‘A taste of Japan’

Visitor responses to the Samurai to Manga display

March 2005
‘A taste of Japan’

© 2005 MORRIS HARGREAVES MCINTYRE

50 Copperas Street, Manchester, UK M4 1HS
Telephone 0161 839 3311
Fax 0161 8393377
Email intray@lateralthinkers.com
www.lateralthinkers.com
Samurai to Manga attracted record visitor numbers for a Room 3 display. The display provoked a positive reaction from visitors and challenged their perceptions of the British Museum.

The resonant proposition, contemporary display and involving curatorial scheme engaged visitors deeply.

While it generated considerable interest in the Japanese Collections, the display was unable to fully satisfy this interest. Visitors were left wanting more.
Contents

1 Samurai to Manga 5
2 Scene setting 6
3 What we did 8
4 Who visited? 11
5 What did visitors do? 14
6 How engaged were visitors? 20
7 What did visitors engage with? 22
8 How did visitors respond? 26
9 Recommendations 33
1 Samurai to Manga

The *Samurai to Manga: Japan across the centuries* display was held in Room 3 at the British Museum from 15 December 2005 to 8 February 2006. Admission to the room was free.

The display opened shortly after the closure of the Museum’s Japanese Galleries for refurbishment. It featured eleven objects with supporting interpretation, highlighting the Museum’s Japanese Collections.

The objects selected ranged from the historical to the contemporary, illustrating the theme of reinvention and continuity in Japanese culture.
Scene setting

Room 3 is used by staff at the Museum as a 'test-bed' to trial new methods of display and interpretation. Each display in the space is visually different and employs different display and interpretation schemes.

Objectives of the display

The Samurai to Manga display sought to fulfil the following key objectives:

• To use historic and contemporary objects from the Museum’s Japanese Collections to explore the notion of reinvention and continuity in Japanese culture; what appears to be modern in fact has a long tradition

• To inform visitors that the Museum’s Japanese Galleries were closed until September 2006 and to generate interest in the refurbished galleries when they reopen

• To make visitors aware that the Museum has a contemporary collecting policy

Presentation and interpretation scheme

The display comprised three pairs of display cases on plinths, each separated by a large text panel highlighting an aspect of reinvention and continuity as represented by the objects. In addition to the text panels, brief object labels were placed in each of the case displays.

Cases 1a and 2a, entitled Friendly robots, paired a wind-up tea-carrying boy, based on a design published in 1796, with an interactive Sony AIBO robot dog. The supporting text panel discussed the evolution of robotic toys in Japan and featured a video screen showing the tea-carrying boy in operation.

Cases 2a and 2b, entitled Samurai, contained samurai armour and a sword, with the various composite pieces made between 1500 and 1800. This was paired with a terracotta tomb figure made one thousand years earlier. The text panel highlighted why the curator had chosen these pieces and discussed the role of the Samurai in Japanese culture.

Cases 3a and 3b, entitled Manga: drawings run riot, featured books illustrated by Utamaro and Hokusai in the 18th and 19th centuries. These were
paired with images of Astro-Boy, a manga character created in the 1950s. The supporting text panel explored the long history of storytelling in Japan in which pictures and words are given equal prominence.

The object text panels were supported by an introductory panel, featured twice within the room, and wall graphics giving additional information on the Museum’s Japanese Collections, how they are cared for and past and present projects with Japan. The text on these panels was featured in English and Japanese.

The cases in Room 3 were positioned away from the walls of the room in an attempt to compress the space. The wall graphics and open pen for the AIBO robot dog encouraged visitors to walk around the back of the cases.

The interpretative text was conceived to be conversational in style and the overall display scheme to be contemporary and accessible. This was felt to be a departure from a more traditional British Museum display.

Hanging banners over the entrance to the room, a large blow up of Hokusai’s Great Wave and bright red plinths and graphics were all used to create visual impact and to entice visitors into the room.

**Room 3 schematic diagram**
3 What we did

Morris Hargreaves McIntyre was commissioned by the British Museum to evaluate the Samurai to Manga display as part of an on-going quarterly evaluation of the Room 3 displays. This report forms the third report in the series.

Building on the first two waves of evaluation, the following techniques were devised and used to meet the research objectives:

1 Sequential visitor tracking
Visitors were tracked during their visit to Room 3 to record their usage of each of the six cases making up the display, the order in which they were visited and the time spent at each case.

This enables us to determine areas of excess or under provision, length of engagement and to identify any ergonomic issues. By measuring the order in which visitors proceed around the display, and whether they exit into or from the Museum, we can also identify behaviour patterns: this is essential for testing the visitor assumptions made during the design of the display.

90 visitors were tracked using Sequential visitor tracking.

2 Meaning making observations
Using observation, we classified visitors’ behaviour into three modes: Browser, Follower and Searcher. Visitors were observed at each of the case displays and their behaviour mode noted. This gives a measure of visitors’ approach mode and how engaged visitors became with the display as a whole.

The more engaged visitors are, the more rewarding their encounter with objects in the Museum’s collection. Measuring visitor engagement in Room 3 is therefore a valuable measure of success.

90 visitors were classified into Meaning making modes.
3 Engagement matrices

We recorded visitors' levels of engagement with the objects in the display using *Engagement matrices*. Visitors' behaviour was marked on a matrix mapping the depth of their engagement against their usage of interpretation materials.

This technique enables us to identify which elements of display and interpretation were most successful at engaging visitors.

*Engagement observations were carried out.*

4 Mini-survey

Visitors were asked a short series of questions to determine group composition, motivation, knowledge of the subject matter, prior awareness of the display, levels of repeat visiting to the Museum and intentional visiting to Room 3. The *Mini-survey* was conducted in Room 3 on 11 and 14 January 2006.

This information provides a basic segmentation of visitors to the Room 3 displays and allows for comparisons against all visitors to the British Museum and to the changing Room 3 displays over the evaluation period.

*Mini-surveys were completed.*

5 Post-it notes and vox pops

We used the *Post-it note response* technique to generate spontaneous responses from visitors to the Room 3 display. Respondents were issued with a pencil and a pad of Post-it notes. When they addressed an exhibit, information, interpretation etc, they were encouraged to note down their immediate response, questions or comments.

When the visitor returned their Post-it notes they were asked a number of questions regarding their overall response to the display in a *Vox pop* style interview. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. Along with the Post-it note responses they provide a rich source of qualitative data on visitors’ responses to the display.

Three key visitor types were identified (*Families, First-time and Repeat visitors*) to enable comparisons to be made between the responses of each visitor type to the displays.

*Post-it note responses were gathered and 34 Vox pop interviews conducted.*
The primary research took place at the Museum over six shifts between 17 January and 5 February 2006, covering weekdays and weekends.
4 Who visited?

Visitor profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Room 3</th>
<th>British Museum*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intentional visiting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional visit to British Museum</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidental visit to British Museum</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge of subject areas covered</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little/ none</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pro/ academic involvement with museums</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures taken from January rolling survey
**Figures for the whole visitor group, not just respondents

The results show that visitors to the Samurai to Manga Room 3 display were more likely to be incidental visitors to the Museum and more likely to be recent repeat visitors, than all British Museum visitors. Almost half of visitors to the display were visitors from London who had previously visited the Museum within the last 12 months.

The emerging pattern is that recent repeat visitors to the British Museum use Room 3 as a gallery to pop into when making an impromptu visit to the Museum. While they might not be aware of the specific display that is on until they arrive at the Museum, they are aware that Room 3 offers regularly changing displays. This changing nature of the displays in Room 3 offers regular repeat visitors something fresh and new to see at the Museum, this is likely to in turn encourage repeat visiting.
Motivation

The columns below compare Room 3 visitors’ main motivation* for visiting the British Museum, with the main motivations of visitors to the *Views from Africa* Room 3 display and those of all visitors to the Museum.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Room 3 Samurai to Manga visitors</th>
<th>Room 3 Views from Africa visitors</th>
<th>British Museum visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the columns illustrate, visitors to the Room 3 *Samurai to Manga* display were more likely than all British Museum visitors to be motivated by *Intellectual* or *Spiritual* drivers and less likely to be motivated by *Social* drivers.

While this is a similar pattern to that recorded during the *Views from Africa* Room 3 display, the results for *Samurai to Manga* demonstrate an increase in *Socially* motivated visitors and a corresponding decline in *Intellectually* motivated visitors. This suggests that *Samurai to Manga* had a more general appeal for visitors than the *Views from Africa* display.

Taken together with the profile of visitors to Room 3, the emerging pattern is that Room 3 is attracting large proportion of visits from a more engaged,

* Refer to *Made in Africa: Room 3 scoping study* for definitions of visitor motivations
** Figures taken from January rolling survey
proactive visitor, who is more likely to be a recent repeat visitor to the Museum. These visitors are have higher intellectual expectations and are primarily motivated by the desire to improve their own knowledge and their understanding of other cultures, to be stimulated creatively and to be and fascinated by what they see. The Room 3 displays successfully appeal to this subset of visitors, just as other galleries, events or exhibitions may appeal, for very different reasons, to other sub-sets.

Audience segmentation will enable the Museum to understand the characteristics, motivations and needs of visitors. The Museum then needs to ensure that it provides a variety of different visiting experiences, of which Room 3 will be one, to meet the differing needs of each of its market segments.

A resonant proposition

The lower level of pre-visit awareness and higher level of incidental visiting to the display, coupled with an increased visitor flow into the Room, demonstrate that the Samurai to Manga display was a more intrinsically resonate proposition than the Views from Africa display. The title of the display, theme, promotional banners and its visual appeal are likely to have contributed to this intrinsic resonance, intriguing visitors sufficiently to make a visit.

It is an attractive theme, we saw the poster and came looking for this exhibition. Repeat visitor

...what drew me in was you have got a fabulous picture of the Great Wave up there, which just pulls you in. Repeat visitor

I came into this particular gallery as it caught my eye as soon as I entered the museum. First-time visitor
What did visitors do?

Usage

*Usage levels by case*

The chart below illustrates the proportion of all visitors to Room 3 viewing the six cases making up the *Samurai to Manga* display.

As the chart demonstrates, Case 1a, containing the interactive AIBO dog, had the highest level of usage, viewed by 70% of visitors to the room. The case with the lowest level of usage was case 2b, containing the tomb figure.

On average each case attracted 56% of visitors to the room. This is very similar to the previous display, also comprised of six cases, when each case attracted an average of 54% of visitors to the room. Again this is notably lower than the proportions recorded for the *Made in Africa Room* 3 display, when each of the three cases making up the display attracted an average of 79% of visitors to the room.
Number of cases visited

The chart below illustrates the number of cases used by visitors to Room 3.

A small percentage of visitors (2%) entered and exited Room 3 without having visited any of the cases; this is likely to have been because the room became very congested at points.

The results are remarkably similar to those recorded in the previous display. The mean average number of cases visited in *Samurai to Manga* was 3.34 out of 6 cases (56%). While the mean average number of cases visited during the *Views from Africa* was 3.25 out of 6 cases (54%).

It is interesting to note that the usage figures for *Samurai to Manga* and *Views from Africa*, both of which had 6 cases, were very similar, with visitors on average visiting just over half of the cases comprising the display. These figures compare with the 2.5 out of 3 cases (83%) of cases visited during *Made in Africa* display.
Text panels

The introductory text for the display took the form of a wall-mounted panel, appearing twice within the display on opposite walls. When in place, the panel was read by one third of visitors. This compares with around half of visitors who read the introductory panels for Views from Africa; these were situated within the case displays, again appearing twice within the room.

The three themed text panels were viewed by between 30% and 47% of visitors to the room, with the Friendly robots text panel, featuring the video loop, being the most popular. Each text panel was then rejected by over half of visitors to the room. These proportions are not unusual in the museum environment. However, with the text panels in Samurai to Manga containing the vast majority of the object interpretation, there is likely to have been an impact on visitor engagement with the objects.

In addition to the introductory and themed text panels, the display featured a series of wall graphics highlighting the Japanese Collections. Nine in ten visitors to the room read at least one of the wall graphics, with the average number read being 3.7 graphics. The success of wall graphics seems to lie in their attractive visual appeal and the bite-size information they contained.

I like this on the wall, the shapes, I think it is quite interesting... Vox pop
...the design is different, with these circular things on the walls and stuff, it is more modern, it is nice, I like it Vox pop
I like the story telling into different points, small points Vox pop

Video loop

47% of visitors to Room 3 read the Friendly robots text panel, of these visitors, 79% watched the video loop of the tea-carrying boy in operation. That is, 37% of all visitors to the room watched the video loop. While this is a significant proportion of visitors, it is a notably smaller proportion than the 50% of visitors who viewed the tea-carrying boy himself. Indeed each of the case displays were visited by 42% or more of visitors to the room.

Interestingly, there were no direct references made to the video loop during the data collection Visitors were neither surprised nor disappointed to have the video in the display. Instead the video loop seems to have added to the overall impression of the display being contemporary, interactive and family friendly.
Circulation

Start of visit

The diagram below illustrates the proportion of visitors beginning their visit to Room 3 at each of the six cases and three text panels making up the display.

As with the previous display, a typical visit to *Samurai to Manga* began at either case 2a or case 3b; the cases to immediate left and right hand side of the room upon entry. In total, 87% of visitors began their visit to Room 3 at one of the case displays. The start case was influenced by which cases were already occupied upon entry to the room.

Around the display

As in the previous display, the cases in Room 3 were positioned away from the walls in an attempt to compress the gallery space to make the room appear busy from the outside. It also enabled visitors to walk around the cases and obtain an almost 360 degree view of many of the objects on display. In contrast to the previous display, walking around the back of the cases was encouraged by wall graphics containing supporting information.
Between one quarter and one half of visitors walked around the back of each of the three case units. Case 1 saw almost half of visitors walk around the back of the case; this case contained the AIBO dog in an open round pen.

End of visit

The Exit survey found that for over half of visitors (52%) Room 3 was the first or only room they were visiting at the Museum that day, for a further 34% of visitors Room 3 was visited on their way out of the Museum.

For 40% of the first-time visitors to the Museum who visited the display, the Samurai to Manga display was their first ever encounter with the Museum’s collections. The display is therefore likely to have framed their expectations of a visit to the Museum.

Dwell

Average time spent in Room 3

Visitors spent a mean average of 3 minutes 43 seconds in the display. This compares favourably with the 2 minute 49 second average recorded in the previous display.

The table below compares the dwell time for Samurai to Manga with the dwell time recorded in the previous display.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-2 mins</th>
<th>3-4 mins</th>
<th>5 or more mins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samurai to Manga</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views from Africa</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 50% of visitors who spent between one and two minutes in Views from Africa compares with only 13% of visitors to Samurai to Manga spending such a short period of time in the display. At the other end of the scale, Samurai to Manga saw a far larger proportion of visitors remaining in the display for 5 or more minutes than the previous display.
**Average time spent at cases**

The chart below shows the average length of time in seconds spent at each case by those visitors who viewed them.

![Chart showing average time spent at cases](chart.jpg)

As the chart illustrates, visitors viewed each case for between 25 and 94 seconds. Again, this compares favourably with the previous display when each case was viewed for between 16 and 37 seconds.
How engaged were visitors?

**Engaged time**

Totalling the cumulative visitor time spent at each of the six cases and dividing this figure by the total number of visitors tracked, enables us to calculate the average time spent engaged at cases for all visitors to the room. That is both those who were and those were not clocked at a case / cases.

On average, visitors spent 160 seconds engaged with the cases in the display, out of the 223 seconds spent in the room; the remainder of the time being spent circulating, reading wall text and generally being in the room but not engaged with the case displays. This is a notable improvement on the 100 seconds spent engaged with the case displays in *Views from Africa*.

**Share of total engaged time**

Using the data we have on the proportion of visitors viewing each case, and the average length of time spent at each case, it is possible to calculate the ‘stickiness’ of the six case displays. That is the proportion of the total engaged visitor time each of the six cases accounted for. This measure takes into account both the relative appeal of the displays – in terms of the proportion of total visitors viewing them – and the length of time that they held visitors’ attention.

**‘Stickiness’ of cases**

![Pie chart showing the stickiness of cases](chart.png)

- Case 1a: 41%
- Case 2a: 21%
- Case 1b: 9%
- Case 2b: 7%
- Case 3a: 13%
- Case 3b: 10%
The chart demonstrates that the ‘stickiest’ cases were cases 1a and 2a, the AIBO robot dog and the samurai armour and sword, these two cases accounted for 62% of all engaged visitor time.

**Meaning making**

Visitors were observed approaching their first case in Room 3 and their *Meaning making* mode noted. They were then tracked throughout their visit to Room 3 to determine the highest mode of *Meaning making* they reached in the display.

On approaching their first case display, 39% of visitors were observed to be in *Browser* mode, 50% in *Follower* mode and 11% in *Searcher* mode. These proportions demonstrate that visitors began their visit to the display in a more proactive and engaged mode than the previous display. This is likely to have been a consequence of the intrinsic appeal of the *Samurai to Manga* proposition.

During their visit to the room, 62% of visitors reached *Searcher* mode, while 26% remained at *Browser* level. This is a marked improvement on the previous display when 61% of visitors remained in *Browser* mode throughout their visit, enjoying only a superficial level of engagement with the display as a whole.

Taken together with the total dwell time and the amount of time spent engaged with the cases, the results show that the *Samurai to Manga* display as a whole was more engaging for visitors than the *Views from Africa* display.

* Refer to *Made in Africa: Room 3 scoping study* for definitions of *Meaning making*
What did visitors engage with?

**Depth of engagement**

Using Engagement matrices, we measured the depth of visitor engagement with the cases making up the Room 3 display. The chart below shows the proportion of visitors addressing each case who became engaged with the contents.

As the chart shows, by far the most engaging case in the display was case 1a containing the AIBO dog. The least engaging cases were cases 2b and 3b.

From our experience in carrying out *Engagement matrices* in museums and galleries we have developed benchmark rates of success. The most successful displays we have encountered have an almost universal reach, engaging three-quarters or more of visitors. The AIBO dog falls into this category.

Displays that engage between one-third and two-thirds of visitors, such as much of that in the *Samurai to Manga* and *Views from Africa* displays, have a
more limited reach, requiring visitors to be relatively committed in their approach.

Interpretation that engages between one-quarter and one-third of visitors is considered to be functional. The Tomb figure falls into this category. For every visitor who had a successful engagement with the display, two visitors who attempted to engage with it failed to do so.

Despite visitors spending longer in the *Samurai to Manga* display and becoming more deeply engaged with the content of the room as a whole, engagement with the individual objects comprising the display was generally lower than in the previous display.

**Usage of interpretation**

Visitors' usage of interpretation in each of the cases was recorded on the *Engagement matrices*. 'Reference' denotes any written interpretation used. 'Human' intervention indicates when visitors entered into or attempted to enter into conversation about the displays, either with other visitors or a member of staff. The results are shown in the chart below.

![Chart showing usage of interpretation](chart.png)
While visitors have an inherent interest in a museum's objects, for most visitors, it is the interpretation that facilitates engagement and enables them to make meaning from objects. The fact that each case recorded a high proportion of visitors not using any interpretation at all - between 30% and 58% of visitors at each case - indicates why engagement levels for some of the cases were so low.

The object interpretation provided in the case displays took the form of brief object labels. In general, there was a low usage of this written interpretation and a relatively high failure rate when it was used. The most engaging cases, cases 1a and 2a, relied the least upon written interpretation and were the most likely to encourage human interaction. Visitors intuitively interacted with the AIBO dog and found the samurai armour visually impressive. The intrinsic appeal and relative familiarity of these objects encouraged visitors to consider the objects in some depth and to enter into conversation with one another about them. When human interaction occurs engagement rates tend to be high.

While visitors can reach a deep level of engagement without written interpretation, this generally relies on familiarity, intuition or an inherent fascination with the object. Visitors were then able to engage with the interactive AIBO and impressive Samurai armour with minimal interpretation. However, they found it more difficult to engage deeply with the less familiar or less inherently impressive objects in the display.

**Engaging interpretation**

In designing the display scheme, it was felt that a single text panel for each pairing of objects would be the most effective way of making connections between the objects, The Museum then wished to test whether, by using minimal object labels, visitors would be encouraged to read these text panels.

In the event, the display scheme attracted visitors to the objects, having considered the objects visitors then looked for interpretation to help them make meaning from them. However, with no interpretation on the object labels, the thematic text panels divorced from the objects and most visitors looking at the objects prior to reading the text panels, or not reading the text panels at all, visitors found it difficult to engage successfully with many of the objects in the display.

Visitors can be encouraged to engage more deeply by placing engaging interpretation in closer proximity to objects. Rather than divorcing interpretation and object, interpretation must flow from the object and facilitate an iterative process of looking and reading. This was achieved to
great effect in the Made in Africa display, when the interpretation was integrated into the cases displays and open questions were used that encouraged visitors to engage deeply with the stone tools.

**Foreign language**

As stated on the previous reports, the high proportion of visitors not reading any of the written interpretation in the display may be accounted for in part by foreign language visitors who do not read English.

The inclusion of Japanese interpretative text is likely therefore to have enhanced the visit for a significant proportion of non-English speaking visitors.
How did visitors respond?

Visitors had a positive reaction to the objects
The objects in the display provoked strong reactions of fascination and awe from visitors.

*The cartoon about the effects of nuclear radiation is very moving* First-time visitor

*Fascinating prints and drawings, Samurai armour and swords are awesome. Family*

*Samurai armour is breathtaking. Repeat visitor*

*The Samurai armour looks really cool; the robot puppy is amazing* Family

Families, Repeat and First-time visitors alike were pleased to see the AIBO robot dog included in the display. They indicated that they do not necessarily want the Museum to restrict itself to historic objects, but that representations of contemporary culture are also welcomed as they provide another perspective.

*The dog, which is a great example of Japan’s technology at the moment, is the sort of thing that there could be a bit more here because I love Japanese culture* Repeat visitor

*The dog, that is something that I didn’t expect to see in a museum, but it is great that it is because I think these sorts of things are modern, Museums don’t necessarily have to be about something past and old…* First-time visitor

Prior to visiting the display, only 22% of visitors were aware that the Museum collects contemporary items such as the AIBO dog. In real terms, this means that the Samurai to Manga display introduced 55,000 visitors to the Museum’s contemporary collecting policy.

The Display scheme was contemporary and fresh
Visitors liked the use of bold colours, blow-ups and wall graphics in the display. This was felt to be a modern approach that served to enliven the space.
Black, white and red create an environment in which makes the exhibition more enjoyable. Repeat visitor
Loved the “Great Wave” image on the wall. Repeat visitor

Visitors felt that the modern design approach both complemented and enhanced the objects in the display.

Yes. It is very up to date but it is about ancient things, but it still keeps you involved. Vox pop
Sophisticated design outstands ancient figures. Repeat visitor
Nice graphic design throughout, very attractive. Good to see the technology with graphics as well as historical artefacts. Repeat visitor

A strong curatorial selection
The opportunity to understand elements of Japanese culture was a highly engaging proposition for visitors to the Museum. For visitors, a museum is not just about the objects. This desire to place objects in context, to gain an understanding and appreciation of the peoples and cultures who produced them is a very appealing proposition for visitors, and one that is frequently mentioned in research carried out at the Museum.

…it is very interesting, and I thought it was good because it was more about the Japanese culture rather than just exhibiting certain artefacts. Vox pop
I liked that it was more interested in Japanese culture and culturalistic rather than just the traditional pots and jars and things like that. Vox pop

Visitors enjoyed the juxtaposition of old and new objects.

Interesting to see modern forms of technology to traditional culture. Family
I enjoyed the dog, as well as the combination of hi technology and more traditional elements. Repeat visitor
It points out similarities and differences between different artefacts. Vox pop
Good mixture of traditional and modern items. Family

Most visitors appreciated the concept of having a contained room that explores a single theme in some depth. They liked that the Museum had selected the highlights from a large collection for them as it provided a focus for their visit.

It is a bit more modern presentation than the standard mooch about and just pick out the things that jump out at you and read the labels etc. Vox
"A taste of Japan"

I think it is a good idea, yes, because it highlights some of the things you have and it is so big and you can see everything and sometimes get a bit lost, so I think it is good to have that and get some ideas. Vox pop

I think making the curation an obvious element is a really good idea Vox pop

In selecting a limited number of highlight object, visitors viewed the Samurai to Manga display as giving them an interesting taster of Japanese culture.

Good Synopsis of Japanese Culture, it serves as a taster! Family
Ideal appetiser for further exhibits. First-time visitor
I felt like this was like an introduction if you want to see more of the Japanese Collections, so maybe it is to give people a flavour of bigger things
It is a good combination of highlights Vox pop

However, a small number of visitors found the display a little too direct as, without further information or additional objects to refer to, they felt that they were only being offered one version of Japanese culture and consequently prevented from drawing their own conclusions.

When I look at the museum I want to make my own choices, browse through several things and pick on my own information, and it is very direct and you have chosen for me and I think it is a bit too direct. Vox pop
Perhaps the curator’s choice thing should be made more prominently explained. ...it is very clearly a curator’s analysis ...one selection and not a definitive version of how Japanese history has been continuous Vox pop

The overall approach was accessible and involving
Overall, visitors liked the concepts explored in Samurai to Manga and the questions it raised, this made it an involving display.

Nice concepts with clear and simple displays. First-time visitor
...it was a nice quality and the comments were interesting Vox pop
It welcomes more opinions from an individual and I am interested in those types of exhibitions. Vox pop

The bite size information and conversational style of text was found to make the interpretation accessible and interesting.
Very good layout of the room with easy to read information displays. Family
It is like a little room of information, which is really nice Vox pop
...easy to read! First-time visitor
...it was quite minimal text, but that was also quite good because it is quite hard to read tons of text when you are in the museum because you get tired quite quickly Vox pop

While the inclusion of one interactive element, the AIBO robot dog, made the display as a whole ‘interactive’.

Interactive, its nice to have a lively display for once. Repeat visitor
It is the First-time I have been here, but I have walked around through the other exhibitions and I like this more, it is more interactive First-time visitor
I quite liked that it is hands on straight away so it draws the children in Family

For families, the interaction, coupled with the contemporary feel of the room and accessible information, made Samurai to Manga a ‘family friendly’ display.

Very informative, child friendly exhibits, full of excitement, helpful staff Family
This groovy interaction is a fantastic way to show children that museums are fun! Vox pop
I think it is good, particularly with the robot thing, it is much more interactive, it is good for children Vox pop
I will probably talk to other mums, the kids really liked it Family

Offers a taster of the Japanese Collections
The key criticism visitors made of the display was that, while they became highly engaged by the proposition and content of the display, there was simply not enough for them to see.

I find that the amount of material on show is too small to make as big an impression. Nevertheless, its quite interesting, Repeat visitor
The size was a little bit lacking Vox pop
It has a fair selection of varied different things, it was a bit too brief I thought considering how much you do have of the Japanese items, it is sort of lacking that Vox pop
'A taste of Japan'

The issue regarding this was two-fold. With large posters outside the Museum promoting *Samurai to Manga* visitors’ expectations of the scope of the display were over-inflated. While the Museum conceived *Samurai to Manga* as a room display, visitors do not differentiate between a display and an exhibition and many expected the latter.

*Way too small! After seeing the posters outside, I expected more!* First-time visitor

*I thought it would be a real one like a big one, that is why I came, I expected to spend a few hours here and looking around and just learn a bit more about the Japanese culture* Vox pop

*I thought it was going to be bigger and so we were a little disappointed when we arrived, it is not much larger than my living room.* Vox pop

Furthermore, visitors’ interest in the Museum’s Japanese Collections was whetted by the display and they wanted to find out more. However, with the Japanese Galleries closed and no further sign-posting, they were left wanting.

*I like sometimes to see more background information and it has all been put away.* Vox pop

*Informative, but would have preferred more on Japanese Culture and History Family*

*A bit like a leaflet compared to a book, it is alright, it tells you something but not much ...I would have liked to have seen a lot more actually, it is enough to slightly whet your appetite* Vox pop

Due to the limited size of the display it could only provide visitors with a taster of the Japanese Collections. That is not to say that visitors want to see more objects included in Room 3 displays; we know that visitors only tend to visit half the objects that are on offer. The issue is one of providing them the means to satisfy their interest by signposting them to more information and objects.

*I think it is a taster, it is fine, but there are insufficient items that link the things you are trying to show* Vox pop

*Good as a taster, yet insufficient items to illustrate links.* Repeat visitor

*Samurai to Manga* definitely succeeded in encouraging visitors to visit the Japanese Collections, in order to satisfy this new-found interest.

*The armour would send me to the section where the armour was displayed. It makes me want to go to the opening of Japanese galleries. Good*
A taste of Japan

approach!! First-time visitor
I have seen it a number of years ago anyway, yes, I would certainly
invigorate to re-visit that again and give it a chance Vox pop
It isn’t one of my regular galleries that we go to, we come to the museum
quite a lot but we don’t go there very often, so maybe it will Vox pop

A welcome development
The Samurai to Manga display was not something that most visitors, fist-time
or repeat, expected to see at the British Museum. It was felt to be more
modern than they would have expected from a display at the Museum.

I suppose, from coming here all my life, it is much more modern, so from
that point no, but from a modern museum yes Vox pop
Not usually no, that is why I came in to see it because it was so different
...undeniably more interesting than some of the older galleries. Repeat
visitor

This was something that they welcomed and hoped it would be something
they would be embraced by the Museum in the future.

I hope that maybe next time when I come and visit the British Museum it
will be like more from this room, because it is a room of information, it is
brief and it is good Vox pop
It’s a welcome change and a very positive step Repeat visitor
it is different to what I am used to, and to what the British Museum
actually exhibits, so it is not how I would expect an exhibition to be in a
British Museum, but it is quite an interesting and welcome surprise Vox
pop

When asked to summarise the display, visitors found it to be accessible,
contemporary, interactive and engaging.

Fascinating and accessible Vox pop
Contemporary and interactive Vox pop
Colourful, exciting and wide ranging Vox pop

If a little insubstantial.

Small, it is just a taste of Japan Vox pop
A small room that is full of information ...it is an original little room
Small but interesting ...it raised quite a few interesting ideas It is a
boutique exhibition with a very clear and strong curator choice Vox pop
'A taste of Japan'

Very bright and interesting, a little bit of a bijou feel about it
A taster of ancient and modern Japanese culture Vox pop
Recommendations

Interpretation

While visitors became deeply engaged with the content of Room 3 as a whole, with the overwhelming majority taking away an understanding of the key themes explored, they did not engage as deeply with the objects themselves. The issue was one of interpretation ergonomics. Visitors were initially attracted to the objects; they then looked to the text for further understanding. However, with only brief information provided on the object labels and the interpretation divorced from the objects, a significant proportion of visitors failed to successfully link the object and the interpretation together. This prevented visitors from achieving a deeper level of engagement.

Interpretation should flow from the object. Physically integrating interpretation and object, providing additional context and using visual prompts and open questions all encourage visitors to consider objects in greater depth and ultimately to engage more deeply with them.

Interactive

Families greatly enjoyed the Samurai to Manga display. The colourful presentation, accessible interpretation and, significantly, the inclusion of the interactive AIBO dog encouraged families to view the display as being interactive and family friendly; more so than other displays at the Museum.

It is significant that the inclusion of just one good quality interactive in a gallery makes it into an interactive display. The Museum might consider incorporating one interactive element into all new displays to heighten engagement for children and families.

Sustainability

As with the previous Room 3 displays, Samurai to Manga generated considerable interest in the themes and collections being explored. While the Museum may conceive Room 3 as a ‘test-bed’ it is not understood as such by visitors. Instead they perceived Samurai to Manga to be a taster exhibition. Yet having had their appetite whetted by the display, visitors were unable to satisfy their interest in the Japanese Collection as these galleries were closed for refurbishment.
While *Samurai to Manga* was hugely successful at exciting visitors' interest in the Japanese Collections, the Museum needs to acknowledge this interest and satisfy visitors' appetite. That is not to say that the number of objects in a Room 3 display should be dramatically increased, rather than visitors should be provided with the means of exploring the collections further should they wish to. While in the past we have suggested signposting to related galleries, a more appropriate alternative in this instance would be to provide illustrated books or an online searchable database within the display – possibly taking the format of a COMPASS tour of the Japanese Collection.

**An introduction**

Carefully selecting highlight objects, presenting them using eye-catching display techniques and supporting this with accessible information provides visitors with an excellent introduction to collections. Having visited the *Samurai to Manga* display, visitors clearly articulated a desire to go on and explore more of the Museum’s Japanese Collections.

It is suggested that there is scope for every permanent gallery in the Museum to have a ‘Room 3’; a small series of case displays that introduce key themes and objects from the larger collection. Such displays have considerable potential to spark an interest in and encourage visitors to explore collections they might not otherwise not engage with.
Morris Hargreaves McIntyre is a creative and intelligent arts management consultancy working in the interests of audience and organisational development.

The company combines thorough project planning with incisive, deep analysis, lateral thinking and detailed, intelligent strategic planning to produce relevant, helpful and high quality reports with practical recommendations.

Our services include:

- strategic analysis, planning, and development
- product and service development
- feasibility studies
- market appraisals
- marketing audits, strategies and plans
- audience development strategies and implementation
- access strategies
- in-service training
- training needs analysis
- training programmes
- organisational development
- change management.

Most of our projects are research-based.

We have a fully integrated market research service that undertakes:

- quantitative research
- qualitative research
- telephone marketing
- community consultation