

Designing an exhibition

Imagined Display Space

Ways of Perceiving

Your exhibition title

The title is your exhibition 'hook'.

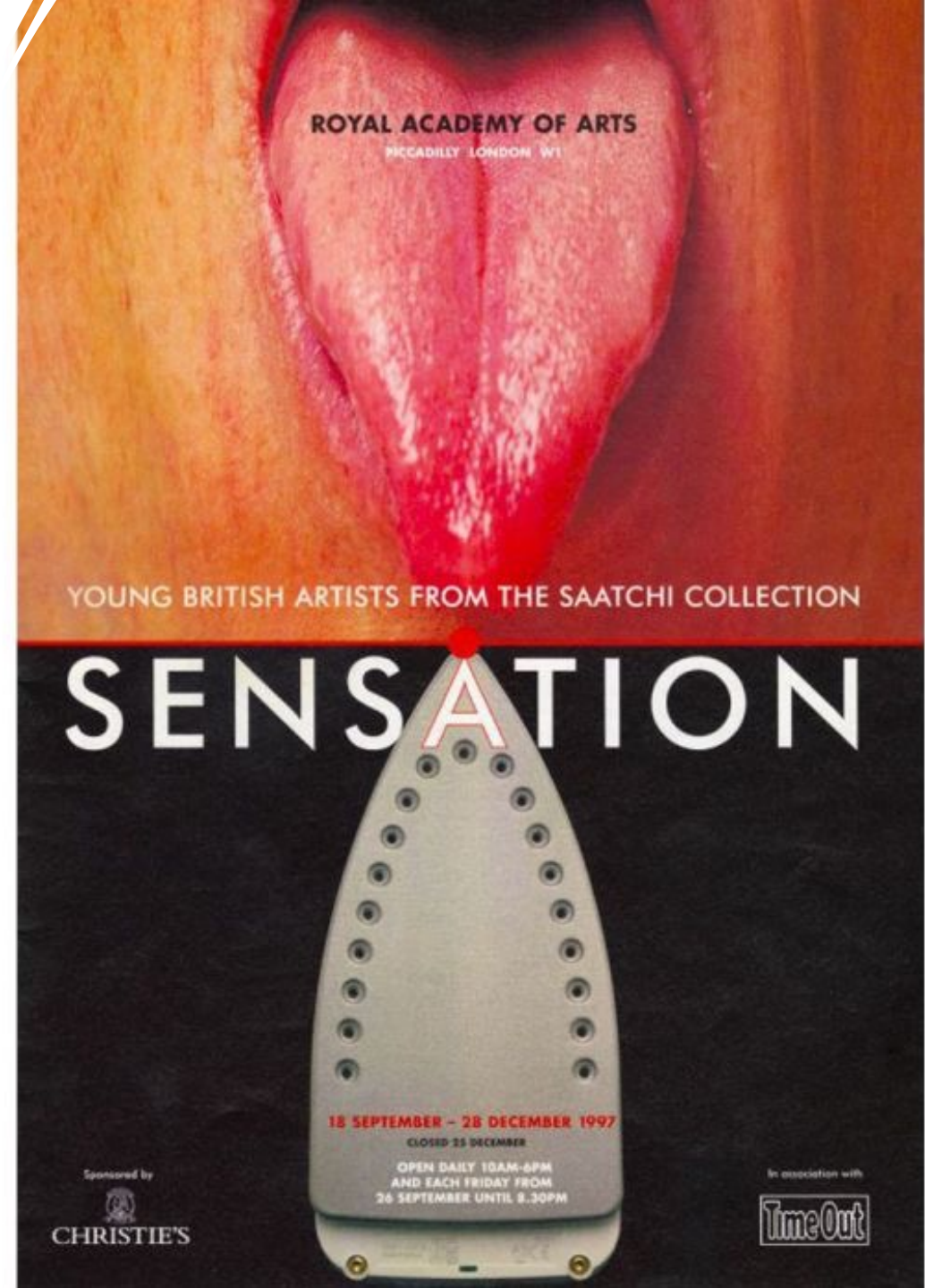
Be original.

Don't try to please everyone.

The aim is to embody the theme with an expressive, attention-grabbing title. Think about what the attendee will see, and also about what will capture their imagination, and what they may potentially take from experience. The title almost always derives from the work.

Steer clear of: '*The history of ...*' '*The work of ...*' and '*Treasures from ...*' as they are overused, bland and uninformative.

Sensation exhibition
poster and catalogue,
1997.
Royal Academy of Arts.



Exhibition examples

Some notable, well named exhibitions:

Sensation – Young British Artists (YBA)

Savage Beauty - Alexander McQueen

Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution

Francis Bacon: Invisible Rooms

Life in Motion – Egon Schiele and Francesca Woodman

You can also extend a title to make it all encompassing:

Birth of the Cool – California Art, Design and Culture at Midcentury

Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917

The Gallery Space and the 'White Cube'

The 'White Cube' is a gallery aesthetic that begun in the early 20th Century. It is derived from the formal, angular space that is mostly square or rectangle, is always white, and has a direct light source coming from the ceiling. It was created as a response to the increasing amount of abstract art that was being displayed in galleries. The all-white frame minimized distraction.

In the book *White Cube* (1976), written by Brian O'Doherty, the author confronted this ubiquitous, modernist approach to gallery design and argued that it made every object therein 'sacred', which in turn deferred from the actual meaning of the artwork, often leading to problematic interpretation.



20:50

Richard Wilson,
2010.

At the Saatchi
Gallery

A 21st Century view

‘In many cases, however, white art gallery walls read as outdated. “All-white rooms are a 20th-century concept,”’ says artist Mark Chamberlain

Contemporary art galleries are embracing less harsh hues: In one installation of *Pacific Art* at the *Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, the exhibition designer painted the walls with a maté tea wash. “It almost looks like a cup of green tea ... It provides a little more of a softer, more natural environment for these works.” Nancy Thomas, Los Angeles County Museum of Art Director.’

(ARTNews.com)

Work with the work

Deviate from the conventional if it better suits your exhibition concept and the work. Consider charcoal grey, off white, off black, even pastel hues, if they evoke the atmosphere and meaning you are trying to create and communicate.

You can also be experimental with materials and even atmospherics, such as Olafur Eliasson's *Your Blind Passenger*, 2010 installation which is/was a 45-metre tunnel of dense fog shown at the Tate Modern.

Location

Whether it be in a gallery, a derelict building, an open space, or an enclosed room, each can greatly affect the viewing experience. If you approach your content distribution with a design ethos, you have an opportunity to make your audiences' experience profound.

In 2022, location choices for an exhibition can also yield unexpected, yet dynamic opportunities. Rather than a physical space, curation and presentation can benefit from dynamic digital environments by expanding to a space on the web, social media, or even into the metaverse. An augmented experience could replace a physical experience, with the benefit of attracting global rather than just local visitors.



DRIFT, Block
Universe (2021).

Multimedia
augmented reality,
polyester block,
LEDs, PSU,
aluminium strips,
wood, NFT.
© DRIFT, courtesy
Pace Gallery.

The significance of time

Holocaust Remembrance Day: 27th January

LGBT+ History Month: 1st February - 28th February

International Women's Day: 8th March

Summer Solstice: 21st June

Black History Month: 1st October - 31st October

World Homeless Day: 10th October

Day of the Dead: 2nd November

Remembrance Day: 11th November

Curate with care, less is more

Once a theme or narrative is decided, we suddenly find ourselves in a position where there are many stories to tell. This can become problematic. The more we try to fit in, the less space we leave for our visitors to formulate their own impressions, ideas, and make up their own mind. Leave physical and intellectual space for the visitor to think.

When you have your theme and your works, whittle them down to 5 maximum (for this task). The choosing of what stays and what goes is the essence of this task; curation.

