A Case Study Analysis of University Fashion Collection Hallway Exhibitions
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"University fashion collections," or dress, textile, and costume collections housed in land-grant North American institutions, were established as study collections to preserve knowledge and enhance fashion education (Green & Reddy-Best, 2022; Kirkland et al., 2023). Thus, their use encompasses activities related to teaching, research, and public outreach (Marcketti & Gordon, 2022; Peirson-Smith & Peirson Smith, 2020). Exhibitions in these settings are traditionally a means for university fashion collections to engage in outreach and educational activities. However, recently, they have been formally recognized as a scholarly work by establishing criteria for curatorial fashion exhibition scholarship (Green et al., 2019) and a venue for peer review via the International Textile Apparel and Association's (ITAA) curatorial exhibition scholarship track. This is beneficial to faculty who engage in research. However, in many university collections, such individuals are cross-appointed in collection management and faculty roles (Marcketti & Gordon, 2022). Due to their various roles and difficulty balancing exhibition schedules with instruction demands, some faculty create simple exhibitions requiring minimal effort (Marini, 2019). Thus, they may hesitate to engage in curatorial exhibition scholarship because it may require creating more complex, high-effort exhibitions.

This hesitation to engage in curatorial scholarship may be exacerbated by limitations such as financial constraints and limited space. Faculty may not have access to spacious, standalone, secure, and environmentally controlled galleries; display spaces in *hallways and corridors* are often available to university fashion collections (Green, 2022). Green (2022) argued that these spaces hold great impact and educational potential. Therefore, the author called for faculty and curators to share their experiences designing hallway exhibitions to form solutions and develop best practices. The purpose of this case study was to examine a tenure-track faculty/university fashion collection director's experiences curating hallway exhibitions at a North American land grant, Research 1 University. The research objectives were: 1) Analyze the content of exhibitions to identify the workarounds used when designing and installing them; 2) Examine the director's reflections on the curatorial process to identify prevalent challenges of hallway exhibitions and related roadblocks for pursuing curatorial exhibition scholarship.

Method and Procedure

Guided by Creswell's (2007) single case study approach, multiple data sources were collected to provide an in-depth and clear picture of the case to establish the credibility of the data via triangulation. Sources included those relating to 18 exhibitions (e.g., exhibit labels, websites, photographs, and feedback collected from visitors) and qualitative data from the director's reflective journal, which contained notes and critiques on designing hallway exhibitions. Data were analyzed using Creswell's (2007) spiral of analysis wherein codes and categories were collapsed into two general themes and interpreted using direct interpretation.

Results and Discussion

For context, the atrium displaying the exhibitions functions as a large hallway and study area for students. Within the atrium are seven enclosed windows, four dedicated to university collection exhibitions, and the remaining three, reserved for visual merchandising displays, are occasionally available to the collection (Figure 1). Each set of windows provides approximately

Figure 1. Left: *Sweater Weather: An In-Depth Look at how these Knits Come Together* is shown in the four university fashion collection windows. Right: *Titanic Fashion* is shown in the three visual merchandising windows.

20 feet of total display space. The primary purpose of the exhibitions was to bring visibility to its fashion program as part of its public outreach program while also providing educational opportunities to students that center on active learning, similar to other institutions (Blanco, 2010). Most exhibitions were curated by the director with the help of a single student pursuing an experiential learning course requirement. However, some were curated with multiple students, a class, or collaborating faculty.

Theme one, "Let's just get something in the windows!" represented the director's need to meet outreach and promotion expectations by rotating exhibitions frequently. On average, two exhibitions were installed each semester. The first exhibition of the semester would often be a "filler exhibition" designed to be a placeholder for the well-designed "feature" exhibition curated by a student curator(s) later in the semester. The filler exhibitions allowed the student(s) more time for planning and training for installing their feature exhibition, which was often content-focused (DePauw, 2017). Filler exhibitions were object-focused (DePauw, 2017) and often included accessories with no or a single garment mounted on a dress form. As in other research, curators tried to create "a meaningful display with limited effort," which required few or no labels (Marini, 2019, p. 21). Labels were simple combination title and introductory labels like those used for *Titanic Fashion* (Figure 1) that identified the objects on display and their time period, eliminating the need for object labels or combination title and object labels (Figure 2). By installing filler exhibitions, the director met promotion and outreach goals while providing active learning experiences to students.

Theme two, "Can they read that? Will they read that?" spoke to limited space for textual content and contexts surrounding the objects. Because the atrium's use as a study area is prioritized, exhibition content was confined to the window interiors. Labels were viewed through the glass; therefore, the text had to be large to be readable. For content-focused exhibitions, larger frames were used to accommodate more text. However, these needed to be integrated into the display's composition, limiting the number of objects displayed (Figure 2). Regarding "Will they read that?" the director experimented with QR codes linked to websites with exhibition text (Figure 2). However, viewers rarely engaged with them, as found in previous research (Ali et al., 2018; Perez-Sanagustin, 2016).

Figure 2. Left: Combination title and object labels were often used for object-focused exhibitions. Right: QR codes, framed or taped to the window, were used instead of labels for some content-focused exhibitions.

Conclusions

This paper aimed to engage in the discussion of hallway exhibitions by sharing workarounds and challenges associated with them. The study also provided context for why faculty curators might hesitate to participate in curatorial exhibition scholarship. In this case, the

director articulated the desire to submit exhibitions to ITAA but felt they could not meet its criteria (Green et al., 2019). For example, time pressures to fulfill outreach goals led curators to forego engaging with theoretical concepts while creating the exhibition's theme, and curators selected objects based on object type (e.g., knits), which would not demonstrate research rigor and limited the curator's ability to present novel, innovative concepts and new knowledge. The atrium imposed challenges that limited the space and context surrounding the objects the curators could provide. Therefore, other curators are encouraged to share their successful experiences overcoming challenges with hallway display spaces while pursuing exhibition scholarship.

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