In collaboration at the University of Houston

Graphic Communications Program  School of Art
and the College of Architecture
Spring 2011

Work\textit{ing}Shop :  Ryan Middle School Exhibition

In collaboration with Carroll Parrott Blue, The Dawn Project Executive Director and Research Professor, Center for Public History and Anna Bass, Ryan Middle School Art Instructor funded by Texas Learning & Computation Center and the University of Houston Instructional Support and Outreach

Ryan Middle School

Excerpts from Building on History: The Jack Yates Colored Senior High School Building

The Jack Yates Colored Senior High School was built in 1925 and opened on February 8, 1926 with 784 students and 17 teachers. The two-story, red brick building was designed in the Classical Revival style. William Ward Watkin, one of Houston’s most eminent architects, most likely played a key role in its classical design. The original Jack Yates Colored Senior High School building housed Houston Colored Junior College from 1927-1947. At the time, it was the only municipally owned and operated colored junior college in the entire world. Houston Colored Junior College was the precursor of Texas Southern University, an integral Third Ward institution. To a large degree the Third Ward’s preeminence as a cultural center was based on the emergence of Texas Southern University as a major educational institution. After its inception, Texas Southern University was the first historically black college and university to house a law school—the Thurgood Marshall School of Law—and was also the first state-supported institution in the city of Houston. Individuals involved in the school’s history are also considered significant elements of local, state, and national history. Reverend Jack Yates was instrumental in organizing the first Baptist association for blacks in Houston, the Old Land Mark Association, which exists today. He also played an important role in the encouragement of fellow freed slaves to own land in Houston. James D. Ryan was the first principal of old Jack Yates Colored Senior High School. Many of the program’s state of the art equipment and teacher’s salaries were privately funded by Ryan.

Today, the original Jack Yates Colored Senior High School building at 2610 Elgin Street houses James D. Ryan Middle School. It is a secondary school, which serves grades 6 through 8, and is a part of the Houston Independent School District. Ryan Middle School serves much of the Third Ward area and a very small portion of Midtown Houston. Ryan Middle School is one of seven middle schools in Houston to offer the Vanguard Magnet Program which encourages the development of students who have been identified as gifted and talented intellectually, creatively, or in leadership. Both Ryan and Yates still remain a tradition in the Third Ward and many of the alumni are passionate about their schools. The school has developed an innovative community learning program based on the unique history of Ryan’s present and its past as the former old Jack Yates school. The idea is to teach a living history where the students can take pride and ownership in their school by researching their school’s history by interviewing former alumni and retired teachers; collecting photographs and other historic materials to create an archive; photograph those still living; and audio and videotape their oral histories. The Ryan Middle School History Project will supplement the school’s officially prescribed curriculum. Carroll Parrott Blue, The Dawn Project Executive Director and former alumna, brings value to this Ryan project through Dawn’s use of digital media to “grow storytellers who invent our future.” Ryan School and the Dawn Project are working together to produce university-school-community team linkages and create digital media enhanced educational programs.
Project

Work\textsuperscript{ing}Shop : Ryan Middle School Exhibition

This collaborative project brings the University of Houston graduates in the Graphic Communications Program and fourth year undergraduates in the College of Architecture together for the design, fabrication, and installation of a portable exhibition about Ryan Middle School for an opening on March 24, 2011. The venue for the exhibition is in what was once the woodworking shop at old Yates High and Ryan Middle School. Within the curriculum, shop classes once held an important role in preparing students for a trade; a way to contribute to the community and incubate local businesses. As an exhibition, \textit{WorkingShop} will re-envision the creative energy, craft, and active participation present in a shop class.

The goal of any exhibition is to unfold a narrative, to deliver a story within a public space. Ryan Middle School’s significant history and relation to the Third Ward community will be told through an immersive environment. The exhibition will help build pride in the efforts and achievements of Ryan Middle School as we bring in the Third Ward Community, students and their families, former alumni, and political leaders from the greater Houston area to the opening night event and subsequent tours. As students from UH, your participation in this exhibition design offers the opportunity to get out of the classroom, engage in a community dialogue, and receive direct feedback from the audience. Formal presentations of the exhibition proposals to the community will hone your presentation skills and provide immediate response. Working directly with Ryan Middle School art students will involve you in a dialogue about the process of design with a group of young students.

Total Project Budget: $5,000. Distribution of $1,000 per team

Exhibition Components

Basic components for the exhibition consist of the following:

1. \textbf{Entry Wall}:
   Introductory entry/exit “wall” with the exhibition title, introduction, basic history narrative and timeline as well as the exit quotation and departing summary

2. \textbf{ShopWorks}:
   Four themed workshops/stations/statements based on a selected topic within the history of RMS

3. \textbf{FrameWorks}:
   a system/structure for RMS art students to contribute to the exhibition

\* Design graduates must create a documentation of the process and results

Materials

\textbf{Materials / Mood / Attitude}

The site of the Ryan Middle School exhibition will strongly influence the mood, attitude, materials and organization of the installation. Four things to consider include:

1) Ryan Middle School: its architecture, role, history and accomplishments
2) Third Ward: relationship between RMS and the surrounding community
3) The Workshop: an exhibition in a workshop space with woodworking equipment
4) Interaction: relationship of exhibition to current art students at RMS.
Available Materials (free)
- Large Scale Prints (plotters at TLC2 lab are 42” and 60” wide)
- Four on-site shop tools (circa 1960) to remain in place
- Digital Stories (video)
- Website (The Dawn Project, Mapping the Third Ward)
- Architectural Salvage

City of Houston Building Materials Reuse Warehouse
9003 N. Main St.
218.814.3324

Other materials to consider:
- Recycled or new: wood, metal, cardboard
- Architectural Salvage
- Vinyl
- Stencils
- Xerography
- Video
- Photography
- Digital Projection
- Fabric

RMS Themes

The two classes will be divided into four teams comprised of graphics and architecture students. Each individual team will be responsible for one ShopWork (a theme based installation). Two teams will collaborate for the entry wall. Two teams will collaborate to make the Framework (structure for RMS student installation)

ShopWork themes include:

1. **Community History**
   - Its Fabric, Homes and Small Businesses
2. **Community History**
   - Its Monuments, Churches and Higher Land Uses
3. **Building History**
   - Jack Yates Colored Senior High School 1926-1958
   - Ryan Jr. High / Middle School 1959-present
   - Houston Colored Junior College
4. **School History**
   - Principals, highlighting William Holland 1940 - 1958
   - Students, highlighting Class of 1958
Exhibition Design

excerpts from What is Exhibition Design?
Jan Lorenc, Lee Skolnick, Craig Berger

What is exhibition design?
Exhibition design is creating experiences in real time; utilizing space, movement and memory to facilitate multi-layered communication. Exhibition designers work in multidisciplinary teams (and with the client) to help them tell their stories to their desired audience. They physically shape the experience, often acting in the role of composer, orchestrator, choreographer and conductor to ensure that the intended messages are delivered in the most compelling and meaningful way. They harness the powerful interpretive potential of space to deliver narratives. Melding communication design and the built environment, exhibition design creates environments that communicate. (p.8)

Telling a Story (p.104)
All exhibitions have one thing in common. They all tell a story. It is the central craft of the exhibition designer. The four elements for telling a story are: a narrative, a narrator, a path, a context.

Narrative
When planning an exhibition, most institutions begin by determining the message they want to convey to their audience. It only becomes a story when it is given a narrative thread with a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Narrator
A narrator is needed to drive the story forward. The narrator can be created using any number of mediums, such as text, graphics, or technology. Most exhibitions employ multiple narrative mediums.

Path
The path gives the story its structure. The space must be organized into a sequence that relates to the story and the visitor experience. The sequence of experiences may be arranged around a timeline, theme, hierarchy, or any other logical system. The exhibition should be a sequence of experiences that build the whole story but never allowing the visitor to see the entire structure at once. The series of revelations are key to keeping the visitor engaged.

Context
An exhibition does not stand in a void, it is integrated into a building or landscape. How the visitor approaches and engages with the exhibition is crucial to preparing the visitor for the experience. When the venue is dictated to us, we strive to squeeze out all of the narrative juice the place has to offer. Consider location; procession; entry; circulation; form, weight, width, height, and depth of space; qualities of light, both natural and artificial; materials; details; structure; climate control and security.

Who do we design for?
Our audience is the most important concern when designing an exhibition space. Know your audience and make decisions that best serve this group.

Immersive and Experience Design
As visitors, we desire to be surrounded by a story in a public space, to be told stories dynamically, and to have an interactive experience blended with real environments. (26) When a guide is available, they are able to help the visitor interpret and interact with the exhibition. While not the same experience, the kiosk, personal digital assistant, and internet can enrich the storytelling experience.
Experience Design is incorporating passive storytelling, nonlinear educational experiences, and interactive engagement with visitors (p.36). Exhibits are often passive. Advances in technology offer the possibility to customize for a unique personal experience as well as participatory experiences in which people, often children, can add to or alter the exhibit. Participation can also be ongoing, through publications, discussion forums, an ongoing conversation through a web presence and evaluations.

Top 10 Exhibit Ingredients

1. Motivate Visitors:
   - Target an audience — the general public and/or specific communities
2. Focus Content:
   - Filter content so visitors are not bombarded with information overload
3. Immersion:
   - Engage visitors within a "story"
4. Modularity:
   - Present smaller themes instead of one larger complex topic
5. Skimmability:
   - Information should be easy to take in because visitors are often standing and/or have different levels of education
6. Patterns:
   - Incorporate traffic/circulation patterns, exhibit sequence patterns and pre-existing framework patterns (architectural elements)
7. Capture Curiosity:
   - Use storytelling techniques to engage visitors
8. Interaction:
   - Give visitors a “fun” experience by tapping into their emotion
9. Integrate Technology:
   - Technology should enhance visitor’s experience, not detract from it
10. Layer Content:
    - Present information in a hierarchical manner

Exhibition Standards
excerpt from http://si.edu/opanda/Reports/EXStandards.pdf

Externally focused standards are characterized by three pervasive themes:

1) Exhibitions should be developed and executed with a focus on the end-user (visitor) and his/her experience within (as well as before and after), expectations for, access to, and navigation of exhibitions. Visitors should feel that their exhibition experience was stimulating, relevant, and enjoyable. For example:
   - Exhibitions should be presented in a way that makes them enjoyable, stimulating and relevant to the museum’s target audiences.
   - Exhibitions should be memorable, aesthetically beautiful, and enjoyable.
   - Exhibitions should relate to visitors. Broken exhibits, intimidating labels, and activities that visitors can’t relate to are barriers to visitor enjoyment that lead to frustration, boredom, and confusion.
   - Satisfaction should be the cumulative gestalt of the whole visit, influenced by factors that came before; the feelings you walk away with.
   - Exhibits should meet visitor expectations for several aspects of the exhibition experience. These aspects include educational experiences, entertaining experiences, and social experiences.
   - Exhibits should be designed to be accessible and easy to use so that visitors understand how to use the exhibit, feel directly engaged with the exhibit, can draw on knowledge from both outside and within the exhibit to interact with it, and find it easy to begin again after pausing.

2) Information and objects should be presented in a way that provides visitors engaging experiences. They should not be presented as exhibits for the sake of exhibits, but in a purposeful manner that nevertheless does not compromise the integrity of the knowledge (sometimes gained through research) or of the objects. Visitors can have a dialogue with the exhibit, affect the exhibit and have it affect them, and feel successful in this interaction. For example:
   - The “why should I care?” should be clear throughout.
   - The emotional impact of an exhibition should sharpen understanding.
   - Exhibitions should offer visitors choices, feedback, and indicators of success that personalize the visit for them. Design should build in “natural” goals and indications of success along with multiple inquiry paths, layered experiences and text, and opportunities to manipulate variables of the exhibit with clearly observable results.
   - Exhibitors should support direct experiences in the exhibition with labels, staff explainers, and opportunities for cooperative engagement. This could mean providing facilitated activities, discovery carts, raising questions in texts, and physically designing exhibits for multiple participants.
   - There should be support for follow-up educational experiences, such as resource rooms, Web pages, outreach programs, and volunteer opportunities.
   - The exhibition should reach out to visitors to engage them with the message.
   - The exhibition should surprise and inspire visitors.
   - Exhibits should aim to create a “flow experience” where visitors are engaged and enjoying themselves.
   - A variety of experiences to match a range of abilities/skills should be provided as visitors want to succeed.
   - Beyond being engaged, visitors should find themselves involved in immediate and long-lasting ways.
   - Visitors should feel intellectually competent. Competence is a cognitive comfort that goes beyond accessibility.
   - Exhibits should present real and genuine objects and phenomenon that provide for intellectually and emotionally involving experiences. This can mean including rare objects, such as one of a kind artworks or artifacts from an ancient civilization, or allowing for interaction with unusual physical phenomenon, as can be found in immersive environments.
   - The space should be used as an evolving repository of knowledge.

3) Messages should be communicated in a clear, coherent manner and through multiple media. An exhibition should allow for differing viewpoints on a subject. Visitor engagement is facilitated by the interpretative and communication strategies that support the messages of the exhibition and their relevance to the visitor. For example:
   - Information should be presented in multiple formats, and decisions should be based on the intended audience.
   - Messages should be clear and coherent and efforts are made to make the subject matter come alive through attractive presentation and opportunities for establishing personal connections and meaning.
   - The exhibition program should include interactive installations, open air displays and education exhibitions, and utilize multimedia techniques.
• Communication strategies that are clear, appealing, relevant, and engaging should be developed.
• Texts and other communication media should be accurate, honest, and clear, yet allow and present differing points of view.

Text
Guidelines for writers and editors provide text hierarchy structures, word/paragraph limits, target reading levels, and preferred styles of language. Text guidelines steer writers toward a tone and style that is museum-specific. For example, The Tech Museum of Innovation's editorial and graphic guidelines discuss consistent use of “The Tech voice” to engage visitors. This means, among many criteria, using the active voice, being concise, and encouraging participation and not using too many new vocabulary words or jargon. Guides issued by the Powerhouse Museum have been utilized by museums across Australia. Entire books have been published on the topic of exhibition text – most notably Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach. Hugh A. D. Spencer, a contributor to The Manual of Museum Exhibitions, identifies clear succinct benefits of text standards. The careful selection of typeface supports the design vocabulary of the exhibition as well as ease of readability. Effective use of the written word enhances public access physically (for a range of ages and abilities), intellectually (through presentations that motivate reading), and by integrating with the overall design of the exhibition instead of competing with other elements. He points out that standards help to achieve a better balance among specialist perspectives within the museum (i.e., curator/researcher, designer, and writer/interpreter).
Exhibit Label Basics, Part 3: Content Bulletin 9 Summer 1999

By Kenneth DeRoux, Curator of Museum Services, Alaska State Museum

Purpose
Labels provide a means for visitors to connect with objects in a museum. They may provide only the most basic identifying information for an object, or they may provide additional levels of interpretation, tying together numerous objects, facts and ideas into a thematic exhibition. (For a discussion of different types of labels, see Bulletin #5). In all cases, labels should be easily visible, readable and enhance the viewing experience. Effective labels go hand-in-hand with clearly conceived ideas about how exhibits are organized and presented. Ideally, they should be an integral part of your exhibit design, rather than added to an exhibit after the fact.

Keep it Simple
Most museum visitors spend relatively little time on any one exhibit. They tend to keep moving, stopping at what interests them. They will often spend more actual time reading labels than looking at objects, since an object can be “seen” in a few seconds. Even so, the label should serve to reinforce the experience of the object.

A strong label will often begin with a concrete reference to the object(s) being discussed, such as “This wall clock stopped at the precise time of the Good Friday Earthquake of 1964.” The basic units of information should answer the questions what?, where?, when?, who? how? and why? Ask yourself “What questions will the visitor ask about this material?” and try to answer them. Keep the label directly related to what the viewer is seeing. Don’t forget the why? question. Why is this object in the museum? If there is some story connected to it, your visitors will love to hear it.

Reading labels should not be like reading an exhibit catalog. Remember that you are writing for people who are reading standing up and possibly bending forward. Resist the temptation to provide too much additional or extraneous information. Large blocks of text will turn away many viewers. The rule-of-thumb for comfortable label length is between 75 and 150 words. If the label must be longer, make sure it is broken into paragraphs or blocks of text no more than 100 words in length. Sub-headings above each paragraph will give viewers easier access to the material. (This paragraph is 95 words.)

Tips
Here are some frequently mentioned guidelines for writing effective labels:

- Use simple sentences. Keep them short but vary the length.
- Don’t use sentences more than 25 words long.
- Avoid excessive use of commas.
- Explain unfamiliar words and concepts—you don’t want to make your visitor feel uneducated.
- Write so that an eighth-grader can understand the vocabulary, but provide information that will keep an adult interested.
- Check for readability, spelling, grammar, passive voice.
- Use active verbs. Avoid the passive voice, which is excessive use of the verb “to be”, (is, are, was, were). In passive voice, the object acts upon the subject, such as “Gold dust was used by miners to pay debts,” instead of “Miners paid debts with gold dust.”
- Don’t provide more than 6 or 7 key items of information per label.
- Relate dates or unfamiliar concepts or practices to dates, etc. that the viewer is familiar with.
- Read the label out loud to insure that the words have an easy flow to them.
- Always proofread, then proofread again.

Advanced Tips
- Use graphics, photographs, maps or other visuals where possible to involve the viewer more directly in making connections.
- Direct the viewer’s attention to specific aspects of the object.
- Occasionally, and where appropriate, ask the viewer open-ended questions about what he/she is seeing.
- Offer up puzzles that might be presented by the material.
- Don’t edit out all emotion or controversy from your labels. But when presenting controversial material, try to be unbiased. Strive to be aware of bias (cultural, political, etc.) within your own writing and correct for it if necessary.
- Develop a style manual for labels. Establish consistency in formatting as well as for grammar, punctuation, and usage.
- Finally, don’t sacrifice clarity for economy. Editing labels down to reduced lengths can sometimes produce unintended inferences. It is better to use a few extra words so that the information is clear. For further information on writing and producing labels, see the following.

References
Serrell, Beverly, Exhibit Labels, An Interpretive Approach, Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, CA, 1996.

Copyright 1999, posted 10/12/99 Webpage last updated April 25, 2007
Detailed Schedule

Graphic and Architecture classes overlap between 3:30 – 5:00 on Monday and Wednesdays. Please form in designated teams for each class. Have all materials organized and ready to present. Each team only has 20 minutes to present work and receive evaluation. Expect to work with your team outside of class to prepare for the exhibition.

January

**Week One**

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<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>18 Jan</td>
<td>3:30</td>
<td>Tour</td>
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<td>Third Ward/Ryan Middle School tour</td>
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<td>Provide general history reading material;</td>
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<td>W</td>
<td>19 Jan</td>
<td>WorkShop</td>
<td>Project Kick-off</td>
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<td>Powerpoint intro</td>
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<td>Form Teams: create a contact list for each member</td>
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<td>Distribute Themes and Binders of research material</td>
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**Assignment for Monday for each team:**

**Message/Story**

Inventory the material in the binder: Information, images, etc. Prepare a brief summary, based on the assigned theme, of the information/messages that must be conveyed in the exhibition. Present any imagery that must be shown as well as proposed imagery and iconography. Based on this content, develop THREE concepts that format the same content in different ways. Use the following list as a guide to positioning in the space:

1. Freestanding portable installation
2. Found object/recycled material (may incorporate current woodworking equipment)
3. Gallery condition: floor, wall, doors, floor, ceiling, windows, etc.

Try to incorporate the following:

1. Large scale (makes strong visual impact on the large gallery space)
2. Intimacy (small scale that pulls the audience in)
3. Interactivity (makes the viewer a participant rather than passive).

This may be playful. It does not have to be technology driven.

Concepts may be drawn imagery or Photoshopped into the gallery space or to scale mock-ups placed into the gallery scale model.

Additional requirements:

1. One proposal per team of the entry information “wall”
2. One proposal per team of the framework (a way for the students at RMS to participate in the exhibition and show their work).

**Week Two**

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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>24 Jan</td>
<td>Concept presentations by team. (see above description)</td>
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<td>W</td>
<td>26 Jan</td>
<td>Concept refinements by team.</td>
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<td>Bring actual samples of materials, portions of full scale mock-ups when possible</td>
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**Selection and merge of teams for entry wall and framework**

**Selection of liaison with Anna Bass, RMS**

**Week Three**

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<td>M</td>
<td>31 Jan</td>
<td>Installation presentations by team.</td>
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<td>Bring a one page budget report for all costs</td>
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<td>Bring samples of materials, portions of full-scale installations</td>
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<td>Include ACTUAL text and imagery on installation sketches and mock-ups</td>
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<td>Print a text sample at full size for legibility study</td>
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<td>Week Four</td>
<td>M 7 Feb</td>
<td>Installation presentations by team. Fabrication drawings, budget, materials sourcing. Text edit, final image gather</td>
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|           | W 9 Feb | **Presentation by teams to the community and students**  
Framework teams to meet with Anna Bass (tentative) |

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<tr>
<th>Week Five</th>
<th>M 14 Feb</th>
<th>Installation presentations by team. Mock-up fabrication. Text edit, final image gather</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W 16 Feb</td>
<td>Installation presentations by team. Mock-up fabrication. Text edit, final image gather</td>
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| Week Six | M 21 Feb | Fabrication  
Framework Teams + RMS |
|----------|--------|---------------------|
|          | W 23 Feb | Fabrication  
Framework Teams + RMS |

| Week Seven | M 28 Feb | Fabrication  
Framework Teams + RMS |
|------------|--------|---------------------|
|            | W 2 Mar | Fabrication  
Framework Teams + RMS |

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<th>Week Eight</th>
<th>M 7 Mar</th>
<th>Installation</th>
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<td>W 9 Mar</td>
<td>Installation</td>
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| Week Nine | M/W 14/16 Mar | SPRING BREAK |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week Ten</th>
<th>M/W 21/23 Mar</th>
<th>Final Installation, Exhibition Prep</th>
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<tr>
<td>Th 24 Mar</td>
<td>EXHIBITION OPENING</td>
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