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Final Cut – Graphic Design in Film Props

Film props are an enhancement to the film experience giving clues, visual interest, and responsibility to tell parts of the story. These have advanced over the years as film making has expanded and developed. Audiences seek more detail than ever before. The creation of props is now a complex process with large amounts of research and design, involving multiple copies made for different purposes, to move and work with special effects and survive months of filming. Graphic design can be seen on props such as book covers, posters, handwritten letters, labels and newspapers (Atkins, 2020, p.8).

This essay outlines the gallery space and curation choices to exhibit a collection of graphic design film props, including research on the history of gallery spaces and curation. As this exhibition is themed around film props it will be titled *Final Cut*, which means “the final edited version of a film, approved by the director and producer” Collins Dictionary (2019). This fits with the exhibition as it displays final artefacts used in the finished film.

Final Cut will display film props which use graphic design, allowing audiences to see the details of the craftsmanship and design. Additional artefacts to be included in the exhibitions are film clips where these props are used, and sketches and research from the designers. The exhibition would enable people to have a detailed look into this aspect of the \$42 billion film industry.

My idea for the location is a stage at Pinewood Studios. There are 23 film and TV stages and a wide range of facilities in which visitors could immerse themselves into the film industry. These stages have been home to films such as Star Wars, James Bond, Les Miserables and The Hobbit. Being surrounded by so much film history would be engaging for the visitors. Having the exhibition in Pinewood Studios opens the possibility for a series of small rooms to be constructed, which visitors could walk through, each room dedicated to a film and its prop.

The most suitable stage for *Final Cut* is Stage 7 (figure 4). The film stage is less conventional but due to the nature of the exhibition, visitors would benefit from a space specific to the theme.

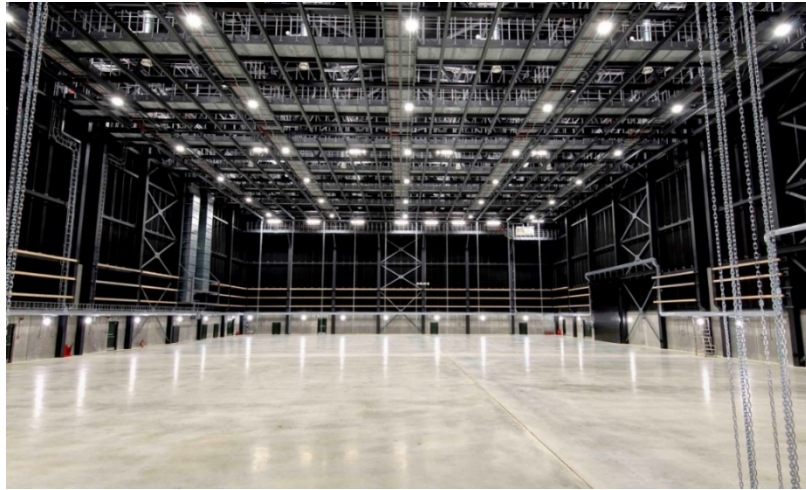


Fig 1. Stage 7 at Pinewood studios

The first artefact on display will be the letter from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2002) (Figure 7). The Hogwarts letter is one of the first main props that viewers see in the film. It was designed by Miraphora Mina for the film. As this is an important scene, the director wanted it to replicate the scene from the book (Rowling, 1997). To stay true to the book, thousands of letters and envelopes were made as the scene in the film did not use special effects but actual letters fired out through a machine. They had real wax seals and handwritten addresses for closeup shots and printed copies for wider shots (Burton, 2017, p.47). The Director Chris Columbus tried to evoke empathy from the audience as Harry's character has had nothing his entire life then a colossal amount of letters arrive and he is overjoyed, the audience cannot help but be on his side.

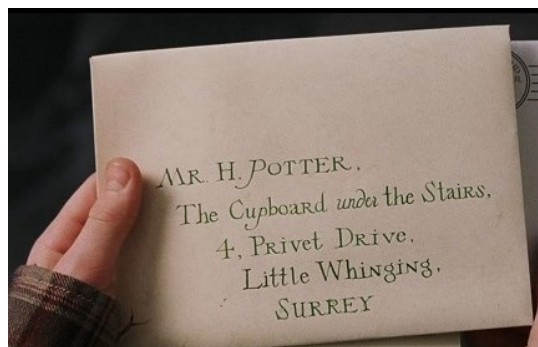


Fig 2. Hogwarts letter from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001)

The Burn Book from the *Mean Girls* (2004) film has become iconic, with products being inspired by the prop, and being featuring in music videos, and imagery from the book being popularised (figure 8). When discussing the aesthetics of the book, the director stated that "It had to be pink -- the

obvious color choice for Regina," (Waters cited in Patches, 2017). The messy and rough style of design suits the prop perfectly to give a homemade look to it, and the pink covers and lipstick marks echoes the film. Pink is used in the film to symbolise femininity; however the burn book content is a stark contrast and is full of hostility and vicious comments, reflecting the paradox that femininity can be delicate but also cruel.

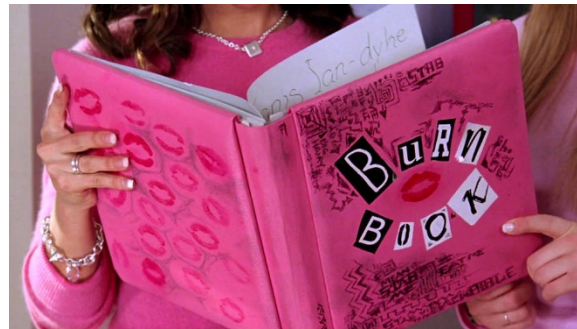


Fig 3. Burn Book from *Mean Girls* (2004)

The next artefact will be the ticket from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005). The film's design team made a double sided metallic, gold ticket. The ticket shows information essential for the film, the *Wonka* logo, and Willy Wonka's signature (figure 9). The reverse side of the ticket reads "Greetings to you, the lucky finder of this golden ticket" (Bergery, 2005). To see both sides, the prop will be standing up in the display case. The typeface on the ticket continues to be used in parts of the film and the film's advertising. As well as the prop being iconic, this is also significant to the exhibition as many of the sets for the film were built at Pinewood Studios (Bergery, 2005).



Fig 4. Golden ticket from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005)

The book in the film *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) opens and closes the film, and links title scenes set decades apart together (figure 10). Designed by Annie Atkins the book cover is mainly an illustration of the Hotel. The title's typography was originally the design for the hotel's 1930 letterhead design but was also used on the pink cover of the book (Atkins, 2020, p.78). The type is suited to the style of 1930s as it is "elaborate and beautifully decorative" (Arniston, 2011. P.74).

The Grand Budapest Hotel was directed by Wes Anderson who is known for his 'detail oriented' style when directing, meticulously designing everything from camera angles to costumes and props (Smith, 2014). This can be seen in the detail in the book props as he approved and guided the design.



Fig 5. The Pink Book from *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014)

Pinewood studios suits this exhibition even though it is not a traditional gallery. Dulwich Picture Gallery, which opened in 1817, was the first purpose-built art gallery in the UK. The gallery consisted of three collections of Old Masters from around Europe and 15th to 19th century British portraits. The London building was designed by Sir John Soane, who created an architectural masterpiece when designing a series of interlocking gallery rooms, and perfectly positioned overhead skylights, casting light on the paintings below (Durant, 1996, p.15). Soane's original design inspired galleries around the world and was the basis for the traditional look.

Gallery design has evolved, for example the Mina Lima exhibition has a similar theme to *Final Cut*. The exhibition takes place in the rooms above their shop in Soho, where visitors are immersed into the *Harry Potter* exhibition as they walk through a series of rooms (figures 2 & 3).



Fig 6 & 7. Mina Lima Exhibition (2016)

According to Cruz curating and the way objects are displayed have “shaped the worlds of art and culture” (Cruz, 2019, p.183). Curation is important as the experience of an exhibition relies on the emotional reaction the artwork provokes. The ‘Affect theory’ distinguishes between emotion and affect. This means that the audience is guided by what they feel and not what is seen when looking at artefacts (Callahan, 2020). In the case of being in an art gallery, it is what occurs when we ‘encounter’ an artefact. David Dernie echoes this by stating that “exhibition design creates a storyline and a potentially emotive content in order to engage the visitor” (Dernie, 2006, p.16). Curators can use affect theory to guide their exhibition plans so they can decide on mood, feel, and experience the visitors have.

This has been considered this whilst designing *Final Cut*, the artefacts shown will be placed in chronological order so the audience can see progress in the detail, tools and skills used, and go on a journey in film history. In Stage 7 there will be four small rooms which from the outside look like stage sets (figure 5). Visitors will walk through the stage before they reach the rooms, giving a behind-the-scenes filmmaking atmosphere. Inside each room a film clip of the prop and the prop itself will be displayed (figure 6). When the audience first enters the room they will only see the film clip upon a screen, which will serve as a reminder and example of how the prop was used. They will then walk through to the next part of the room where the prop will be located on a plinth. The props should be well lit and the only thing which has spot lighting, to add emphasis and drama to the experience. All walls, apart from the screens, will be black so that focus is on the artefacts creating a more immersive experience. Supporting information about the artefact would be provided by information plaques.

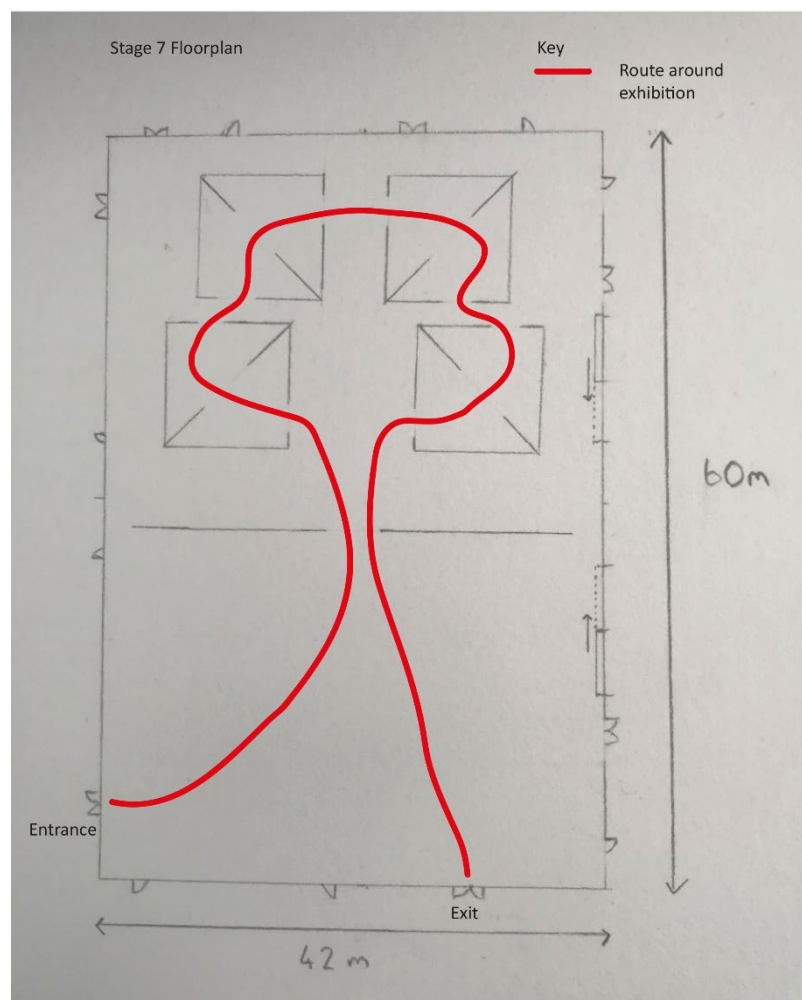


Fig 8. Stage 7 Pinewood studios Exhibition Layout Map.

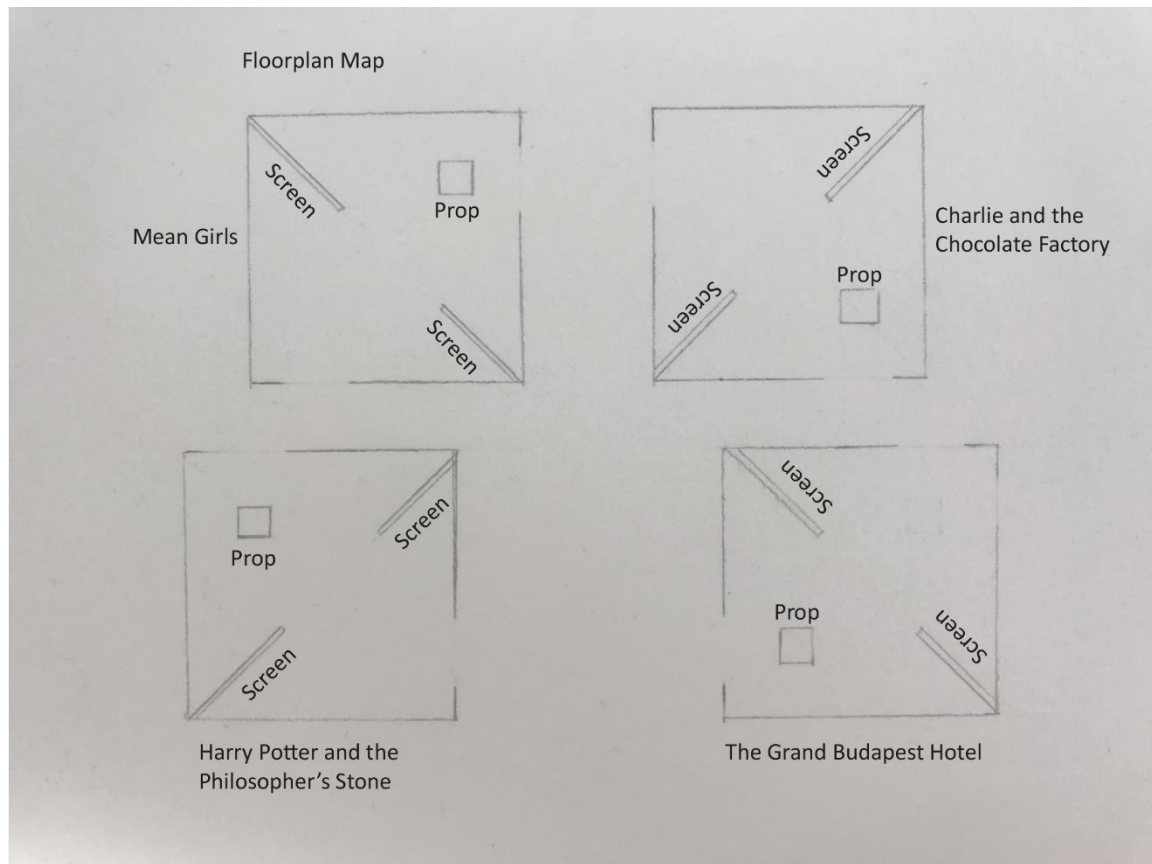


Fig 9. Detailed Final Cut Exhibition Map

The gallery environment can also evoke certain behaviours. This can be seen in situationist theory which suggests “Variance in human behaviour is typically a function of the situation a person inhabits” (Upton, 2009, p.104). This change into the cinematic environment will provoke certain behaviours and moods in a person. Within this exhibition, visitors are likely to move through the spaces slowly and quietly. This is because of the cinematic and film environment that will be created, making people behave in a similar way to being in a cinema or on a film set.

This essay has drawn upon theory to outline a gallery space, curation, and exhibition. The affect and situationist theories have influenced the design of the exhibition and its contents to enhance the experience. Four suitable artefacts have been chosen, these are all recognisable and are key elements to a film’s plot. A location to suit the theme of film props was selected for the *Final Cut* exhibition.

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