information. I visited the museums on campus and took note on their labeling system. I used a system similar to the Kelsey Museum of archeology because of the similarities in exhibit layout and content.

All sixteen artifacts have imagery that relate to Audentia. For example, the Bell Krater features a scene from the mythological foundation of the city, Diana and Apollo fighting the Mantichora. The pieces also show political history, such as a plate featuring the Flavian Emperor, Domitian, who built the temple illustrated in the first poster.



Figure 5: The layout of the exhibit

The installation of the exhibit dictated the form of the final product because of the wall space I was issued. I sketched plans for spots either in a corner or along one wall, but I unexpectedly received a corner with one long wall and three feet of the other wall. I had to rearrange my plans to fit this new parameter.

Conclusion

Through this project, I found that my artistic practice informs my scholarly practice in a surprising way, and vice versa. Initially, I believed that the content should be uniquely scholarly, and it should be decided before the creative side of exhibit development. Then, using the content, I would create the exhibit using the foundation skills I have learned since the beginning of my art school career. Realistically, I used both my scholarly and artistic practices simultaneously throughout the process. The formation of the content, while heavily research based, required my creativity to form a new city with its own history. Similarly, the development of the exhibit included my research of museum practices. Through this project, I was able to flex and grow in both scholarship and creativity.

I will be pursuing a Master's in Museum Studies from New York University in the fall, and I believe that this project has helped me prepare for this. I believe that this project was an investment in my future by giving me a head start in museum practice and research. Taking what I learned this year and applying it to my future is the biggest outcome of this project.

In the future, I want to design more exhibits for different subject matter. I am often asked what kind of museum I would like to work at, and I have never given a definitive answer to that question. While there is some subject matter that I am particular to, I realized throughout this project that it's the development of the exhibit itself that interests me.

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Figure 1: Spreads from Museum Visits, Paris, France. Personal photograph by author. 2015.

Figure 2: Cotter, Holland. An Installation by Fred Wilson: Liberty/Liberte. 2006. New York Historical Society, New York, NY.

Figure 3: Illustrations by Emily Sneideman, Ann Arbor, MI. Personal photograph by author. 2015.

Figure 4: Fabric comparison of Ancient and New Clay, Ann Arbor, MI. Personal photograph by author. 2016.

Figure 5: An Installation by Emily Sneideman, Ann Arbor, MI. Personal photograph by author. 2016.