Standing on the threshold

Visitor responses to *Divine Cat* in Room 3 at the British Museum

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Standing on the threshold – Visitor responses to *Divine Cat* at the British Museum

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The **proposition** of the *Divine Cat* display was extremely **strong** and **resonant** and helped create a sub-brand that informed visitors’ expectations.

In reality, these expectations were not wholly matched by the display as visitors sought more contextual information about the cat and many failed to **make the link** to the wider topic of communicating with the gods.

Visitors expressed a strong **aesthetic response** to the main object and **fascination** with the information about investigating the object, but were largely unable to pass through the threshold to a deeper state of engagement.
Contents

1  Divine Cat: Speaking to the gods in Ancient Egypt  5
2  Scene setting  6
3  What we did  8
4  Exhibition overview  9
5  Who visited?  12
6  Attractor  14
7  Behaviour in the room  18
8  Presentation  28
9  Conclusions and Recommendations  31
Divine Cat: Speaking to the gods in Ancient Egypt

The Divine Cat exhibition was held in Room 3 at the British Museum from 8 November 2007 – 27 January 2008.

The display focused on the ancient Egyptian practise of dedicating metal statues of gods in temples, in a bid to communicate with the divine realm, and seek favours in return. Centred around the iconic bronze Gayer-Anderson Cat, the exhibition revealed how objects can be read in different ways, using archaeological and historical sources, but also the fruits of exciting new scientific research.
Standing on the threshold – Visitor responses to *Divine Cat* at the British Museum

## 2 Scene setting

### 2.1 Objectives

The main objective of this display was not so much to inform people about the Gayer-Anderson Cat, rather to encourage visitors to look at an object differently. In this case they were given the opportunity to consider the object through scientific terms, or to find out more about votive objects across the world.

### 2.2 Presentation and interpretation scheme

For the *Divine Cat* display, the room was darkened with the object in focus of the exhibition – the Gayer-Anderson Cat – brightly lit in the centre of the room. The title of the exhibition was behind and above the cat in bright green lettering.

On either side of the cat were display panels running to the rear of the room, offering two different approaches to looking at an object. The display on the left hand side of the room was titled ‘Approaching the gods in Ancient Egypt’ and, by splitting the display into a number of different panels, combined objects with pictures, text and quotes.

The display on the right hand side of the room was ‘Investigating an ancient masterpiece’ and concentrated on the scientific processes the cat had undergone within the Museum in order to explore it in more detail. Amongst the seven display panels on this side of the room there was a replica cat which visitors were encouraged to touch.

There was also a large panel which featured the exhibition’s title, on the back of which was information and photographs of other votive objects in different cultures around the world.

The diagram below shows the layout of Room 3 for the *Divine Cat* exhibition.
Standing on the threshold – Visitor responses to *Divine Cat* at the British Museum

**Schematic diagram of Divine Cat**

1 - Divine cat votive
2 - Series of objects, quotes, images, text etc.
3 - Other dedicated objects
4 - What is the cat made from?
5 - What was the original colour of the cat?
6 - Interactive cat (please touch!)
7 - How was the object made?
8 - X-ray of the object
9 - How has this cat been changed?
10 - What do we know about the jewellery?
What we did

Morris Hargreaves McIntyre was commissioned by the British Museum to evaluate the *Divine Cat* display as part of an on-going evaluation of the Room 3 displays. This report forms the twelfth report in the series.

The following primary research took place at the British Museum over 5 shifts between 13 - 23 January 2008, covering weekdays and weekends.

**Anatomy of a 3 minute visit**

Our researcher approached visitors who had already completed their visit in the room, and asked the visitor to talk them through their visit, describing their thought process behind every decision and continuously describing their thoughts and feelings at each element of the display.

This methodology provides a wealth of rich, qualitative data and enables us to get inside visitors’ minds.

86 Anatomy of a visit interviews were completed

**Sequential visitor tracking**

We tracked individual visitors during their visits to Room 3, recording their behaviour at different areas of the room, recording where they went first, how many elements they looked at and how the information available on either side of the room affected how they viewed the main object.

This information allows us to identify patterns of visitor behaviour, which is essential to understanding how visitors are responding to the design of the exhibition.

100 visitors were tracked using sequential visitor tracking.
4 Exhibition overview

The publicity and marketing for *Divine Cat* created an extremely strong sub-brand, from the title of the exhibition to the image (above) used to advertise the display. The subjects of either Egypt or cats on their own would be popular, so when they were combined they formed an extremely powerful and resonant proposition that appealed to a large number of Museum visitors.

Having been made aware of the exhibition either through the title or publicity material, visitors formed their own expectations that this would be an exhibition about the role of the cat in Ancient Egypt. In fact, the exhibition attempted to use visitors’ interest in the Cat to engage them in the wider topic of communicating with the gods.

However, visitors’ focus on the Cat itself and the desire for knowledge about it meant that the visitors’ focus and exhibition’s focus did not match.

Due to these expectations that visitors had formed in their minds, they entered Room 3 and moved straight to the main object – the Gayer-Anderson Cat. The amount of object at this point successfully satisfied their emotional motivations to see a beautiful object, but left them wanting more in terms of increased knowledge and understanding.
Having received a large emotional aesthetic response at the main object, visitors wanted to satisfy their intellectual needs and so moved to another part of the display which promised a link to the Gayer-Anderson Cat, in this case the ‘Investigating an ancient masterpiece’ display which featured information directly associated to the cat itself. At this side of the room, visitors did not necessarily find the information they had expected to, but what was offered was sufficiently interesting and out of the ordinary to facilitate their engagement and increase their knowledge and understanding. This unexpected information provided them with a look behind the scenes of the Museum, and offered them a previously unseen glimpse of how the Museum really works.

Both the main object and the right hand side of the display gave visitors valued aesthetic and intellectual outcomes. The left hand wall, with its looser selection of objects, quotes and text attempted to shift visitors’ focus to the wider topic of communicating with the gods. In doing so it offered a catalyst to use their imaginations and discover the feelings of empathy, reflection and an altered state, that we have seen in other Room 3 shows.

Whilst the right hand wall and cat object facilitated Follower behaviour amongst visitors, the lack of a direct connection to the Gayer-Anderson Cat on the left hand wall, and also the lack of an obvious narrative structure resulted in lower levels of engagement.

Visitors who did spend time at the left hand wall showed signs of reaching a more engaged state, but the link to the main title and proposition of the exhibition was too weak for many visitors.

This does not mean that visitors did not find the Divine Cat display hugely enjoyable – there was an extremely enthusiastic response to the beauty of the main object itself, and the information provided on the right hand wall fascinated many visitors, whilst the tactile replica in the display was an unexpected but popular element. The exhibition did however miss the opportunity to propel these visitors to a higher level of engagement.
Visitor Engagement Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VISITOR INPUT</th>
<th>OUTCOMES</th>
<th>MUSEUM INPUT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-visit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to messages Past experiences Needs Motives Wants</td>
<td>Raised awareness Interest: offer meets needs Stimulate desire, fascination, intrigue, visit decision, pre-visit expectations</td>
<td>Brand promotion Past delivery Communicate the benefits Promote sub-brands Communicate emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional openness Social interaction Intellectual openness</td>
<td>Heightened anticipation and mood Social enjoyment Visit focus</td>
<td>Atmosphere and ambience Facilities and services Orientation, proposition, guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect to existing knowledge and experience</td>
<td>Selection Spontaneous aesthetic response Recognition, identification</td>
<td>Attractor Presentation and display Information and classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage emotions and imagination</td>
<td>Deeper, wider knowledge and understanding Empathy, creativity, reflection, profound meaning, altered state</td>
<td>Context, interpretation, interaction, and immersive experiences</td>
</tr>
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5 Who visited?

The Divine Cat display attracted the highest number of visitors and highest average visits per day of any Room 3 display we have evaluated.

A large proportion of visitors to the Divine Cat display were in the Museum in order to either see The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army, or to try and get tickets for the exhibition. Whilst this undoubtedly boosted visitor numbers for Divine Cat, as will be seen in this evaluation report, the proposition of this Room 3 was extremely strong and successfully managed to draw in this enlarged Museum audience.

As a result however, many visitors’ motivations for coming to the Museum were different to the usual, more general Museum visitor, thus affecting how they behaved in Room 3.

As at the previous Room 3 displays, the pen portraits remain relevant, although there was a much higher proportion of incidental visitors at this display than at previous exhibitions in the space.
5.1 Pen portraits of typical Room 3 visitors

Research at the previous eleven Room 3 displays has helped us to understand the type of visitors who come into the room. The following are three brief general descriptions of the most common type of Room 3 visitor.

Serial Room 3 visitor

This type of visitor is a regular visitor to Room 3 with the exhibition often being the sole reason behind their visit that day. Many of these visitors will just pop into the Museum during a lunch break as they know that they will see something new and interesting in the room.

Visitors with a personal connection

Room 3 attracts visitors who have come to the British Museum for another reason and entered Room 3 as the subject matter interests them. This is often due to the close subject relations of Room 3 and a special exhibition. For example, in this instance many visitors came to the Museum to see Crafting Beauty in Modern Japan and visited Room 3 as the subjects covered in the two spaces were loosely related and therefore of interest.

Incidental visitors

Room 3, and the Museum as a whole, attracts a large number of incidental visitors, many of whom are making their first visit to the Museum that day. The room’s close proximity to the main entrance and Great Court and its often intriguing décor attract many incidental visitors into the display.
Although largely similar to the attractor model for The Korean Moon Jar, some elements of the model have changed. The key connection and interest points for visitors have changed from Korea and ceramics to Egypt and cats, and whereas at the last display some visitors thought it was unusual to have such a plain-looking object receiving star treatment, there were no such queries here. The nature of the cat itself, combined with the Egypt proposition was enough to convince visitors that this was an important object.
6.1 Repeat Room 3 visitor

For some repeat visitors, the prospect of a new display in the room is enough to draw them in to a room where they feel they are guaranteed an enjoyable intellectual and emotional experience.

I’ve been to this room before and I think the fact it is quite small and dark, so you don’t get a lot of people trooping in and out of it, does make it a place where you can concentrate on one object

I’ve generally found that the little exhibitions you do in this room are quite entertaining

6.2 View of object

As with The Korean Moon Jar, positioning the object in the centre of the room meant that visitors could see the piece from outside the room. Combined with a large title in bright colours, the room became an extremely attractive proposition for incidental visitors.

Aesthetic

Many visitors considered the Gayer-Anderson Cat to be an interesting and beautiful looking object on first glance, and having seen the object from outside the room it had enough star quality to convert these people into Room 3 visitors.

I saw the cat ... and it looked very interesting

The showcase in the middle when you looked through

You could see from the door, the Divine Cat, so it draws you in

Own room importance

Although less common at this exhibition than at The Korean Moon Jar display, some visitors did wonder why the object had been given its own room.

Interesting to know why you suddenly picked on this relatively small piece to have a whole room

Museum behaviour

Room 3 was the first room of the Museum that many visitors encountered and so upon entry immediately came into the room. This also works for visitors leaving the Museum and deciding to see one last thing before they leave.
Standing on the threshold – Visitor responses to Divine Cat at the British Museum

When you first come in [to the Museum] this is the first thing we saw so we came in here

It was by the front door

It was right next to the entrance

I’m waiting for a friend and she’s not yet arrived and I’m just having a wander and this is near the entrance

6.3 View into room

The layout and display of Divine Cat was extremely different from The Korean Moon jar exhibition which used light colours and had a warm, homely ambience.

In contrast, Divine Cat used very dark background colours, interspersing them with brightly lit objects and pictures and bright text in white and brilliant green.

Alluring ambience and atmosphere

The perceived atmosphere of the room was a major draw for visitors who considered it mysterious and interesting, with some going so far as to describe it as like entering a tomb.

A sort of mystery

It's tomb-like and mystic

I like the darkness ... it does draw you in when you see the dim light

Going into a tomb

Whilst some visitors described a sense of mystery in the room’s atmosphere, others felt it was more reverential as if they were in a church.

It’s quite spiritual really. It’s good and ethereal

A bit like church – quite quiet and calm, looking at the actual shrines

It does feel like a quieter, sort of worshipful state

Whether they considered the space to be more like a tomb or a church, visitors largely agreed that the ambience in the room was calming and a break from the noisy bustle of the Museum’s main foyer.
Standing on the threshold – Visitor responses to *Divine Cat* at the British Museum

*Peaceful atmosphere*

*I think it’s quite calming*

*It’s very soothing really*

**Bite-size / convenience appeal**

As mentioned previously, a large proportion of visitors came to see *Divine Cat* in order to kill some time before their designated entry slot for *The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army*. With its proximity to the Great Court and the relatively small size of the space, Room 3 was an ideal space for these visitors.

*I've bought a ticket for the Terracotta Army and I've 15 minutes to go*

*I thought I would have a quick look before I went into the Terracotta Army*

*I'm going to see the warriors and I've got an hour to spare*

*One of the things I liked was it's small and accessible*

*I had some time to spend before I meet the rest of my group and I love anything about Egypt*

**Modelling**

Although visitors did not actively express this as an attractor, we know that subconsciously Museum visitors enter a particular room, or view a particular object because of the high volume of people in that space.

This behaviour was seen at the Ikebana changing displays, where the crowds gathering outside the room encouraged other visitors to investigate.
7

Behaviour in the room

7.1 Where did visitors go first?

Our tracking studies showed that nearly two thirds of visitors in Room 3 went straight to the main object first. A further 21% of visitors went to the left hand side of the room first, with the remaining 16% going to the right hand side of the display.
7.2 The Gayer-Anderson Cat

Having reached the main object in focus of the exhibition, visitors discovered an (intentional) lack of contextual information about the cat surrounding the main object, meaning that those visitors who wanted to find out more about it were forced to look elsewhere in the room. However, for those less motivated visitors who were happy to just have an immediate aesthetic response, this was achieved instantly at the beginning of the exhibition, and many were happy to leave the space without trying to engage any further.

*I wanted to see the Divine Cat – just wanted to look at the cat itself
*I just wanted to look at the cat

Regardless of whether they moved on to another part of the display and achieved other outcomes, many visitors mentioned the initial aesthetic response.

*The statue itself is wonderful
*I liked the object. It's quite stunningly beautiful
*The sculpture – took a good look at that. Beautiful, really beautiful

Visitors liked being able to see the cat from all sides

61% of visitors chose to move around the main object, looking at it from a number of sides.

*I like how you can walk the whole way round the cat as well. I think that's quite important

Not only did this give visitors the opportunity to appreciate the object fully, it also helped to alleviate the bottleneck that was caused by people crowding around this object.

Visitors wanted more contextual information

For many visitors, the proposition of the exhibition centred on the Gayer-Anderson Cat itself, and they were therefore motivated to find out more about this object.

*The history of the cat ... I know it featured in Ancient Egypt a lot but its significance... I saw that small display down there but it's not related to the cat
Perhaps just a little more about the significance of cats, because it’s so significant in Ancient Egypt, and perhaps more of why that is, why there is the cat opposed to other animals.

It’s nice to know the figure’s recent history, where it was and how it came to be here and what you’ve done to it.

With the lack of contextual information regarding the cat in the exhibition, visitors struggled to gain any intellectual outcomes from this part of the display. Although learning about the cat itself may not have been a main objective of the exhibition, the absence of any background information frustrated some visitors, as they failed to grasp the concept of the display.

I’d say it’s lacking in context … there’s no background

I was looking for more of an explanation but I couldn’t find one

I’m sure there must be more background

Have I missed the point, or did it say anywhere that cats were sacred in Egypt?
7.3 Investigating an ancient masterpiece

The right hand wall of the exhibition was the next logical step for many visitors as there was a link to the main object, in that the information still referred directly to the Gayer-Anderson Cat.

Many visitors who had tried and failed to find any contextual information at the main object then moved on to the right hand wall to try and answer their unanswered questions. In reality, they were unable to find these answers here, but the information available regarding the scientific approaches was suitably interesting to engage visitors and provide them with intellectual outcomes.

What did visitors look at?

The chart below shows the number of panels that visitors looked at (excluding the interactive tactile replica cat).

Number of panels viewed

![Number of panels viewed chart]

The fact that 20% of visitors looked at every panel on the right hand wall shows that visitors found the content and narrative very engaging and therefore were willing to follow from one panel to the next.

61% of visitors looked at 3 or more panels, and only 10% of all visitors to the room ignored the panels completely.

Those visitors who only viewed some of the panels tended to read the title of the panel and decide then whether or not to invest their time in the remainder of the panel.
Standing on the threshold – Visitor responses to Divine Cat at the British Museum

It is nice that you can see the big [text] and then follow as much as you can

Touching the replica cat

46% of visitors touched the replica cat in the display, and most visitors who did found it to be an extremely positive experience.

Many people were pleasantly surprised at being able to touch the object, as it is an experience that they would not usually associate with museums in general.

It makes a change because you go in to the Egyptian room and everything is not touch, not touch, not touch!

It was good ... because in museums you cannot touch anything

I love touching things, even though normally it's don't touch, don't touch, and I love a chance to touch things. So I appreciated that very much even though I recognise it's not the real thing. It was a big part of my experience

Visitors described the cat as extremely tactile, and found themselves interacting with the object as if it were a living animal.

The cat you can stroke ... it makes you want to caress it

I tickled it under its chin

I started playing with the cat

I like stroking cats

It felt like a cat, it didn’t just look like a cat

Over half of visitors to the room did not touch the cat, with many being unaware that they were allowed to.

Why is the cat there so easy to touch? You would have thought there would be a fella in front to stop you touching it?

We just thought it had glass in front of it? Was there not?

The cat looks like it's in a cabinet

Some visitors had other reasons for not touching the cat.

I didn't feel I wanted to, because everyone else has touched it – hygiene issues

Putting your hand in is like putting your hand into an unknown area. I find it very scary
Visitors achieved significant intellectual outcomes

The ‘Investigating an ancient masterpiece’ section of the display proved extremely popular amongst visitors. Although they were unable to find the contextual information about the cat that had driven them there, they found the material on the right hand side of the wall to be suitably engaging.

I liked the way they described the work that has been done to the cat, because I didn’t know

Knowing the detail of the cat, how it was repaired

It was interesting to see ... how they investigate the things that they find

It was interesting to see how it was made and how it has been repaired. It was very interesting to know about it.

I was kind of interested in how they’d x-rayed it and how they’d managed to mend it underneath – I found that fascinating

Visitors felt that the right hand side of the exhibition offered a ‘behind the scenes’ look at the Museum’s work, and therefore made them feel as if they were seeing something that they would not normally see.

I liked to see the x-ray inside. That drew my attention more, of what happened to it over the years

It draws you in. you feel like you’re part of it, especially how it ... being explained

I see myself more as a history person than a science person, but I did actually find the science side very interesting, which was a surprise
7.4 Approaching the gods in Ancient Egypt

The left hand side of the room was less popular amongst visitors as it did not appear to further the proposition of cats. Visitors felt that this side of the wall was a separate, self-contained element of the display and so visitors were less willing to engage with it – especially those who had just come to learn see or learn something about the cat itself.

[On the right] it’s all connected with the actual exhibit rather than those items [on the left wall] which are connected with the exhibit but not directly

This is problematic as the left hand wall was one of the only places in the exhibition where visitors could be expected to achieve more powerful outcomes such as empathy and reflection, before moving to an altered state. Visitors who did invest the time in this wall successfully achieved these outcomes, but unfortunately most visitors stopped at an aesthetic response (at the Gayer-Anderson Cat) or reached an intellectual outcome (at the ‘Investigating an ancient masterpiece’ section).

How did visitors behave?

Visitors who looked at the wall were observed to ascertain how they had behaved at this section of the display. Using the Browser, Follower, Searcher method of meaning making, the definition breakdowns were as follows:

- **Browser**: just glances at the wall, at the pictures, quotes and objects, then moves on to another element of the room
- **Follower**: tries to make sense of the wall, looking at different objects, images and text
- **Searcher**: closely studies the wall, looking at a number of different objects, or studies an aspect of the wall in extremely close detail

The chart below shows the percentage of visitors to the left hand wall who behaved in each of the above ways.
Meaning making at ‘Approaching the gods in Ancient Egypt’

Visitor behaviour

- Searcher: 12%
- Follower: 27%
- Browser: 61%

This chart shows us that over 60% of people who looked at the wall only briefly engaged with it before moving to another part of the exhibition. As mentioned previously, this may be because there was a lack of obvious link between the main object and this part of the display and visitors were not willing to invest the time to try and find a link for themselves.

_ I just glanced at the things that looked interesting_

A more traditional Museum message

Some visitors felt that when comparing the two sides of the exhibition, the left hand side was less interesting to them as it showed information and objects that they would expect to see in the Museum, whereas the right hand wall was more unusual and interesting.

Many of the visitors were in the Museum to see The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army – an exhibition that attracted a different, more general
Standing on the threshold – Visitor responses to Divine Cat at the British Museum

audience rather than the typical Museum audience. This could help explain why the more traditional objects were less successful than the scientific modern information found in Room 3.

*It was the most technical bits of how they did it which was interesting. Whereas the other [left hand] side was similar to what you could see in many of the other galleries*

*This [right hand side] engaged me more than those little objects*

*I read about the cat [on the right hand wall] ... it was very interesting. I had never heard about it before so was fascinated by it all. Walked over there [to the left hand wall], it was too much*

**Visitors gained new knowledge and understanding**

Those visitors who did invest time at the left hand wall were rewarded with intellectual outcomes as they learnt more about votive offerings.

*The little artefacts are very interesting*

*I was interested in the offerings they made to the gods*

*I learnt something. I didn’t know that they were inscribed*

*The idea of them being presented to the gods, being able to be bought and presented to the gods*

**Some visitors reached an altered state**

By using their existing knowledge and understanding and engaging their emotions, some visitors were able to achieve much higher outcomes at the left hand side of the exhibition than anywhere else in the display.

*For me the most unique part was all the statues on the left hand side that were purchased. I think because I work in a seminary I was intrigued by sacred objects in other cultures and the fact they thought they could communicate with the gods by giving a statue and making their request on the bottom*

*People could contact the divine through an object*

*Incredible workers. I’m amazed*
7.5 Back wall

65% of visitors to Divine Cat went behind the back wall to read the information regarding votive objects in other cultures.

It was interesting to see the other ways people connect with the gods in different cultures

However, many visitors did not realise that there was any further information behind the back wall.

Is there something behind that?

I missed that

Make it a bit more obvious that there’s something round the back

I went to the end, turned, and wanted to look at the centrepiece. So that attracted me over ... away from what was behind that wall

I didn’t see it

Many of the people that went behind the wall only did so because they saw other people doing the same, and more prominent signage needs to be available so visitors are made aware.

7.6 Did visitors return to the object in focus?

Having viewed the interpretation around the room, just over half of visitors returned to look at the main object. This can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the information might have been enough to raise visitors’ interest in the main piece, as they wanted to transfer the knowledge they had gained in the exhibition onto the object in focus.

I was just mainly interested in the cat ... [but] now I’m standing back and taking a quiet moment and going ‘yeah ok, so this is their form of speaking to the gods’

Secondly however, some visitors said that they tried to look at the other information in the room, but became disillusioned with the interpretation they found and so returned to look at the main object.

I just scanned around with my eyes to see what I felt was more important to me to see, then I got a bit fed up and just went to the cat
Presentation

8.1 Lighting

As has been mentioned previously, the lighting in the room helped create a certain ambience – whether mysterious like a tomb or reverential like a church.

When in the room, visitors commented that the contrast of darkness with brightly lit objects and text panels helped them to gain a visit focus.

*The way everything is set up shows off the object extremely well. It's beautifully done with very good information all the way through*

*The dark's quite good because it makes you focus on the object*

*The fact that the whole room was black and these were shown off and lit. It's comfortable to be in, and at the same time focuses your attention where it should be*

*The intimacy of the room, the darkness of it, makes you focus upon the main object*

8.2 Interpretation

The quality and amount of interpretation in the room received a positive response from visitors.
Standing on the threshold – Visitor responses to *Divine Cat* at the British Museum

I think all the displays are very good. They give you the information that you want, why they've made these things and other cultures that have done similar things.

*Informative but not overpowering*

There was a lot more text than I was expecting, but that didn’t bother me because I just decided which ones I wanted to read. I think there’s quite a lot of information and it’s quite well broken up.

*It’s all pretty concise information, it’s not too in-depth*

8.3 Colour scheme

The colours used for the title and interpretation were praised by visitors, though no one interviewed noticed that different colours had been used for different areas of the interpretation, e.g. quotes, titles etc.

*I think the green against the black with the lights is brilliant*

*I like the use of colour, the green and the white. It comes out extremely well and ... it draws your eye in with the images down the side*

*I liked the lighting and the colours*

8.4 Size

As is always the case for Room 3 displays, some visitors said the exhibition was smaller than they had expected, and they would have liked to see more objects and information.

*I thought there would have been more in here*

*It’s a shame there wasn’t a bit more*

*I thought there was going to be more artefacts*

This is only an issue in terms of the contextual information about the cat which has been mentioned previously in the report. However, with regards to the size of the exhibition, some visitors stated that they had seen the display advertised on the Museum’s website and made a visit especially to see it. When they arrived at the Museum to find such a small exhibition, some of these visitors were understandably somewhat disappointed.
Standing on the threshold – Visitor responses to Divine Cat at the British Museum

I thought it was a paid exhibition – I didn’t realise it was this size. We’ve come up specially to see this

This all comes back to the original proposition and the sub-brand that has been created for the exhibition. In many cases the expectations created by this brand exceeded the actual experience of the visit.

8.5 Volume of people

Divine Cat attracted the highest average daily visitor figure for any display in Room 3 so far, meaning that there were very often a number of visitors in the room at one time.

It was quite crowded

Everyone gets in the way of each other

It’s so crowded. If you really want to read then you must fight for it!

I felt as though I wanted to get out as there were too many people around

Some visitors felt that the amount of visitors in the room detracted from their visit as they were unable to see certain objects, and the decision of what to look at in the display was determined by the number of people stood in front of them.

This problem was exacerbated by a bottleneck caused by visitors looking at the Gayer-Anderson Cat. As this was the most popular element of the display, people needed more space to look at the piece and to allow other visitors to move to other elements of the room.

I more or less went to where I could actually get in

There’s a bit of a traffic jam in the middle where the case is
Conclusions and Recommendations

The display and ambience of the room affects emotional openness

Findings from the Divine Cat display and previous Room 3 shows have highlighted the importance of creating an ambience in the room to help immerse visitors in the subject. Whilst for the Divine Cat display visitors described a reverential, church-like atmosphere, other displays such as Korean Moon Jar helped place visitors in a Korean house.

Creating the initial ambience in the room affects how emotionally open visitors will be in the room, and therefore affect their behaviour and outcomes. The more immersed visitors become in the room through its display and ambience, the more engaged they become and achieve more significant outcomes.

Images / publicity create sub brand

The publicity and marketing material for the room helps to create a sub-brand which highlights the exhibition proposition and informs visitors’ expectations. In the case of Divine Cat the publicity material featured images of two cats – one object related and the other science related.

This created a major proposition of ‘cats’ in the room, thus helping to explain why visitors could engage with the main object and left hand wall, but struggled to make the jump to the information on the right hand wall, which had less of an obvious ‘cat’ connection.

360° view of the main object

In Divine Cat, as in Korean Moon Jar, visitors liked being able to walk around the object and view it from all sides. This allows visitors to appreciate the full detail of the object, and where there is interpretation around the object, it encourages them to look at the object in a different way.

This technique also helps to alleviate crowding around the object in focus.

Visitors were looking to reassure their own background knowledge

Visitors were attracted into Room 3 by the propositions of ‘Egypt’ and ‘cats’, two subjects about which visitors already held some background knowledge. Whilst in the exhibition many were looking to confirm and reassure their own background knowledge, but the lack of contextual information about the cat meant that some visitors were unable to do this.
Right hand wall proved very popular

Upon failing to find any contextual information about the cat, many visitors looked to the two sides of the exhibition for further context. The clearest and most obvious link came through the right hand wall which directly featured the Gayer Anderson Cat.

Although this wall did not feature the information that visitors were initially searching out, the information available proved sufficiently interesting to engage them.

Visitors especially appreciated the chance to see ‘behind the scenes’ of the Museum as the information gave them a previously unseen glimpse of another side of the British Museum.

Tactile objects

Whilst the tactile cat proved a very popular element of the display, some visitors felt uncomfortable reaching into a space to feel the object. Objects that protrude out from the wall, such as the tactile Moon Jar are a more popular method of interaction.
Standing on the threshold – Visitor responses to *Divine Cat* at the British Museum

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