



¿Observas que hay un salto en la numeración de los folios?

¿Notas que los pergaminos tienen diferente tamaño?

A las ratas y ratones para construir

Fig. 1. Visitor consulting a raising label. Image by Lucía Gómez-Robles.

MULTI-LAYERED EXHIBITIONS USING TRADITIONAL SYSTEMS. TWO CASES IN MEXICO*

Lucía Gómez-Robles

Architect and Art Historian, Projects' Director, DIADRASIS, SPAIN

luciagomezrobles@gmail.com

Multi-layered and hypertextual systems applied to dissemination allow for the stratification of information for a better understanding. The digital era brought with it many possibilities yet new technologies need maintenance, which might be an issue in regions with low investment on culture. Furthermore, when visitors extensively use display terminals they are isolated from their group. Nevertheless, interactive and stratified information is a communication strategy that may be successfully applied with non-digital devices. This article presents two different cases of temporary exhibitions without technology, organized in Mexico, where codes that clearly distinguish the levels or the categories of the information were used, consequently offering an easy non-technological selection system.

Keywords:

engaging exhibitions – interaction – multi-layered information – museums – dissemination

1. INTRODUCTION

The most important advantage of the digital era applied to dissemination is probably the multi-layered and hypertextual systems, namely the possibility of superimposing different layers of information and connecting them. We all experience the benefits of these systems when using the internet, jumping from one topic to another by a simple click and rapidly reaching different levels of information according to our own interest.

The system offers two main advantages. On the one hand, data are not all displayed at the same time, consequently reducing space and avoiding to confuse the user. On the other hand the same user may choose the information relevant to him, and what is interesting and may be seen in detail as well as what is not so important and should therefore be put aside.

The benefits are very tempting from the dissemination point of view and for this reason many museums have integrated computer terminals with hypermedia information, to improve the visiting experience for people interested in enlarging their knowledge. However, the use of these displays has often not been very successful due to maintenance problems and their individual character. Maintenance is an important issue, especially in regions with low investment on

culture, where budgets need to follow other priorities. Furthermore, even when funds and subsequently maintenance are guaranteed, the individual use of display terminals does not suit the common museum visitor, or people in groups, couples, families, schools, etc. For older visitors some special digital displays, even regular terminals, might be intimidating and unfriendly as well. Nevertheless, this issue is decreasing everyday, thanks to the globalization of technologies.

2. NONLINEAR, INTERACTIVE, ENGAGING EXHIBITIONS

From the 18th century on, museums have evolved from being just cabinets for curiosities, where thousands of objects were stacked inside a room without any explanations, to becoming a more modern concept which attempts to create meaningful experiences for visitors. However, this is not easy to achieve and most museums, particularly in Mexico¹ maintain a traditional museography system with plain technical labels or, in the best-cases, a linear narrative on large panels full of non-stratified information that visitors rarely read in full.

Digital devices often help to provide richer discourses that allow visitors to interact with the exhibition and to make selections within the visit. Yet, as mentioned

* The author was curator and museographer at both exhibitions.

¹ Despite the fact that the majority of museums in Mexico keep an old style museography, there are some interesting exceptions such as the MIDE or the Gran Museo del Mundo Maya, that are really noteworthy.

above, digital resources are not always the best option when designing an exhibition even though the possibility of nonlinear exhibition discourses is however desirable.

Nonetheless multi-layered information and interactivity are not exclusive characteristics of technological exhibitions. As a matter of fact, stratified interactive information is a concept and it can also be applied to physical and traditional ways. Even when designing a hypertextual application for a computer, the first step is the simple organization and classification of the information by topics, relevance, type, etc. The information is then included in a properly organised database, which allows multiple connections (hyperlink). The system however may be developed without technology, by using a code which clearly distinguishes the levels or the categories of the information, that is, offering an easy selection system. The main difference between the digital and the physical system is the amount of data displayed at the same time. While the digital application only shows the selected information, the physical system needs to present all the layers together, for the visitor to choose. This requisite forces the use of a large space to show all the information but this apparent inconvenience becomes an asset, considering that all the visible layers are available for the visitor who does not need to explore the contents searching for specific data, as in the case of a computer application. In addition more than one visitor, with different interests, may also enjoy the display at the same time.

3. MULTI-LAYERED BIG FORMAT LABELS FOR WORKS OF ART. THE CASE OF ATLIXCO, PUEBLA

In 2013, the National Coordination of Conservation of Cultural Heritage (CNCPC) of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) prepared a

semi-temporary exhibition for a collection of twenty one canvas paintings and two polychrome wooden sculptures previously conserved at the CNCPC. These heritage elements belonged to the temple of Santa Clara in Atlixco, a historical town in the state of Puebla, the last remains of the historical monastery of the Clarisses in that city. The collection consisted of an incomplete series of the Life of San Francis by Luis Berrueco, a famous local painter in Puebla during the 18th century, an almost complete cycle of the Life of the Virgin by Bartholomé Alonso de Cazares, an 18th century painter from Seville, Spain, and three anonymous paintings and two sculptures of Saint Clare and Saint Anthony. The paintings had been piled for years in one of the side rooms of the temple, resulting in heavy damage. The purpose of the exhibition was to provide a proper place to safeguard the collection until the temple was conserved, its condition is not suitable for the artefacts. At the same time, it was an opportunity to bring them back to the local community, who can now enjoy them. Additionally the museography also provided a space to describe and explain the conservation processes undertaken at the CNCPC.

The place chosen for the exhibition were three large rooms in the Cultural Centre of the city. Since the building was not a real museum and it lacked trained staff for the maintenance of a complex museography, the goal of the exhibition was to provide the maximum information in the simplest way. The budget for the exhibition was also low. For these reasons the strategy was to make the most out of the descriptive labels. Labels were designed for this occasion as an “object panel” (Fig. 2) including different kinds of information, encoded by colours. The code allows the public to easily select the topics of its interest. Every painting or sculpture had one of these panels with the following information (Table 1):

Title	
Author	
Date	
Image of the object before the conservation processes	Description of the scene
	Information about the author
	Curiosities of the representation
Image of the conservation process	Conservation processes
	Main data on the Iconography of the object
Image of the object (after conservation) with indication of figures and attributes	

Table 1. Distribution of the information in the panels. Table by Lucía Gómez-Robles.

The description of the scene (in red) includes a detailed explanation of the historical and symbolic context.


The information about the author (in pink) comprises characteristics about the author's style and some additional biographical data. When possible, this information about his life was linked to details shown in the painting.

Curiosities of the representation (in purple) describes anomalies in the scene, distinctive features typical from the original region (Puebla or Seville) or peculiarities of its historical period.


The Conservation process (in orange) explains the main conservation treatments undertaken on the heritage object, using simple terms for visitors to understand the different actions. This topic is also reinforced by the images of the object placed on the left side, before the conservation processes were undertaken.

Iconography main data (in blue) includes the most important information from the iconographical point of view. This topic is supported by the bottom image, where all the figures and attributes are identified as well.

La recepción de Santa Clara
Luis Berruenco (?)
Primera mitad del siglo XVIII



Antes del proceso de restauración



Cosido y vendoteles en la obra durante el proceso de restauración

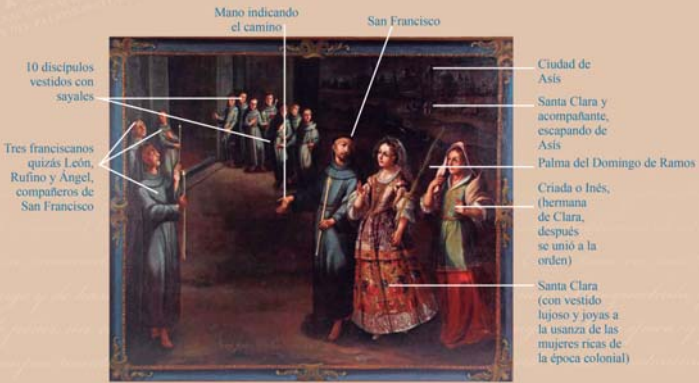
SCENA: Este lienzo representa la llegada de Santa Clara de Asís (1194-1253) a la Porciúncula, la modesta capilla en la que San Francisco y sus seguidores se reunían. El significado de la pintura es fundamental para la iconografía clarisa, pues conmemora el momento fundacional de la orden, cuando Santa Clara tomó los hábitos y, posteriormente, escribió una regla para la vida religiosa de las mujeres, de la cual deriva la Segunda Orden Franciscana.

AUTOR: Luis Berruenco debió usar, en ocasiones, modelos reales para sus cuadros. El personaje femenino que acompaña a Santa Clara lleva, salvo por pequeños detalles, el mismo traje que una de las asistentes al parto de San Francisco. Los detalles del vestido de Santa Clara también parecen responder a un modelo real, su cuidado en la representación femenina pudo deberse a su amor por las mujeres. Llegó a casarse por viudez en cuatro ocasiones, entre 1720 y 1728.

CURIOSIDADES: Las fuentes franciscanas establecen que Santa Clara fue recibida con un desfile de antorchas y no de velas. Tampoco hay constancia de que Santa Clara fuese acompañada de otra mujer, lo que indica que quizás se buscó mostrar cómo las religiosas de Santa Clara –muchas mujeres ricas– ingresaban al convento con criadas o esclavas, que las asistían en las tareas cotidianas de la vida monástica.

RESTAURACIÓN: El cuadro de la Recepción de Santa Clara se encontraba rasgado y, posteriormente, cosido de forma tosca. Para restaurarlo se eliminaron los remiendos y se unieron de nuevo los fragmentos. El sistema consiste en ajustar los bordes mediante vendoteles temporales, fijando las partes a una nueva tela por el proceso del retelado (ver proceso en la "Fundación de las tres órdenes").

ICONOGRAFÍA: Santa Clara sostiene una palma, pues la noche en que huyó de sus padres para unirse a los franciscanos era Domingo de Ramos. La disposición de los frailes a la entrada de la Porciúncula tampoco parece casual: los tres franciscanos de la izquierda del cuadro podrían ser León, Rufino y Ángel, quienes legaron una de las fuentes más importantes sobre la vida de Francisco de Asís y la historia franciscana en una serie de documentos conocida como "La leyenda de los tres compañeros".

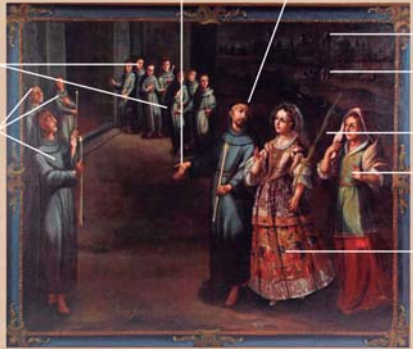


Mano indicando el camino

San Francisco

10 discípulos vestidos con sayales

Tres franciscanos quizás León, Rufino y Ángel, compañeros de San Francisco



Ciudad de Asís

Santa Clara y acompañante, escapando de Asís

Palma del Domingo de Ramos

Criada o Inés, (hermana de Clara, después se unió a la orden)

Santa Clara (con vestido lujoso y joyas a la usanza de las mujeres ricas de la época colonial)

Fig. 2. Example of object panel.
Design by Alma Méndez.



Fig. 3. Leaflet with instructions on the colour code. Design by Alma Méndez.

At the beginning of the exhibition a leaflet briefly explains the colour code (Fig. 3) and the contents of the three exhibition spaces and the hall with the introductory information: cycle of the Virgin, San Francis series and sculptures and anonymous paintings (Fig. 4). Every space also includes a section panel with further explanations on the group of objects exhibited there as well as their author, in order to provide a general context. Through this simple system visitors

may plan their own visit according to their interests or make five different visits by following one of the topics/colours.

The exhibition museography is extremely simple due to the condition of the space but the experience, as the visitors themselves explained, is very rich thanks to the important amount of information available through a very friendly system.



Fig. 4. Leaflet with information on the contents of the rooms. Design by Alma Méndez.

4. STRATIFIED INTERACTIVE INFORMATION FOR CHOIRBOOKS. THE CASE OF TEPOTZOTLÁN

In 2014 the CNCPC produced an exhibition on historic choirbooks in collaboration with the National Museum of the Viceroyalty (MNV) in Tepotzotlán, North of Mexico City. As in the previous example, the origin of the project was the previous conservation project of the museum collection of choirbooks.

On this occasion the place was the museum and the museography team from the Museum worked closely with the CNCPC in the creation of the exhibition. The budget was also higher, which allowed for a more complex solution, based on the same principles: different information layers that were easy to identify by visitors, for an individual selection of which part of the exhibition to visit. This time, and thanks to the budget and the expert team in charge of the

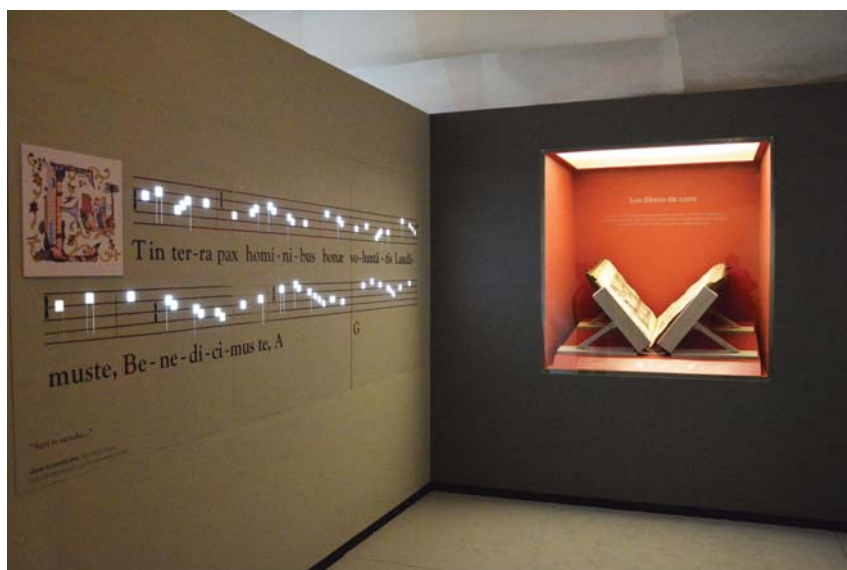


Fig. 5. Room 1. Plainsong. Image by Óscar Gutiérrez.



Fig. 6. Room 2. Polyphony. Image by Óscar Gutiérrez.



Fig. 7. Room 3. Manufacture. Image by Óscar Gutiérrez.



Fig. 8. Room 4. The use (the choir). Image by Óscar Gutiérrez.



Fig. 9. Room 5. The neglect. Image by Óscar Gutiérrez.



Fig. 10. Room 6. The stabilization project. Image by Óscar Gutiérrez.

production, an additional feature could be added: interactivity by handling. Right from the beginning, one of the main design conditions was to use physical solutions in order to reduce maintenance requirements.

The exhibition was divided in six rooms. The first two were dedicated to music, plainsong (Fig. 5) and polyphony (Fig. 6). The other four explained the life of these books, from their creation to the stabilization project: how they were made (Fig. 7), how they were used inside the temple and by whom (Fig. 8), how and when they were abandoned and the damages they suffered during the neglect period (Fig. 9), and finally the stabilization project undertaken at the CNCPC (Fig. 10).

Every book presented a specific topic, up to 19 different pieces were distributed in the six rooms: “what is a choirbook”, “plainsong”, “polyphony”,

“the amanuensis”, “the illuminator”, “the binder”, “books for the mass”, “books for the canonical hours”, “instructions for singing”, “factitious”, “reparations”, “the choir”, “choirboys and bad habits”, “vandalism”, “mutilation”, “neglect”, “historical reparations”, “small interventions”, and finally, “what next, after the project”. These main topics created the basic story of the exhibition, the life of the choirbooks.

Furthermore, the books also offered a very rich amount of additional information that could impress the public. Sometimes these data were visible on the book itself but in other cases the information was supplementary and not directly observable, which led to a different display system. Three different information levels were designed and distributed in three of the rooms, around the showcases containing the books (Fig. 11), those dedicated to polyphony, the use of the books (the choir) and the neglect (Table 2 & Fig. 11).

Observable information [Interactive labels with questions and answers]	Main topic [BOOK]			
	Technical data	Specific information on conservation	Specific information on art	Specific information on history

Table 2. Distribution of the information in the showcases. Table by Lucía Gómez-Robles.



Fig. 11. Example of book showcase and information distribution. Image by Óscar Gutiérrez.



Fig. 12. Panel of the writer in the manufacture room. It includes the general description of his activity and a step by step explanation of the process illustrated by drawings. Image by Lucía Gómez-Robles.



Fig. 13. Large format photograph in the stabilization project room. Image by Lucía Gómez-Robles.



Fig. 14. Binding system and tools of the binder. Image by Lucía Gómez-Robles.

The other three, instead, were complemented with large format photographs, drawings and replicas (Fig. 12 to 14).

Therefore, the main topic supported the information illustrated by the book containing the central story, while side interactive labels invited the visitor to observe the object according to a specific question. These questions had two different objectives. On one hand, they guided the observation and on the other, they allowed to rapidly decide whether the additional data were interested or not for the reader. After reading the question, the visitor could choose to observe the book to figure out the explanation by himself, to discover the answer by handling the moving label or just leave if he was not interested. Most of the

information was hidden by the interactive labels but it was easily identified through the questions.

For example the book to explain “factitious” contained, as the key information, the explanation about this kind of books:

Factitious

Due to their use through the centuries, choirbooks needed to be updated according to changes in the liturgy. Sometimes they were disassembled to introduce new pages or to combine parts from different books. These are called factitious.

The observable data questions in this case were related to the material evidences identifying factitious books (Table 3):

Visible question	Hidden answer
<i>Can you see a jump in the pagination?</i>	<i>This indicates that the book is a factitious. The page number 28 includes the end by writing “finis”, but it continues with the following one, numbered 109.</i>
<i>Can you see that pages have different sizes?</i>	<i>This indicates that the book was made by joining two different ones. The pages on the left are smaller than the ones on the right side.</i>

Table 3. Scheme of the observable data questions in the case of factitious book. Table by Lucía Gómez-Robles.



Fig. 15. Spin labels in the Polyphony room. Image by Óscar Gutiérrez.



Fig. 16. Raising labels in the choir room. Image by Óscar Gutiérrez.

These kinds of questions were always showing observable evidence and they were presented through a mechanical interactive label. They could spin to show the answer behind (Fig. 15), be raised like a tap to discover the solution under (Fig. 16) or be extracted like a horizontal book in a shelf to read the information on the cover. These last ones were constructed as real books (Fig. 17).

Finally, some specialized information was also included in the object label keeping the easy selection strategy. This label was designed as a long band of 130 cm

including regular technical information and art, history and conservation data identified through a coloured icon (Fig. 18W). This information was not directly observable but obtained through the specialists' analyses.

5. CONCLUSION

Collections of works of art are often presented without any kind of information except for technical data which commonly includes title, author (when



Fig. 17. Extractable labels in the neglect room. Image by Óscar Gutiérrez.

known), date and material. However, and since the general public is not made of experts, this is clearly insufficient. Sometimes museums solve the problem with long introductory panels full of information that, most of the time, are too extensive and too far from the exhibit objects. Digital terminals have been used as a possible solution to supply further information that can be selected by the user without using a big space, although they are not generally connected to the object.

The solutions explained within this text propose more direct information, linked to the object and designed in a way that allows the visitor to choose levels of information, colors, shapes, mechanical interactivity and design tools that create multi-layered low-cost possibilities. These exhibitions do not presume the

previous knowledge of the visitors. Different kinds of information with different depth levels are available for the public to choose.

The absence of technology should not be an obstacle to creating nonlinear discourses in museums. Stratified information is a way of thinking, a showing strategy. We just need to choose the best tool available, apply it and create an unforgettable experience for visitors.

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Fig. 18. Book with object label, in this case: technical information, conservation specific data, art specific data and history specific data. These data are identified through a coloured icon: conservation (scalpel and orange colour), art (paint brush and yellow colour), history (quill pen and red colour). Image by Óscar Gutiérrez.