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Beyond the Exit: MoMA Design Store & the Extended Museum Experience

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Beyond the Exit:
MoMA Design Store & the Extended Museum Experience

A thesis presented in Candidacy for Departmental Honors in
Art History
from
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

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4.29.2024

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Beyond the Exit: MoMA Design Store & the Extended Museum Experience



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Abstract

American art museum attendance soared following World War II as museums became popular education and entertainment destinations for the growing middle class. Shaped by the influence of 1980s Reaganomics and the effects of neoliberal funding policies, museum shops developed from small information desk ventures into a vital source of public relevance and financial sustainability. When given creative liberty and economic attention, the now standardized amenity presented the opportunity to sell institutional ethos. In light of neoliberal capitalism's tendency to construe value primarily in economic terms, shops reveal how the art museum strategically assigns new meaning to its collection, mission, and cultural function.

My thesis examines the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Design Store, which opened in 1989, as a unique case study of commercial innovation centered around the valuation of art history. This study critically analyzes four distinct elements of MoMA's retail endeavor: period context, branding, spatial organization, and product offerings in relation to the museum's curatorial strategy of collecting and exhibiting "good design," as well as emerging concerns of authenticity and sustainability in art. The Design Store's mission promises an extended museum experience beyond the exit. The store's evolution demonstrates art museums' potential to meet shifting public demands for enjoyable experiences that are educational, ethical, *and* revenue-generating.

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Introduction: Entering Through the Exit

“We really want to create a sense of discovery. Some people may think it’s just a museum store, but it’s much more than that... The store is an extension of the museum.”

- Emmanuel Plat, MoMA Director of Merchandising, 2018

As a standardized amenity, the museum shop exists as a destination for visitors seeking to possess a shred of culture, a token of a defined (and reasonably priced) humanity. In its most base form, it sells simple souvenirs loosely relating to the universalized “art” historical canon. However, when given creative liberty and financial attention, it presents the opportunity to sell the very ethos of the institution itself.

The earliest example of cultural site merchandise dates to the 18th century when European pilgrims would travel to religious destinations.¹ As a result of these pilgrimages, markets for manufactured items such as *ampullae* protective amulets and badges sprung up at the exit of popular shrines.² These products served a dual symbolic function of religious icon and cultural cachet. Hundreds of years later, the practice of cultural souvenir collection would continue in America.

Born in 1741, Charles Willson Peale was an American painter, soldier, scientist, inventor, politician, and naturalist. He was a member of the Sons of Liberty and an outspoken patriotic leader during the American Revolution, but most importantly to this study, he is credited with the founding of the first American public museum – the Philadelphia Museum – in 1786.³ There was no “gift shop” in this early museum, but there was a notable product visitors could buy as a

¹Larkin, Jamie. “‘All Museums Will Become Department Stores’: The Development and Implications of Retailing at Museums and Heritage Sites.” *Archaeology International* 19 (2016): 110.

²Bell, A. R. and Dale, R. S. 2011. “The Medieval Pilgrimage Business.” *Enterprise and Society* 12, no. 3: 624. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1467222700010235>.

³“Charles Willson Peale.” 2021. *WHHA* (En-US). 2021. <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/charles-willson-peale>.

souvenir. Moses Williams, a black artist, was born into slavery in the 1770s as the son of Peale's enslaved servants Lucy and Scarborough. Peale frequently referred to Moses as "lazy" to justify his bondage even after freeing the rest of the enslaved family.⁴ Moses Williams assisted with the creation of taxidermy, hanging of art, and gallery maintenance of the first museum, and went on to sell the first American museum souvenir: cut silhouette portraits. These portraits were made from a physiognotrace silhouette machine installed in 1802 that rapidly produced affordable likenesses of sitters. The machine required a skilled operator to manage it, and Moses Williams became such a man.⁵ A written reflection by Rembrandt Peale, a son of Charles Wilson and an artist in his own right, recalls the experience:

It is a curious fact that until the age of 27, Moses was entirely worthless, but on the invention of the Physiognotrace, he took a fancy to amuse himself in cutting out the rejected profiles made by the machine and soon acquired such dexterity and accuracy, that the machine was confided to his custody, with the privilege of retaining the fee for drawing and cutting. This soon became so profitable that my father insisted upon giving him his freedom one year in advance.

American cultural institutions, whether of natural history or art, have indulged in retail ventures since their very inception. With the base fascination for cultural commodities and the origins of the American art museum visitor experience established, I recognize that museum gift shops present a distinct retail value proposition of providing both art history-based education and entertainment to its shoppers. In recent years, a new term has entered the museum industry

⁴Sellers, Charles Coleman. *Charles Willson Peale: A Biography*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969, 122.

⁵Peale. "The Physiognotrace." *The Crayon*, October 1857, 307-308.

lexicon to describe this propensity: edutainment.⁶ Edutainment refers to a mode of public engagement designed to be stimulating and enriching. Originally defined as a category of toy and game products for children, the term in the context of museums references the integration of Learning and Outreach concepts into every dimension of an institution, with the aim of guests departing with an experience that was enriching and fun by making nuanced histories digestible in an instructive and exciting way. “Edutainment” is a new word for an old phenomenon of museum marketing that has existed prior in various forms, such as at Peale’s museum.⁷ Dr. Sharon Macdonald, a professor of cultural anthropology and Director of the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage in Berlin, Germany, refers to museum shops as “the grand finale, the final exhibit of the show.”⁸ Thus, the significance of the retail space in presenting products that entertain, educate, and pertain to the museum has become crucial in creating an impactful experience for guests.

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) has been actively promoting and redefining the once-well-known narrative of Modernism upon which it was founded—a narrative that emphasized abstraction, formal innovation, internationalism, and aesthetic universalism.⁹ The museum was chartered in 1929 as an educational institution whose collection encouraged understanding and enjoyment of experimental, avant-garde art for diverse local, national, and international audiences. Even after more than a half-century of Postmodernism, which began to

⁶Wikipedia Contributors. 2024. “Educational Entertainment.” *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation. March 18, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Educational_entertainment.

⁷“Charles Willson Peale, ‘the Artist in His Museum’ (1822) | PAFA - Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.” 2015. *PAFA - Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*. April 15, 2015. <https://www.pafa.org/museum/collection/item/artist-his-museum>.

⁸Chernick, Karen. 2017. “Who Decides What You Buy in Museum Gift Shops | Artsy.” *Artsy*. November 24, 2017. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-decides-buy-museum-gift-shops>.

⁹“MoMA from Modernity into the Post Modern.” 2019. *JHI Blog*. 2019. <https://www.jhiblog.org/2019/02/04/moma-from-modernity-into-the-post-modern/>.

challenge Modernism during the 1960s by reasserting representation and historicism in art, MoMA has adapted to changing aesthetic realities by merging its institutional tradition with new initiatives that integrate artists of different styles, generations, identities, media, and nationalities into its fundamental ethos of progress. Indeed, MoMA has called back to the ideas of its first director, Alfred Barr, famously known for his single-minded Modernist pursuit of “*PROGRESS*”¹⁰ to pitch itself to donors while pursuing a decidedly Postmodern approach to merchandising that would have been unrecognizable to his original vision. With an average of 3.5 million visitors a year, the Museum of Modern Art has become an internationally recognized *brand*. Accordingly, the creative merchandising of MoMA Design Store serves as one of its greatest champions. The Design Store merges marketing, curation, merchandising, and education practices into one retail destination. Yet, the store did not emerge in the late 1980s purely out of an unprompted craving to sell “good design.” Its origins have much to do with neoliberalism, which also emerged during that period and shaped its historical context.

Neoliberalism is an economic and political ideology that advocates for free-market principles, limited government intervention in the economy, deregulation, privatization of public assets and services, and a focus on individual responsibility and entrepreneurship. In the 1980s, under the direction of the 40th U.S. President Ronald Reagan, the term came to be commonly referred to as “Reaganomics.” Neoliberalism is closely tied to the conservative political right, which emphasizes the importance of competition, free trade, and the belief that the market is a moral and self-regulating force that will efficiently generate unchecked prosperity. However, one major impact of neoliberal policies has been the general reduction of public funding for the arts, including museums, which have been forced to raise revenue by other means—including the

¹⁰Kinsella, Eileen. 2019. “How New York’s MoMA Raised More than \$400 Million for Its Expansion in Just Four Years | Artnet News.” *Artnet News*. October 10, 2019. <https://news.artnet.com/market/moma-secret-weapon-massive-400m-expansion-1671187>.

expansion of their commercial enterprises. Moreover, in light of the growing power of neoliberal capitalism's tendency to construe value in narrowly economic terms, shops have also become paradigmatic of how museums assign value to their collections and missions. The Museum of Modern Art is a legal non-profit, and as such, its Design Store is officially registered as an auxiliary service to the museum meant to generate revenue to offset operating costs and education funding needs.¹¹ However, Emmanuel Plat, the Director of Merchandising for MoMA since 2012, views the store's mission as twofold: "Besides generating revenue for the museum, one of our missions is to make good design available to as many people as possible. We can reach people who may not be interested in coming to MoMA or may be intimidated by it, but the experience of the store can be a point of entry to the museum."¹²

This thesis analyzes the MoMA Design Store as a case study of commercial innovation centered around the cultural valuation of modern art. Moreover, this study critically analyzes four distinct elements of MoMA's retail endeavor: period context, branding, spatial organization, and product offerings in relation to the museum's curatorial strategy of collecting and exhibiting "Good Design." These key points are symptoms of a host of behemoth concerns currently plaguing American art museums, such as neoliberalism, social justice, and sustainability. The Design Store's mission promises an extended museum experience beyond the exit. The store's evolution demonstrates art museums' potential to meet shifting public demands for enjoyable experiences that are educational, ethical, and revenue-generating.

¹¹Suozzo, Andrea. 2013. "Nonprofit Explorer - ProPublica." *ProPublica*. May 9, 2013. https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display_audit/25572720221. NOTABLE EXCERPT: "The Museum, MoMA PS1, the Support Corp and the Council are not-for-profit organizations exempt from tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; AFE, LLC is a limited liability corporation. (pg. 7)

¹²Drumm, Perrin. 2018. "At Work with MoMA Design Store's Merchandising Team." *Behance.net*. 2018. <https://www.behance.net/blog/at-work-with-moma-design-stores-merchandising-team>.

Chapter 1

The Need: MoMA and Commercialism in Period Context

“Within four months of its opening, there were retail operations in the lobby. It was just the front desk... but there was that need from early on, from people visiting the museum, to want to take some token of the experience home with them.”

- Chay Costello, MoMA Associate Director of Merchandise, 2018

Introduction

As financial insecurity and cultural turmoil sculpted depression-era New York City, the Museum of Modern Art, founded in 1929, began operating commercial enterprises that persist today as models for innovation. As noted in the Introduction, MoMA’s store models developed tangential to the emergence of late-20th-century neoliberalism, addressing revenue shortfalls from reduced public funding and the prevalent propensity to merge entertainment with education opportunities –“edutainment”– through commercial enterprises. Since 1939, MoMA has managed five retail ventures: The Bookstore, the Art Lending Service, The Annex Special Shop, Bookstore 2, and the Design Store. The most successful and enduring has been the Design Store. This chapter examines the evolving relationship between MoMA and American commercialism from 1929 to 1989 and the historical motivators that led to the founding of the Design Store.

i. The Museum of Modern Art - An Overview

In the late 1920s, influential patrons of the arts, Lillie P. Bliss, Mary Quinn Sullivan, and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, sought to establish an institution devoted exclusively to modern art. All cultural entrepreneurs in their own right, these three women perceived a need to challenge the conservative aesthetics of traditional museums. On November 7, 1929, two weeks after the Black Thursday stock market crash, Bliss, Sullivan, Rockefeller, and other original trustees A. Conger Goodyear, Paul Sachs, Frank Crowninshield, and Josephine Boardman Crane officially founded the Museum of Modern Art. Its founding director would be Alfred H. Barr, Jr. As the first director of MoMA, Barr submitted an organizational plan for the Museum that resulted in a multi-departmental structure divided by various forms of visual expression. After spending three days visiting the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany, in 1927, Barr regarded meeting with the small yet visionary faculty as “one of the important incidents in my own education.”¹³ Inspired by the expansive and integrated Bauhaus curriculum, the MoMA curatorial departments would include new categories of architecture and design, film, media and performance, and photography, as well as the traditional disciplines of drawings and prints, painting, and sculpture. Barr envisioned the museum’s collection to be like “a torpedo moving through time, its nose the ever-advancing present, its tail the ever-receding past of 50 to 100 years ago”¹⁴ with the intent of providing New York with “the greatest museum of modern art in the world.” (Figure 1.1) As one of the first museums in America to be solely dedicated to the exhibition of modern art, early directorial staff were forced to confront vital questions of identity, value, and public interest.

¹³“MoMA through Time: The School that Inspired MoMA.” *Museum of Modern Art*. 2024. https://www.moma.org/interactives/moma_through_time/1930/the-school-that-inspired-moma/.

¹⁴“MoMA through Time: Starting a Collection from Scratch.” *Museum of Modern Art*. 2024. https://www.moma.org/interactives/moma_through_time/1920/starting-a-collection-from-scratch/.

Since its founding, financial duress has plagued the housing of these global works. Opening the same year as the United States entered the Great Depression, MoMA's first home was a small rented space in the Heckscher office building on Fifth Avenue at 57th Street. Even when MoMA opened this first location in 1929, it was determined to sell its ethos to the general public through souvenirs. A table of postcards, art reproductions, and holiday cards were available for purchase in the "lobby."¹⁵ At the time, the Metropolitan Museum of Art set the standard American museum shop model, having opened its sales shop in 1908 (even before that, the Met had been selling photographs of works in its collection).¹⁶ After three years of increasingly well-attended exhibition openings, the institution faced the threat of eviction when tenants complained to the landlord. The Museum survived by moving in 1932 to 11 West 53rd Street, an address then occupied by a five-story townhouse belonging to the Rockefellers. (Figure 1.2) MoMA's commercial endeavors during these early years were relatively uninspired and inconsequential.

The museum remained at the Rockefeller townhouse until 1937 when the site was demolished to make space for the present flagship building designed by American architects Philip L. Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone.¹⁷ In May 1939, MoMA finally moved into this new building at its current location in midtown Manhattan. The *crème de la crème* of the art world and New York society marked the occasion of the space's grand opening with a luxurious reception gala. However, not everyone was invited to be part of the unveiling of this new era. Frances Collins, the then manager of Publications at MoMA, distributed a satirical invitation to "the semi-public opening of the new Museum of Standard Oil." (Figure 1.3) Collins was upset

¹⁵Treggiden, Katie. "New MoMA Flagship Store Boasts a Two-Story Bookshelf with 2,000 Books." *Design Milk*, February 4, 2020 <https://design-milk.com/new-moma-flagship-store-boasts-a-two-story-bookshelf-with-2000-books/>.

¹⁶Weisbrod, Burton A. *The NonProfit Economy*. Revenues from Sales, 109. 1988.

¹⁷Grischkowsky, Thomas. "MoMA | Don, the MoMA Guard Dog." *Inside/Out: A MoMA/MoMA PSI Blog*, 2016. https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2016/02/12/don-the-moma-guard-dog/.

that various staff members had not been invited to the opening party for the new museum space and pointed out the deep ties to Standard Oil that created an air of exclusion between employees and the upper-echelon friends of the Rockefellers. On the front of the card, beneath a crown insignia, text read, “Oil that glitters is not gold.”¹⁸ The American Abstract Artists group also began to protest the museum after witnessing a distinct lack of living artists in early exhibits, which they felt didn’t properly engage with the “modern” part of MoMA’s brand. As the museum was facing mounting external and internal strife, the first venture we can adequately analyze as a “MoMA museum shop” opened in the new lobby of the building.

Opening within a week of the grand reception, MoMA’s first established commercial venture, the Bookstore, was still far from what we may consider a museum shop today. Like many of its contemporaries, it was a sales desk located in the center lobby that visitors would pass as they entered and exited.¹⁹ Still, it boasted a modest selection of exhibition catalogs, reproductions, greeting cards, and postcards themed after the works in their budding collection and New York City. It slowly expanded into a more holistic approach, which is when they began offering and marketing “Good Design.” Of course, the shop was not a priority; instead, the collections, architecture, and occasional benefit event primarily encompassed the museum experience for visitors. Until after World War II, many American museums focused on expanding collections and purchasing works. During and immediately after the war, “the museum’s prime responsibility was to its collections, not its visitors,” wrote Kenneth Hudson in his essay “The Museum Refuses to Stand Still” for a 1998 issue of the academic journal

¹⁸“Interactives | Exhibitions | Messing with MoMA” New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2015. <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2015/messingwithmoma/>.

¹⁹Gifts: The Museum of Modern Art Store Catalog, *Museum of Modern Art*, New York, 1976-77

Dædalus.²⁰ However, it is significant to note how, even from its start, the Museum of Modern Art demonstrated a considerable concern with connecting to its visitors through licensed, museum-exclusive merchandise. It would take many more years of shop iterations for the Design Store to finally come into being.

ii. A Series of Special Shops

In 1939, the MoMA Bookstore opened inside the new Goodwin and Stone building's main lobby with a spatial footprint of only 100 square feet, but over the next several decades, it expanded to over 3,000 square feet of lobby space to match customer fervor for MoMA-approved products. The Bookstore primarily stocked art publications, which in the 1960s tended to range in price from 25¢ to \$60, as well as Christmas cards, original prints, postcards, and appointment calendars illustrated with reproductions of posters in the museum collection. In 1963, a notable addition was made with reproduced drawings from the museum collection by Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Klee, Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Henri Matisse, and Saul Steinberg on notecards. Additionally, museum members could receive a 25% discount on publications costing \$1 or more and Christmas card orders over \$3. As these product listings from a 1963 retail catalog and press release suggest, the MoMA Bookstore was a destination for reproductions and paper goods, not “design items” or other merchandise.

While the Bookstore's opening and general operations were similar to those of museum peers of the period, by 1948, MoMA had broken away from its contemporaries and had begun experimenting with public-facing retail venture models. The Junior Council of The Museum of Modern Art, led by Blanchette Rockefeller, conceptualized a museum-backed “art lending

²⁰ Hudson, Kenneth “The Museum Refuses to Stand Still,” *Museum International* 66, no. 1-4 (2014): 136–143, cited by Haimerl, Amy “How Do U.S. Art Museums Finance Their Operations?,” *ARTnews.com*, March 3, 2021, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/united-states-art-museum-financing-1234584930/>.

library” as “a forum to educate young collectors about modern art.”²¹ The library would allow the public to rent or purchase works of art selected by a trustee advisory committee in consultation with curators from the museum. The works of art, which varied in media and style, were chosen from local galleries and approved by museum staff before being sold to the public. Works included paintings, drawings, prints, sculptures, and photographs, which were available for rent ranging from \$5 to \$52 for a two three-month period or purchase ranging from \$125 to \$750. The Art Lending Service (ALS), opened in 1951, was only available to museum members. Still, the general public could access the space to browse the member’s “store” as if it were a gallery, which would inspire them to become members themselves so that they could take work off the walls of MoMA to hang in their homes. (Figure 1.4) The Art Lending Service closed permanently in 1982 after a thirty-year pioneering effort that other institutions adopted throughout the international art community.

In a 1966 press release, MoMA heralded the opening of a new “special shop” opening in the Annex that exclusively sold color slides, film stills, black and white postcards, greeting cards, posters, and large color reproductions of works in the permanent collection. The creation of this “special shop,” as MoMA press releases called it, reveals how the MoMA Bookstore failed to meet the needs of two critical market segments: educators and decorators. While the MoMA Bookstore did meet the needs of art historians and the general public who were seeking cards for themselves and friends, as well as books, the new offering of slides for classroom use was a valuable method of distributing images of permanent collection works to a broader audience of educators. The inclusion of large reproduction posters marks the shift of wanting to display art

²¹“Art Lending Service and Art Advisory Service Records 1948-1996 in the Museum of Modern Art Archives,” finding aid, *The Museum of Modern Art Archives*, New York, 2006, <https://www.moma.org/research/archives/finding-aids/ArtLendingb.html>.

loudly in one's living spaces in a larger format than the postcard/small print sizing. Notably, books were *not* sold in the new Annex shop, which closed in 1989.

On October 19, 1969, MoMA continued the “special” shop concept by opening Bookstore 2, the first off-site venture separate from the institutional address. Bookstore 2 was located at 32 West 53rd Street, the office space immediately adjacent to where the current Design Store flagship is located. In the first month of its opening, the new store reportedly exceeded the sales of the 1968 Christmas shop inside the MoMA Bookstore. When Bookstore 2 opened, it sold all museum publications and independent, select titles. In addition to books, it sold the slides that had once been exclusive to the Annex shop, as well as postcards, reproduction prints and posters, and reproduction notepaper. The most significant offering of Bookstore 2 was their Christmas shop. (Figure 1.5) The Christmas shop included “greeting cards by contemporary artists specially commissioned by the Museum's Junior Council; 3-D constructions in paper and plastics, which also serve as Christmas cards or gifts; the 1970 Appointment Calendar printed in fine gravure, illustrated with photographs of selections from the Museum's Design Collection; “Poem Disposables;” and a nine-month non-calendar calendar of *Happenings* by Allan Kaprow.” Such items were available exclusively between the two stores. (Figure 1.6) It is unclear why the external storefront was more financially successful than the one inside the museum, considering the pricing and offerings were relatively consistent across locations. Perhaps shoppers found the standalone shop less intimidating than venturing into the large, hallowed halls of the museum, or maybe it was simply easier to navigate products in a smaller space devoted purely to shopping rather than surrounded by visitors looking to get admission tickets to journey on to the galleries above – there is no way to be entirely certain what the customer mindset was at this particular time and space.

Bookstore 2 settled into its expanded quarters at 23 West 53rd Street with a new array of games, puzzles, limited edition original art pieces, frames, and design objects in 1972. While the store proved to be a popular destination and retail catalog, it had only a minor impact on improving the prevailing financial condition of the Museum of Modern Art in the 1970s: debt. For the fiscal year 1969-70, MoMA reported its yearly deficit to be \$1,204,500, the largest thus far in its 40-year history. The deficit had only grown from the 1968-69 fiscal year, and a grant of \$280,000 from the New York State Council on the Arts scarcely assuaged it. The grant followed a historical appropriation of \$20 million by the 1970 New York State Legislature to aid art institutions specifically. William S. Paley, Board of Directors President of the time, noted that the museum's financial plight urgently required new sources of support to be added to the existing base of individual donors, such as state and federal funds and, notably, corporate sponsorship. John Brantley Hightower, who served as museum director for three years from 1970-1972, was vocal in urging total funding of the appropriation authorized by Congress for the National Endowment on the Arts and pointed out the United States gives only 7½ cents per person to the arts as compared to the higher amounts in Europe. While Hightower did not serve as director for very long, in the 1971 annual report, he eloquently alluded to the imminent rise of neoliberalism and his concerns about how this new economic paradigm shift would affect American art museums in the coming decades:

For many American institutions, the past year has been one of searching, reappraisal, and self-examination. Much of this had been due to a two-edged economic trend unique in its effect upon non-profit, privately supported enterprises: constantly rising costs and the simultaneous shrinking of endowments. This has required most institutions to adopt a

sterner discipline as to their objectives and their methods in fulfilling them. But a great deal of the reappraisal has also been due to more general forces in contemporary society, such as the questioning of old values and old approaches to, among other things, learning and the arts. The Museum of Modern Art has been no exception to this widely felt need among cultural institutions to take a new look at themselves.²²

Hightower speaks here on the effect of a “two-edged economic trend” that can be understood as a reference to the period’s emerging framework of neoliberalism.

iii. Culture Wars & Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism can be briefly summarized as an economic and political model that seeks to transfer the control of all economic factors from the public to the private sector.²³ The model emphasizes free trade, deregulation, globalization, and an overall reduction of government spending that has systematically attacked funding of the public arts and humanities since its inception in the late 1970s following a variety of international economic and political crises of the decade.²⁴ Economic geographer David W. Harvey claims that neoliberalism is a force of “creative destruction” that has radically altered not only “institutional frameworks and powers” but also wider societal practices and perceptions of “labor, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproduction activities, attachments of the land, and habits of the heart.”²⁵ Furthermore, scholar Arthur MacEwan claims that the neoliberal

²²“The Museum of Modern Art Records Record Deficit,” *Museum of Modern Art* press release, March 16, 1971. https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/4608/releases/MOMA_1971_0045_37.pdf

²³Kevin Vallier, “Neoliberalism,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/neoliberalism/>.

²⁴David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

²⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

agenda aims to have every aspect of human society “running adjunct to the market.”²⁶ The subtleties of neoliberalism are often more nebulous and covert in its impact on daily life than “full capitalism.” An overwhelming majority of academics now consider its policies “amoral” in how it has shifted the value of democratic citizens to be viewed as little more than “customers.” Some vehement scholars now suggest that we should understand the model as an evil, "root-of-all-problems" economic plan or a conservative slur, but it wasn't always viewed this way.²⁷ Neoliberalism originated in the years 1978-80, with four global leaders coming into power: Deng Xiaoping, Paul Volcker, Margaret Thatcher, and Ronald Reagan.²⁸ Since the Museum of Modern Art is an American institution, this study will only consider the direct effects of 40th U.S. President Ronald Reagan's policies on American public arts and museum funding, many of which were only possible because of Paul Volcker's command of the U.S. Federal Reserve throughout the 1980s. However, it is critical to understand that neoliberalism is an international economic system that has affected the lives and routines of countries outside the United States, Great Britain, and China through its globalization of the market.

When the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was founded in 1965 under President Lyndon B. Johnson as an independent agency of the federal government, the goal of this agency was to support the arts across all disciplines and levels of establishment with the intention of “bringing the arts to all Americans” through furthered educational exposure.²⁹ NEA's funding was comparatively modest compared to European endowments but still succeeded in supporting a sizable number of artists. However, following the election of Reagan in 1981, one of the first agenda items for his administration was a plan to eliminate the National Endowment for the

²⁶Arthur MacEwan, “Neoliberalism and Democracy: Market Power versus Democratic Power,” *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader* (London: Pluto, 2005), 170-183.

²⁷Jessica Whyte, *The Morals of the Market: Human Rights and the Rise of Neoliberalism* (New York: Verso, 2019).

²⁸Ibid

²⁹“U.S.C. Title 20 - EDUCATION.” www.govinfo.gov. 2023.

Arts.³⁰ The plan was part of the administration’s extensive neoliberal economic policy, colloquially termed “Reaganomics,” which can be distilled into four simple principles:³¹

1. Lower marginal tax rates
2. Less regulation
3. Restrained government spending
4. Noninflationary monetary policy.

Livingston Ludlow Biddle Jr, the third chair of the NEA from 1977 to 1981, published the administration’s scheme in his 1988 book, *Our Government and the Arts: A Perspective From the Inside*, which explored the motivations of Reaganomics’ attempted dissolution of the NEA.³² Biddle claims he first heard about the plan to eliminate the endowment from his friends in Congress. Following the book’s publication, Barnabas McHenry, who was then the vice chairman of the President’s special Arts and Humanities Taskforce,³³ confirmed the rumors in an interview with *The New York Times*. McHenry informed Biddle that “some people in the coming administration wanted the endowment to ‘disappear.’” However, the young task force was slowly persuaded not to eliminate it entirely and instead opted to reduce the endowment’s funding by 50 percent. Daniel J. Terra, President Reagan’s ambassador-at-large for cultural affairs, later confirmed in 1988, the year of the book’s publication, that “it’s true there were some in the

³⁰ H. William Honan, *The New York Times*, “Book Discloses That Reagan Planned to Kill National Endowment for Arts (Published 1988),” 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/05/15/arts/book-discloses-that-reagan-planned-to-kill-national-endowment-for-arts.html#:~:text=The%20Reagan%20Administration%20planned%20to,forthcoming%20book%20by%20Livingston%20Biddle%2C>.

³¹ Milton Friedman, “The Real Free Lunch: Markets and Private Property,” *CATO Policy Report* Volume XV, no. 4 (July/August 1993).

³² *Ibid*

³³ Ronald Reagan. “Executive Order 12367 – President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.” 2023. Reagan Library Archives.

Administration then who would have liked to have seen the endowment reduced or done away with altogether. I came with a neutral mind, but then I took a very strong position supporting it, and gradually, that became the consensus.”³⁴

The Reagan Administration perceived the endowment as an expenditure lacking in value. In a purely economic sense, they did not view it as profitable - the epitome of wasteful federal spending. Art under neoliberalism is considered primarily in an economic purview, and since “art for art’s sake” lacked an investment return that met the administration’s desires, they simply saw no real cause for it continuing. Biddle concludes the Reagan Administration’s 8-year-long conflict with the National Endowment with the fact that they were only able to cut the endowment by 6%, due to the championing of former Representative Sidney Yates, who oversaw the endowment’s annual budget. As stated before, neoliberalism doesn’t solely affect fiscal matters. Neoliberals, especially during Reagan’s conservative era, believed that the market needed a moral foundation. Consequently, the NEA again found itself compelled to fight for its survival, this time on the cultural front.³⁵ The arts it supported came to be publicly viewed during this period as more than a poor investment; they were politically and morally dangerous.

On May 31st, 1989, Senator Slade Gorton spoke in front of the Senate on his plan to remove funding from the arts, stating: “The State must confine itself to its own interests, and art must be free. Neither subsidy nor censure is appropriate, for the state, with its unrivaled power, must not take sides in purely symbolic disputes.”³⁶ The hearings revolved around the

³⁴ Michael Leja, “Foundations of American art scholarship,” *Perspective: actualité en histoire l’art* 2 (2015): . <https://doi.org/10.4000/perspective.6045>.

³⁵ David Bosworth, “Hard Being Good: Reaganomics, Free Expression, and Federal Funding of the Arts,” *The Georgia Review* 45, no. 3 (1991): 441–62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41400198>.

³⁶ Medvecky, Michael “Art on the (Supply) Side: Neoliberalism and Public Funding for the Arts - *Gnovis Journal*.” *Gnovis Journal*, April 28, 2010. <https://gnovisjournal.georgetown.edu/journal/art-supply-side-neoliberalism-and-public-funding-arts/>.

congressional reauthorization of the NEA following a series of investigations by Senator Jesse Helms's conservative followers. Conservative Republicans sought to stoke their constituents' ire by pulling several art pieces funded by the NEA, such as *Immersion (Piss Christ)* by Andres Serrano, 1987 (Figure 1.7), which received a \$15,000 grant, and a traveling exhibition of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe (Figure 1.8) that was granted \$30,000.³⁷ These works, along with others, were used to provoke cries of “obscenity” and “blasphemy” not only from the far right but also from moderate citizens who expressed outrage over taxpayer-funded art.³⁸ Liberal defenders of the NEA found themselves in the difficult position of defending free speech while attempting to appease public anger directed at select funded projects. Public media spun this scandal throughout the '90s, and it wasn't until the early 2000s that the Senate, with bipartisan support, resolved that the NEA chair would now be tasked with ensuring a vague “general standard of decency.”³⁹

In the 1960s, American museums had begun to market themselves as not just collectors but rather interpreters of humanity. This rebrand aimed to convince Congress to approve the first federal funding of American cultural institutions, which led to the foundation of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Even in the early days, approved government endowments covered specific visitor engagement projects but not operating costs. As a result of the NEA's funding offerings, throughout the 1970s, museums began to push educational programming for the public that could be eligible for grant funding as

³⁷ Kastor, Elizabeth. 1989. “HOUSE TRIMS NEA BUDGET as REPRIMAND,” *Washington Post*, July 13, 1989. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1989/07/13/house-trims-nea-budget-as-reprimand/61baa54f-305c-4c31-ba3a-c2e43a14858b/>. For further context, see Meyer, Richard. “The Jesse Helms Theory of Art.” October 104 (2003): 131–48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3397585>.

³⁸ Phelan, Peggy. “Serrano, Mapplethorpe, the NEA, and You: ‘Money Talks’: October 1989.” *TDR* (1988-) 34, no. 1 (1990): 4–15. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1145999>.

³⁹ Bosworth, David. 1991. “Hard Being Good: Reaganomics, Free Expression, and Federal Funding of the Arts.” *The Georgia Review* 45 (3): pg 443 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/41400198.pdf>.

an institutional standard.⁴⁰ However, the Reaganomics of the 1980s forced American museums to pivot to a new method of assuring relevance and financial sustainability. While moral interrogation was directed towards art institutions in general, three strategies emerged to maintain their cultural and fiscal relevancy: globalized blockbuster shows, sending their collections to Japan for higher licensing fees, and the museum shop.⁴¹

iv. Early DEIA and Edutainment at MoMA

Five years after establishing the new curatorial department of Architecture and Design, MoMA embarked on a two-year pilot in 1937 to determine what their Department of Education could look like.⁴² This department has demonstrated a proclivity towards using pop cultural entertainment channels to publicly teach modernist art since its inception as well as an interest in commercially promoting certain well-designed toys for edutainment value. Following the pilot completion, the department formally established itself with a three-point purpose:

- 1) to help meet the needs of children and adults seeking art for their personal satisfaction
- 2) to promote among the general public an understanding of the value of creative art experience in everyday life
- 3) to stimulate the teaching profession in promoting art for general education

⁴⁰ Oliver, Andrew, Anne Hawley, and John Hale. "The Museum and the Government." *National Bureau of Economic Research* 0-226-24073-8 (January 1, 1991): 91–106. <https://doi.org/10.7208/9780226241777-006>.

⁴¹ "The Business Model of the Nonprofit Museum." 2017. *Sotheby's Institute of Art*. 2017. <https://www.sothebysinstitute.com/news-and-events/news/the-business-model-of-the-nonprofit-museum>.

⁴² "80 Years of Education at MoMA | MoMA." 2019. The Museum of Modern Art. *MoMA*. 2019. <https://www.moma.org/research/80th-anniversary>.

MoMA's Department of Education described itself as having an experimental approach to teaching art history and studio craft revolving around what curators determined was the "art of our time." They engaged their departmental purpose by not only operating a year-round art school for children and adults, but in the decades since its founding, serviced fifty New York City public high schools with visual teaching aids especially prepared for teachers' needs, exhibited its teaching methods all over the United States, and produced two series of television programs on creative activities for young people and their parents.⁴³ In the early 1950s, the MoMA Department of Education invited the American public to watch children learn about and create art with their television show *The Enchanted Gate*. According to the department's founding director, Victor D'Amico, the program's objective was to show that "all children are creative and that the art experience should not be limited to the talented only, or to those who are regarded as having special gifts." Each episode ended with D'Amico saying that the program was "not making artists" but "individuals responsive to creativity and the world around them."⁴⁴

The featured stars of season one were children of diverse genders and ethnicities selected from New York public schools and kindergartens. (Figure 1.9) Two years before the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling *Brown v. Board of Education* that prohibited segregation in public spaces, MoMA made a strong public statement supporting integration by televising the broadcast. Civil rights leaders of the 1960s, most famously activist Rev. Milton Galamison, spoke up about the lack of equal opportunity and systemic segregation that persisted in New York public schools despite the majority of media and press focused on the violent backlashes against the decision

⁴³Museum of Modern Art. "Background Information of the Education Department of the Museum of Modern Art." Spring 1956. Press release, no. 51.

https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/2078/releases/MOMA_1956_0059_51.pdf.

⁴⁴Harvey, Michelle. "Channeling Creativity: A Trip through the Enchanted Gate." *Medium*. MoMA, December 20, 2017. <https://stories.moma.org/channeling-creativity-a-trip-through-the-enchanted-gate-15568ee940e>.

happening in the South.⁴⁵ MoMA sought to represent children of all kinds to demonstrate how they believed art came from people from all walks of life. The public reaction to the show was overwhelmingly positive, and NBC renewed it for a second season. In questionnaire evaluations sent out by MoMA, public school teachers noted that students often shared ideas they had learned from the class program, and parents also reported their children's enthusiasm and growing interest in modern art. One father wrote, "This is absolutely the first meaningful show for children since the inception of television." The audience also proved to be economically diverse. A season one viewership summary report from 1952-1953 reads, "Among the fathers, there were 102 different occupations, including many salesmen, businessmen, doctors, and lawyers, but also including bus drivers, machinists, plumbers, window cleaners, florists, etc. Among mothers, there were 28 occupations other than that of housewife. These included nurses, secretaries, dressmakers, actresses, post office clerks, lawyers, and factory workers."⁴⁶

To better reflect the diverse family structures of the children featured on the program, season two of *The Enchanted Gate* invited parents, grandparents, and other live-in relatives to be on the show and respond to art concept prompts alongside but separate from the children working - giving studio space to each of them to express themselves creatively. (Figure 1.10) *The Enchanted Gate* intertwined entertainment with education by showcasing specific works from the growing MoMA collection related to the day's concept prompt. The TV show was a unique edutainment endeavor for an art museum of the period and succeeded in making modern art more immediately accessible to viewers. Soon after, the department took more of its edutainment interests commercially. In the mid-1950s, MoMA Education promoted highly designed toys and art equipment for children and families. A 1956 departmental review report

⁴⁵Bonastia, Christopher. 2023. "Segregation in New York City Schools Continues." *THIRTEEN - New York Public Media*. October 27, 2023. <https://www.thirteen.org/blog-post/segregation-new-york-city-schools-continues/>.

⁴⁶Ibid

stated, “It is the Museum’s purpose to stimulate public demand for the manufacture, rather than go into the business itself.” While MoMA never began manufacturing products in-house, as the report claimed it was uninterested in, the Design Store took the Education department along “into the business” by advertising it as one of the critical benefactors of its sales since its founding.

v. A Design Solution...

In June 1989, the Museum of Modern Art announced the opening of a new aspect of their institution: the MoMA Design Store. The vision for this retail space solely focused on selling furniture and design objects. It is important to note that the MoMA maintains that the Design Store differs from the standard definition of “museum shops.” Their website claims their emphasis on design as a unique facet of the museum’s history sets them apart from the typical gift shop amenity now found in any art museum of note. These are not just souvenirs but objects that embody the institution’s founding values and curatorial scholarship. The About page of the museum’s website reads, “In 1932, The Museum of Modern Art established the world’s first curatorial department devoted to architecture and design. MoMA has long recognized design’s important role in our culture alongside traditional mediums like painting and sculpture.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, Chay Costello, MoMA Associate Director of Merchandise, says the Design Store stands apart from museum shops because of their interdepartmental collaborations: “We review everything we carry in the store with the museum curators. They are an amazing resource we have access to. We always try to tie the store’s merchandising to the exhibitions in the museum simultaneously. It’s a way for people to bring some of the art and design they love from MoMA

⁴⁷ “MoMA Design Store - Museum Store.” 2023. MoMA Design Store. 2023. <https://store.moma.org/pages/about-moma-design-store>. Subheading1: “Our point of view...”

home with them.”⁴⁸ In other words, a reciprocal relationship between commerce and art historical curatorship (based on academic knowledge of the canon) has been foundational for MoMA since the 1950s.

The museum has a long, precedent-setting history of challenging the perceived rift between commerce and the arts. When curators founded the Department of Architecture and Design, they set out to shape and debate postwar consumer culture with their exhibitions. Their most famous foray into this uncharted field was the *Good Design* series, which ran from 1950 to 1955 under the direction of curator Edgar J. Kaufmann Jr. (Figure 1.11) The annual program selected various products that the MoMA curators deemed “the best” of furniture, appliances, and domestic items based on “eye appeal, construction, function, and price” – a practice not so different from the Design Stores’ current operation. Curators subsequently exhibited works at both MoMA and Chicago’s Merchandise Mart, publicly listing the displayed items by name, designer, approximate retail price, and stocklists. (Figure 1.12) Bloomingdale’s, which helped fund the exhibition, many of whose pieces were featured, benefited from MoMA advertising its products to the people as worthy of artistic recognition.⁴⁹

The “design solution” that emerged in the 1980s established a connection between the merchandising department, education department, and curatorials’ historic *Good Design* series to generate museum revenue through MoMA brand-authorized collaborations.

⁴⁸Parisi, Danny. 2023. “How the MoMA Design Store Became More than Just a Gift Shop.” *Glossy*. October 2, 2023. <https://www.glossy.co/fashion/how-the-moma-design-store-became-more-than-just-a-gift-shop/>.

⁴⁹ “DESIGN: The Value of Good Design, Part I – Dreamideamachine ART VIEW.” 2019. *Dreamideamachine.com*. 2019. <https://www.dreamideamachine.com/?p=44672>.

Conclusion

Many scholars believe modern art was born in 1863 Paris with the notorious Salon des Refusés, featuring Édouard Manet’s controversial painting *Luncheon on the Grass*, and that it thrived into the mid-1900s by advancing a fundamental belief in stylistic (and sometimes social) progress.⁵⁰ The devastation of the First World War and the Russian Revolution inspired a “utopian fervor” in artists, designers, and authors. The central value of Modernism was the idea that the world had to be fundamentally rethought and uncover a shared humanity that could unite all peoples, regardless of their history. MoMA’s curatorial strategy has always maintained an interest in the internationalist, globalizing element of modernism, and the institution itself was founded on the belief that humanity could be “healed” by such new approaches to art and design.⁵¹

Since its founding, the museum owned and operated a variety of stores that both reflected and innovated public desires to possess such art in various capacities. In the 1980s, neoliberalism emerged as an economic ideal that subsequently affected all aspects of human life through its systemic promotion by the Reagan Administration. Neoliberalism shares certain basic presumptions with modernism, such as the belief that universalizing the human experience will solve all problems. Modernism, like neoliberalism, promotes homogeneity and an unquestionable pursuit of progress, whereas the Postmodernism art movement antithetically promotes heterogeneity and historicism.⁵² Today, MoMA collects and curates both Modern and Postmodern art. However, the funding-through-authorized-retail solution of the Design Store

⁵⁰ Arnason, H. Harvard, and Marla Prather. *History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Photography*. 4th ed. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998. ISBN 978-0-8109-3439-9. OCLC 1035593323. Accessed via Internet Archive.

⁵¹ “What Was Modernism?” *Victoria and Albert Museum*. V&A. 2017. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/what-was-modernism#:~:text=At%20the%20core%20of%20Modernism,approaches%20to%20art%20and%20design..>

⁵² Karg, Alexandra. 2020. “Modernism vs. Postmodernism Explained in 6 Facts and 13 Artworks.” *TheCollector*. November 2020. <https://www.thecollector.com/modernism-vs-postmodernism/>.

could be understood as a distinctly postmodern endeavor. It engages in capitalism with the goal of generating revenue but rejects neoliberalism by doing so not to drive the global market but to fund institutional operations and MoMA's Department of Education. The museum owns Barbara Kruger's 1990 artwork *Untitled*, and, in many ways, the piece reflects the institution's plight. (Figure 1.13) Bold text, characteristic of the artist, reads, "I shop therefore I am," which is a parody of René Descartes's famous classical philosophical dictum, "cogito, ergo sum," or "I think therefore I am." We, the general public, shop so that MoMA can continue to exist against all neoliberal odds of extinction.

Chapter 2

The Brand: Designing an Identity & Social Signals

“You cannot understand ‘good design’ if you do not understand people.”

- Dieter Rams, Industrial Designer, 1976

Introduction

MoMA Design Store emerged following a decade of Reagan’s neoliberal America and increasing financial pressure to maintain education programming and operations. It established a new era for museum retail, where artists, unfamiliar and recognizable alike, are united to propel the MoMA “torpedo” into the commercial market. The store carefully curated its brand around the notion of “Good Design” and leverages the legacy of the museum’s image as a quintessential pioneer and tastemaker of the future of art, as well as a critical collector of the most exquisite offerings of Modernism – now Postmodernism– in the world. A 1989 primary source press release sets the parameters for all subsequent marketing materials from the Design Store, with thirteen canonical artists referenced. These artists serve as a cornerstone to the store’s brand identity amidst other significant marketing materials that sought to represent MoMA’s authority on “Good Design.” Several decades after opening, under the leadership of a new Director of Merchandising, the Design Store underwent a radical brand and product selector restructure. This restructure expands upon initial advertising practices with contemporary artists and concerns.

i. Debut

In a June 1989 press release announcing the Museum of Modern Art Design Store opening, MoMA delineated the shop's mission alongside an initial listing of products relating to famous artists and architects. In this debut marketing material, the Design Store established its intellectual and cultural legitimacy by drawing upon the power of existing touchstones in the art historical canon. Once identified, these artists underwent a profound transformation. They ceased to be solely creators of aesthetic material and instead became aesthetic commodities themselves, strategically employed to delineate the brand personality of the Design Store. Their names are signals, flagging readers to why the store is such a unique destination venue – why it is valuable – and how, as consumers, they too can possess said value when they purchase the work of a museum-approved master. In turn, the press release assured the significance of these artists by associating them with the pre-existing Museum of Modern Art's legacy of national tastemaking in the field of artistic innovation. The press release read as follows:

In October 1989, The Museum of Modern Art will open The MoMA Design Store, a retail space devoted to the sale of furniture and design objects. The new space, which will consist of approximately 3,000 square feet, will be located directly across from the Museum at 44 West 53 Street. Since its inception, the Museum has sought to introduce the public to good design through exhibitions, publications, and its design collection. Additionally, its stores have sought to make well-designed, functional objects accessible to the public. The present Museum Store, located in the lobby and lower levels of the Museum, sells art publications, paper products, design objects, posters, and

slides. Furniture, lamps, and some home products are located in The Museum Store Annex at 37 West 53 Street. The MoMA Design Store will replace the Annex, providing a more appropriate setting for the display of products for which the Museum is best known--those directly related to the Museum's collection. The plan will also permit the expansion of the publications, posters, and slide areas in the present location, which will be renamed The MoMA BookStore. The MoMA Design Store, designed by Hambrecht Terrell International, will carry an expanded selection of home furnishings, small design objects for home, office, and travel use, tools, toys, and personal accessories. Among its offerings will be authorized versions of furniture and lighting designs by such notable architects and designers as Alvar Aalto, Mario Bellini, Marcel Breuer, Le Corbusier, Charles Eames, Eileen Gray, Takenobu Igarashi, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Jergen Moller, Isamu Noguchi, Dieter Rams, Richard Sapper, and Frank Lloyd Wright. All revenues from the Museum's stores directly support the operations and [educational] programs of The Museum of Modern Art.⁵³

Listing these renowned artists and starchitects not as mere people but as *brands* that the Store is *collaborating* with, brands that the average museum guests could admire in the museum collection and then subsequently take home, marks a critical shift in how an art museum values their status as trusted, cultural cornerstones.⁵⁴ By monetizing certain representative artists as part of the MoMA brand, this press release expands the product offerings of pre-existing bookstores,

⁵³Silvers, Regina, "THE MOMA DESIGN STORE SCHEDULED TO OPEN OCTOBER 1989" Press Release, *The Museum of Modern Art*, New York, June 1989

⁵⁴ "Museums and Trust." n.d. <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Museums-and-Trust-2021.pdf>. Data collected by AAM and Wilkening Consulting.

as previously discussed in Chapter One, to target an emerging market of educated customers already well-versed in the design world, or at least those who seek to look the part.

The selection of the artists is deliberate, as their oeuvre characterizes MoMA's bold foray into the consumer design market. These thirteen set the precedent of inclusion for all future product lines, simultaneously setting a high-brow standard and potential limitation in vision. To understand the Design Store's brand identity, we must first understand these artists' work *and* public image.

ii. The Thirteen

Previous press releases of MoMA BookStore 1 and 2 mentioned artists in passing as simple nods to an inventory of picture slides and academic books. Never before had a MoMA-managed store listed so many artists that promoted connection to the museum collection in such a commercial manner or so boldly asserted its authority to do so. These artists' idiosyncratic lives and works converge to define the shop's brand as functional and aesthetically iconic, and through their estate/representative's authorization, they ensure the "exclusivity" that the store boasts as its primary offering. Diverse representation is markedly absent from this listing. Of the thirteen artists, there were only two artists of color, both of whom were Japanese men, and one woman designer whose Google biography is linked inextricably to Le Corbusier (listed immediately before her on the press release) with whom she had a romantic relationship. This section presently discusses the implications of this lack of inclusion, but first and foremost, it's critical to understand the relationships of these artists to MoMA at the time of publication, as well as to the broader art historical canon.

At the time of publication, all of the aforementioned artists had works in the MoMA permanent collection and had been exhibited except for one. Jørgen Møller is a mysterious anomaly on the list. Similar to his twelve other peers, he was an architect and industrial designer who began his career as a designer in the early 1960s. He worked at Arne Jacobsen’s studio for eight years, then broke off to work on his own as well as to collaborate with Professor Erik Herløw, a pioneer of Danish design and founder of the design faculty at Charlottenborg School of Architecture. At the same time, Møller began his partnership with Georg Jensen Silversmith.⁵⁵ Jacobsen is a recognized artist in the MoMA Collection database, as is Erik Herløw. Yet, while Møller was connected to these great designers and clearly known enough to be featured among such prominent designers as van der Rohe and Wright, he is still a missing figure from the MoMA artist database. When one searches for any trace of his presence in the museum, all you may find is the aforementioned press release.

The other artists listed in the press release seem to be perfectly at home in the collection as modernists. (Figure 2.1) Furthermore, all have worked in three-dimensional media as either industrial designers who built home goods or the homes themselves or as artistic sculptors. Takenobu Igarashi, born in 1944, despite being a sculptor and graphic designer, has only had his poster designs collected by MoMA. (Figure 2.2) With only ten works in the collection, he is the least artistically represented by the museum, although from 1984 to 1991, he was commissioned to design the official MoMA calendar.⁵⁶ The most collected artist of the thirteen is Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe (Figure 2.3), with over 1,857 works in the collection, the first of which was featured in 1932 at the now famous *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*.⁵⁷ However,

⁵⁵ “Jørgen Møller: Designer de Padova.” 2023. *De Padova*. March 23, 2023.

<https://www.depadova.com/designer/jorgen-moller/>.

⁵⁶ “38 – Takenobu Igarashi.” 2024. *Takenobuigarashi.jp*. 2024. <https://takenobuigarashi.jp/artwork-en/38-2/>.

⁵⁷ “Modern Architecture: International Exhibition.” 2018. *The Museum of Modern Art*. 2018. <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2044>

when it comes to exhibits, Isamu Noguchi (Figure 2.4) has been the most consistently represented since his early work as a Guggenheim Fellow was among the very first to be exhibited by the museum in 1930, only a year after the museum's opening.⁵⁸ Long after his death in 1988, Noguchi continues to be a popular artist who sells well at the MoMA Design Store; however, all of the aforementioned artists still have products authorized by their respective management entities for sale on the MoMA Design Store with the exception of the mysterious Møller, and surprisingly Dieter Rams and Marcel Breuer, who have seemingly fallen out of production fashion at this time.

Despite their personal and professional differences, all thirteen of these artists either helped shape or paid notable homage to the visual aesthetic of mid-20th-century modern. The aesthetic visually featured clean lines rather than fussy decorative elements. Each of these designers sought to approach solving needs simply and attractively rather than indulging in artistic ornamentation that was purely for "art's sake." According to the art historian Kristina Wilson, in the context of the media where they were originally advertised throughout the 1950s-60s upon their release, the "clean" Modernist aesthetic of these MoMA artists appealed to a dominant sense of "racial cleanliness" perpetuated by advertisement of the period that featured White models or magazines that primarily targeted White audiences, such as *Life*.⁵⁹ When advertised as such, their designs conveyed an aesthetic of "control and exclusion." (Figure 2.5) However, not only White consumers were buying into the mid-century modern design products

⁵⁸ AN EXHIBITION OF WORK OF 46 PAINTERS & SCULPTORS UNDER 35 YEARS OF AGE, Exhibition Catalog, Museum of Modern Art
https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_master-checklist_333046.pdf?_ga=2.2519216.1218680164.1709048079-607772271.1699922643

⁵⁹ Wilson, Kristina. 2021. "Mid-Century Modernism's Racial History." *Hyperallergic*. April 26, 2021.
<https://hyperallergic.com/639763/mid-century-modernism-racial-history/>.

and ethos.⁶⁰ In the popular period magazine *Ebony*, produced by the Johnson Publishing Company as the “Black counterpart” to *Life*, advertisements for the very same furniture and design pieces promoted the aesthetics of empowerment and the advancement of Black social capital. (Figure 2.6) Notably, in both magazines, mid-century modern furniture was always photographed alongside women to remark upon how these products were as alluring as a glamorous fashion model. The MoMA Design Store obviously came much later and advertised to a more diverse audience, but it is important to note that while their listed thirteen artists brand identity is overwhelmingly White, male, and cis-gendered, the work of all of these artists has always been embraced by a wide array of demographics because of how the design pieces welcome myriad readings and contexts.

iii. Marketing & Public Perception

A Fireside Chat

The year is 1939. It is May, and Amelia Earheart has been declared dead, Adolf Hitler has announced intentions to invade Poland, the Spanish Civil War has officially ended, and on the first of the month, a new character called “Batman” has just debuted in *Detective Comics* #27.⁶¹ Also, in May of that year, the Museum of Modern Art was about to receive arguably the best publicity any American cultural institution has ever had. Between 1933 and 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was engaged in an experiment of mass media communication, referred to as his “fireside chats.” (Figure 2.7) During these “chats,” he spoke to the American public on the recovery from the Great Depression, New Deal initiatives, and, starting in September of 1939,

⁶⁰ Harris, Dianne. 2023. “Review: Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design.” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 82 (1): 91–93. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jsah.2023.82.1.91>.

⁶¹ Wikipedia Contributors. 2024. “1939.” *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation. February 26, 2024. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1939>.

the course of World War II. On the radio, he expressed self-assuredness and familiarity with the country, and on the evening of May 10th, he gave the following eloquent statement about his feelings and hopes for the future of MoMA:⁶²

When men dedicate a new edifice for a common enterprise, they are at once celebrating an achievement and announcing a purpose. They cannot refrain, nor could they properly be excused from making clear what that purpose is. From all that has been said by the speakers to whom we have been listening tonight, the mission of this museum is plain. We are dedicating this building to the cause of peace and to the pursuit of peace. The arts that ennoble and refine life flourish only in the atmosphere of peace. And in this hour of dedication, we are glad again to bear witness before all the world to our faith in the sanctity of free institutions. For we know that only where men are free can the arts flourish and the civilization of national culture reach full flower. The arts cannot thrive except where men are free to be themselves and to be in charge of the discipline of their own energies and ardors. The conditions for democracy and for art are one and the same. What we call liberty in politics results in freedom in the arts. There can be no vitality in the works gathered in a museum unless there exists the right of spontaneous life in the society in which the arts are nourished. A world turned into a stereotype, a society converted into a regiment, a life translated into a routine, make it difficult for either art or artists to survive. Crush individuality in society, and you crush art as well. Nourish the conditions of a free life, and you nourish arts, too. In encouraging the creation and enjoyment of beautiful things, we are furthering democracy itself. That is why this museum is a citadel of civilization. As the Museum of Modern Art is a living museum,

⁶² “Franklin D. Roosevelt Speech, 1939 | MoMA.” 2024. *The Museum of Modern Art*. 2024. <https://www.moma.org/research/archives/archives-highlights-04-1939>.

not a collection of curious and interesting objects, it can, therefore, become an integral part of our democratic institutions—it can be woven into the very warp and woof of our democracy. Because it has been conceived as a national institution, the museum can enrich and invigorate our cultural life by bringing the best of modern art to all of the American people... In the future, we must seek a more widespread popular understanding and appreciation of the arts. Many of our great cities provide the facilities for such appreciation. But we all know that because of their lack of size and riches, the smaller communities are, in most cases, denied this opportunity. That is why I give special emphasis to the need of giving these smaller communities the visual chance to get to know modern art. As in our democracy, we enjoy the right to believe in different religious creeds or in none, so can American artists express themselves with complete freedom from the strictures of dead artistic tradition or political ideology. While American artists have discovered a new obligation to the society in which they live, they have no compulsion to be limited in method or manner of expression. The opportunity before the Museum of Modern Art is as broad as the whole United States. I trust that the fine example which this institution is affording will be widely copied and that the good work will continue until the influence of the best and the noblest in the fine arts permeates every community in the land.

Since this historic radio announcement, MoMA, and consequently the MoMA Design Store's goal for public perception, has been set: to be the noble "citadel of civilization" that at once soothes and invigorates a nation of people. FDR coined the phrase "living" museum in this

broadcast, and since then, the institution's marketing strategy has sought to reflect this characterization of dynamism and continuous growth.

Visual Advertising Elements

MoMA's collection is considered one of the most culturally significant in the world of art made from the mid-19th century onwards. For a museum known for its collection, it only makes sense for it to base a large part of its advertising materials around what it owns. To this end, one of the most indispensable works they have in the collection that supplements all of their marketing endeavors is *MoMA Logotype*, set in Franklin Gothic No. 2 and designed by Ivan Chermayeff. Chermayeff's graphic design work for the museum (Figure 2.8) has been an iconic staple of the institution's identity vernacular since the logo's creation in 1964.⁶³ This text logo, alongside full-scale images of work from the collection or visiting exhibitions, was the standard visual mode of museum advertisements up until 2009, when design firm Pentagram introduced a new system of cropping images. The system was based around a four-quadrant grid (Figure 2.9) where the MoMA text logo was always vertical to reference the 11 West 53 Street building sign. In addition to the text, copy was kept minimal and was brightly colored, with the majority of the grid dedicated to blown images of artworks that were either cropped, juxtaposed, or shown engaging with the text in some way to build graphic drama. (Figure 2.10, 2.11) Julia Hoffmann, who was MoMA's Creative Director for Graphics and Advertising from 2008-2013, further developed and applied the new system. She described it as "organized and flexible... that would support program material across print, web, and environmental application." By 2018, the MoMA logo was back to being used in both vertical and horizontal alignments, but the emphasis on lively colors, structural text, and dynamic graphic rhythm was carried on throughout

⁶³ 2024. "MoMA — Story." *Pentagram*. 2024. <https://www.pentagram.com/work/moma/story#:~:text=Brand%20identity%20system%20for%20the.cultural%20institution%20in%20the%20world>.

renovation and over to all Design Store marketing materials by the firm Triboro. Then in 2019, in the midst of the institution's renovation and expansion, the Design Store received its current logo. Created by New York-based firm Order, the existing brand kit was reviewed and altered to be "more modular, adaptable, and scalable." The logo features the Chermayeff, bolded MoMA typography with "Design Store" rendered at the same scale but slimmer in MoMA Sans font, the most recent version of which was drawn by Christian Schwartz at Commercial Type in 2017.

(Figure 2.12)

Alongside the new store-specific text logo, which reflected the evolving nature of the museum's relationship with its retail ventures, the designers at Triboro designed a marketing campaign that fully reinforced MoMA's dedication to representing both established and emerging artists, as well as its willingness to inject a level of absurdity and curiosity in the mundanity of public transportation, billboards, and newspapers. Triboro compiled a series of artist quotes, each pertaining in some way to a theme of "transformation" and "the future" as a way to advertise the soon-to-be-reopened museum.⁶⁴ The campaign revolved entirely around the Commercial-type design of the MoMA Sans font and color palette of the brand kit. (Figure 2.13, 2.14) The bestselling *MoMA Artist Quote Tote* tote bag line reflects this stylistic representation of the museum purely through quotation and color choice. (Figure 2.15) MoMA's advertisements have reached a level of brand recognition and appreciation where they are desirable even when reproduced on fashion merchandise.

⁶⁴ Heasty, David. 2022. "'A New MoMA' Campaign." *Fonts in Use*. May 31, 2022. <https://fontsinuse.com/uses/47200/a-new-moma-campaign>.

Critical Reception

The Design Store was initially well received as an opportunity to furnish homes stylishly and affordably by fashion magazines and society papers.⁶⁵ However, in the early nineties, professional shopper journalists were divided on the Design Store because of the disconnect between its quality products and poorly managed interior. Specifically failing to reach a consensus on the quality of experience shopping at The Design Store, with many only encouraging ordering of products via the MoMA catalog, and if the space itself lived up to its Bauhaus-esque ethos of “good design” equating to a “good life.” For example, in 1993, *New York Times* journalist Roberta Smith acknowledged how the store was a “league leader in narrowing the gap between art appreciation and shopping, and in using the esthetic imprimatur to elevate the act of purchasing into a form of collecting.”⁶⁶ Smith harshly, though perhaps not undeservingly, criticizes how the Design Store has become too invested in promoting its *own* brand rather than the artists it once aimed to primarily represent:

The store is unfocused, extremely cluttered, and riddled with gift items that would not have met its standard 15 years ago. Some of them, like an unusually unattractive line of cloud and woodgrain stationery, are produced by the museum itself. In other instances, self-promotion has superseded not so much taste as discretion. Twenty years ago, Braun’s crispy black plastic clocks were sold at the Modern [Smith is referring to the Bookstore 2

⁶⁵ PATRICIA DANE ROGERS. “Society Taste Maker: FINAL Edition.” *The Washington Post*. Washington, D.C.: WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post, 1989.

⁶⁶ Roberta Smith. 1993. "The Shop as the Mirror of a Museum's Soul: The Shop as the Mirror of a Museum's Soul." *New York Times* (1923-), Feb 05, 2. <https://proxy.wm.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/shop-as-mirror-museums-soul/docview/109223088/se-2>.

location, prior to the Design Store]; now, there are Braun-type clocks printed with the museum's logo.⁶⁷

While other critical shoppers and journalists throughout the 1990s and 2000s remarked positively on the quality of products, with one applauding a line of disability and elderly-friend-designed kitchenware, Smith's stinging comments on the store's spatial organization and sudden invasion of "knick-knacks" reflect the same issues the Design Store faced before its most recent direction under Emmanuel Plat.

iv. The Plat Effect

In 2012, the MoMA Design Store, like many American retailers, struggled to determine its inventory's future in a post-2008 consumer market. Enter Emmanuel Plat (Figure 2.16), a French leader in the design and merchandising community with a nearly 20-year background in luxury retail, who had just become the new director of merchandising.⁶⁸ Plat promptly introduced new concepts and strategies that revolutionized how the store selected and sold items. When he arrived at the Design Store, the offerings were, in his words, "cheap and colorful," meaning brightly hued "modernist" knick-knacks made of primarily plastic, often priced under \$50.⁶⁹ The preconception was that guests visited museum shops to buy postcards and cheap reproductions of the art they had just seen. However, this preconception didn't realistically reflect the market. Plat says, "The data we had showed there was a potential appetite for higher price points, and I wanted to experiment with that. Many people from the team thought it was crazy... The highest

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ "Emmanuel Plat | MoMA." 2024. The Museum of Modern Art. MoMA. 2024. <https://www.moma.org/about/senior-staff/emmanuel-plat>.

⁶⁹ "Design Gatekeepers: Emmanuel Plat - Core77." 2024. Core77. 2024. <https://www.core77.com/posts/25509/design-gatekeepers-emmanuel-plat-255094>.

priced item at the time was, I think, a \$200 kettle.” Yet, in his first 18 months, he developed a multi-point plan that completely overhauled the museum’s retail division. His strategy was, first and foremost, to elevate the Design Store’s product offering to build a stronger connection between purchasing said products and supporting the museum’s mission. While “cheap and colorful” wasn’t entirely thrown out the window, the new Design Store boasted a mix of affordable, “democratically priced” objects, iconic design pieces, and the work of emerging artists in the design field. Under Plat’s oversight, the new product selection process proceeded as follows.⁷⁰

First, he and his team of five lead buyers and each buyer’s assistant scatter and begin searching for the most innovative and unusual products they feel stand a chance of meeting the MoMA standard. Research begins by exploring Kickstarter and several other sites and blogs, but the team also intentionally takes time to seek out serendipitous finds in nature. The team of eleven travels the world, visiting design industry trade shows and seeking out as many local, small boutiques as possible. Next, once the buyers return home with their unique finds, they reconvene to discuss. “We have these major style outs where we have hundreds of products that we put out on a table,” says Chay Costello, the associate director of merchandising. They review the items in these meetings and compare them to what the museum offers. (Figure 2.17) Then, if the product survives the initial peer review within the department, it goes home with a staff member for testing. In addition to this testing, products are vetted against eight criteria. Alexandra Glaser, Senior Product Manager MoMA Retail, has noted⁷¹ that these filters must be “flexible and constantly evolving.” Still, the following questions align with what the team frequently asks of potential product candidates:

⁷⁰Ibid

⁷¹ “MoMA Design Store, When Shopping Conveys Happiness and Evokes Joy.” 2023. *Milanohome.com*. 2023. <https://www.milanohome.com/en/news/retail-evolution/il-moma-design-store-a-milano-home.html>.

1. Is it useful?
2. Is the artist or designer in the MoMA's permanent collection or part of an exhibition?
3. Does it innovatively use materials or technology?
4. Does it carry an educational value?
5. Is it "sustainable?"
6. Does it represent gender and cultural diversity?
7. Does it solve a problem?
8. Lastly, will the customer buy it?

According to Costello, only about 75% of products meet the criteria. The team collects 6,000 products annually to be available for purchase at many Design Stores internationally. In addition to the merchandising department, products are reviewed by the museum's curators. Of the 75% that survive the merchandising team, only another 75% get past the curators, "but the dialogue and guidance are critical," says Plat. "We get feedback and direction, and we hear what they are interested in seeing. Throughout this process, we learn a lot." The buzzwords that indicate a product will make it to the shop floor are "innovation, creativity, and quality."⁷²

After this overhaul, the Design Store can be considered a literal extension of the Museum experience because of its technical process of curatorial product selection. Chosen products are elevated to a pedigree of creative authority that many artists covet; the MoMA exhibits them. The exhibition is expanded from its traditional understanding, but the essence of critical elimination and aesthetic display for an object persists. Now, featured works can be purchased by

⁷² AFP, and AFP. 2015. "New York's MoMA Store: A Pioneer in Innovation." *The National*. 2015. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts/new-york-s-moma-store-a-pioneer-in-innovation-1.26597>.

any general public member, according to The Design Store, because of their statement to “actively work to democratize good design at every price point.” (Figure 2.18) While shoppers must still legally pay the set prices and most likely will be influenced by advertising, through the store, MoMA is conducting an exercise in empowering members of the public to make the final decision in appraising the neoliberal *worth* of art through their determination to buy it.

v. Modern Art/Contemporary Concerns

The Museum of Modern Art has a remarkable history of pushing DEI’s early practices by including minority artists in their collections and radically diverse education programs. However, as shown by their 1989 press release artist listing, the Design Store initially failed to do much to align inclusion with their retail brand. However, in recent years, MoMA has increasingly considered diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of its brand profile. This change in marketing and product inventory reflects an evolving political climate that views DEI as a valuable selling point to a growing audience. The Design Store strives to evolve its brand by meeting public concerns for representational diversity and environmental sustainability.

Nevertheless, the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Design Store operations has only sparked new issues that MoMA must creatively address to fulfill the Store’s original brand commitment, showing that modern art, unfortunately, can’t resolve every contemporary concern. This chapter began with thirteen artists the Design Store selected to represent their budding brand - each an already established figure somehow related to the museum’s permanent collection. However, now that the Design Store has become a recognizable retail powerhouse that fronts only the very best of design products, it chooses to continue building its brand by connecting itself to unestablished, underrepresented, entrepreneurial

creators rather than limiting itself to solely reproducing collection masterworks. They do this in two ways:

1. “Meet the Makers” webstore collection
2. Product Design MFA alum program at the School of Visual Arts, NYC

On the MoMA Design Store primary US/international website, a tab on the far right of the navigation bar is emblazoned with “Only at MoMA.”⁷³ When one clicks it, a drop-down menu opens, revealing eight more subheadings; the fifth is “Meet the Makers.” The featured Makers profiles are in constant rotation depending on the shopping season. In the spring of 2023, the creators were All Very Goods, Chilewich, Dusen Dusen, Keane, Khiry, Panisa Khunprasert, SPGBK Springbreak, Royal Jelly Harlem, Takao Inoue, and YAM. (Figure 2.19) These are artists of various ethnic and racial backgrounds, creating across a broad swathe of mediums and inspiration. Of the ten featured businesses, Black individuals own half - three founded, owned, and operated by Black women. Another two, Inoue and Khunprasert, are East and Southeast Asian, respectively. The final three businesses, Chilewich, Dusen Dusen, and Keane, are owned by white artists.

60% of the ventures profiled by MoMA at this time were women-owned, demonstrating their interest in featuring diverse artistic perspectives in their product lineup. Most recently, in the winter of 2024, the Makers’ profiles have been edited to reflect the recent holiday shopping season, with the page’s subheading reading, “Better than Santa’s workshop, here are some of the designers who crafted your gifts this season.” Between both familiar and new faces, the lineup includes Aaks, All Very Goods, Chilewich, Dusen Dusen, Haricot Vert, Jag Nagra, Keane,

⁷³ “MoMA Design Store - Museum Store.” 2014. *MoMA Design Store*. 2014. <https://store.moma.org/pages/meet-the-makers>.

Khiry, Panisa Khunprasert, Royal Jelly Harlem, Style Jieum, Takao Inoue, and YAM. (Figure 2.20) Of this lineup, 80% of the businesses represented are owned and operated by women designers, and designers of color front 69%. An increase in DEI representation within the past year exemplifies The Design Store's commitment to continuously diversifying the narratives they sell. These artists primarily design home goods, fashion, and kitchenware; none are part of the MoMA permanent collection, unlike the original thirteen. However, they pull direct inspiration from collection pieces and various movements. For example, Haricot Vert (Figure 2.21) is a Brooklyn local who studied abroad in France, where she fell in love with the history of postmodernist collage and the works of Robert Rauschenberg. Her admiration for Rauschenberg evolved into a highly referential, mixed-media collage jewelry business when she moved back to New York from France.⁷⁴ 2024 has been the first time her work was sold at the Design Store; however, among other new season names in the lineup, one of the designers isn't as 'new' as we may think at first glance.

Panisa Khunprasert (Figure 2.22) stands apart from the rest of the artist lineup - she's been here before. Hailing from Bangkok, Thailand, Khunprasert has a background in industrial design and a family toy business.⁷⁵ She later moved to NYC and graduated with an MFA in The School of Visual Art's (SVA's) Products of Design program, where she was introduced to the MoMA Design Store alongside her classmates. Since 2014, SVA's MFA Products of Design cohort has collaborated with the Museum of Modern Art annually.⁷⁶ Students are challenged to design products for possible inclusion in The Design Store Wholesale Catalog and are mentored by both their professors and professional staff at MoMA. For example, in 2015, the second

⁷⁴ "MoMA Design Store - Museum Store." *MoMA Design Store*. 2014.
<https://store.moma.org/pages/meet-the-makers#haricot-vert>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ "SVA MFA Products of Design Celebration." 2018. *The Museum of Modern Art*. 2018.
<https://www.moma.org/calendar/events/4303>.

academic year of the collaboration, Gabrielle Zola (Business Development Manager, MoMA Retail) and Chay Costello (Associate Director of Merchandising at MoMA) introduced the new cohort class the theme of “kitchenware” the merchandising department was looking to expand upon.⁷⁷ In this presentation, they shared the history of the Design Store and explained what it used to sell prior to Plat’s reimagination and what they wanted to market moving forward.

(Figure 2.23) The class was tasked with designing products that would grow additional income streams to support museum operations and increase MoMA brand awareness. MoMA and SVA’s collaborative relationship bloomed from Plat’s desire to connect with more young designers in NYC so that MoMA could give back to the city by supporting local entrepreneurs. Khunprasert was the first student to benefit from it when her coaster design (Figure 2.24) was selected as the very first product to be produced for MoMA Wholesale.⁷⁸ Since graduating from SVA in 2016, her relationship with the merchandising team has flourished.

In addition to fostering relationships that would “support local talent” on the designer side, in 2023, Plat stated that finding local manufacturers of products was their number one priority because doing so would “not only reduce our reliance on the supply chain but also aligns with our commitment to more sustainable shipping practices.”⁷⁹ As stated above as part of Plat’s new criteria, “sustainability” is a vague ideal against which products are judged, but what does sustainability mean for MoMA? To the rest of the world, sustainability is defined as “a social goal for people to co-exist on Earth over a long time,”⁸⁰ and in 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined it as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising

⁷⁷ MoMA. 2015. “Products of Design.” *Products of Design*. December 12, 2015.

<https://productsofdesign.sva.edu/blog/moma-project-kickoff-rare-well-done>.

⁷⁸ in. 2021. “Products of Design.” *Products of Design*. August 2, 2021.

<https://productsofdesign.sva.edu/blog/panisa-khumprasert-moma-windows>.

⁷⁹ Celeste, Sofia. 2023. “Inside MoMA Design Store’s Retailing Thought Process.” *WWD*. November 16, 2023.

<https://wwd.com/home-design/shop-home/momas-design-store-on-building-exclusivity-1235891536/>.

⁸⁰ Ramsey, Jeffrey L. (2015). “On Not Defining Sustainability”. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*. 28 (6): 1075–1087. doi:10.1007/s10806-015-9578-3

the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”⁸¹ However, beyond these goal-oriented statements, definitions are widely disputed depending on discipline and across literature, context, and time. MoMA’s interpretation centers around changing energy consumption, materiality, and waste, and it publishes a regular internal newsletter where colleagues can engage with sustainability in small ways and discuss their ecological perspectives. On their website’s Sustainability Mission page, the emergence of environmental concern becoming part of the museum’s brand is briefly explained as a “journey [that] grew from a foundation of staff interests, which led to operational adjustments in 2008, and has continued to build momentum through the award of LEED Platinum certification for the Museum’s renovation and expansion in 2019.”⁸² They state that it is their goal by 2025 to have reduced building emissions by 30% and cut waste output “in half.” Furthermore, MoMA states in a 2024 window text (Figure 2.25) advertising the recent exhibit *Life Cycles: the Materials of Contemporary Design* on the 53rd Street side of the Museum, “Good design can be an agent of positive and sustainable change. By developing thoughtful manufacturing processes—which reduce waste or use it in a new material, for example, emitting fewer greenhouse gasses or even capturing carbon dioxide—designers play a role in restoring the fragile ties between humans and the rest of the natural world and commit to the well-being of future generations.”

The implications of this exhibit’s location are discussed further in Chapter Three, but from this advertising copy alone, we can note the connection MoMA is making between its curatorial concept of “Good Design” not only being an indicator of design quality but a moral indicator to how featured art pieces are “saving” the planet. As discussed in this chapter’s

⁸¹ Nations, United. 2024. “Sustainability | United Nations.” *United Nations*. 2024. <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability>.

⁸² “Sustainability | MoMA.” 2019. *The Museum of Modern Art*. 2019. <https://www.moma.org/about/sustainability/>.

Section Three, “Good Design” was adopted as a key branding philosophy for the Design Store that affects all elements of the venture. Thus, MoMA’s statement about “Good Design” now being ecologically beneficial is inherently linked to its retail operations - which is concerning. In 2020, *New York Times* journalist Blake Gopnik critically observed how MoMA started exhibiting ecological art and design in close proximity to the Design Store and remarked:⁸³

The lust that gets inspired by such planet-friendly designs means that, deep down, these objects aren’t committed to solving the single, fundamental problem that is threatening our future: That too vast a number of humans want more objects, comforts and pleasures than the planet can provide without breakdown. The message these objects send, just by virtue of being so eminently covetable, is that covetousness is a sin we are almost powerless to resist. They send the faulty message that our species can get out of its existential predicament simply by craving somewhat more earth-friendly goods.

The Design Store illustrates Gopnik’s point of “bright green consumerism”⁸⁴ by featuring a gift guide dedicated to “eco-friendly” shoppers. They claim to have made it “easier and [more] delightful”⁸⁵ to engage with themes of reducing, recycling, and reusing by curating products that specifically engage with those ideas.⁸⁶ In stores, green plaques (Figure 2.26)) highlight such products with green plaques that explain exactly how they “do good.” MoMA’s endeavors to become a “circular museum” are admirable and should be considered a successful development

⁸³ Gopnik, Blake, “The Mixed Message of Earth-Friendly Design (Published 2020),” *The New York Times*. 2024. . <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/11/arts/design/MoMA-design-green-nature.html>.

⁸⁴ MacKinnon, J. B. (James Bernard). *The Day the World Stops Shopping : How Ending Consumerism Saves the Environment and Ourselves*. First edition. New York, NY: Ecco, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers, 2021.

⁸⁵ “Ethically Responsible.” *MoMA Design Store*. 2024. <https://store.moma.org/collections/ethically-responsible>.

⁸⁶ “Living Sustainably” MoMA Design Store - Museum Store.” *MoMA Design Store*. 2022. <https://store.moma.org/pages/living-sustainably>.

model other American museums should strive towards. Yet, the Design Store’s messaging that encourages “reducing” contradicts itself by still urging customers to buy more from them, effectively nullifying its message. On the other hand, MoMA’s environmentally conscious improvements to its infrastructure and dedication to frequently featuring artists and exhibits that critically engage with the climate crisis are largely possible because of the revenue generated by the Design Store. There is no “good” way to design the museum out of this financial-social-environmental predicament other than honesty.

In Chapter One, we explored the complex history of American museum funding and the collaborative relationship between the MoMA’s merchandising, collections, and education departments. The Design Store flaunts this harmonious inter-departmental history as a critical facet of its value proposition on its webstore About tab: “Every purchase you make supports MoMA’s educational programs. Every year, we engage with over one million people through our programming in the Museum, all five of New York City’s boroughs, and worldwide.”⁸⁷ By highlighting how purchasing from the museum can help offset education costs for communities, this brand statement pushes many would-be customers to feel compelled, if not obligated, to buy from MoMA; this phenomenon is called the value-action gap. The value-action gap is a marketing term that indicates the dissonance that occurs when the values or attitudes of an individual do not correlate to their shopping habits. The fluctuations of the value-action gap have been significant in developed countries over the past twenty years. Research tracking interest in socially conscious purchasing power over 2004–2014 by the University of Indiana identified that “40% of the population in developed countries were not in any way engaged in resolving green issues. Interest in environmental matters was on the decrease.”⁸⁸ In 2022, KPMG conducted a

⁸⁷ “MoMA Design Store - Museum Store.” *MoMA Design Store*. 2023.

<https://store.moma.org/pages/about-moma-design-store>. Subheading: “Every purchase...”

⁸⁸ “Digital Library of the Commons.” *Indiana.edu*. 2014. <https://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/handle/10535/10284>.

follow-up study on this research and saw a post-COVID-19 pandemic landscape. They found that the value-action gap has narrowed considerably, with “86% are now actively concerned about social and environmental factors” and “76% have made purchasing decisions based on a company’s approach to reducing its environmental impact.”⁸⁹ It is alarming that the average consumer has to be enticed as a savior to address the significant issue of the lack of governmental funding for American museums. MoMA is a registered non-profit; as an extension, The Design Store is also a legal non-profit. By having a thorough understanding of the current economic and funding system for art museums, one recognizes the dilemma of museum shops simultaneously having to embody the same ennobled, ethical mission of their non-profit institution, which is, according to the International Commission of Museums, ‘a permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage’⁹⁰ as well as the dual function of making enough money to support the operations of the institution and the amenity itself. The Design Store successfully supports the Education Department, but when black swan events like the COVID-19 pandemic threaten business as usual and expose cultural institutions’ financial weaknesses, there is only so much creative brand building and non-profit marketing one can do to keep the dream alive. In 1956, the Education Department was the largest department of the museum, but now, it has shrunk to the smallest. In 2020, MoMA terminated all contracts with its freelance educators. The closing sentence to the layoff email is ominous: “It will be months, if not years, before we

⁸⁹ “Me, My Life, My Wallet - Consumers and Sustainability.” 2022. *KPMG*. August 24, 2022. <https://kpmg.com/xx/en/home/insights/2022/08/me-my-life-and-my-wallet-consumers-and-sustainability.html#:~:text=Our%20research%20shows%20that%20fully.action%20to%20lead%20to%20improvements>.

⁹⁰ “Museum Definition - International Council of Museums.” *International Council of Museums*. August 24, 2022. <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/#:~:text=Following%20the%20adoption%2C%20the%20new.exhibits%20tangible%20and%20intangible%20heritage>.

anticipate returning to budget and operations levels to require educator services.”⁹¹ In the spring of 2024, educational programs have yet to return to full pre-pandemic capacity.

Conclusion

The Design Store has come a long way since it first introduced itself in 1989. When it initially defined its brand through the authorized selling of notable, established artists, journalists, and the general public positively responded to the opportunity to purchase artistic and affordable products. In addition to the thirteen artists featured in that press release debut, marketing, and advertising materials have fully embraced a history of “Good Design” doing good for an ever-changing American public at MoMA as a critical selling point to its retail identity. Over the decades as an internationalist brand, MoMA has evolved alongside changing perceptions of taste and cultural values while still maintaining a strong sense of aesthetics and a desire for internal innovation. In 2020, art museums worldwide were forced to close their doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the economic upheaval the pandemic caused for all American museums, 2020 became a period of sudden public social awareness demonstrated by the rise of a powerful movement promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as decolonization following the murder of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Standing Rock #NODAPL protests. Recent expansions in DEI practices and sustainability improvements at MoMA and its Design Store reflect the public’s rising social justice and climate change anxieties. These developments have successfully met the basic desires inherent to these causes. For example, of the latter contemporary concerns, MoMA has reevaluated energy and materiality for exhibitions and shop-stocked products. For the former, not only has there been an

⁹¹Valentina Di Liscia. 2020. “MoMA Terminates All Museum Educator Contracts.” *Hyperallergic*. April 3, 2020. <https://hyperallergic.com/551571/moma-educator-contracts/>.

increase in the array of represented artists and narratives featured, but there has been more attention shown to specializing products for a more minority group-oriented consumer market. However, to reiterate, as was discussed in Chapter One, neoliberal capitalism construes value in narrowly economic terms but is not limited to only economics in its effect - it affects *all* things. Despite MoMA's best efforts to celebrate diversity, promote sustainable practices, and democratize the pricing of its products, for any cultural institution existing under neoliberalism, the harsh reality is that not all people whose culture is represented can afford to purchase the design items that celebrate their history and must produce more to buy despite environmental urging to consume less. Seemingly, even "Good Design" fails to provide a comprehensively "good" answer to these social dilemmas.

Chapter 3

The Space: Built Environments

“[The MoMA Design Store] makes shoppers more interested in the art and draws shoppers closer to the museum. It’s actually a really beautiful thing if you think about it.”

- Emmanuel Plat, MoMA Director of Merchandising, 2023

Introduction

In 2009, infamous street artist Banksy coined the phrase “exit through the gift shop” at his *Banksy vs. Bristol Museum* exhibition.⁹² (Figure 3.1) He went on to recycle the phrase as the title of his subsequent 2010 documentary. In the film, he allegorically considers the phenomenon of artistic commercialization as a creative death, where the “gift shop” is what waits beyond the life of a true creator - a type of heaven or hell, where the eminence of consumer culture in the contemporary art world trumps the idealism of “art for art’s sake.” Beneath Banksy’s layered narratives is the architectural evidence that art museums have historically intentionally placed shops at the exits of street doors, and since the 1980s, the gallery exits of blockbuster shows. Then, the inception of the world wide web provoked many of these museum shops to go online, empowering anyone to purchase a museum-branded product without ever setting foot in the institution – no exits necessary. MoMA Design Store takes the phenomenon further by having shop outposts worldwide, both physical and online. Glenn Lowry, the David Rockefeller Director, and Emmanuel Plat, Director of Merchandising, have made statements that refer to the Design Store as an ideological “extension” of MoMA because of its curated focus and practices. However, this chapter examines the layout of the Design Store’s physical and digital structures to

⁹²Ibid

analyze how these “spaces” mimic or alter the built aesthetics of the museum’s curated galleries, as well as how shoppers interact with them, to demonstrate that the Design Store is extending the MoMA’s mission in both intangible and tangible senses.

i. Locations & Spatial Organization

MoMA operates six brick-and-mortar stores and two web-based shops. They have three physical locations in the United States, all in New York City: the Design Store on 53rd St. in Manhattan, the Museum Store on 53rd St., and the Design Store in Soho.

53rd Street

The original Design Store at 53rd Street, directly across from the main museum building of MoMA, opened in 1989. (Figure 3.2) However, it has undergone tremendous renovation to reflect its ever-growing significance to the institution. In the summer of 1999, it closed for several months to be entirely redesigned by an up-and-coming West Village architectural firm. The renovation aimed to enhance the alignment between the MoMA Design Store’s identity and its connection to the museum, as articulated by the firm 1100 Architect. They characterized the original commercial space, designed by the now-defunct firm Hambrecht Terrell International, as “hastily assembled and lacking cohesive structure.”⁹³ The same year, planning for a museumwide renovation by architect Yoshio Taniguchi, set to begin in 2001, was in the final stages. Still, the MoMA Board of Directors decided that the Design Store renovation required immediate attention and needed to be completed before the main museum was scheduled to be finished in another four to six years. Then-president of MoMA retail, James D. Gundell, rationalized, “We

⁹³ Hogrefe, Jeffrey. 1999. “MoMA, Acme of Modern Taste, Commissions a New Boutique.” *Observer*. August 2, 1999. <https://observer.com/1999/08/moma-acme-of-modern-taste-commissions-a-new-boutique/>.

are really looking for a fresh solution to this store, which is at the same time mission- and market-driven.” The current 3,500-square-foot store has since changed its aesthetic appearance over the years. For example, for many years, the floors of the building were blue rubber as an homage to Yves Klein’s *Blue Monochrome* (Figure 3.3) in the museum’s permanent collection across the street.⁹⁴ Also, in the past, the project architect Ellen Martin stated she wanted customers to feel there is less, not more, for sale to address the problem she identified with MoMA at the time: merchandise overkill.⁹⁵ Her plan included countertops being practically cleared of display objects with merchandise neatly filed away. While the floors have since been filled in with a neutral, industrial gray concrete to match better that of the flooring of the MoMA galleries across the street, and now merchandise crowds every surface in sight, the space resembles a thoroughly adorned space that resembles more of a curiosity cabinet than a minimalist showroom.

Entering the Design Store feels like stepping into a gallery. On the walls, in large applied text similar to exhibition typography, are the phrases “UNEXPECTED DISCOVERIES” and “Curator-approved products for everyday living.” (Figure 3.4) These statements assure the consumer of their brand ethos of “authenticity” and reinforce the notion of public trust toward museum institutions. The layout of the store is unstructured and lacks intuitive wayfinding. In the back corner are primarily kitchenware items. On the far right, children’s toys mainly appear. In general, visitors encounter a great variety of products, but only one of each is visibly displayed, as in a gallery. Stocked purchasable items are tucked away in drawers beneath. Recent and notable brand collaborations are shown on pedestals in the center of the store, and all jewelry and

⁹⁴ “Yves Klein. *Blue Monochrome*. 1961.” 2019. *The Museum of Modern Art*. 2019. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80103>.

⁹⁵ “Less is more” is a phrase coined by the architect Peter Behrens during the early 20th century and made famous by Mies van der Rohe. It came to be regarded as a fundamental principle of modernist aesthetics and thus represents in this instance how the Design Store struggled with getting back to the key ideologies of modernism, which it was initially centered around.

watches are displayed inside the same central glass counter. Supplementing the majority of items in this store location is the inclusion of explanatory placards reminiscent of museum gallery labels. The singular floor-display products are more than exciting things for visitors to look at and covet; they are veritable art pieces visitors are encouraged to learn about by reading the texts provided. Plaques accompany select items reproducing works in the MoMA permanent collection, as seen in Figures 3.5 and 3.6. Other plaques note how products were inspired by artists represented in the museum's permanent collection (Figure 3.7) or related to past exhibitions (Figure 3.8). Still, other items seem less focused on recalling particular museum objects and educating shoppers, such as a cheeky Keith Haring chessboard (Figure 3.9); these have shorter plaques that function more as sales pitches that simply leverage the visitor's assumed familiarity with the styles of famous artists. Some products, such as those on the wall of clocks (Figure 3.10), feature zero explanatory plaques - even though curatorial statements are associated with certain examples on the website, including the Kit-Cat Clock.

Interestingly, the only book for sale in the 53rd Street location is a large, plastic-bound Jean-Michel Basquiat coffee table book (Figure 3.11). The implications of this are obvious: Basquiat's oeuvre is now a commercial sensation, and his name has become a saleable commodity readily appropriated by publishers. Since his untimely death in 1988, his art, originally created to express powerful personal narratives that tangled with the aesthetics of urban graffiti and issues of racial inequality in America, has become a co-opted symbol of "cool"⁹⁶ removed from its political context by luxury brands that reproduce his life works and sell his tragedy.⁹⁷ The book wasn't even displayed as "a book" but rather as a decorative

⁹⁶Warren, Caleb, and Margaret C. Campbell. "What Makes Things Cool? How Autonomy Influences Perceived Coolness." *Journal of Consumer Research* 41, no. 1 (August 2014).

⁹⁷ "The Commodification of Jean-Michel Basquiat." *Jacobin.com*. 2022.

<https://jacobin.com/2022/05/jean-michel-basquiat-commodification-art-inequality-racism-branding>.

accompaniment of a bookend. While the plaques do provide some art historical information about highly-designed product offerings at this Design Store location, customers wanting more substantial knowledge must go across the street to the museum.

@ MoMA

On the lowest level of the Museum of Modern Art is the Museum Store that Plat launched as a special Design Store location during the 2019 renovation and expansion of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Gensler and Lumsden Design. (Figure 3.12) Plat considers the “Museum Store at MoMA” to be the flagship retail entity of the museum, which primarily differs from other MoMA Design Store locations around the world by its unique siting *inside* the institution. The space was once a storage room, but following the success of the Design Store and the historical legacy of having an in-museum shop, management felt it was more important to convert it to a retail area that reimaged what the offerings and experience of a traditional museum shop would be. Director Lowry stated in a press release that the museum renovation and expansion, including the new store, were “inspired by Alfred Barr’s original vision to be an experimental museum in New York, the real value of this expansion is not just more space, but space that allows us to rethink the experience of art in the Museum.”⁹⁸ The store is viewable from the street and the upper levels of the museum, inviting curious pedestrians to peer down into the cozily illuminated and wood-paneled retail space below and enter directly without having to pay admission. As customers walk down the wide stairs right into the middle of the shop, they can see most of the space at first glance as if entering a subway station. A central feature is the two-story wall of books that goes from the ground floor well into the

⁹⁸ “THE EXPANDED and REIMAGINED MUSEUM OF MODERN ART TO OPEN ON.” 2019. https://press.moma.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/MoMA_ExpansionAnnouncement_2.5.19-1.pdf .

double-height ceiling of the museum entrance foyer. To create a visitor connection to the expanded galleries, the architects moved the store from its historic lobby kiosk to the lower level to accommodate visitor volume. The double-height shelving display was added so that the store “feels very integrated into the architecture of the museum.”⁹⁹ The 30-foot featured wall is more of an art installation than a functional bookshelf; however, many books are available for sale below. (Figure 2.13) The 2,000 featured art publications marking the Design Store entrance were all selected to reflect MoMA’s curatorial vision.¹⁰⁰ Many are limited editions and from independent publishers.

Where books were more of a stylistic afterthought at the 53rd Street location, as exemplified by the lone Basquiat coffee table volume, they are the thematic spine of the Museum Shop. The Museum Store is divided into clear sections along the walls and floating island display tables: Toys & Games, Books, Posters, Office & Tech, Home & Kitchen, and Spotlitged Products. Alongside the displays of products are books that thematically relate to the products. For example, a small assortment of “outdoor” themed products, including the bestselling self-watering planters, modernist gardening shears, Bauhaus-esque watering pots, mushroom-shaped lamps, and an outdoor lantern speaker are three books: *Oasis in the City: The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden at The Museum of Modern Art* by Peter Reed and Romy Silver, *Art in Flower: Finding Inspiration in Art and Nature* by Lindsey Taylor, and *You Grow, Gurl: Plant Kween’s Lush Guide to Growing Your Garden* by Christopher Lee. (Figure 3.14) This blend of supplemental literature offers diverse perspectives on a single theme, ranging from the academic tone of *Oasis in the City*, published by MoMA, to the fun yet practical self-help guide of the famous gender-queer influencer Plant Kween. This range appeals to a

⁹⁹Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Greene, Emily. 2019. “MoMA Wants You to Get Lost in the Stacks – SURFACE.” *SURFACE*. November 12, 2019. <https://www.surfacemag.com/articles/moma-design-store-midtown-book-wall/>.

broader market segment, increasing purchase potential, and demonstrates MoMA's interest in blending art history with social media-based emerging artistic narratives from marginalized voices. Emmanuel Plat claims that the emphasis of The Museum Store is to expand on the broader Design Store vision by offering curated books but still featuring design items sold at other locations. However, there is an element of excitement knowing that when one buys from this location, they're "taking" directly from the upstairs collection, such as the *Yoshimoto Cube No.1* (Figure 3.15)

SoHo

The SoHo branch of MoMA Design Store opened in 2001, only two years after the 53rd Street renovation. (Figure 3.16) The six-story, red-brick building is located in the bustling retail center of the neighborhood, only a few doors down from Bloomingdale's department store on 81 Spring St A. This location feels the most urban and trendy of the three locations in New York and stays consistently busy even during the January shopping slump.¹⁰¹ Recognizable art-themed products such as Yayoi Kusama pumpkin and gourd plushies tastefully sit in the windows with detailed thought-bubbled phrases like "give the unexpected" and "gifts of good design" boldly floating overhead. (Figure 3.17) The terminology of "gifting" solidifies this Design Store location as a shopping destination for tourists and locals alike. The Design Store itself occupies the ground floor and basement of the building, with the floors above converted into privately owned six full-floor condominium residences. In 2015, the store was nearly booted from the block due to increasing rent costs and MoMA's inability to afford the prime location

¹⁰¹ "Urban" in this usage refers to the fashion aesthetic definition of the term that emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s in cities with roots in hip-hop music culture. The "urban look" is connected to the performance of attitude, individuality, and social defiance that has since been heavily commercialized by streetwear labels. "Urban Fashion: Owning the City in Style | Napapijri UK." 2024.

off-Broadway.¹⁰² Marvin Rosenberg, senior managing director at Colliers International, who was the exclusive leasing agent for the retail property, stated in an interview that “[MoMA] was there when the rents were more reasonable, and [the landlord] would be happy to have MoMA stay and he would try to accommodate them, but we’re not sure they can afford market value.”

Collier International intervened on behalf of the Design Store to negotiate a more reasonable agreement, and they were able to find a compromise after surveying the outside market, which was significantly pricier.¹⁰³ Thus, the MoMA Design Store was able to renew the lease for the 15,000 square-foot retail space, and the lease for this location will be up in 2030.¹⁰⁴

When a shopper enters the store from the street, the first thing they see is a large sign that lists the various shopping sections, providing helpful directions for customers with specific intent rather than casual perusal. On the first street-level floor are the Home, Kitchen, Tech, Desk, Travel, Jewelry, and Accessories product groups and a large sale section on the back wall near the cash register. Embedded into the walls of the first floor are large tablet panels where shoppers can access the MoMA Design Store website to purchase items that may be out of stock at this particular location. On the second basement-level floor are the Furniture, Bed & Bath, Lighting, Wall Clocks, Books, Prints, and Kids sections. Also, on the far left side of the second floor is an in-shop shop, Mini Market, for the small Danish brand HAY. HAY is represented as a manufacturer of several objects in MoMA’s collection, and the SoHo location is the only authorized American retailer for the brand, which makes it a popular destination for shoppers

¹⁰² Pham, Diane. 2015. “Soho’s MoMA Store May Shutter Because It Can’t Afford the Rent | 6sqft.” 6sqft | *NYC Real Estate News and Information*. April 24, 2015.

<https://www.6sqft.com/sohos-moma-store-may-shutter-because-it-cant-afford-the-rent/>.

¹⁰³ Cullen, Terence. 2015. “MoMA Store Stays Put in Soho amid Price-Out Worries.” *Commercial Observer*. Commercial Observer. November 30, 2015.

<https://commercialobserver.com/2015/11/moma-store-stays-put-in-soho-amid-price-out-worries/>.

¹⁰⁴ “MoMA to stay in Soho: Colliers International.” *Real Estate Weekly*, vol. 61, no. 7, 2 Dec. 2015, p. A6. Gale OneFile: Business, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A437507304/ITBC?u=tel_a_etsul&sid=bookmark-ITBC. Accessed 1 Mar. 2024

only looking to buy beautiful yet functional furniture that Denmark is known for. Information plaques accompany many products here as well, keeping the curatorial element consistent across shop locations; a few products, such as the IZIPI Matisse eyeglass collection, had descriptive information plaques connecting the product to the MoMA collection and mission that were not present for the same product featured the other locations.

International

Outside New York City (Figure 3.18), the Design Store owns and operates three brick-and-mortar locations in East Asia. (Figure 3.19) In 2008, the Design Store opened its first international location in Tokyo and, under Plat's direction in 2017, expanded into Kyoto. Then, in 2019, another physical store opened in Hong Kong. The store has no permanent retail locations in Europe, except for a small, shop-in-shop residence in the iconic KaDeWe department store in Berlin, Germany. It operates there as a brand with a section within the larger retail space alongside other retail labels such as Alexander McQueen, Coach, and Dior. By existing in the same establishment as these luxury brands, the Design Store elevates its status while offering standard pricing across locations. While the same products are for sale and thus still undergo the rigorous curation process that makes the MoMA Design store so unique at any location, this outlet's close proximity to luxury labels arguably diminishes the relevance and historical significance of the namesake cultural institution. However, in another sense, this Design Store shop-in-shop residency does well in extending the historical relationship between modern art and commercialism exemplified in the careers of Salvador Dali, Jasper Johns, and Andy Warhol, among others.¹⁰⁵ These great artists collaborated with department stores during their lifetime, so

¹⁰⁵ "How a NYC Department Store Launched Warhol and Friends | the Art Story." 2015. *The Art Story Blog*. April 15, 2015. <https://www.theartstory.org/blog/how-a-nyc-department-store-launched-the-art-careers-of-warhol-and-friends/>.

why shouldn't the institution that now seeks to collect and educate the public about their legacy do the same? Moreover, since modernism has always been closely tied to globalization (and thus the global market) through modernism's basic principle of an international style, it makes sense both educationally and financially for the Design Store to expand its operation abroad.¹⁰⁶

ii. Target Audiences and Popularity

MoMA Design Store has meticulously designed itself to be a destination, but for *whom* exactly? Robin Sayetta, Director of Business Development for the Museum of Modern Art, imagines the ideal Design Store shopper persona as “an affluent customer who is walking by that window and stopping in their tracks and being attracted to what they see... they're sophisticated and interested in the arts and interested in design, and I think there are a lot of customers like that around the country.”¹⁰⁷ Customer reviews and shopping blogs across the web seem to corroborate this assumption. In 2023, popular Tiny Apt. blogger Christene Barberich declared it “the ultimate emporium of cool-people-design gifts.”¹⁰⁸ Likewise, established critical shopper Mike Albo wrote for the *New York Times* on the typical Design Store attendee, “the spaces look savvy, and so do the shoppers. We do not crave Impressionism posters here; there is no inflatable Munch ‘*Scream*.’ This is a hub of elevated taste that matches our Age of Enlightened Design when everyone reads *Dwell* magazine, knows Ray Eames was a woman, and has father-figure fantasies about Tim Gunn.”¹⁰⁹ The perception seems to be that by shopping at the Design Store, one is

¹⁰⁶ The famous 1932 MoMA exhibition, "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition," curated by Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock, epitomizes how modernism is inherently linked to globalization. *The Museum of Modern Art*. "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition." *MoMA*, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Nicolaus, Fred. 2024. "The MoMA Design Store Unveils a Major Partnership." *Business of Home*. 2024. <https://businessofhome.com/articles/the-moma-design-store-unveils-a-major-partnership>.

¹⁰⁸ Barberich, Christene. 2023. "My (Super) Edited MoMA Design Store Gift Guide." *Substack.com*. *A Tiny Apt*. November 21, 2023. <https://atinyapartment.substack.com/p/my-super-edited-moma-design-store>.

¹⁰⁹ Albo, Mike "A Trip to the Gift Shop Is like a Day at the Museum," *The New York Times*, April 26, 2007. Accessed 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/26/fashion/26CRITIC.html>.

“cool,” if not displaying a degree of pretentiousness about said coolness. In the context of a social-media-centric economy, the act of consuming modern art products from the MoMA Design Store, whether by toting a MoMA shopping bag, wearing a MoMA hat, or furnishing a MoMA-themed home, raises intriguing questions about the intersection of art consumption and perceived coolness. Is the perceived coolness associated with such consumption merely a social performance? Considering the pervasive influence of social media on consumer behavior, it becomes pertinent to question whether any level of consumption exists outside the realm of social validation. Moreover, beyond the allure of stylish products, consumers may be drawn to the MoMA brand by the social narrative it embodies. The act of shopping at MoMA may signify more than a mere transaction; it may represent an assertion of autonomy and a manifestation of social distinction and refined taste. In this light, the act of proudly displaying MoMA-branded items could be interpreted as a form of social signaling, conveying to others a sense of commercial empowerment and cultural sophistication. This is not a new phenomenon.¹¹⁰ In a classic sociological study, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Pierre Bourdieu remarks on the noticeable “need” for engagement in cultural practices – such as attending museums and being familiarized with the arts – is directly correlated to high levels of education which is historically linked to wealth.¹¹¹ Through branding, the Design Store indulges an old social desire to be perceived as educated and wealthy by wearing the merchandise of the art museum. While its wearers may not necessarily know the reproduced artist they are wearing, they are sending a social signal that they are “intellectuals.”

In a January 2024 conversation with the SoHo manager, I asked about her qualitative observations of working at the location over the years, and she shared what tends to be most

¹¹⁰ Also note Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Bantam.

¹¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987).

popular with shoppers in the area. First and foremost, the holidays are exciting in SoHo and for the Design Store, mainly because of the launch of the holiday card and ornament selection. Second, products that are “edgier” or “urban,” she claimed, were more likely to sell because they were better suited to the clientele in that area of lower Manhattan, with its chic, artsy tradition. Based on my observations in-store and a brief on-site conversation I had with the location store manager, tourists tended to shop for fashion merchandise such as clothes and jewelry, easily transportable kitchenware, and distinctly “New York” products (for example, Figure 3.20). However, more locals tend to shop for home furnishings and technology to enhance their homes, in addition to the curated cool of MoMA’s streetwear collaborations with companies like New Era and Champion. Furthermore, the Design Store was recommended by a number of locals to me during my time there as their favorite place to buy gifts. In my conversation with the store manager for the 53rd Street location, I learned that products directly relating to the MoMA collection sold best closer to the museum because of the assumed interest of shoppers desiring a souvenir—something to take home that expands upon, reproduces, or references a work or exhibition they had just seen.

For the Museum Store, attendance levels match or marginally exceed the number of admissions for the museum, typically 14-20,000 per day.¹¹² Tuesdays generally are viewed as the slowest traffic days for retail businesses across the U.S. However, on the first Tuesday of 2024, the Museum Store still averaged over 9,000 shoppers. For the 53rd Street location, the in-store manager shared that the location averages 2,000-5,000 shoppers daily. The manager for the SoHo location declined to share the number of visitors for the location because it is considered proprietary data.

¹¹² Conversation with location manager, in-person, January 4th, 2024

iii. Websites

Since launching its website in 1998 during the DotCom bubble, the MoMA Design Store has fully embraced an omnichannel marketing strategy to build engaging consumer interactions both on-location and online. When you search MoMA Design Store, the Google subtext bio reads, “Get the best of MoMA, online and in the galleries. Enjoy exclusive Design Store discounts and access to MoMA every day. See MoMA come to life...” This text implies that the Design Store is the public determinant of quality within the MoMA Collection because its products are only inspired by or reproduce “the best.” Such a statement further strengthens the apparent correlation between the store’s marketing practices and a neoliberal understanding of the museum itself. The Design Store’s product curation policy, purportedly featuring only the most exceptional works from the MoMA collection, begs the question: does the process of productization inherently confer significance upon a work of art? This inquiry necessitates a meticulous examination of the artworks and artistic movements that receive representation within the Design Store’s curated selection. Furthermore, the language used to describe the act of “accessing” the collection, especially for international shoppers, and the claim to bring the museum experience “to life” through the click of an e-commerce platform link carries significant connotations of access. The expression “bringing something to life” implies a process of rendering it more vivid or stimulating. This could encompass evoking memories of past visits or envisioning a visit for the first time. However, it also suggests a subtle implication that the MoMA relies upon the Design Store to enhance the visitor experience, consequently introducing an assumptive narrative that the collection itself isn’t engaging or entertaining.

After reading this short description, if one even pauses to do so, one is taken to the store landing page. On the top navigation bar of the site are twelve tabs: New, For the Home, Office,

Tech, Accessories, Prints & Artists, Books, Kids & Games, Only at MoMA, Holiday, Gifts, and Sale. (Figure 3.21) Hovering over the “Only at MoMA” reveals a menu of seven subheadings: Best Sellers, Exclusives, In MoMA’s Collection, Meet the Makers, Press Favorites, Team MoMA, and Top Rated. The digital spatial layout of the website is organized and minimalist, featuring black, sleek text on white backgrounds with bold, occasionally animated, colorful photography framed in sharp edge boxes, aligning with the sleek yet playful brand identity previously discussed in Chapter Two. The website is a structured interplay between the sharp, contemporary brand typography and the modern color blocking inspired by MoMA’s collection. Notably, the only photograph depicting the galleries or any non-reproduced artwork in the collection is at the bottom of the landing page as a backslash to the header “What Makes Us Different.” The MoMA Design Store’s mission and call to purchase in this tab is succinctly established in five statements:

1. Our point of view is uniquely informed by MoMA’s historical relationship to design
(relating to how, in 1932, the museum established the world’s first curatorial department devoted to architecture and design)
2. Our selection process is unlike any other
(relating to the “good design” criteria of the Merchandising dept under Plat)
3. Our assortment, like the pieces in MoMA’s Architecture and Design Department, is item-driven.
(relating to how only products that “epitomize an important movement, collection, or designer” are offered)
4. We actively work to democratize good design at every price point

5. Every purchase you make supports MoMA's educational programs.

These statements exist on both the international primary and Japanese sites; however, different images are used when referring to the “item-driven” nature of the store.¹¹³

In addition to the MoMA Design Store's standard international website, the enterprise also manages a Japan-exclusive website featuring collaborations with prominent Japan-based designers such as COMME des GARÇONS and distinctly American signature lines such as Yankees baseball hats. (Figure 3.22) While both websites offer the same products, some differences exist: items are presented differently between sites, different products are recommended based on VPN access, and several featured country-exclusive products are unavailable on the International website. For example, the “AIR BONSAI” product is solely for sale in Asia and is specially sold through the MoMA Design Store. (Figure 3.23) “AIR BONSAI” is an abstract, inflatable sculptural form created by contemporary artist duo Ryohei “Wabi” Kudo and Kazushi “Sabi” Nakanishi, who won a JAGDA award for it in 2012.¹¹⁴ This product, which only recently received media attention in 2022, is now listed as a best seller through the Japanese site of MoMA Design Store. “AIR BONSAI” is a difficult product to find for sale, especially for shoppers outside of Japan. However, the Design Store removes this barrier for international shoppers who can still access the website to order the exclusive product. Thus, they successfully accomplished their mission of making “good design accessible to everyone” with just some extra shipping fees.

¹¹³“MoMA Design Store - Museum Store.” *MoMA Design Store*. 2024.
<https://store.moma.org/pages/about-moma-design-store>.

¹¹⁴ Johnny. 2012. “Inflatable Air Bonsai.” *Spoon & Tamago*. April 30, 2012.
<https://www.spoon-tamago.com/inflatable-air-bonsai/>. Also: “JAGDA: JAGDA Topics.” 2020. Jagda.or.jp. 2020.
<https://archive.jagda.or.jp/information/jagda/1305>.

The Japan site caters specifically to the noteworthy representation of Japanese designers in the MoMA collection. On the Japan site landing page, a large, hyperlinked graphic translates into English as follows: “We have collected stylish items that are typical of Japan, such as simple shapes and materials that have a natural feel. We have a rich lineup of tableware, lighting, furniture, etc.” Next to this description is a poster representing the work of renowned American sculptor Isamu Noguchi, who maintained studios in Japan and New York for much of his career. (Figure 3.24) Drawing distinct visual parallels between Noguchi’s life and work, featured extensively in the permanent collection, represents how the MoMA Design Store also aims to operate in New York and Japan and merge the aesthetic and socio-visual practices of the two cultures. Much like the original Thirteen artists used in the first press release (see Chapter 2), Noguchi’s artistic legacy is being used to advertise the Design Store ethos to Japanese audiences representatively. During his lifetime, Noguchi produced designs for various companies such as Zenith, Bakelite, and Herman Miller, so this commodification of his work by the MoMA Design Store is arguably consistent with a pattern he had already established himself.¹¹⁵ However, what is unusual with the representation of his legacy is how Noguchi has a more significant product presence on the Japan retail site than on the US/International site, with thirteen products sold relating to his name. Compared to the main site, which only features five products, all furniture reproductions of Noguchi’s manufactured by Vitra or Herman Miller, it’s clear there is a unique emphasis on this artist’s work for differing target audiences. In addition to Noguchi-affiliated products, the Japanese Design tab features a wide variety of minimalist furniture and kitchenware items. In contrast, the top recommended products on the main site are considerably

¹¹⁵ “Biography - the Noguchi Museum.” *The Noguchi Museum*. September 30, 2022. <https://www.noguchi.org/isamu-noguchi/biography/biography/>.

more colorful, graphic, and referential of modernism or geometric abstraction - more in line with the Museum's trademark branding.

The two websites run by the MoMA Design Store showcase its interest in expanding its global sales reach, reimagining its aesthetic brand kit to appeal to cultural differences, and, most importantly, representing artists in the MoMA permanent collection to diverse demographics.

iv. Sit, Stare, Shop

When most U.S. museum stores were established immediately after World War II, they were clever and simple souvenir additions to the already centrally located information desk. As museum attendance rose and shops were recentered as revenue generators¹¹⁶ during the post-war period, it became a question of *where* to place these fledgling museum shops best. As part of the information desk, they successfully served as a critical entry and exit point to the museum. The museum shop has stayed in that main area for many American museums. The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) recommends locating stores at *both* the entry and exit points; such positioning at entrances enhances sales by immediately signaling the merchandise available as visitors enter, which further signals what they may later see exhibited.¹¹⁷ Positioning at the exit capitalizes on the excitement of a just-seen exhibit, and it meets the visitor's need for having a future memory activation object to recall the experience later.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, research by the Museum Store Association suggests that 94% of museums maintain an on-site store, but a growing number are pursuing off-site or satellite locations.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶Kovach, Debra Singer. 2014. "Developing the Museum Experience: Retailing in American Museums 1945–91." *Museum History Journal* 7 (1): 103–21. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1936981613z.00000000024>.

¹¹⁷ Latta, Michael. 2019. "Take a Look Around: A Customer Journey Analysis of the Museum Store." *American Alliance of Museums*. December 18, 2019. <https://www.aam-us.org/2019/12/18/take-a-look-around-a-customer-journey-analysis-of-the-museum-store/>.

¹¹⁸ Lai, Y. C., and Y. S. Deng. "The Souvenir as a Travel Memories Keeper and Trigger." Unpublished master's thesis. *National Chiao Tung University* (2007).

¹¹⁹Ibid

What is particularly interesting about the MoMA Design Store is the number of satellite locations and their unique variations in proximity to the institution. The 53rd Street location, directly across from the museum, is within view of the entrance and exit but also, most critically, is in sight of the level 1 West Tower South gallery exhibition space. The North and South galleries (Figure 3.25) on the first floor in the West Tower are free and open to the public and are directly next to the main staircase leading down into the Museum Store. The South Gallery has windows that face the street, and visitors can see straight into the front windows of the Design Store across the road from them. Since the 2019 expansion and moving of the Museum Store, the South Gallery has frequently rotated small exhibitions related to sustainable design materials. Because of the proximity of these exhibits to the two stores, visitors subconsciously can create cognitive connections between the sustainability of the featured artworks and the products they can purchase. Wall text frequently utilizes the phrase “Good Design,” recalling the marketing phrase most often used by the Design Store and discussing how the featured artworks underscore the moral call to action of supporting sustainable designers. Exhibition plaques further spur visitors to desire “green” products - the closest place to buy some? The Design Store. While green plaques note which products in-store are especially environmentally conscious, many are not. However, because of their proximity to such exhibitions, visitors approach spending in a morally empowered way.

In the front window of the 53rd Street Design Store location sit six skateboards emblazoned with the graphic art of Jeff Koons.¹²⁰ The product is a collaboration between The Skateroom and the Museum of Modern Art. Displayed in the front window, the decks are shown

¹²⁰ Koons is an interesting artist to think about in this context of museum commerce. He worked as a MoMA membership desk attendee for a number of years before becoming a Wall Street commodities trader on Wall Street. He became an artist after working as a Wall Street financier, and his Koons's art reflects his life's blurring of the boundary between art and commerce. The "New Shelton Wet/Dry Doubledecker" is a Duchamp-inspired meditation on the novelty and obsolescence of commodities. At the Design Store it is the commodity.

back to back so shoppers can see the deck art inside and outside the Store. They are limited-edition decks with reproductions of three Jeff Koons artworks from the collection: *Pink Panther* (1988), *Tank (Two Dr. J Silver Series, One Wilson Supershot)* (1985), and *New Shelton Wet/Dry Doubledecker* (1981). (Figures 3.26, 3.27, 3.28) *New Shelton* is reproduced as a single deck, *Pink Panther* as a diptych, and *Tank* as a triptych. They're priced at \$450, \$750, and \$950, respectively, and member and other discounts explicitly do not apply to the series.¹²¹ The Skateroom is founded upon a charitable mission: to build skate parks in developing parts of the world.¹²² There is a distinct link between manufacturers and artists with this product line. With every purchase of these boards, The Skateroom donates a portion of all sales to the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, an organization co-founded by Koons. Furthermore, while The Skateroom and MoMA have collaborated many times since 2014 and have always chosen to hang their boards to mimic a gallery appearance, as seen at both 53rd Street and the SoHo shop location, what is particularly interesting about the 53rd Street location is the seating arrangement in front of the decks. (Figure 3.29) A small stool is placed directly in front of the skateboard purchase display to invite shoppers to sit, admire, and contemplate the products as works of art, no different than any gallery. MoMA Design Store intentionally blurs the boundaries between the museum's authentic originals and commercial reproductions and carefully curates their stores with products that evoke the theoretical essence of the permanent collection, if not directly visually, replicate it.

Conclusion

The Design Store is an international retail venture with both physical and digital presences that at once imitates and challenges the traditional museum visitor experience. With a

¹²¹ "Jeff Koons Pink Panther Skateboard Diptych." *MoMA Design Store*. 2024.

<https://store.moma.org/products/jeff-koons-pink-panther-skateboard-diptych>.

¹²² "ABOUT US – the SKATEROOM." *THE SKATEROOM*. May 19, 2023. <https://theskateroom.com/about-us>.

target audience of self-selecting “cool” people in search of well-designed, artistic gifts for themselves and others, the store maintains a global reach by considering the varying aesthetic preferences of its cultural target markets while upholding the essence of the museum’s permanent collection – an invocation of collected prestige that appears in-store in more ways than one. The Design Store’s product displays blur the traditional perception of sitting, standing, and staring at artworks in galleries – particularly with the Design Store’s long partnership with The Skateroom. The pairing debuted at Art Basel in 2015, where they displayed for sale a deluxe set of 32 board decks featuring all 32 of Warhol’s 1962 Campbell’s Soup Cans – *Pepper Pot*, *Chicken Noodle*, *Tomato* – which are in MoMA’s permanent collection.¹²³ In an edition of 100, it’s priced at \$10,000, which is relatively more “democratically priced” than the \$15 million that MoMA paid for the series in 1996. Also on display at Art Basel was a board deck triptych of *Gold Marilyn Monroe*, 1962. Reproduced in sections on three decks, the edition of 100 sells for \$2000. In 2024, the most recent example of their collaboration is their Jeff Koons line, which is dually charitable in its proceeds and aligns with their interest in reproducing Pop and Postmodern artists as the primary source of collection inspiration. Plat explains that boards are not being sold as art but as functional skateboards “to which you can attach wheels.” The question is how many skateboarders would be willing to use the one-of-a-kind, thousand-dollar board decks– does their beauty and cost override their inherent functional design? Their presentation recalls masterworks hung in hallowed halls, yet the product themselves as seen with both the skateboards and the 30-foot tall book display directs consumers to pull the product down from their curated pedestals, use them, and eventually break them. Between the web stores and brick-and-mortars, it’s clear the Design Store is seeking to imitate a degree of the aesthetic “cool” refinement of a

¹²³ Laster, Paul. “Zoom: MoMA Launches Line of Warhol Skateboards.” *Observer*. December 2, 2015. <https://observer.com/2015/12/zoom-moma-launches-line-of-warhol-skateboards/>.

“white-cube” gallery space to signal self-ordained “cool” shoppers to the space, while still ensuring customers feel free enough to pick up and peruse products without feeling as if they are trespassing onto an untouchable display. The mixed identity signals of spatial organization continue into the Design Store’s curated product offerings, which are discussed more in depth next chapter.

Chapter 4

The Product: Offerings and “Authenticity”

“Having a product carried by the MoMA Design Store has long been a career-defining achievement for designers, even in a time when cultural relevance seems to be increasingly

measured by clicks and likes—but then again, not every museum is known for acquiring digital, immaterial objects like the “@” symbol.”

- Aileen Kwun, Journalist, 2018

Introduction

In the fiscal year of 2023, the Museum of Modern Art reported revenue of \$75,933,000 from all retail, publishing, and restaurant activities. Compared to the \$71,192,000 in 2022, the museum has successfully increased its margins by \$4,74,000¹ in only a year. While the breakdown of specifically which of these activities contributed to what percentage of the overall operating revenue is undisclosed, we can assume that retail is only generating profit by selling products. The MoMA Design Store does not operate as a luxury retailer. However, French sociologist Nathalie Heinich argues that nearly all forms of contemporary art have become a signal of wealth and cultural distinction. Further, some contemporary and modern art has become a luxury product “analogous to the yachts, watches, and overpriced handbags that today serve as an outward sign of wealth for those who have taken advantage of the financialization of the economic world.”¹²⁴ I would not go so far as to say that contemporary and modern art is purely fiscal signal;¹²⁵ I think that would be reductive to certain Surrealists and Modernists, such as Isamu Noguchi, who sought to represent social philosophies about childhood and the

¹²⁴Appadurai, Arjun, Johanna Bockman, Nathalie Heinich, Martijn Konings, Leigh Claire La Berge, Geert Lovink, Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, and Willy Thayer. 2021. “Art Under Neoliberalism.” *ARTMargins* 10 (3): 126–58. https://doi.org/10.1162/artm_a_00303.

¹²⁵My thinking about this particular issue of art as a consumptive social signal was informed by De Salvo, D. M., Beck, J., Horrigan, B., & Jenkins, B. *Andy Warhol : From A to B and Back Again*. Whitney Museum of American Art, 2018 particularly this quote on page 13 of the catalog: “At once a consummate insider and an outsider, Warhol understood the twin American desires for innovation and conformity; he also grasped what one could be and do in private, but not in public. His art, one could say, shaped these contradictory impulses into a completely original vocabulary of image and processes that profoundly informed, and continues to inform, our perception of the world we traffic in daily.”

psychological impact of divisive forces of war, racism, and fascism on children, as well as adults, collective unconsciousness. In more recent years, even anti-establishment “street” art, such as early Banksy, was intended to be purely populist. Unfortunately, neoliberalism's effect on the art market has determined that even the anti-establishment “street” is desirable to the establishment because of the cultural cachet value of mystique “cool-ness,” which in turn becomes a luxury. Luxuries – both loud and quiet – are sold as Design Store products and displayed as artworks. From fashion to furniture, signals cross, yet consistently purport the modernist message of “good design” results in a “good life.” This idea has been the central vision of MoMA since its founding and practically applies to its current retail endeavors. However, as this chapter will discuss, not *all* products uphold this legacy of design, forsaken in the name of blatant luxury revenue generation.

i. “*Item*” as Signal

“Fashion can be accessible, but it is also quite covetable,” and since 2017, the MoMA Design Store limited merchandise has become precisely that.¹²⁶ The Design Store brand image came to be a part of fashion vernacular alongside the October 2017–January 2018 exhibition *Items: Is Fashion Modern?* *Items* is only the second exhibition in MoMA’s history devoted to clothing design; the first, organized in 1944, posed a similar question: *Are Clothes Modern?*¹²⁷ The curatorial approaches to these provocative questions radically differed between exhibitions but were perhaps too limited in their conclusions. Bernard Rudofsky, an architect and social historian, determined that most clothing was “anachronistic, irrational and harmful.”¹²⁸ *Items*,

¹²⁶ Garner, Stephen. 2017. “MOMA UNVEILS COLLECTION for NEW FASHION EXHIBIT.” *MR Magazine*. September 8, 2017. <https://mr-mag.com/moma-design-store-unveils-collection-new-fashion-exhibit/>.

¹²⁷ “Items: Is Fashion Modern?” 2017. *The Museum of Modern Art*. 2017. <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1638>.

¹²⁸ The New York Times. 2024. “MoMA Plunges Headfirst into Fashion (Published 2017),” 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/arts/design/moma-items-is-fashion-modern-review.html>.

organized by Paola Antonelli, senior curator of architecture and design, and Michelle Millar Fisher, curatorial assistant, approached this seminal question by pairing anthropological methodology with aesthetic nostalgia. In addition to their years of travel and research, the pair enlisted a New York-based team, as well as several international consultants, to select 111 items - aka “paragons of design” - to be the epicenter of the exhibition narrative. All 111 were chosen because of their scale of impact upon both the fashion industry and “society,” and the show was “driven first and foremost by objects, not designers ... [and] considers the many relationships between fashion and functionality, culture, aesthetics, politics, labor, identity, economy, and technology.” Composed primarily of postwar garments and accessories, *Items* does improve upon Rudofsky’s Western-centric lens by including pieces such as the sari, the kippah, and the keffiyeh.¹²⁹ However, some critics noted that curators did not appropriately display such garments alongside other pieces; what curators envisioned to be dichotomous just came across to some journalists as fetishes of streetwear that willfully removed non-Western clothing from their cultural context.¹³⁰ Such items would be numbers 11 and 43 on the list, respectively, the two main garments that have become a merchandise staple of Design Store branding: baseball hats and graphic T-shirts.

Item #11: Baseball Hats

The *Items: Is Fashion Modern?* curatorial checklist reads: “Item #11: Baseball cap. Two examples from New Era, c. 1950 and 1996.”¹³¹ (Figure 4.1) German immigrant Ehrhardt Koch

¹²⁹Ibid

¹³⁰ Esculapio, Alex. 2018. “Items: Is Fashion Modern?” *Fashion Theory* 23 (4–5): 579–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704x.2018.1427922>.

¹³¹ Antonelli, Paola. 2017. “Items: Is Fashion Modern? // Checklist - Items: Is Fashion Modern? - Medium.” *Medium*. Items: Is Fashion Modern? July 20, 2017. <https://medium.com/items/items-is-fashion-modern-checklist-e353b83e7652>.

founded New Era company in 1920 as a fashion hat business, and it excelled at producing Gatsby-style caps.¹³² However, trends languished as the decades wore on, and by 1932, consumer demand for fashion caps had faded. Harold Ehrhardt later joined his father's company and noticed the growing popularity of professional baseball in America. New Era decided to take a calculated risk and introduced a new item in the marketplace: the baseball cap. New Era produced the first professional baseball cap in 1934 for the Cleveland Indians' uniforms, and by 1950, they were the only independent cap maker supplying caps to big league baseball teams. In 1954, Harold updated New Era's fitted baseball cap, which was the iteration of the hat on view in the exhibit. Immediately beyond the exit of the show was an expansive Design Store pop-up on the sixth floor where special, limited-edition merchandise was on a constant highlight rotation, trapped behind the admission fee paywall. On view were selected items from MoMA's collaboration with ten different fashion brands whose garments are featured in or inspired by the show. *Items* feature the "Silk Scarf" designed by Hermes, but the Design Store tapped Mary Katrantzou, Marni, and Rick Owens to deliver their take on the seminal accessory.¹³³ Additionally, French nail polish company Nailmatic created polish sets that symbolically recall other exhibit items, including black leather jackets and ballet slippers. Direct from the show are Ray-Bans, Swatches, Armor-Lux Breton shirts, Champion hoodies, and Ralph Lauren polos, among other collabs.¹³⁴ Most of this merchandise was available on the ground floor, 53rd Street, and Soho locations, but the sixth-floor concept shop offers a more exclusive range. For example, while the MoMA store has a navy New York Yankees baseball cap, the sixth floor currently offers a rainbow's worth of the accessory. Chay Costello explains that "we wanted to focus on

¹³² "Our Story." 2024. *New Era Cap*. 2024. <https://www.neweracap.com/pages/our-story>.

¹³³ Sporn, Stephanie. 2017. "MoMA's First Fashion Exhibition in 73 Years Opens in October." *The Hollywood Reporter*. September 28, 2017. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lifestyle/style/momas-first-fashion-exhibition-73-years-opens-october-1044028/>.

¹³⁴ Ibid

iconic designs that everyone knows, recognizes and responds to, much like the pieces in *Items*.” which the Design Store successfully does through the iconic forms it sold for this limited time. The New Era hat stands apart from this. The Design Store selected the New York Yankees emblem hat, and in addition to the New Era logo on the right side of the cap, MoMA added their Chermayeff logo to the left side - thus melding two “icons” of New York City into one.¹³⁵ (Figure 4.2) The hat symbolizes the street-creditable, covetable status of owning a Yankees hat, which has become one of the most iconic items in contemporary fashion, and signals to others that not only are you fashionably on trend, but you’re also a supporter of the arts.¹³⁶ The hats were an instant sensation, and the Design Store is still making and selling them long after the MoMA exhibit that birthed them has moved out.¹³⁷

Item #43: Graphic T-shirts

How can a T-shirt fulfill an institutional mission statement? At MoMA, surprisingly well. In 2015, prior to the success of the *Items: Is Fashion Modern?* merchandise lines, Emmanuel Plat, established a multiyear collaborative partnership with UNIQLO Co., Ltd., a Japanese casual wear designer, fast-fashion manufacturer, and retailer. This partnership was Plat’s restructured Design Store’s first foray into fashion collaborations. He explains the level of interdependence and communication that went into it:

They work very closely with creatives from the museum. Few people realize the work that goes on behind the scenes. You cannot manipulate or change the artwork or cut it and

¹³⁵“MoMA NY Yankees Adjustable Baseball Cap - Kelly Green.” *MoMA Design Store*. 2024.

<https://store.moma.org/products/moma-ny-yankees-adjustable-baseball-cap-kelly-green>.

¹³⁶ Gallagher, Jacob. “From Jay-Z to Gucci, How the Yankees Hat Became Bigger than Baseball.” *WSJ. The Wall Street Journal*. March 12, 2018.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/from-jay-z-to-gucci-how-the-yankees-hat-became-bigger-than-baseball-1520871316>.

¹³⁷ Parisi, Danny. “How the MoMA Design Store Became More than Just a Gift Shop.” *Glossy*. October 2, 2023. <https://www.glossy.co/fashion/how-the-moma-design-store-became-more-than-just-a-gift-shop/>.

put something on a sleeve. So, we have a constant dialogue with UNIQLO. They always do a combination of the big staples — [Andy] Warhol, [Jean-Michel] Basquiat, [Keith] Haring, and new living artists. Recently, they did Paula Scher. Every two months or so, they introduce a new artist, and that [merchandise] stays for two weeks or so, and then they move on to a new artist. Now, they’re going beyond art and are starting to bring design features.¹³⁸ (Figure 4.3)

UNIQLO and MoMA’s partnership is mutually beneficial. UNIQLO benefits because it provides a brand image lift in the sense that the association with the MoMA brands uplifts its own public image of representing quality, innovation, and contemporary/modern design that works in everyday living - ultimately energizing the store’s products and shopping experience.¹³⁹ In recent years, UNIQLO has come to emphasize its sustainability efforts despite being a fast fashion brand. For example, it aims to switch approximately 50% of all materials used to recycled materials by 2030.¹⁴⁰ MoMA also seeks to improve its environmental impact, so by joining forces, they present an image of a stylish, culturally-savvy, sustainable future.

Since MoMA holds the image licensing for nearly all works in its collection, through this partnership, UNIQLO can rest assured that its offerings are entirely unique, the ultimate characteristic of an exclusive sponsorship. Except for the Design Store, UNIQLO is the only place where MoMA-licensed graphic clothing can be purchased. In addition to the “icons” of the MoMA collection, the museum has helped connect the retail company to emerging and

¹³⁸Feitelberg, Rosemary. 2016. “MoMA Design Store to Open More Shops in Japan, Launch HAY Furniture in New York.” *WWD*. January 16, 2016.

<https://wwd.com/feature/moma-design-hay-japan-launch-hay-furniture-in-new-york-10314005/>.

¹³⁹ Aaker, David. “The Uniqlo and MoMA: A Partnership That Wins.” *Business Transformation Consultants | Prophet*. Prophet Brand Strategy. July 2015.

<https://prophet.com/2015/07/241-the-uniqlo-and-moma-a-partnership-that-wins/>.

¹⁴⁰ “CLOTHING MADE from RECYCLED MATERIAL | Unlocking the Power of Clothing. UNIQLO Sustainability.” 2022. <https://www.uniqlo.com/jp/en/contents/sustainability/planet/products/material/recycle/>.

underrepresented artists such as Anni Albers, Daniel Joseph Martinez, Ryan McGinness, and Sarah Morris.¹⁴¹ (Figure 4.4)

This partnership benefits MoMA because of UNIQLO's global positioning of advertising the MoMA collection beyond the spatial and economic imitations of the Design Store, thus aligning with its mission to "connect people from around the world to the art of our time." Furthermore, UNIQLO has financially supported the museum through a series of programs and initiatives since 2013, the first of which being the "UNIQLO Free Friday Nights" on every first Friday of the month, where admission is waived for NYC residents.¹⁴² The company covers admission costs for millions of visitors, which supports MoMA's operating costs. In March of 2014, UNIQLO took the opportunity further by launching the product line 'SPRZ NY' (abbreviation for Surprise New York), where all garments were labeled as 'MoMA Special Edition' designs.¹⁴³ The store sought to match the Design Store's own spatial ideology of "extending" the museum by completely remodeling the second floor of their Fifth Avenue Global Flagship Store to look like the museum itself. The floor became known as the SPRZ NY Store, and if products were sold out there, desperate shoppers could simply walk a couple of blocks over to the 53rd Street Design Store location to see if they still had them in stock, ultimately creating a circuit of consumption of viewing art and then buying clothing inspired by.

When American museums suffered during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, Education departments were hit especially hard. As previously discussed in chapter two, section five, Modern Art/Contemporary Concerns, the MoMA Education department was no exception to this period of hardship and chaos. UNIQLO financially supported the museum by helping launch the

¹⁴¹ Greenberger, Alex. "Uniqlo's New MoMA T-Shirts Are Most Subversive Ones Yet." *ARTnews.com*. May 21, 2014. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/uniqlo-new-moma-t-shirts-most-subversive-ones-yet-2445/>.

¹⁴² "UNIQLO NYC Nights | MoMA." 2023. *The Museum of Modern Art*. 2023. <https://www.moma.org/calendar/programs/159>.

¹⁴³ "Uniqlo MoMA." *Americans for the Arts*. May 15, 2019. <https://www.americansforthearts.org/events/bca-10/bca-partnership-awards/uniqlo-moma>.

virtual learning program ArtSpeaks, which was recently rebranded to UNIQLO Art for All.¹⁴⁴ Through videos available on MoMA’s website and YouTube, museum staff shared their personal experiences with works of artwork in the galleries and have continued to support it as a means of connecting art lovers around the world.¹⁴⁵ However, I’ve been able to find out if this partnership has helped MoMA hire back contract educators who were fired when the museum closed in 2020.

In the West, baseball hats and graphic T-shirts have become culturally synonymous with “cool” in streetwear fashion. They revel in their own emblazoned quality – boldly signaling to all that their wearer is familiar with the arts and proudly supports it. The Design Store indulges in this desire for branded visibility but also sells products on the opposite end of the spectrum of logomania—products where the value of form outweighs the desire for ornamentation.

ii. Quiet Luxuries

Modernism is a Premium

The antithesis of the “loud” branded products previously discussed is the sleek home furnishings that more quietly exude the ethos of a brand. When products are “loud,” they prominently feature the logo of the business, whereas quiet ones often go entirely unbranded – the quality and form speak for themselves. All-over logo prints characterize loud luxury – think Louis Vuitton tracksuits or baggage – and shoppers pay the premium cost to own items that are, assumably, well made and express to any passerby that the owner is someone of means and social distinction. Quiet luxury is still just as expensive as loud luxury, if not sometimes a little

¹⁴⁴ “UNIQLO and MoMA Extend Long Standing Partnership with Launch of New Programs and Product Collaborations | FAST RETAILING CO., LTD.” *Fastretailing.com*. 2022. <https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/group/news/2202241100.html>.

¹⁴⁵ “UNIQLO ArtSpeaks | Magazine | MoMA.” 2024. *The Museum of Modern Art*. 2024. <https://www.moma.org/magazine/tags/194>.

more, but it shirks the need to clearly mark itself with logos - you can only know it's luxury if you are already one of the elite few who can purchase it. In a 2021-2022 consumer psychology study on the effects of narcissistic social attitudes on spending patterns conducted by Ling Jiang, Annie Peng Cui, and Juan Shan, researchers found that in both American and Chinese consumer markets, luxury shoppers are trending towards purchasing quiet luxury items rather than the previously popular loud.¹⁴⁶ MoMA Design Store is not exclusively a luxury retailer, yet many of its products, especially since the introduction of Emmanuel Plat in 2013, can be classified as luxury goods. In economics, a luxury good is defined as a product “for which demand increases more than what is proportional as income rises, so that expenditures on the good become a more significant proportion of overall spending,” and they are the opposite of necessities where demands increase proportionally less than income.¹⁴⁷ Modernism ideologically is at odds with luxury but has a history of failing to be as financially accessible to the masses it seeks to serve.

Alfred H Barr, Jr often elucidated upon the Bauhaus, which was the institution's philosophical and aesthetic inspiration. Modernism and especially the Bauhaus centered around the idea of “good design” improving the life of “the common folk,” as previously noted, though it has also appealed to elite collectors and consumers as well – a fact clearly indicated by the involvement of the Rockefellers and other wealthy founders of MoMA. Protagonists of the movement—a dizzying array of architects, designers, artists, cultural historians, and industrialists—promoted a populist image of the works of modernism, aiming to make quality homes and lives financially accessible to the general public.¹⁴⁸ However, the generators of this

¹⁴⁶Jiang, Ling, Annie Peng Cui, and Juan Shan. 2021. “Quiet Versus Loud Luxury: The Influence of Overt and Covert Narcissism on Young Chinese and US Luxury Consumers' Preferences?” *International Marketing Review* 39 (2): 309–34. <https://doi.org/10.1108/imr-02-2021-0093>.

¹⁴⁷ Varian, Hal (1992). "Choice". *Microeconomic Analysis* (Third ed.). New York: W.W. Norton. p. 117. ISBN 978-0-393-95735-8. Retrieved 4 October 2019. [...] As the consumer gets more income, he consumes more of both goods but proportionally more of one good (the luxury good) than of the other (the necessary good).

¹⁴⁸ For example, Frank Lloyd Wright's *Usonian* homes project (1937) or Oscar Stonorov and Louis Kahn's various modernist low income housing projects throughout the 1940s.

aesthetic and rhetoric were primarily of the upper class, as was the audience who consumed their designs. American Modernism adopted a language of “elegance” that favored the postwar emerging middle class and wealthy, not lower-income consumers. I discussed the complex racial significance of modernist home furnishing in Chapter Two, but it is particularly important to note the wealthy connotation it had for different groups. In *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design*, Kristina Wilson notes that white middle-class consumers viewed owning modernist furniture as “a symbol of cleanliness, control, and affordability” that they could utilize “as an accessory for an emerging identity.” Black middle-class families associated this furniture with ideals of “sociability, bodily comfort, and elite class distinction.” Regardless of racial identification, American middle-class families viewed modernist furniture as a social signal connoting the owner’s taste and status.¹⁴⁹ The Design Store seeks to assuage the tension between expression and expense, but even by proffering its agenda of “actively work[ing] to democratize good design at every price point,” modernist products fail to be as financially accessible as the original movement hoped to be. While “quiet luxury” is a relatively new fashion term, modernism is inherently an aesthetic of quiet luxury. It looks beautiful and unassuming and is expensively out of touch with the economic class many of its creators wanted to reach. By understanding how modernism, at its core, is a movement and aesthetic of luxury, we can perhaps better understand the story of a \$6,000 kitchen set that came to mark the Plat era of the MoMA Design Store era.

¹⁴⁹ Wilson, Kristina. *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body : Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design*. First edition. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021.

One Kitchenset to Rule Them All...

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the product offerings at the Design Store post-2008 were grim. They were cheap, which met the ideal of “democratic pricing,” but they were also cheaply designed and manufactured, which was far from the founding vision of the venture. Plat wanted to elevate product offerings, which ultimately meant an elevation of pricing, too. So he took a risk and pitched a \$6,000 kitchen set made in France called The Malle W. Trousseau. (Figure 4.5) The set included a handmade wooden chest of 43 kitchen essentials, all of which successfully passed the design filter of quality but got stuck on the likelihood of shoppers wanting to buy something so expensive from the museum. Plat recalls the Merchandising Team’s reaction as “‘No one is going to buy your \$6,000 kitchen set,’ they said. ‘This is MoMA Design Store, people buy postcards.’”¹⁵⁰

The Malle W. Trousseau creators, Isabelle Mathez and Frederic Winkler were watching their daughter leave home for the first time as a college student when she asked the inevitable question of any young adult setting out on their own: what kitchenware do I need? These parents’ answer was the Trousseau.¹⁵¹ Mathez spent 18 months traveling the world assembling a collection of only the very best utensils, and after gifting them to her daughter, she recreated the set for the rest of us. The designer couple did not create the utensils that make the product so expensive; they merely curated them. The story goes that when the w. Trousseau debuted at the seasonal press preview, “all the media outlets there were fighting for the exclusive” because it was the most expensive product the Design Store had ever sold, a distinction that stands to this day. It immediately sold out, and while they no longer carry the product, it validated a burgeoning idea that “there aren’t only visitors to the museum who want to take away an

¹⁵⁰Ibid

¹⁵¹ Katie Hagar. 2013. “Malle W. Trousseau Kitchen Set.” *Better Living through Design*. August 13, 2013. <https://www.betterlivingthroughdesign.com/accessories/malle-w-trousseau-kitchen-set/> .

affordable souvenir, but also a design-savvy, affluent customer, mostly local New Yorkers, who are interested in more exclusive objects.” The Design Store has embraced a new price point of exclusivity that may have made the original Bauhaus modernists cringe but isn’t that far from the reality of the movement.

Herman Miller x MoMA

The foremost American Modernist industrial design company is Herman Miller. Founded in 1905 as the Star Furniture Co, the Michigan-based firm initially produced historic revival furniture.¹⁵² The Great Depression forced the company to reconsider its brand identity, as its revival pieces were not generating sufficient sales to keep the company afloat. Enter Gilbert Rohde (1894–1944), a New York advertising illustrator turned designer who had just returned from his travels across France and Germany. His work reflected his interest in the American Streamline Moderne aesthetic, (Figure 4.6) as well as trends he had just observed firsthand in Europe, such as French Moderne and the International Design style of Bauhaus.¹⁵³ In 1932, he once again left his home in New York City for a life-changing trip to Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he met Dirk Jan De Pree, the president of a struggling Herman Miller. Rohde pitched modernist design to De Pree, successfully propelling the company towards a bold modernist aesthetic that could differentiate it from its competitors and bolster its business through fraught times. He argued that Herman Miller stood at the precipice of a changing American lifestyle and that traditional furniture could no longer meet their radically shifting needs. De Pree took a bet on what the public would like despite personally disliking Rohde’s designs and placed the future of his company in the debut of a Rohde-designed furniture set at the 1933 Century of Progress

¹⁵² “Timeline.” 2023. *Hermanmiller.com*. 2023. <https://www.hermanmiller.com/about/timeline/>.

¹⁵³ Phyllis Ross. “Merchandising the Modern: Gilbert Rohde at Herman Miller” 2004, *Journal of Design History* 2004

Exposition in Chicago. De Pree said of the pieces, “They were boxes. Utterly plain, no carving, no inlay,” and criticized Rohde, saying that they “needed surface enrichment.”¹⁵⁴ Somewhere amidst their correspondence, De Pree yielded to the industrial design experience of his new partner and let him go forth with the designs as they were. The *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* lauded Rohde’s debut. From then on until the time of his passing in 1944, Rohde advised De Pree on all matters of design, marketing, and production. His replacement faithfully stewarded his legacy, George Nelson, who took on the role of lead designer in 1945.¹⁵⁵ Nelson amassed many prominent designers throughout his nine-year-stint at the company, all of whom are reflected in the MoMA permanent collection and are still sold through Herman Miller at the Design Store. One such notable designer is Isamu Noguchi.

Isamu Noguchi

As previously discussed in Chapter Three, Isamu Noguchi was a Japanese-American artist and designer who is prominently featured in both the U.S. and Japan-exclusive MoMA Design Stores but is particularly emphasized at the Japan outlet. Born in 1904 in Los Angeles, California, to a mixed-race family of writers, Noguchi never considered himself to be of one particular place - preferring to view himself as an “internationalist.”¹⁵⁶ His mother took him to Japan at the age of two, where they lived together until the age of thirteen, when they decided it was time for young Noguchi to return alone to the States for high school. After high school, he balanced his premedical degree at Columbia University with evening sculpture classes at the Leonardo da Vinci School of Art on New York’s Lower East Side in 1922.¹⁵⁷ Overwhelmed with

¹⁵⁴ “America’s Modernist Pioneer: Herman Miller Vintage Classics - Invaluable.” 2022. *Invaluable*. March 28, 2022. <https://www.invaluable.com/blog/americas-modernist-pioneer-herman-miller-vintage-classics18256-2/>.

¹⁵⁵ “George Nelson : George Nelson Foundation.” *Georgenelsonfoundation.org*. 2024. <http://www.georgenelsonfoundation.org/george-nelson/index.html#milestones>.

¹⁵⁶ “Biography - the Noguchi Museum.” *The Noguchi Museum*. September 30, 2022. <https://www.noguchi.org/isamu-noguchi/biography/biography/>.

¹⁵⁷ “The Abstract Sculptor Who Melded East and West.” *Columbia College Today*. September 14, 2020. <https://www.college.columbia.edu/cct/issue/fall-2020/article/abstract-sculptor-who-melded-east-and-west>.

his passion for sculpture, he dropped out of university to pursue being a full-time academic sculptor who specialized in portrait busts. (Figure 4.7)

In late 1926, Noguchi applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship. His application proposed a year-long study of stone and wood cutting where he would gain “a better understanding of the human figure” in Romanian sculptor Constantin Brâncuși’s Paris studio, and then he would spend another year traveling through Asia, exhibit his work, and return to New York. When he was granted the award, and under Brâncuși’s mentorship, Noguchi began experimenting with sculptural modernism and abstraction, “infusing his highly finished pieces with a lyrical and emotional expressiveness, and with an aura of mystery.”¹⁵⁸ Chapter Two notes how MoMA exhibited his work even as a young artist, foreshadowing the museum’s future relationship with him. Noguchi was primarily an artist rather than a commercial designer; in fact, he frequently remarked that he was a poor example of a commercial designer for ready-made objects. He is best known for his non-furniture, non-commercial sculptures that engage in forms and ideas of surrealism, such as *Death (Lynched Figure)* of 1934 (Figure 4.8) or *This Tortured Earth* of 1942–1943. (Figure 4.9) These surrealist mode sculptures, particularly in the mid-1940s, often played with the technical and ideological themes of balance. *Humpty Dumpty* of 1946 (Figure 4.10) is an example of such a work that is constructed of separate parts that perfectly rest against one another to stay in place without any need for glue or screws. He says of his work, “Everything I do has an element of engineering in it—particularly since I dislike gluing parts together or taking advantage of something that is not inherent in the material. I am leery of welding or pasting. It implies taking an unfair advantage of nature.”¹⁵⁹ When Noguchi eventually

¹⁵⁸ “Biography - the Noguchi Museum.” *The Noguchi Museum*. The Noguchi Museum. September 30, 2022. <https://www.noguchi.org/isamu-noguchi/biography/biography/>.

¹⁵⁹ Noguchi, Isamu. 2017. “Humpty Dumpty.” *Whitney.org*. 2017. <https://whitney.org/collection/works/1520>.

tried his hand at commercial ready-made, he continued his motif of aesthetically asymmetrical with “impossible” engineered construction forms.

The story of the *Noguchi Coffee Table* (Figure 4.11) is one of conflict and intrigue. The table relates directly to MoMA history since it was originally designed in 1939 as a commission from Anson Conger Goodyear, MoMA’s first appointed president.¹⁶⁰ In Noguchi’s 1968 autobiography, titled *A Sculptor’s World*, he explains the story of how the original design was stolen by a fellow artist.¹⁶¹

[on his history and feelings on industrial design] There was the time I went to Hawaii in 1939 to do an advertisement (with Georgia O’Keeffe and Pierre Roy). As a result of this, I had met Robsjohn Gibbings, the furniture designer, who had asked me to do a coffee table for him. I had already done a table for Conger Goodyear. I designed a small model in plastic and heard no further before I went west.

By “west,” Noguchi refers here to his 7-month stint at a Japanese internment camp in Arizona during World War II. In 1942, Noguchi entered the concentration camp entirely of his own will as an act of solidarity with fellow Japanese-Americans so that he could understand and later share the conditions he experienced.¹⁶² While he was there, he saw an advertisement for his design being sold as belonging to Gibbings. Since Noguchi had voluntarily interned himself, he had no way to contest the intellectual infringement until his release several months later. When

¹⁶⁰ “A. Conger Goodyear Scrapbooks in the Museum of Modern Art Archives Goodyear Scrapbooks.” Museum of Modern Art. 2024. <https://www.moma.org/research/archives/finding-aids/GoodyearScrapbooksf>.

¹⁶¹ Noguchi, Isamu. *A Sculptor’s World*. [1st U.S. ed.]. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.

¹⁶² Tolan, Rory. 2017. “The Internment Artist.” *The Paris Review*. February 17, 2017. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/02/17/the-internment-artist/>.

he was finally able to protest Gibbing's plagiarism, Gibbings simply goaded him by saying: anybody could make a three-legged table," which only spurred Noguchi to make an even better prototype out of spite that Gibbings wouldn't be able to steal. His autobiography continues:

In revenge, I made my own variant of my own table, articulated as in the *Goodyear Table*, but reduced to its rudiments. It illustrated an article by George Nelson called 'How to Make a Table.' This is the *Noguchi Coffee Table* that was later sold in such quantity by the Herman Miller Furniture Company. I was not interested in, however—or should I say not capable of—designing anything for manufacture *a la mode*.

Despite Noguchi's own self-doubt about not being able to make fashionable industrial designs, his *Coffee Table* is still manufactured by Herman Miller¹⁶³ and is a best-selling product at the MoMA Design Store.¹⁶⁴ It consists of three pieces: a free-form plate-glass top with flat polished edges and a self-stabilizing tripod made of two interlocking curved legs of solid or ebonized walnut. A version of it is in the permanent collection, but the Design store sells it in two wood variations. It costs \$2,495 for non-members and \$2,245.50 for members of the museum. This is comparatively cheaper than buying directly from Herman Miller, which sells it for \$2,595.00.¹⁶⁵ Other products produced by him sold by the Design Store but are Japan site exclusives, including reproductions of his and Gifu Chochin's 1952 experimentalist encounter light sculptures, named *AKARI* (Figure 4.12) and limited edition posters (Figure 4.13) of his art printed on the same materials the *AKARI* sculptures were made from.

¹⁶³ "Isamu Noguchi." *Hermanmiller.com*. 2024. <https://www.hermanmiller.com/designers/noguchi/>.

¹⁶⁴ "Noguchi Coffee Table from Herman Miller - Transparent/ Walnut." *MoMA Design Store*. 2024. <https://store.moma.org/products/noguchi-coffee-table-from-herman-miller-transparent-walnut>.

¹⁶⁵ Table, Noguchi. 2020. "Noguchi Table – Herman Miller." *Hermanmiller.com*. 2020. https://store.hermanmiller.com/living-room-furniture-coffee-side-tables/noguchi-table/103695.html?lang=en_US&sku=103695.

When one purchases the *Noguchi Coffee Table* product, one is not only purchasing a reproduction of a famous work from the collection but a direct “artifact” from MoMA’s institutional history because the Design Store advertises its unique connection to Goodyear. While Herman Miller is a luxury brand, the lowered price at the Design Store demonstrates how they do seek to make modernist, “good” design more financially accessible. However, it is still an expensive coffee table. A coffee table is also, at its heart, a functional object, not a product of necessity. Yes, it serves a purpose and is beautifully made, but no, we don’t all need to have one to live a “good life.” The next section entirely lacks the practical function these aforementioned quiet luxuries offer and demonstrates how the MoMA Design Store has compromised its original mission of practical living in the name of trending collectibles.

iii. Play as Purpose

Are toys art?¹⁶⁶ This is the central question to understanding the potential of edutainment products in museum shops. Using highly designed toys as a means of fostering design thinking in children is a distinctly modernist occupation with roots in Froebel’s gifts¹⁶⁷ and expanded upon in the early 20th century with Ellen Key’s radical book *Century of the Child*.¹⁶⁸ Contemporary psychology corroborates that the act of physically playing with toys enhances the development of gross and fine motor skills, creativity, imagination, and critical problem-solving skills.¹⁶⁹ When we all undergo the first rituals of adulthood and “put our toys away,” we often reflect on the myriad ways we “lose” our creativity and imagination. Modernism offers us a solution in the “executive toy.” Early examples of executive toys date to immediately after World War II with

¹⁶⁶ “How to Make a Distinction between a Toy and Fine Art? - SOHO ART - Whatshisname.” *SOHO ART - Whatshisname*. December 19, 2019. <https://www.sohoart.uk/how-to-make-a-distinction-between-a-toy-and-fine-art/>.

¹⁶⁷ “Froebel’s Gifts.” *Froebel Trust*. 2017. <https://www.froebel.org.uk/training-and-resources/froebels-gifts>.

¹⁶⁸ “Century of the Child: Growing by Design, 1900–2000.” *The Museum of Modern Art*. 2018. <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1222>.

¹⁶⁹ “What the Research Says: Impact of Specific Toys on Play.” *NAEYC*. 2024. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/play/specific-toys-play>.

the popularity of the drinking bird toy. The most recognizable example of an executive toy was designed in 1967 by Simon Prebble, who created “Newton’s Cradle.” As the consumer desire for social distinction and identity signals amidst corporate office culture grew throughout the late 60s and early 70s, executive toys became even more popular. Interestingly, curator Donald Albrecht, who organized the 2000 exhibition “On the Job: Design and the American Office” at the National Building Museum in Washington, noted that such toys were finding an audience around the same time that the MoMA collection featured textile designer Alexander Girard was creating Environmental Enrichment textiles in 1971 for Herman Miller. Emmanuel Plat loves executive toys and brought his passion for them to the Design Store despite the argument that they don’t serve a functionalist purpose.¹⁷⁰ He challenges that notion by simply remarking, “they have something poetic about them,” thus insinuating that the act of “play” is purpose enough— if not a *need* in an era where neverending social feeds and screens are the primary providers of distraction.

Yoshimoto Cube No. 1 Desktop Puzzle

Naoki Yoshimoto is a Japanese artist and filmmaker born in 1940.¹⁷¹ He is most famous for discovering that two stellated rhombic dodecahedra could be pieced together into a cube when he was experimenting with different ways to split a cube into equal parts while he was investigating the laws of shape and space in his visual practice. He invented the cube puzzle in 1971 and debuted his invention in 1972 at a solo exhibition entitled “From Cube to Space.” He later produced and sold three commercial versions: the Yoshimoto Cube No. 1, 2, and 3. (Figure

¹⁷⁰ Lasky, Julie “Designing Distraction: Executive Toys (Published 2015),” *The New York Times*, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/05/garden/designing-distraction-executive-toys.html#:~:text=The%20short%2C%20unplumbed%20history%20of,1860s%20to%20World%20War%20II..>

¹⁷¹ Wikipedia Contributors. 2023. “Yoshimoto Cube.” *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation. July 14, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoshimoto_Cube.

4.14) It grew popular as a fun mind puzzle and executive toy in Japan, but it wasn't until the early 80s that it came to find a home amongst fine art and design. The story goes, according to the Design Store website, "In 1981, an Asahi newspaper reporter gave the Yoshimoto Cube as a souvenir to a MoMA curator when he visited New York. The curator became interested in it, and it became part of the Museum's collection in 1982."¹⁷² Since then, the cube has become a popular Design Store project with glowing reviews from none other than Emmanuel Plat, which is proudly displayed on a plaque next to the metallic 2-inch cube. The plaque reads: "The more you play with this deceptively simple cube, the more you discover its many shapes." The cube is an exact replica of the one in the permanent collection and is made of plastic and polyester made in Japan, just like the original. In the sense that "play is purpose enough," the puzzle does fulfill a niche need to provide non-screen-based mental and creative stimulation with its "addictive yet calming" design. For this reason, as well as being an object from the collection that one can't help but want to play with when seen from behind glass, the Yoshimoto Cube No. 1 fulfills the necessary Design Store criteria of being "useful" as a toy that is both entertaining and thought-provoking.

MoMA BE@RBRICK Collectible Figures

Bearbrick (rendered as BE@RBRICK) is a brand of collectible toys designed and produced by Tatsuhiko Akashi for the Japanese company MediCom Toy Incorporated.¹⁷³ Since its creation in 2001, hundreds of Be@rbricks variants have been released in a range of sizes and materials that are typically made of ABS plastic, but in special instances, they have been made of

¹⁷²"Yoshimoto Cube No. 1 Desktop Puzzle." *MoMA Design Store*. 2024.

<https://store.moma.org/products/yoshimoto-cube-no-1-desktop-puzzle>.

¹⁷³Vonderahe, Oliver. 2023. "All about Bearbricks: The Ultimate Collectible." *Sotheby's Institute of Art*. February 17, 2023. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/all-about-bearbricks-the-ultimate-collectible>.

wood, felt, or even metal. While there is variation between collaborations, the standard sizing is termed 100% (seven cm tall), 400% (twenty-eight cm tall), and 1000% (seventy cm tall.)¹⁷⁴ Collaborations since 2001 have included artist estates such as Andy Warhol and Keith Haring, as well as luxury fashion brands such as Karl Lagerfeld, Vivienne Westwood, and Ivana Helsinki. Due to their limited production and the participation of recognizable artist “brands,” Be@rbricks have become highly sought-after designer toys. They typically sell anywhere between \$170 USD and \$2,700 USD depending upon the level of embellishment and the collaborator. However, resellers have been known to hike prices by almost 7% to 1800%, leading to some art collectors viewing these as a more profitable investment than NFTs.¹⁷⁵ For example, in 2019, Christie’s Auction House auctioned a Coco Chanel x BE@RBRICK collaboration at the 1000% size, edition 615/1000, which sold for \$30,367.75 USD— that’s one expensive plastic bear!¹⁷⁶

The Design Store tapped into the Be@rbrick collectible market, well aware of the hype surrounding the toy and the expense buyers or resellers would go to possess one. Since the “bear” itself is usually little more than molded plastic, the surface ornamentation of it is what drives its value. In 2021, the Design Store announced its first collaboration with Be@rbricks to be themed after one of its most famous artworks in the collection, *Starry Night* by Vincent Van Gogh, painted in 1889. (Figure 4.15) The series was sold in two combinations. The first retails at \$200 USD, featuring one bear at 100% and the other at 400%. The second comes at a single large-scale figure at 1000% (27.5”), which sells individually for \$650 USD.¹⁷⁷ (Figure 4.16) In

¹⁷⁴ “BEARBRICK Trademark of Medicom Toy Corporation - Registration Number 2839649 - Serial Number 76471459: Justia Trademarks.” *Justia.com*. 2016. <https://trademarks.justia.com/764/71/bearbrick-76471459.html>.

¹⁷⁵ “So, It Turns Out That BE@RBRICK Might Be a Better Investment than NFTs.” *Highsnobiety*. October 24, 2023. <https://www.highsnobiety.com/p/are-bearbricks-a-good-investment/>.

¹⁷⁶ “MEDICOM TOY.” *Christies*. 2022. <https://onlineonly.christies.com/s/contemporary-art-asia-art-runway/medicom-toy-3414/77599>.

¹⁷⁷ Ghassemitari, Shawn.. “MoMA Design Store and MEDICOM TOY Partner on a BE@RBRICK Rendition of ‘Starry Night.’” *Hypebeast*. July 26, 2021. <https://hypebeast.com/2021/7/moma-design-store-medicom-toy-vincent-van-gogh-starry-night-bearbrick>.

anticipation of extreme demand for the figure, The Design Store Japan locations held a lottery where only winners would be allowed to buy the product - which created an element of exclusivity and anticipation.¹⁷⁸ To combat resellers, The Design Store had to enforce a policy of only one figure per customer. Following the success of this first collaboration, they followed up their debut with a reproduction of another popular collection piece, *The Persistence of Memory* by Salvador Dalí, painted in 1931. (Figure 4.17) The Dalí series was sold in two combinations similar to the Van Gogh one. The first retails at \$200 USD, featuring one bear at 100% and the other at 400%. (Figure 4.18) The second comes at a single large-scale figure at 1000% (27.5”), which sells individually for \$750 USD - \$100 more expensive than the Van Gogh edition.¹⁷⁹ The toy once again became a best seller and was noted to be particularly popular in the US at the SoHo location by an in-store manager. The Design Store insists it’s not a gift shop, yet up until 2023; these collaborations were expected and in line with what other museum gift shops were offering. To try and break away from its competitors, The Design Store advertised the wildly popular BE@RBRICK 400% portable Bluetooth speaker as a “MoMA Exclusive” despite the product actually being a collaboration between MEDICOM and Rinaro Isodynamics.¹⁸⁰ (Figure 4.19) This latest \$550 USD edition to the “MoMA x Be@rbrick” line makes no reference to any artist, designer, or movement in the museum’s collection. It’s an expensive collector’s item, the current reigning epitome of “loud luxury,” and does not align with the Design Store’s stated core purpose of extending the museum experience beyond the exit.

¹⁷⁸ Mike. “MoMA Partnered with Medicom Toy for van Gogh the Starry Night Bearbrick Figure.” *MIKESHOUTS*. August 5, 2021. <https://mikesounds.com/moma-x-medicom-bearbrick-figure/>.

¹⁷⁹ “MoMA BE@RBRICK Salvador Dalí Collectible Figures - 100% & 400% Set.” *MoMA Design Store*. 2023. <https://store.moma.org/products/moma-be-rbrick-salvador-dali-collectible-figures-100-400-set>.

¹⁸⁰ “BE@RBRICK 400% Bluetooth Speaker.” *MoMA Design Store*. 2024. <https://store.moma.org/products/be-rbrick-400-bluetooth-speaker>.

Yoshitomo Nara 123 Drumming Girl Series

Born in 1959 in Hirosaki, Aomori Prefecture, Japan, Yoshitomo Nara is a Japanese Neo-Pop artist best known for his illustrations, paintings, and sculptural works that explore the relationship between memory, rebellion, and childhood wonder. His work is heavily influenced by Japan's subculture of comic books, animated films, and video games, as well as his personal devotion to punk rock music and scene culture. He received his B.F.A. (1985) and an M.F.A. (1987) from the Aichi Prefectural University of Fine Arts and Music and later studied at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, Germany, between 1988 and 1993.¹⁸¹ During the 90s, Japan experienced its Neo-Pop art movement, which is a postmodernist counterculture of art that meditated upon the ideas and motifs of Western movements of the 1950s and 60s, such as FLUXUS, Neo-Dada, and Pop artists. However, Neo-Pop is not regurgitated Warholian aesthetics as one many assume; artists of the movement reflect on the consequences and representation of global commercialism, which is the effect of neoliberalism on mass media, by drawing on a wider amount of sources and techniques, often with a satirical edge.¹⁸² Nara is an eminent Neo-Pop artist and, as of 2019, is officially the most expensive Japanese artist to sell at auction in art world history when his painting *Knife Behind Back* sold for HK\$195.7m (\$25 million USD) at Sotheby's Contemporary Art Evening Sale.¹⁸³ (Figure 4.20) Nara has 130 works in MoMA's permanent collection and has been the star of nearly 40 solo exhibitions since 1984. In addition to his fine art sculptures and paintings, in recent years, he has created "toys" such as

¹⁸¹ Marino, Nick, "Yoshitomo Nara Paints What He Hears," *The New York Times*, July, 24th, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/24/t-magazine/yoshitomo-nara.html>.

¹⁸² "Pop Art Movement Overview." *The Art Story*. 2016. <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/pop-art/>.

¹⁸³ "Yoshitomo Nara Becomes Most Expensive Japanese Artist as His 'Knife behind Back' Sells for Record-Smashing HK\$195m | Auctions News | the VALUE | Art News." *TheValue.com*. 2019. <https://en.thevalue.com/articles/nara-yoshitomo-kaws-contemporary-art-sothebys-hk>.

several miniature collectible figures and a stuffed animal based on characters from his oeuvre. (Figure 4.21)

This *123 Drumming Girl* (Figure 4.22) is a collectible object series designed in 2020 by Nara featuring three small figurines of girls holding drumsticks in different poses.¹⁸⁴ The dolls reflect his aesthetic of cute yet edgy characters inspired by his passion for rock music. MoMA's artist catalog notes the typical subjects of his work are "big-headed girls with piercing eyes."¹⁸⁵ The Drumming Girl dolls stay true to his stylistic characterization and are a direct physical realization of the characters from a series of large-scale billboards he created in the late 2000s. (Figure 4.23) Each of the PVC plastic figures is sold separately for \$150 each. *Girl #1* holds two gold drumsticks and wears a light blue dress and a color-coordinated tall pointy hat with the number one emblazoned on it. #2 wears the same outfit in dark green, and #3 is dressed the same but in red. Nara's approach to sculpture revolves around touch, and they often have fingerprints left on them. While these indentation characteristics of his sculptural work are not present on these figurines, knowing that they were made from a work that he did directly touch does more to establish their value as a product at the Design Store than the Be@rbricks which lack a distinct artistic connection that goes deeper than printed surface level. Unfortunately, what Nara's dolls lack is design intent. The *123 Drumming Girl* series are darling sculpted figurines that one can put around their home or office, but they do not meet the tenet of functional use.

¹⁸⁴ "Yoshitomo Nara 123 Drumming Girl Collectible Object - Green #2." *MoMA Design Store*. 2024. <https://store.moma.org/products/yoshitomo-nara-123-drumming-girl-collectible-object-green-2?variant=44170194551014>.

¹⁸⁵ "Yoshitomo Nara | MoMA." *The Museum of Modern Art*. 2014. <https://www.moma.org/artists/25523>.

“Rosebud”

Toys are vestibules of memory and signals of individuality that can transform areas of work into dynamic spaces of growth—a modernist ideal. Donald M. Rattner, founder of the Creative Home blog, said in a 2015 New York Times interview that “the things people have out on their desks are interesting signifiers of what’s important to them and what they want to maintain in their memories.”¹⁸⁶ He called that attachment “the Rosebud phenomenon” a la Orson Welles’s 1941 film *Citizen Kane*. MoMA Design Store labels all of the aforementioned items as “Desk Accessories.” They’re small, expensive objects, typically made of plastic, that in many cases have been raised to the level of “collector’s item,” where they’re more often being proudly displayed rather than played with. While Yoshimoto’s Cube design encourages thoughtful stimulation and creative interaction, both the MoMA BE@RBRICK collaborations and Yoshitomo Nara *Drumming Girls* fail to mesh with the Store’s ethos of design with purpose.

Conclusion

“Don’t touch the art!” A repetitive warning from security staff, curators, art educators, and mindful patrons to the rest of us. In some cases the phrase has become a joke rather than the strictly enforced rule it began as. The Museum of Modern Art, like many other installation oriented museums, doesn’t usually let visitors touch the art on display. As an “extension” of the museum, The Design Store offers visitors an opportunity to engage with the artworks they have just seen, overall layering the sensory experience. It extends the museum with a curated selection of products that range from loudly branded to quietly luxurious and force us to critically question what their purpose will be in our lives if we decide to purchase them. Products utilize semiotics of identity and wealth politics and promise to make life “good” with their “good

¹⁸⁶ Lasky, Julie, “Designing Distraction: Executive Toys,” The New York Times. 2015
<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/05/garden/designing-distraction-executive-toys.html#:~:text=The%20short%2C%20unplumbed%20history%20of,1860s%20to%20World%20War%20II..>

design.” They are works of modern art in the sense a culturally savvy creator designs them and reflects or challenges viewers' preconceptions of their future. This is what the brilliant marketing team at MoMA wants us to accept, but on closer examination, is the Design Store an actual continuation of a curatorial theme or a commercial, retail-premium appropriation of the museum's “greatest hits?” Unfortunately, it is both. Certain products such as the Yoshimoto Cube and even Nara's recent foray in toy design resume the institution's gallery focus beyond the lobby exit. Yet, other products such as the BE@RBRICK collaboration is a more troubling indicator of the Design Store failing to offer innovative and artistic designed goods that directly relate to their mission, and taking the less inspired (but certainly easier and marketable) path of reproducing popular works. If one only critically analyzes such products, the entire operation seems, to some extent, to be “the tail wagging the dog.” However, I analyze these products comparatively to other great products that engage with the history of Modernism. *The Noguchi Coffee Table* is a fascinating example of modern design with a compelling backstory that directly relates to the institution. Products like the table, of which there are many, successfully “extend.” According to previously discussed journalistic and architectural intervention sources, The Design Store has a history of defining, cluttering, and then redefining itself every decade or so in order to keep itself in stride with its goal. The recent proliferation of expensive printed plastics indicates that the Store may need to consider rightening itself again soon. Ultimately, the Design Store is a valuable element to the Museum of Modern Art for its brand awareness development and educational endeavors, but is not without its faults.

Conclusion: Torpedoing Ever Forward

“As boundaries continue to blur, MoMA Design Store has continued to evolve, proving that design retail can serve to both entice and educate.”

- Aileen Kwun, Fast Company journalist, 2018

As the Museum of Modern Art faced the rapidly shifting landscape of funding and retail brought on by recent social and economic developments following the COVID-19 pandemic, the museum once again was forced to confront and redefine what it means to be a “creator,” what it means to possess “art.” Modernists and neoliberals alike desired a globalized world, and as of 2024, our communication channels have never been more connected.

i. Catastrophe

In the nonprofit world of museums, there are three main categories of revenue: contributions, program services, and earned income. Earned income has been the primary focus of this thesis with retail because it typically accounts for 40% of a museum's revenue.¹⁸⁷ In a 2018 report, Sotheby's Auction House regarded earned income revenue as a "relatively new and increasing category," encompassing everything from merchandise and licensing to gift shops and educational programs. Sotheby's notes that while such commercial practices within the museum space have become a norm, this revenue stream "represents relatively new and disruptive developments to the museum business model of the past." Six years ago, when Sotheby's published this report, a total embrace of museum shops as crucial sources of earned revenue was heralded as the dynamic, shiny, bright trajectory for art museums worldwide. Yet, In 2020, art museums worldwide were forced to close their doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the hyper-specialized "cultural economy" and "heritage industry" became one of the pandemic's numerous victims. American archaeologist and historian Neil Asher Silberman described the state of museums during the COVID-19 pandemic as such:

With in-person visits and fundraising events suspended or drastically restricted, museums of all sizes and subjects have turned to the virtual to keep their patrons focused on the museum's mission, even if they cannot visit physically. Precious operating funds have been invested in virtual exhibitions, virtual gallery talks, and even virtual fundraising galas to create an impression of virtual normalcy. But the clock is ticking. Time is not on

¹⁸⁷ "The Business Model of the Nonprofit Museum." *Sotheby's Institute of Art*. 2017. <https://www.sothebysinstitute.com/news-and-events/news/the-business-model-of-the-nonprofit-museum>.

the side of the virtual for museums and other cultural institutions that have based their very existence not only on ticket sales and school group visits but also, more importantly, on gift shops, cafes, cafeterias, and special events.¹⁸⁸

With earned revenue streams significantly reduced or, in some cases, wholly decimated, many museums and cultural heritage sites shuttered. According to the American Alliance of Museums, 60% of American museums reported experiencing pandemic-related financial losses since March 2020, with the average being a little over \$791,000.¹⁸⁹ In another AAM survey conducted with Seattle-based Wilkening Consulting in 2021, it was found that 76% of all U.S. museums reported that their operating income fell an average of 40% in 2020 while their doors were closed to the public an average of 28 weeks due to the pandemic.¹⁹⁰ During the pandemic, these stores showed their connection to the institution rather than acting as separate retail entities by closing the MoMA Design Stores on 53rd Street and in Soho alongside The Museum of Modern Art on 53rd Street and MoMA PS1 in Queens from early March through March 30.¹⁹¹ When the museum reopened, they all reopened and moved forward together as a unit.

ii. Catalyst

Inspired in part by the success of the MoMA Design Store, both pre and post-pandemic, museum stores worldwide have begun experimenting and expanding what it means to “sell” art

¹⁸⁸Silberman, Neil. 2020. “Good-bye to All That: COVID-19 and the Transformations of Cultural Heritage.” *International Journal of Cultural Property* 27 (4): 467–75. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0940739120000314>.

¹⁸⁹ Data from the Fourth National Snapshot of COVID-19 Impact on US Museums, conducted by AAM and Wilkening Consulting.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid

¹⁹¹ Hilburg, Jonathan. “Met, MoMA, and More Go Dark over Coronavirus Concerns.” *The Architect's Newspaper*. March 13, 2020. <https://www.archpaper.com/2020/03/met-moma-shut-down-coronavirus-concerns/>.

history. Diane Drubay, the chief executive of We Are Museums, a European consultancy that advises museums worldwide on marketing, shared in a 2018 interview with the *New York Times* that in many places, stores are no longer the exit but “a point of entry.” In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, museum shops that have survived the economic blight now fill the often lacking commercial role of gift and design boutiques. In 2022, MoMA Design Store reported posting its most substantial sales to date, with the number of transactions having risen more than 20% each year since 2020.¹⁹² The store is undeniably an essential contributor to the museum’s operating budget. Emmanuel Plat explains:

“The COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst for the museum to shift its assortment. Today, the lineup includes famous pieces like the Eames chair by Ray and Charles Eames for Herman Miller and the Artichoke pendant lamp by Poul Henningsen for Louis Poulsen, as well as novelty, exclusive items like a Solgaard suitcase outfitted with an expandable closet and Subu Slippers by British Nigerian artist and designer Yinka Ilori.”

The future of product curation in the Design Store weaves between past and future – between legacy and expectation. The original concept of MoMA was that art deemed modern of the period would be purged to make room for more modern art. Barr proposed selling works older than fifty years to other museums, such as The Metropolitan, to fund purchasing new works by living artists – aligning with his vision of the museum’s torpedo “tail” representing “the ever-receding past of 50 to 100 years ago.” MoMA hasn’t exactly done this; their mindset to maintain both the relics of canonical modernism while still making room for the living is to

¹⁹² Celeste, Sofia. “Inside MoMA Design Store’s Retailing Thought Process.” *WWD*. November 16, 2023. <https://wwd.com/home-design/shop-home/momas-design-store-on-building-exclusivity-1235891536/>.

continuously expand the institution through renovations and new properties like MoMA PS1. The Design Store matches the institution's current strategy in this regard by featuring the latest novelties alongside older designs. There is the question, however, of whether, in their pursuit of providing more “exclusive” items, the store is attempting to make new titans of design, such as the next desirable chair or coffee table, or they’re selling out to passing trends.

iii. Takeaways

The current financial state and store model of American museums is a cumulative result of Reagan’s neoliberal policies. The Museum of Modern Art’s Design Store remains faithful to modernist principles and the institution’s initial mission of promoting “good design” despite its inherently post-modernist and capitalist nature. The Design Store has successfully implemented and furthered the museum’s values by considering emerging social concerns of environmental sustainability and expanding the diversity of its featured artists and shoppers. However, the legacy of neoliberalism has negatively impacted the store’s ability to “democratize” price points in a way that considers underlying issues of economic equity in America. The Design Store is a paragon of retail edutainment for an American art museum and meets current market-demanded offerings for art-based experiences that are socially conscious and revenue-generating.

For my thesis, I was not granted access to the full fiscal report breakdowns of what retail operations were generating x amount compared to cafes since the public reports lump the two together. Due to the lack of information from MoMA, I can not confidently include the exact revenue the Museum generates from the Design Stores, yet while this study may have only been able to provide a limited view of the retail’s monetary value, it is my academic assumption it is

enough of a significant amount to be increasingly supporting over the past decade. Purely rationalizing the “value” of The Design Store, as well as museum stores in general, is ironically a neoliberal predisposition to derive value in purely monetary forms. Through its support of education programs as well as the role of the store in disseminating well-designed products that educate its customers on art, the Store proves its cultural value as a public access point for modernism, which supports artist estates and emerging artists alike. The MoMA Design Store is an innovative postmodernist answer to the modernist question of accessibility that commercially compels both the art-informed and unsuspecting to discover time and time again what “Good Design” means beyond the exit.

Chapter 1 Figures

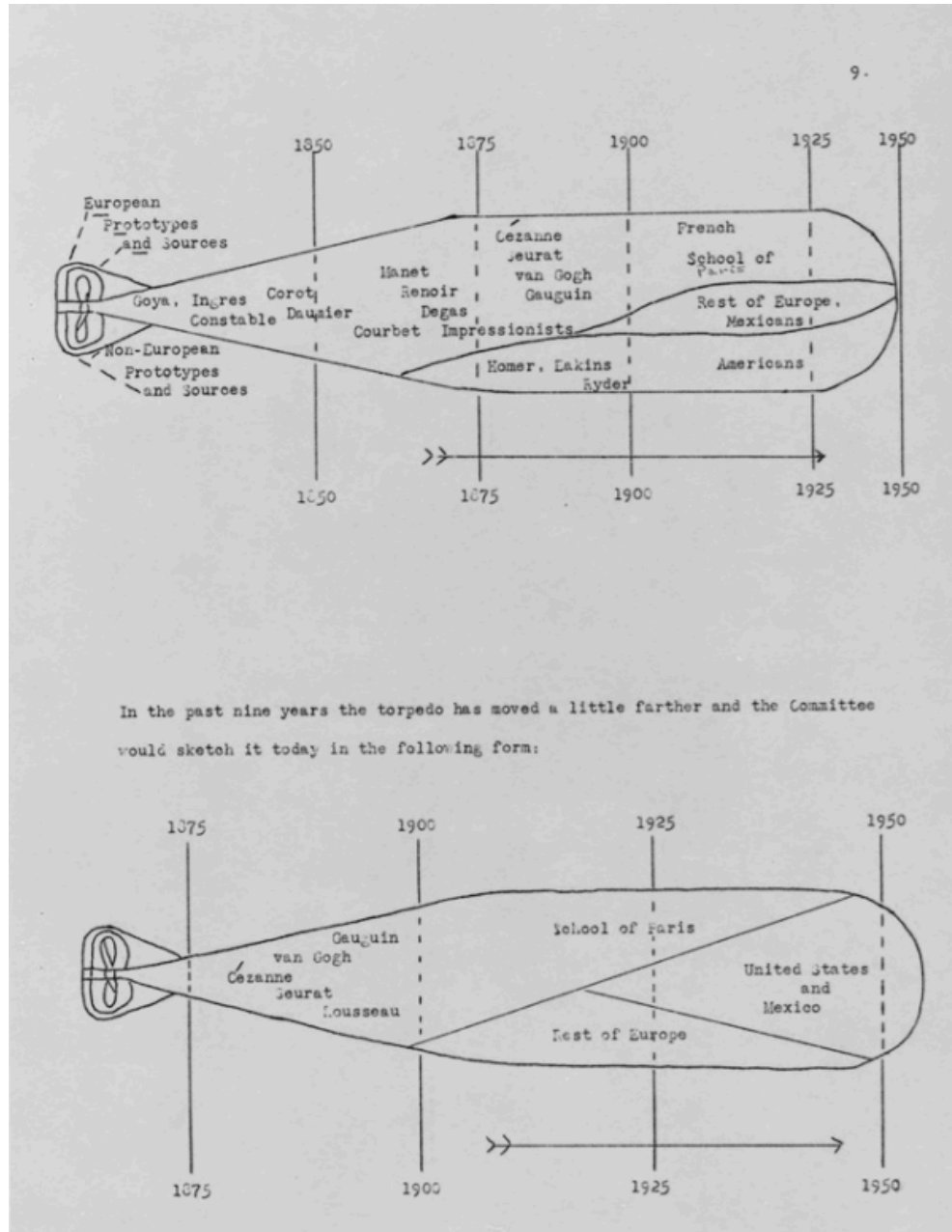


Figure 1.1: Alfred H. Barr Jr., 'Torpedo' diagrams of the ideal permanent collection of *The Museum of Modern Art*, as advanced in 1933 (top) and in 1941 (bottom) Prepared for the *Advisory Committee Report on Museum Collections*, 1941, Offset, printed in black, 11 x 8 1/2" (29.2 x 20.3 cm), Alfred H. Barr Jr. Papers, II.C.38. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, ARCH.2154



Figure 1.2: Uncredited, *Facade of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937*, photograph, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York



The Empress of Blandings
 and
Mister Charles Boyer
 request the honor of
Mr. Goodyear's presence
 at the semi-public opening of the new
Museum of Standard Oil
11 West 53rd Street, New York, N. Y.
Wednesday evening, May the 10th
from nine until one o'clock
Better dresses - 5th floor

R. S. V. P.

this card will admit two persons
or one person and two dogs or...

Figure 1.3: Frances Collins, *Oil that Glitters Is Not Gold*, 1939
 The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York



Figure 1.4: Uncredited, *photograph of an exchange at the Art Lending Service, 1950–60,*
The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York

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 GAUGUIN · CARTIER-BRESSON · BRASSAI
 KELLY · NEWMAN · CALDER
 LAANES · O'KEEFE · BEAL · ROUSSEAU
 ANIMAL SHUFFLEBOOK · SNAP SNAP SNAP
 SATELLITE · PYLONS · KONNECTO
 ATOMIX · FLOAT · HEARTS

CHRISTMAS CATALOGUE FROM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Figure 1.5: Uncredited graphic designer, “Christmas Catalogue From The Museum of Modern Art,” Museum of Modern Art Press Release, 1972

Note the names of featured “giftable” artist names that make up the tree



Figure 1.6: Mon Levinson, *Possibilities I - Christmas Card for MoMA*, 1969, Die Cut construction on heavy white paper, orange envelope, 4 x 4 ½ in.

Originally sold in-store and featured in the 1969 Museum of Modern Arts Christmas catalog. Image from the resale of product from Etsy shop Klassyglassandmore. Notice that even as a holiday greeting card, design is first and foremost rather than conspicuous “Christmas” themed.



Figure 1.7: Andres Serrano, *Immersion (Piss Christ)*, 1987, Cibachrome print, photograph, 150×100 cm., International Center for Photography

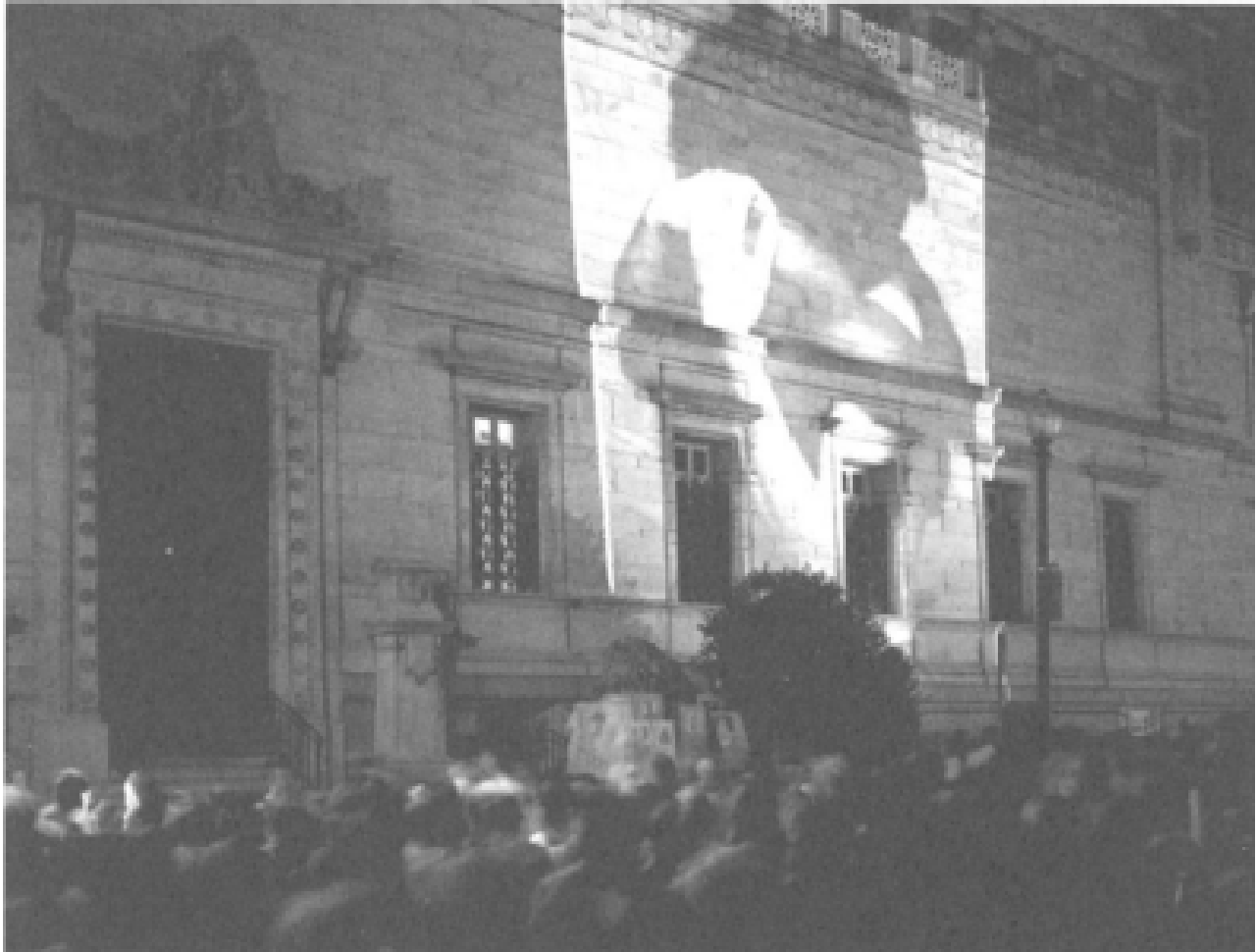


Figure 1.8: Frank Herrera, *Photograph of The Perfect Moment exhibit protest*, June 30, 1989, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., © Frank Herrera

Projected image:
Robert Mapplethorpe, *Embrace*, 1982



Figure 1.10: *Pixie, Peter, Joseph, and Joey looking through a piece of blue cellophane, Video still image, *Through the Enchanted Gate*, Season 1, “Make a Feeling and Seeing Picture,” May 18, 1952, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York*



Figure 1.11: Leo Trachtenberg, *Installation view of the exhibition "Good Design" November 21, 1950–January 28, 1951, 1950*, Photograph, Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN463.1A



Figure 1.12: *Good Design labels*, attached to the products at Bloomingdales endorsed by the exhibition of Good Design at MoMA, 1950 (image source: *Are we human? Notes on an archaeology of design*, B.colomina, M. Wigley)



Figure 1.13: Barbara Kruger, *I shop therefore I am*, 1990, Photolithograph on paper shopping bag, composition: 12 3/8 x 9 13/16" (31.5 x 25 cm); sheet (bag): 17 5/16 x 10 3/4 x 4 3/16" (43.9 x 27.3 x 10.7 cm) Gift of Kölnischer Kunstverein, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New

York
SC233.1996

Chapter 2 Figures

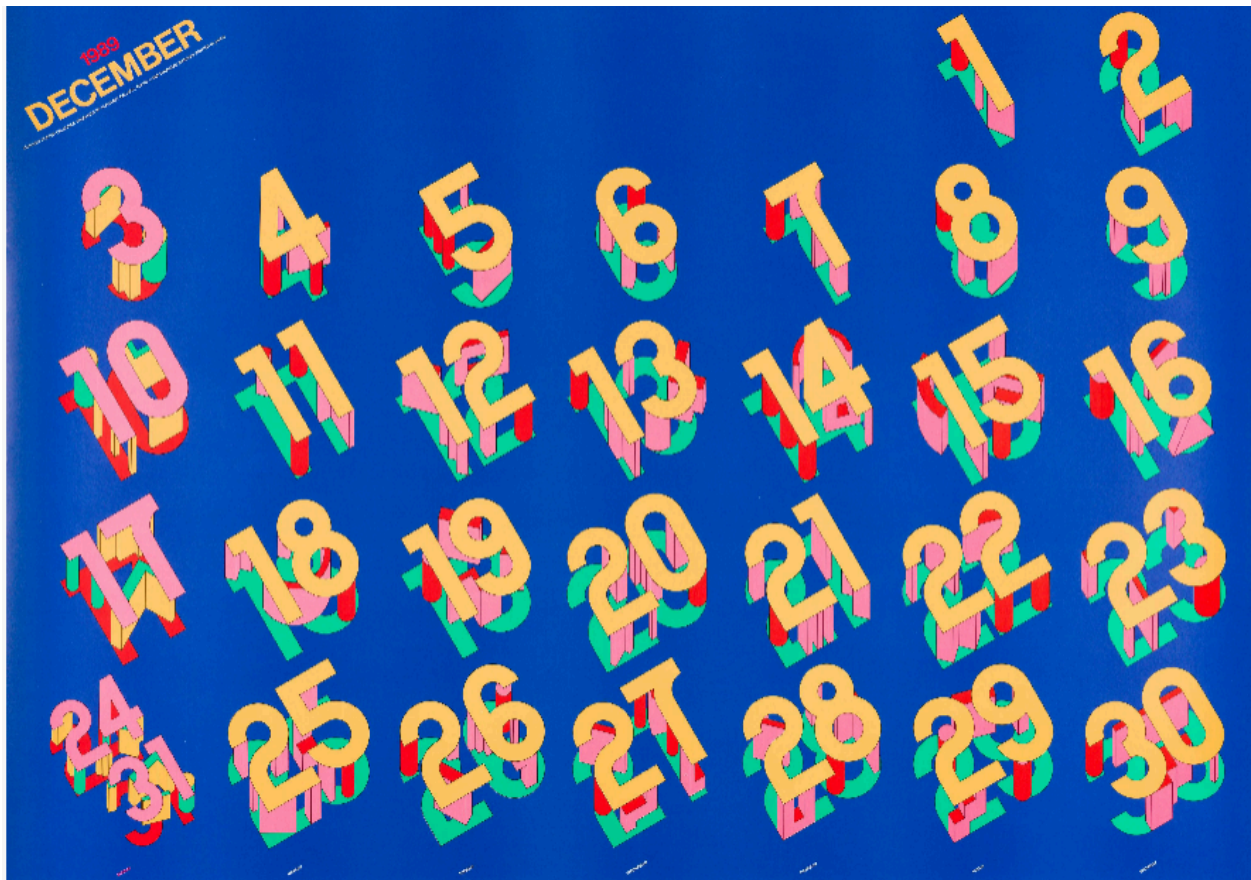


Figure 2.2: Takenobu Igarashi, *Calendar poster*, 1988
The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 2.3: Modern Architecture: International Exhibition, Feb 9–Mar 23, 1932
The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York

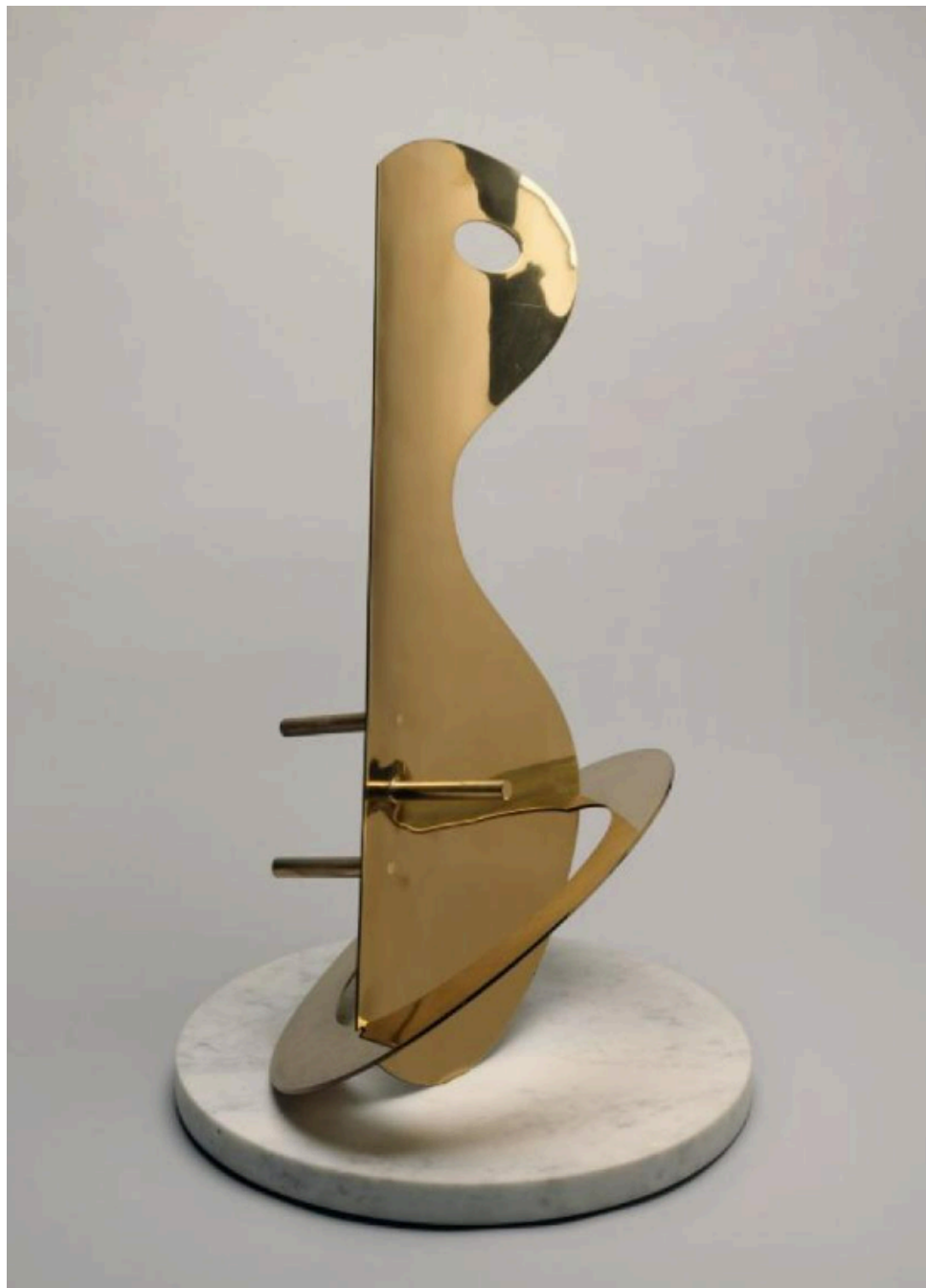


Figure 2.4: Isamu Noguchi, *Leda*, 1928, Aluminum bronze, brass, 23 3/8 x 11 7/8 x 12 5/8 in. (59.4 x 30.2 x 32.1 cm), Marble base: 1 1/8 x 15 x 15 in. (2.9 x 38.1 x 38.1 cm)

CURRENT COLLECTION

The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York

PROVENANCE

Marie Sterner, 1928, Lawrence Rill Schumann, c. 1958, The artist, 1962, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation, Inc., 1982, Current collection, 2004



Figure 2.5: Advertisement for Chicago Metropolitan Mutual Assurance Company (detail),
Ebony, December 1954, 89



Dual purpose dress of bright red crepe with deep silk fringe bespeaks the gay 30's. It is made with a fitted jacket that buttons up the front to neckline. Dress has fringe trim over the shoulders. Design by Francine Frocks. Price \$40.

Figure 2.6: Fashion Fair, *Ebony*, August 1953, 1985



Figure 2.7: Bettmann, *President Franklin D. Roosevelt Speaking at Network Microphones*, 1941

MoMA

The Museum of Modern Art

Figure 2.8: Ivan Chermayeff and Matthew Carter, *MoMA logo*, 1964/2004

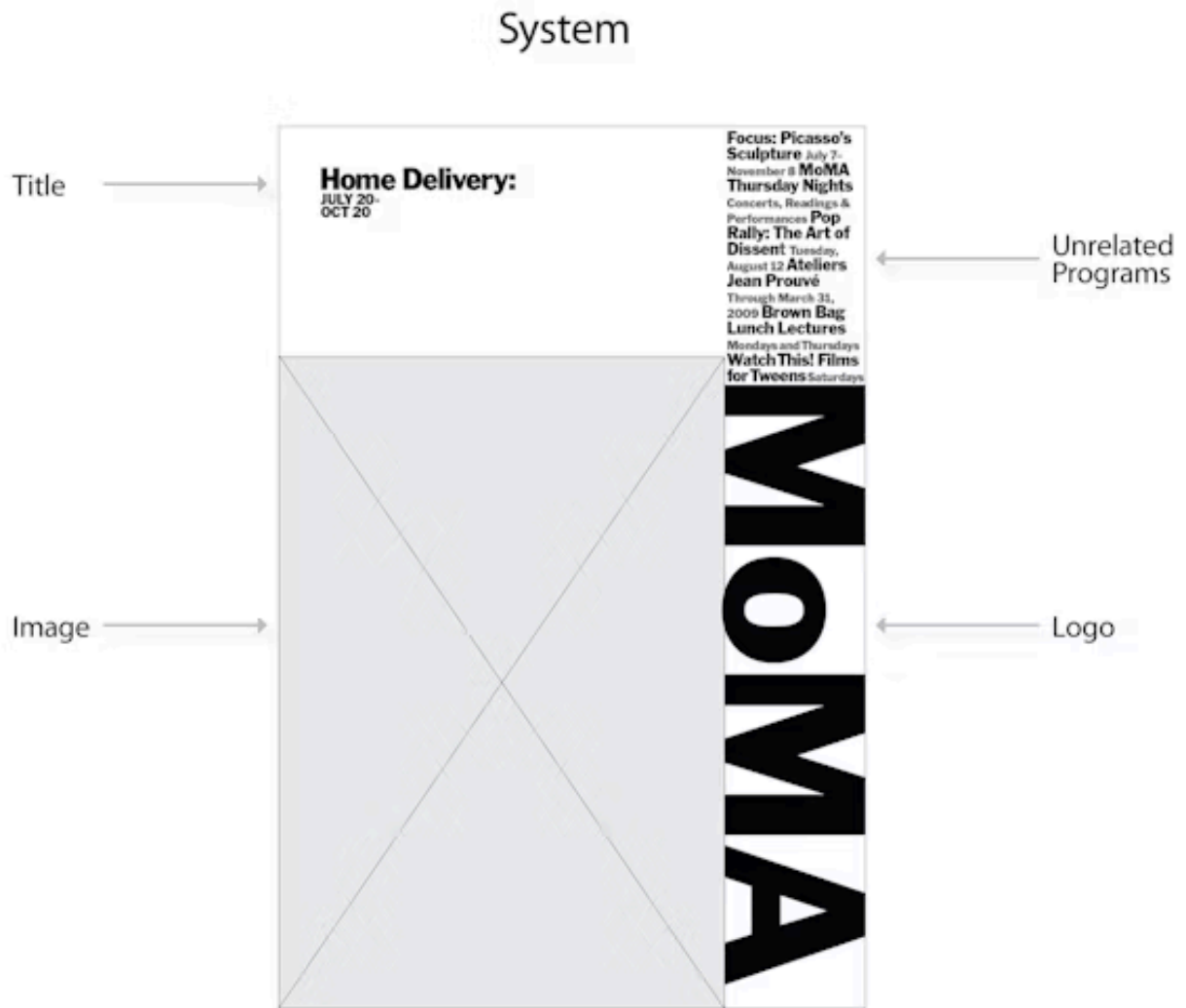


Figure 2.9: Pentagram, *MoMA Advertising Recast System*, "The new identity establishes a system for the consistent treatment of images and type," 2009

DEC 14 **Marlene Dumas**
 FEB 16 **Measuring Your Own Grave**

Pipilotti Rist:
 Pour Your Body
 Out (7354 Cubic
 Meters) THROUGH
 FEB 2 Focus: Sol
 LeWitt THROUGH
 JUN 29 Modern
 Mondays JAN 12 &
 26, FEB 9 & 23



Figure 2.10: Pentagram and Julia Hoffmann, *Example of New MoMA Grid System*, “A poster using the new system, which makes dramatic use of images,” 2009



Figure 2.11: Julia Hoffmann and Pentagram, *Out of Home Advertising Media Examples for MoMA*, “Installation in the Fifth Avenue and 53rd Street subway station across the street from the museum,” 2009

The Museum of Modern Art
The Museum of Modern Art
The Museum of Modern Art
The Museum of Modern Art
The Museum of Modern Art
The Museum of Modern Art
The Museum of Modern Art
The Museum of Modern Art

Figure 2.12: Drawn by Christian Schwartz, input from Matthew Carter, italics drawn by Greg Gazdowicz, Cyrillic support by Ilya Ruderman added Cyrillic support, *MoMA Sans*, 2017

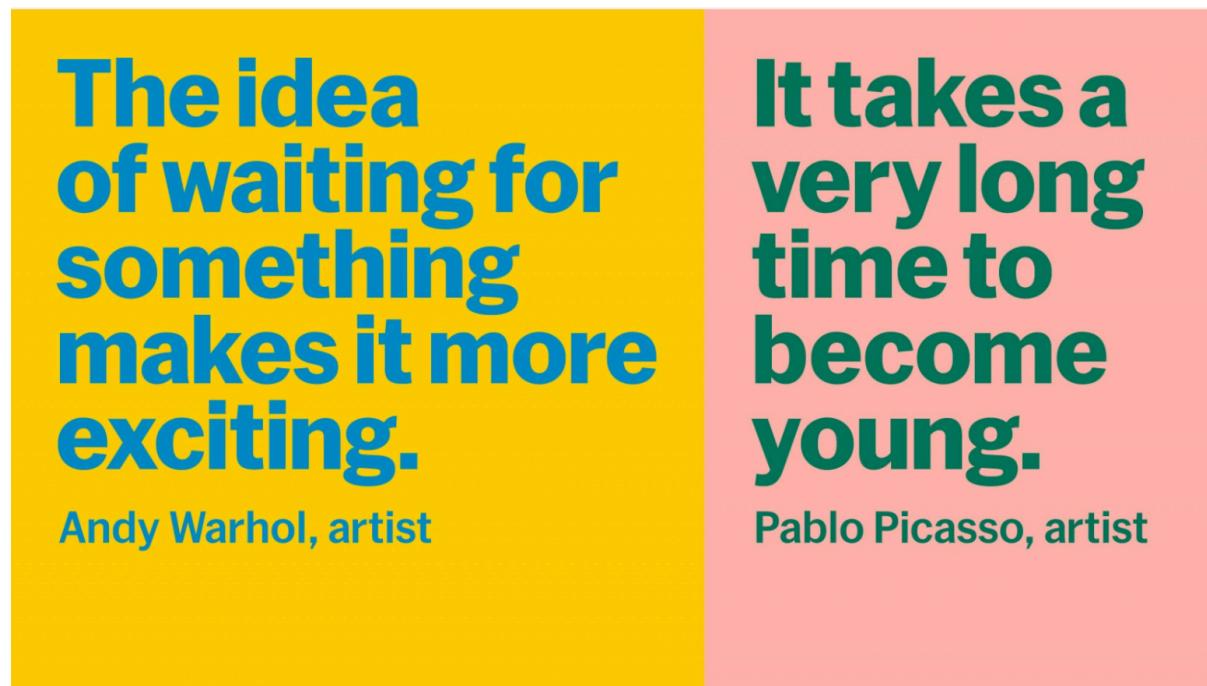


Figure 2.13 and Figure 2.14: Triboro advertisement campaign for MoMA 2019 reopening



Figure 2.15: MoMA Design Store, *MoMA Artist Quote Tote*
The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 2.16: Uncredited, Emmanuel Plat (left) and Chay Costello (right), 2018, “At Work With MoMA Design Store’s Merchandising Team,” The Behance Blog, Blog entry published April 10, 2018 by Perrin Drumm

Emmanuel Plat is the Director of Merchandising at MoMA
Chay Costello is the Associate Director of Merchandising at MoMA



Figure 2.17: MoMA Merchandising Team office, 2018
 “At Work With MoMA Design Store’s Merchandising Team,” The Behance Blog,
 Blog entry published April 10, 2018 by Perrin Drumm

MoMA Design Store

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We actively work to
 democratize good design
 at every price point.

From the [Butterup Knife](#) to the [WaterRower Rowing Machine](#) and everything in between, our goal is to make design accessible to as wide an audience as possible.



Figure 2.18: MoMA Design Store website “democratize good design” product examples
Butter-Up Knife (\$24) at right and *WaterRower Rowing Machine Model #300 S4* at left (\$1,599)

Meet the Makers

Ever wondered how our designers create? Here are their stories.



Figure 2.19: MoMA Design Store website, *Meet the Makers*, 2023
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Meet the Makers

Better than Santa's workshop, here are some of the designers who crafted your gifts this season.



Figure 2.20: MoMA Design Store website, *Meet the Makers*, 2024
The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 2.21: MoMA Design Store website, *Meet the Makers - Haricot Vert profile*, 2024
The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 2.22: Unknown, *Panisa Khunprasert in front of her display window at MoMA Design Store, 2021, The MoMA Design Store, 81 Spring Street, New York, 10012*



Figure 2.23: SVA Blog, Gabrielle Zola (Business Development Manager, MoMA Retail) and Chay Costello (Associate Director of Merchandising at MoMA) guest lecture at the MFA Products of Design class at the School of Visual Arts, NYC, 2015



Figure 2.24: Panisa Khunprasert, *Geo-Stacking Coasters*, 2017
\$30 Non-Member | \$27 Member

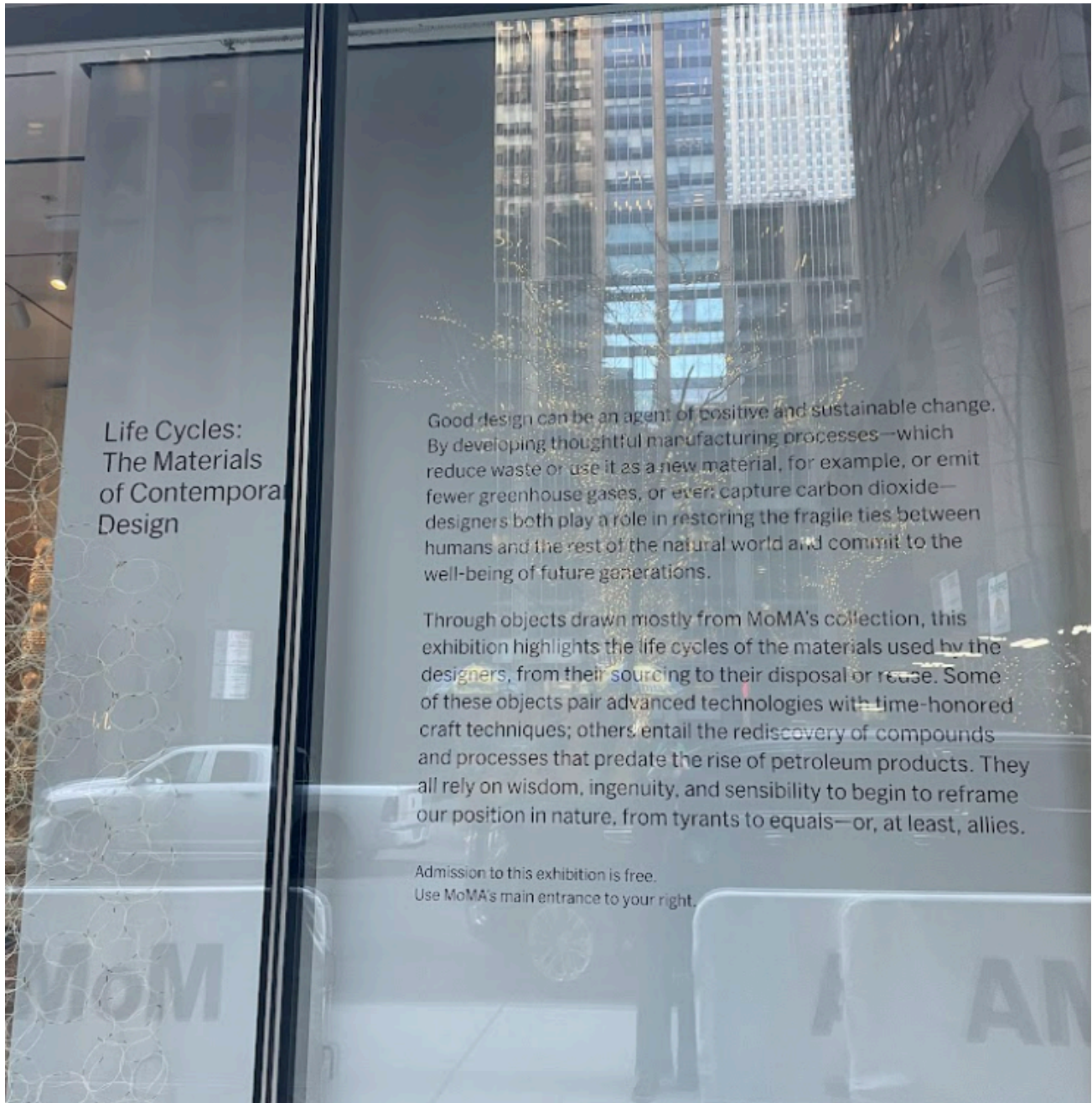


Figure 2.25: Anna Wershbale, *exterior view of Life Cycles: The Material of Contemporary Design* exhibition from West 53rd Street sidewalk, 2024



Figure 2.26: Anna Wershale, *an example of in-store green plaques*, 2024
The MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53rd Street, New York, 10019

Chapter 3 Figures



Figure 3.1: Banksy, *Exit Through The Gift Shop*, 2009, Vandalized old painting, 91×122 cm (35 5/8 x 48 1/8 inches), Unique; Signed, exhibited at *Banksy vs. Bristol Museum*, Bristol, 2009



Figure 3.2: LARQ, *MoMA Design Store Display Window "The Value of Good Design,"* 2019
 The MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53rd Street, New York, 10019
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 3.3: Yves Klein, *Blue Monochrome*, 196, Dry pigment in polyvinyl acetate on cotton over plywood, 6' 4 7/8" x 55 1/8" (195.1 x 140 cm), The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 618.1967



Figure 3.4: Anna Wershbale, *MoMA Design Store on-site*, 2024
The MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53rd Street, New York, 10019

Left: “Unexpected Discoveries”

Right: “Curator-approved products for everyday living.”



Figure 3.5: Max Bill, *Bauhaus Automatic Watch*, originally designed in 1961, rereleased in 2020
The MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53rd Street, New York, 10019

Curator's Plaque:

“This automatic Max Bill watch pays homage to the Bauhaus, where Max Bill studied multiple disciplines, from architecture to graphic design. The hands of the watch are the same red color as the door of the school, while the windows of the Bauhaus are depicted on the case back providing a clever view of the watch’s internal movement. Max Bill’s work is represented in MoMA’s collection.”



Figure 3.6: Josef Albers, *Nesting Tables*, 1926-27
The MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53rd Street, New York, 10019

Curator's Plaque:

While serving as the artistic directors of the furniture workshop at the Bauhaus from 1926 to 1927, Albers, a designer in MoMA's collection, conceived these tables from the private Berlin apartment of his and his wife Anni's closest friends.

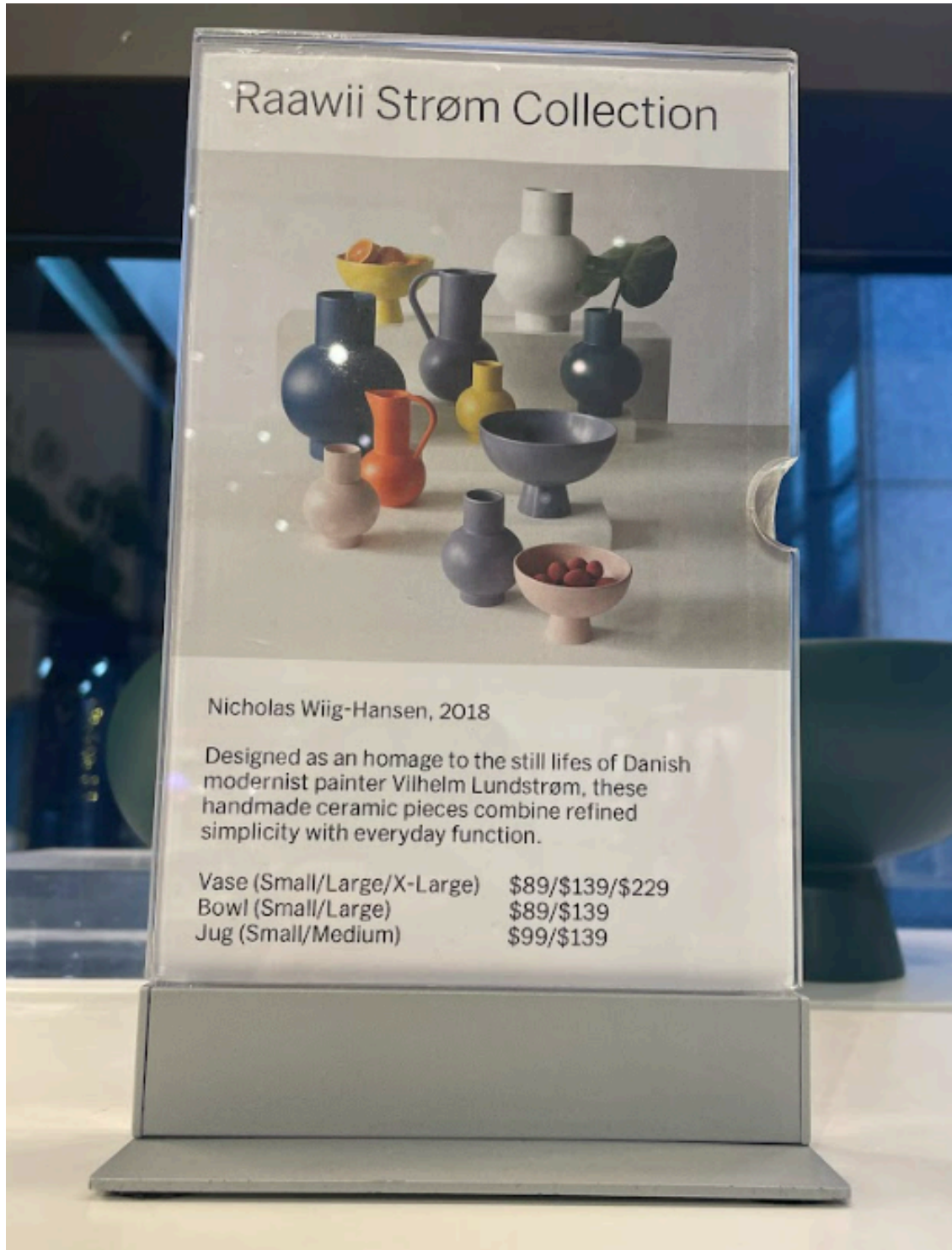


Figure 3.7: Nicholas Wiig-Hansen, *Raawii Strøm Collection*, 2018
MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53rd Street, New York, 10019

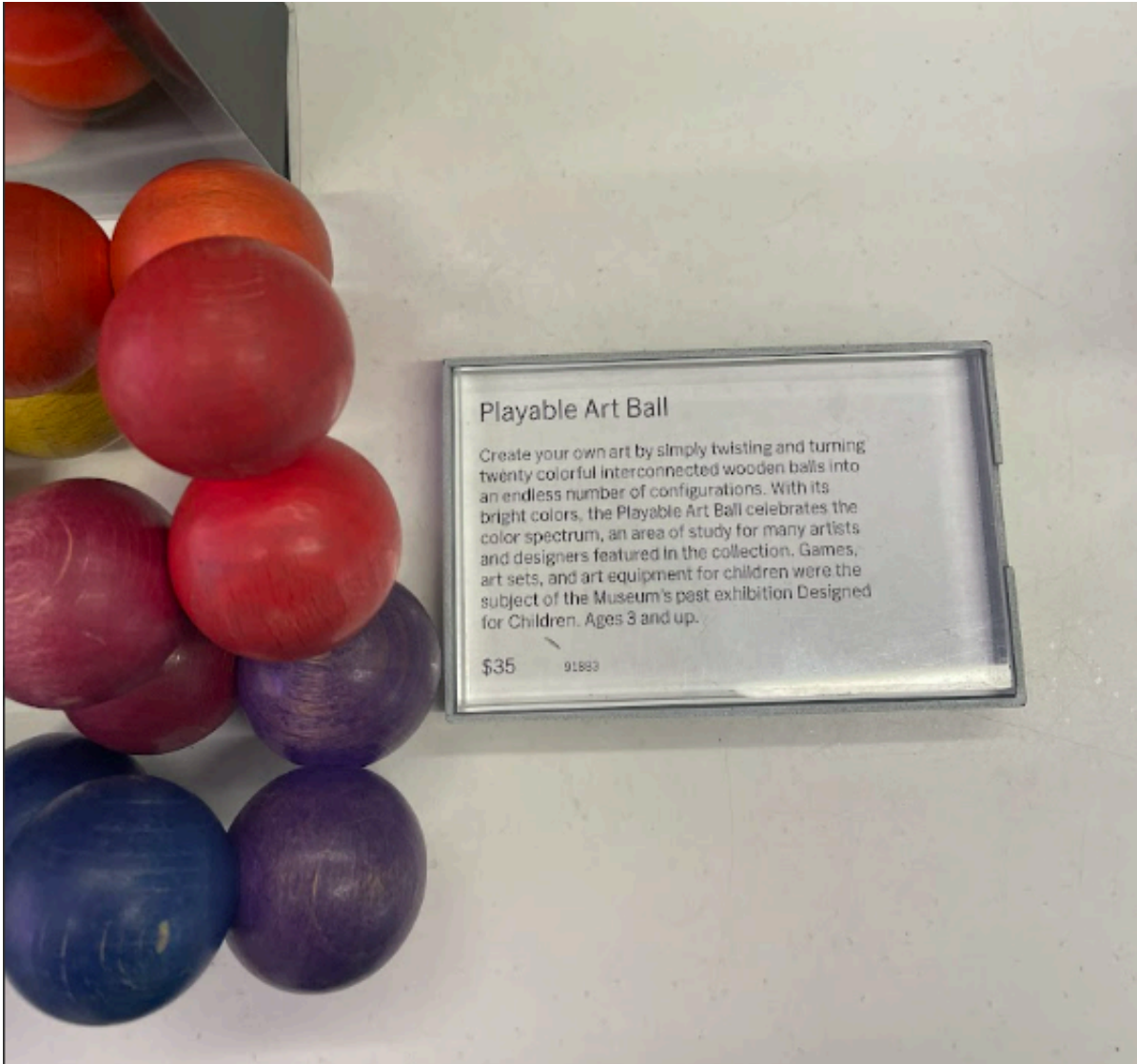


Figure 3.8: Anna Wershbale, *Playable Art Ball product display*, 2024
MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53rd Street, New York, 10019

Curator's Plaque:

Create your own art simply by twisting and turning twenty color interconnected wooden balls in an endless number of configurations. With its bright color, the *Playable Art Ball* celebrates the color spectrum, an area of study for many artists and designers featured in the collection. Games, art sets, and art equipment for children were the subject of the Museum past exhibition "Designed for Children."



Figure 3.9: Anna Wershbale, *Keith Haring Games product display*, 2024
MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53rd Street, New York, 10019



Figure 3.10: Anna Wershbale, *Display Wall of Clocks product display*, 2024
MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53rd Street, New York, 10019



Figure 3.11: Anna Wershbale, *Bookend display prominently featuring multiple editions of a Basquiat coffee book written Hans Werner Holzwarth and Eleanor Nairne, published by Taschen in 2018, 2024*

MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53rd Street, New York, 10019

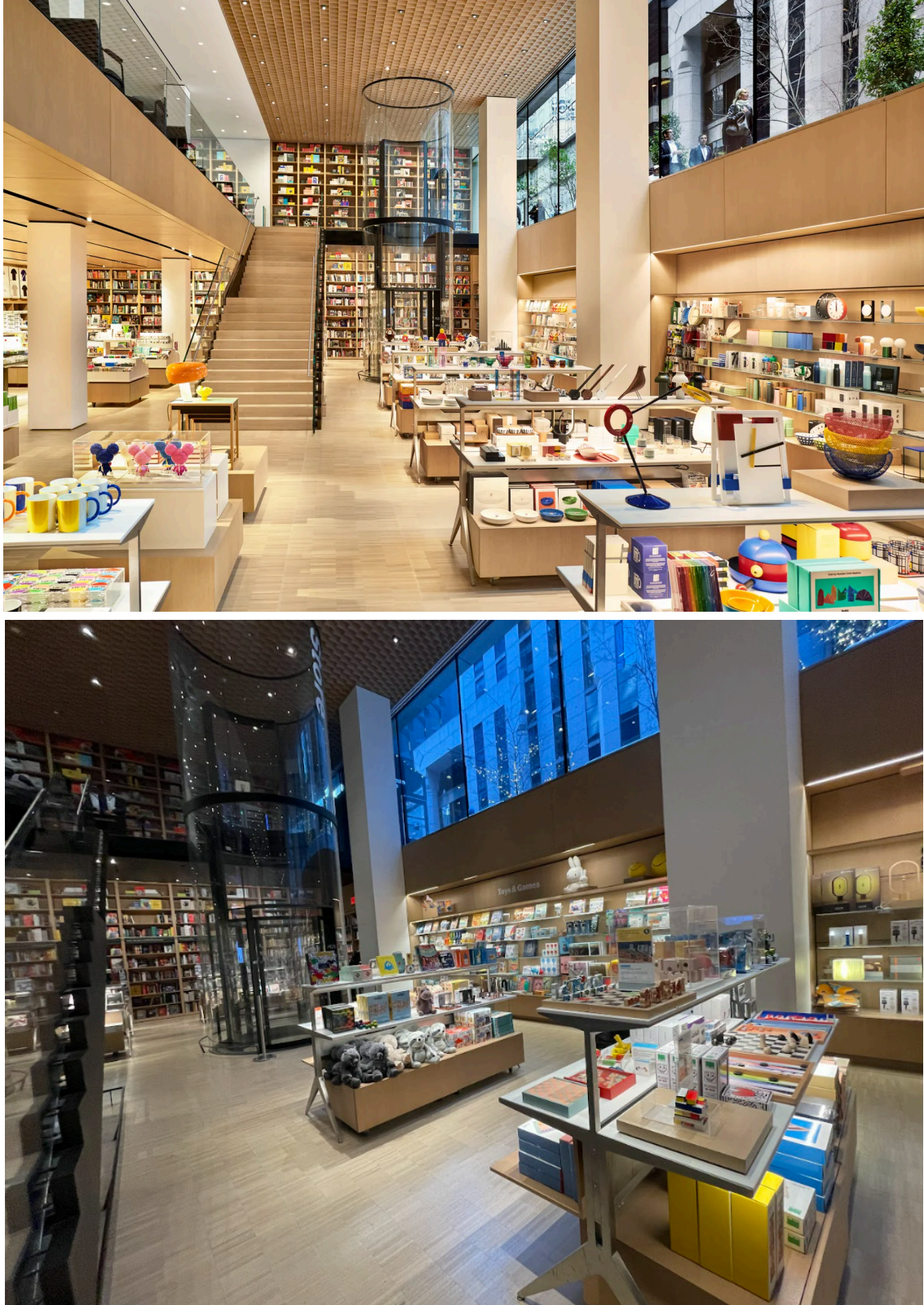


Figure 3.12: Uncredited (above) Anna Wershbale (below), *interior view of The Museum Store at Museum of Modern Art, 2024*
11 West 53 Street, New York, 10019



Figure 3.13: Anna Wershale (left) TurnOffYourPC r/bookshelf on Reddit.com (right), view of the 30 foot bookshelf at The Museum Store, 2024 (left) 2021 (right)
 The Museum Store at the Museum of Modern Art , 11 West 53 Street, New York, 10019



Figure 3.14: Anna Wershbale, *Gardening Wall Display*, 2024
 The Museum Store at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, 10019

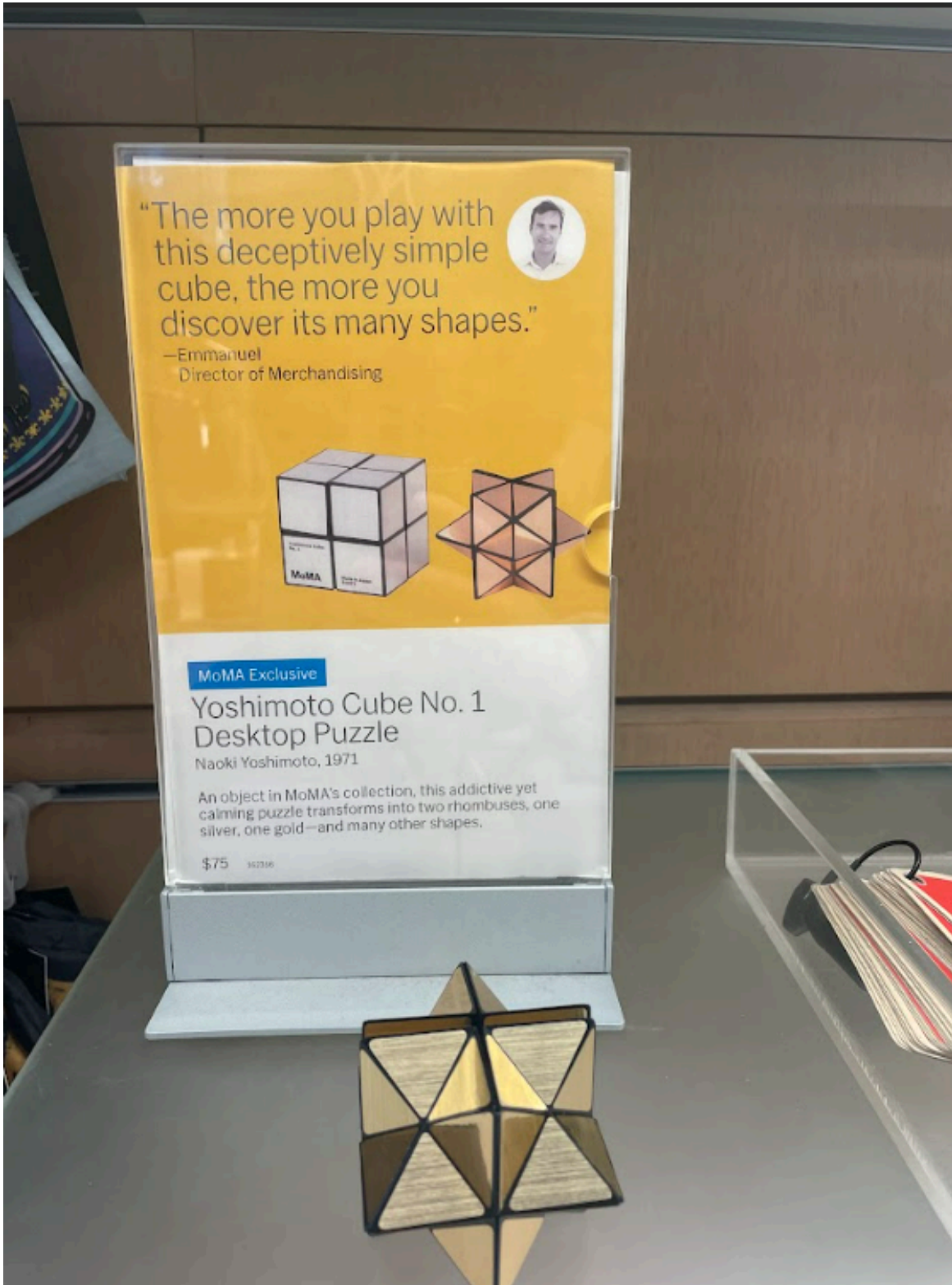


Figure 3.15: Anna Wershbale, *Yoshimoto Cube No. 1 Desktop Puzzle product display*, 2024
 The Museum Store at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, 10019



Figure 3.16: Anna Wershbale, *exterior view of MoMA Design Store, SoHo*, January 2024
The MoMA Design Store, SoHo, 81 Spring Street, New York, 10012



Figure 3.17: Anna Wershbale, *Display Window of the SoHo Design Store location*, 2024
The MoMA Design Store, Soho, 81 Spring Street, New York, 10012
Note the Yayoi Kusama gourd plushies in the bottom.

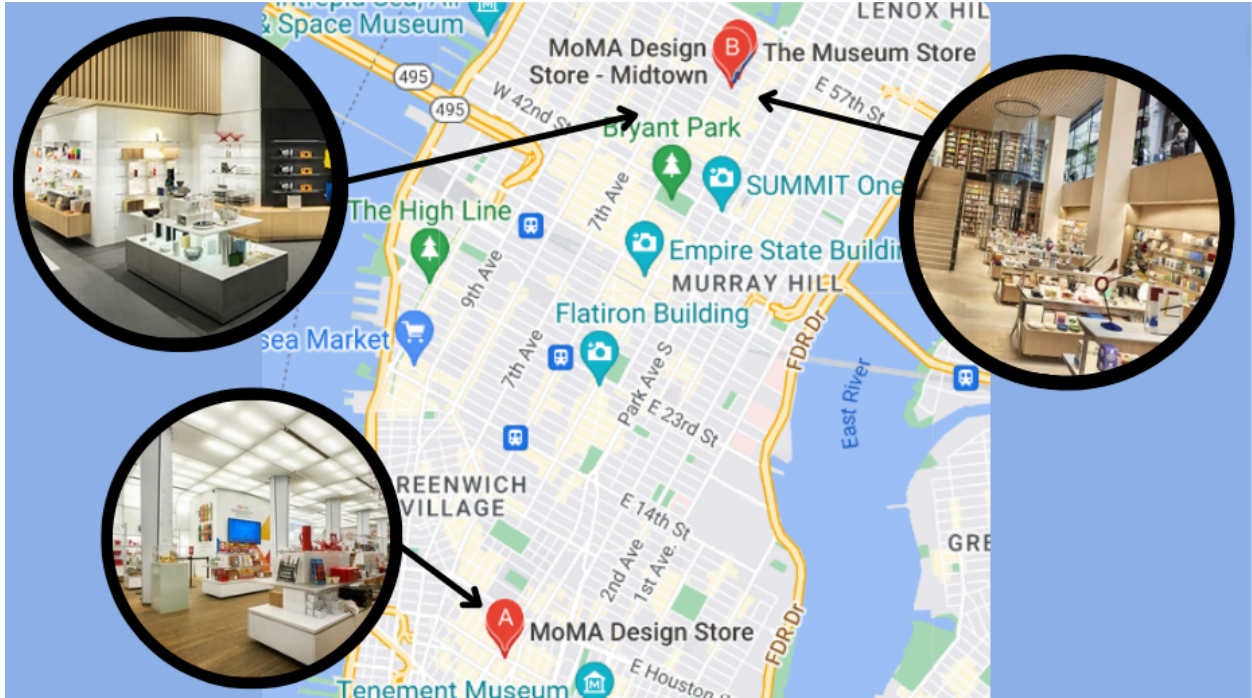


Figure 3.18: Anna Wershbale, *Map of All Design Store locations in the United States, 2024*

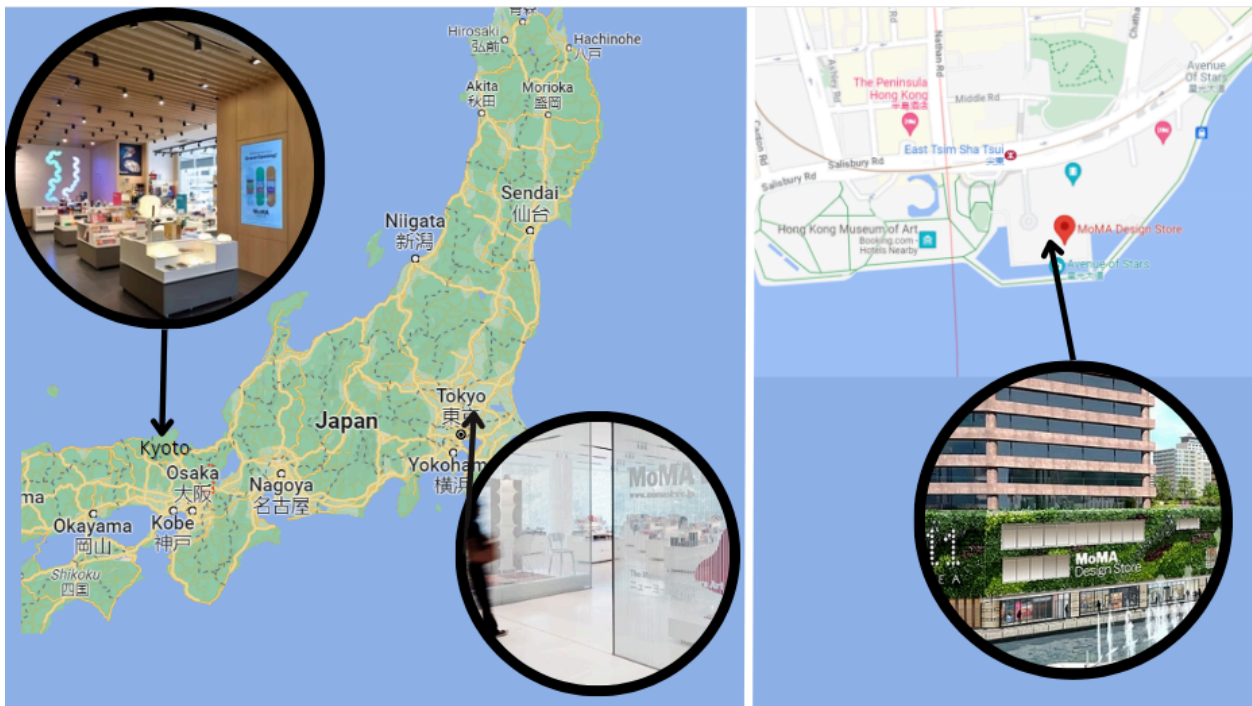


Figure 3.19: Anna Wershbale, *Map of All Design Store locations in East Asia, Japan (left) Hong Kong (right), 2024*



Figure 3.20: Anna Wershbale, *example of New York City brand specific products available through The Design Store, The MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53rd Street, New York, 10019*

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New Arrivals
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Figure 3.21: Anna Wershbale, *screenshot of MoMA Design Store US and International website landing page, February 2024*

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ダブルポイントキャンペーン対象。<4月1日午前11時まで>

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Figure 3.22: Anna Wershbaile, *screenshot of MoMA Design Store Japan-exclusive website landing page, March 2024*



Figure 3.23: Ryohei “Wabi” Kudo and Kazushi “Sabi” Nakanishi, *AIR BONSAI*, 2012,

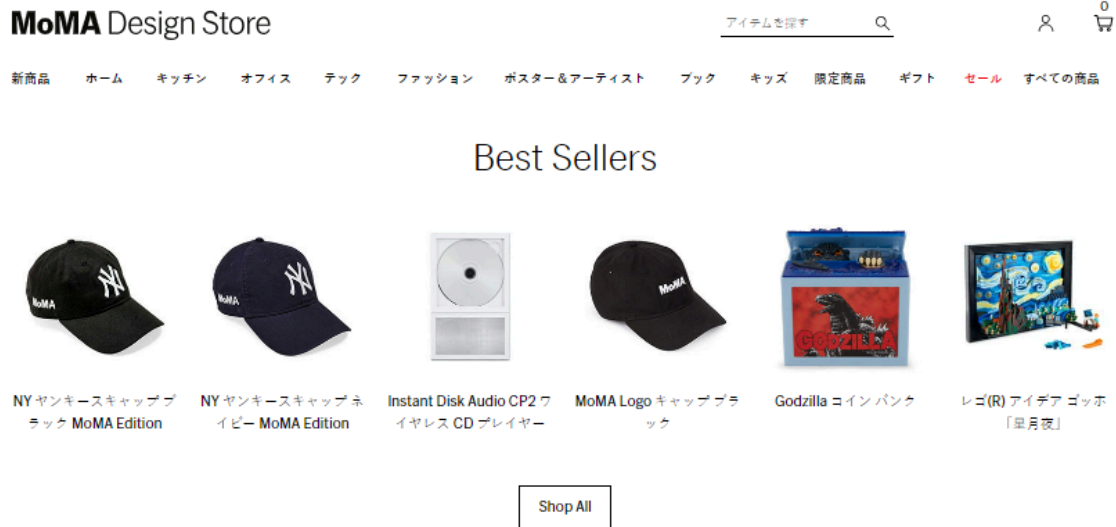


Figure 3.24: Anna Wershbale, screenshot of “Japanese Design” subsection of MoMA Design Store Japan-exclusive webstore, 2024

Site Translation from Japanese to English:

“Japanese Design”

“We have collected stylish items that are typical of Japan, such as simple shapes and materials that have a natural feel. We have a rich lineup of tableware, lighting, furniture, etc.”

(Below poster design) “Shop Isamu Noguchi: 1AT round orange framed poster

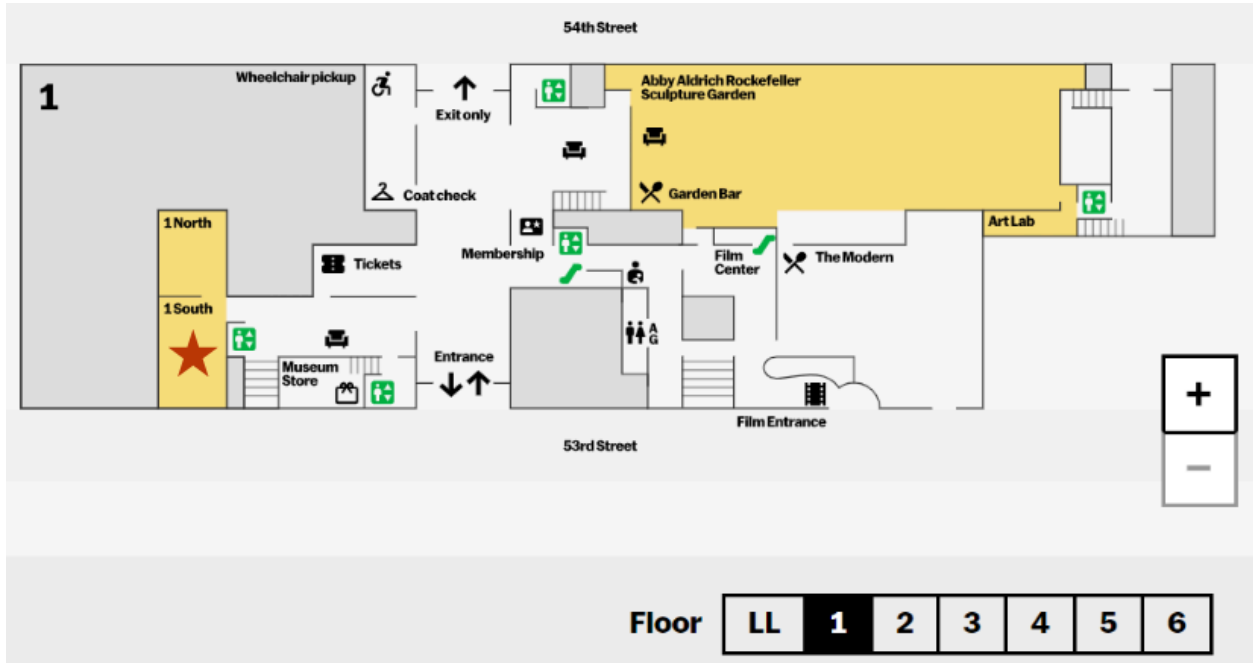


Figure 3.25: Anna Wershbale, *screenshot of The Museum of Modern Art Level 1 map, 2024*



Figure 3.26: Jeff Koons, *Pink Panther*, 1988, Porcelain on formica base, 41 x 20 1/2 x 19" (104.1 x 52 x 48.2 cm, Gift of Werner and Elaine Dannheisser, 187.1996, Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 3.27: Jeff Koons, *Three Ball 50/50 Tank* (Two Dr. J. Silver Series, One Wilson Supershot), 1985, Glass, painted steel, distilled water, plastic, and three basketballs, 60 5/8 x 48 3/4 x 13 1/4" (154 x 123.9 x 33.6 cm), Gift of Werner and Elaine Dannheisser, 226.1991.a-f, Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 3.28: Jeff Koons, *New Shelton Wet/Dry Doubledecker*, 1981, Vacuum cleaners, plexiglass, and fluorescent lights, 8' 5/8" x 28" x 28" (245.4 x 71.1 x 71.1 cm), Gift of Werner and Elaine Dannheisser, 185.1996, Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 3.29: Anna Wershbale, *MoMA x The Skateroom Jeff Koons collaboration product display*, January 2024, MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53rd Street, New York, 10019

Chapter 4 Figures



Figure 4.1: Martin Seck, *Installation view of the exhibition "ITEMS: Is Fashion Modern?"* October 1, 2017–January 28, 2018, 2017, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, IN2386.1



Figure 4.2: New Era, *MoMA Exclusive: MoMA NY Yankees Baseball Cap*, 2017, wool, sizes ranging from 6 ⁷/₈ through 7 ³/₄, MoMA Design Store

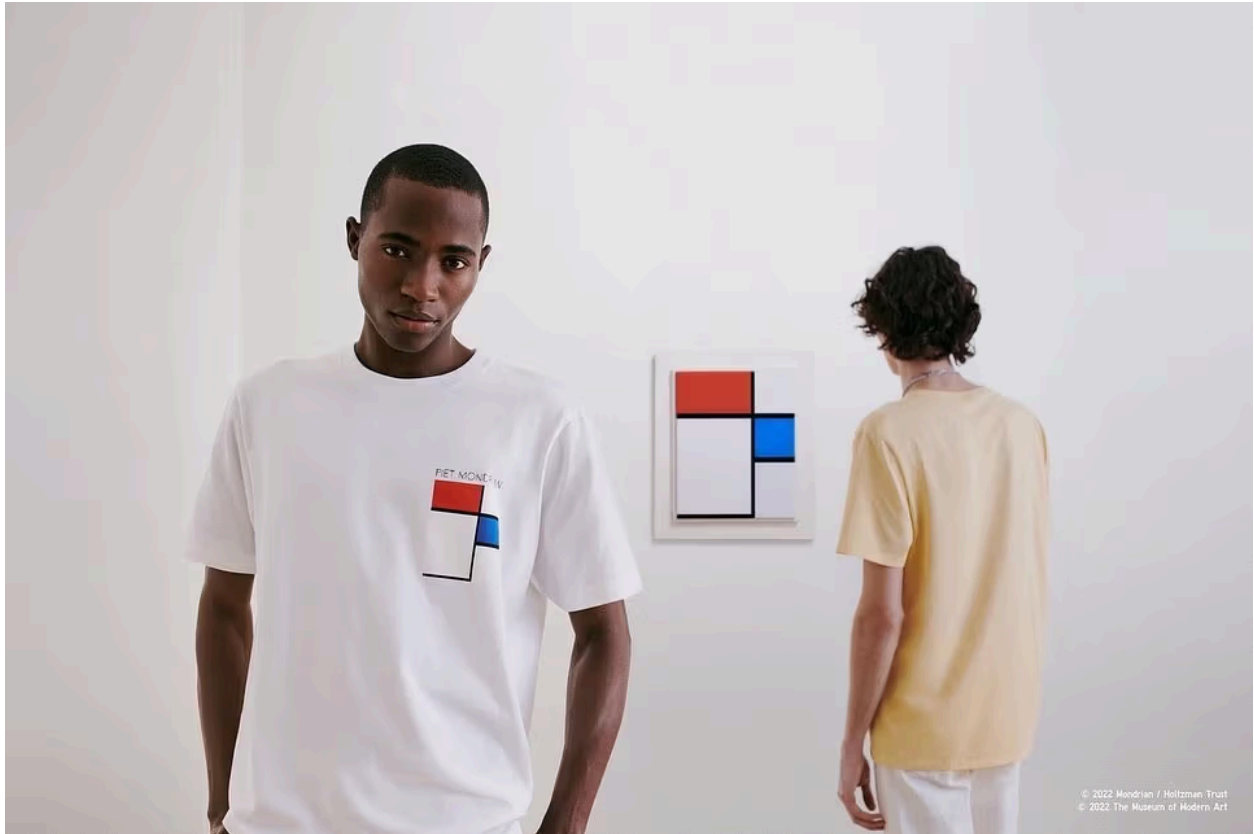


Figure 4.3: UNIQLO, *Piet Mondrian Composition No. II, with Red and Blue MoMA Collection*, 2022, cotton, made in Vietnam



Figure 4.4: example of a lesser known but still notable artist that MoMA connected to UNIQLO

Above:

Daniel Joseph Martinez, *Untitled* from *If Only God Had Invented Coca Cola, Sooner! Or, The Death of My Pet Monkey*, 2004, screenprint, composition: 26 15/16 x 20 15/16" (68.5 x 53.2 cm); sheet: 27 15/16 x 21 15/16" (71 x 55.8 cm), Museum of Modern Art, New York, 98.2011.1

Below:

UNIQLO, *Limited Edition Daniel Joseph Martinez T-shirt MoMA Collection*, 2014, cotton

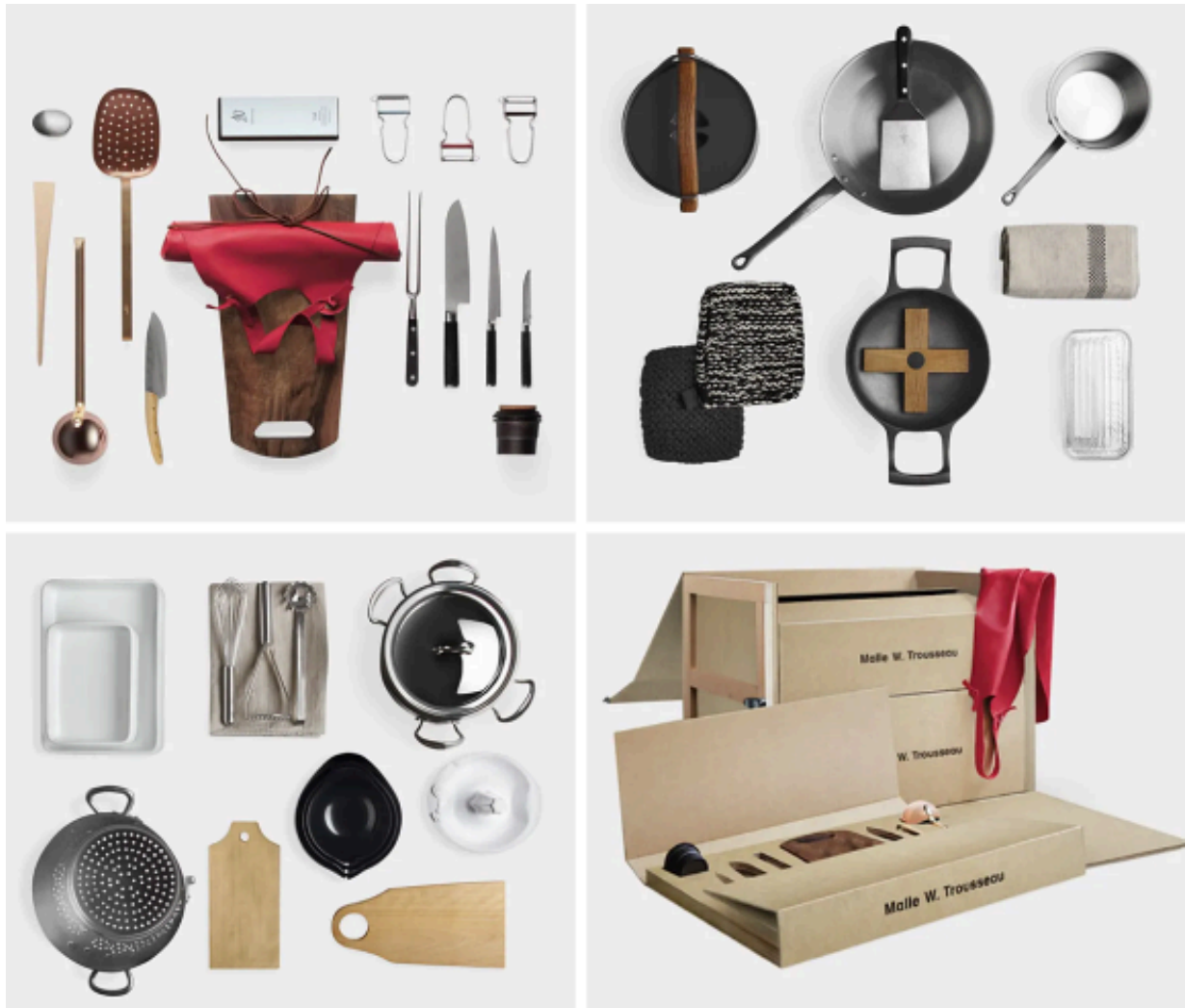


Figure 4.5: Isabelle Mathez and Frederic Winkler, *The Malle W Trousseau Kitchen Set*, 2013



Figure 4.6: William Delano, *Marine Air Terminal of LaGuardia Airport*, 1939
New York – an architectural example of the American Streamline Moderne movement



Figure 4.7: Uncredited, *photograph of Isamu Noguchi at work on study of Abraham Lincoln based on Gutzon Borglum's 'Seated Lincoln', Essex County Courthouse, Newark, New Jersey, 1924, The Isamu Noguchi Archive 03709*



Figure 4.8: Isamu Noguchi, *Death (Lynched Figure)*, 1934, Monel metal, steel, wood, rope, 88 3/4 x 31 7/8 x 22 1/8 in. (225.4 x 81 x 56.2 cm), Stamped on the palm of the proper left hand: 34 ISAMU

CURRENT COLLECTION

The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York

PROVENANCE

Estate of the artist, 1988
 The Isamu Noguchi Foundation, Inc., 1990
 Current collection, 2004



Figure 4.9: Isamu Noguchi, *This Tortured Earth*, 1942 - 1943 (cast 1963), Bronze, 3 x 28 1/8 x 29 in. (7.6 x 71.4 x 73.7 cm), Inscribed on underside: I. Noguchi '42 1/6 Number 1 from an edition of 6 (2 realized); conceived in magnesite, Fabricated by Fonditori Artistici, Rome

CURRENT COLLECTION

The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York

PROVENANCE

The Isamu Noguchi Foundation, Inc., 1982
Current collection, 2004



Figure 4.10: Isamu Noguchi, *Humpty Dumpty*, 1946, Ribbon slate, Overall: $59 \times 20 \frac{3}{4} \times 17 \frac{1}{2}$ in., (149.9 \times 52.7 \times 44.5 cm), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York



Figure 4.11: Isamu Noguchi, *Noguchi Coffee Table*, 1944, 15.75 x 50 x 36 in., configuration of the Noguchi Table is a registered trademark of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, collection at the Museum of Modern Art, New York
Below image is an advertisement of the table by MoMA Design Store, 2024



Figure 4.12: Isamu Noguchi, “*AKARI*” *IN*, 1951,
MoMA Design Store, Japan-exclusive website



Figure 4.13: Isamu Noguchi, *IAT Round Orange*, framed poster print, unknown but poster likely designed between 2019-2024
 cm: 73×54.5×2.5, 2.7kg
 MoMA Design Store, Japan-exclusive website

Curator's Plaque:

“This poster is framed with washi paper used in the lighting sculpture AKARI by artist Isamu Noguchi, whose work is in the MoMA collection.

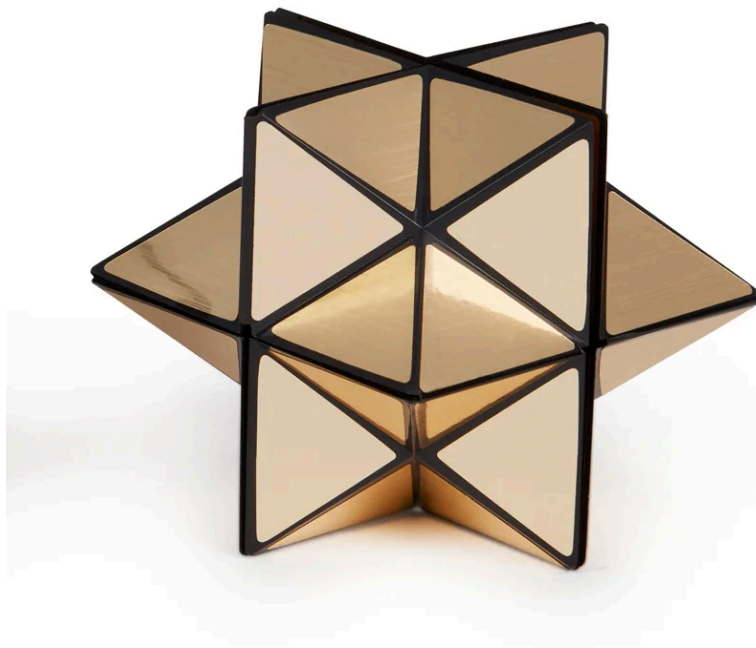


Figure 4.14: Naoki Yoshimoto, *Yoshimoto Cube No. 1*, 1971
Reproduction sold by MoMA Design Store, New York



Figure 4.15: Vincent Van Gogh, *Starry Night*, Saint Rémy, June 1889, Oil on canvas 29 x 36 1/4" in. (73.7 x 92.1 cm.) Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest (by exchange) The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 472.1941



Figure 4.16: MoMA x MEDICOM TOYS, *MoMA BE@RBRICK Vincent Van Gogh Collectible Figures*, 2021, ABS Plastic, 100%: 2.75h x 1.6w x 0.75"d, 400%: 11h x 5.5w x 2.75"d, 1000%: 27.55h x 10w x 10"d



Figure 4.17: Salvador Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931, Oil on canvas, 9 1/2 x 13" in. (24.1 x 33 cm.), Given anonymously, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 162.1934



Figure 4.18: MoMA x MEDICOM TOYS, *MoMA BE@RBRICK Salvador Dali Collectible Figures*, 2022, ABS Plastic, 100%: 2.75h x 1.6w x 0.75"d, 400%: 11h x 5.5w x 2.75"d, 1000%: 27.55h x 10w x 10"d



Figure 4.19: MEDICOM TOYS and Rinaro, *MoMA Exclusive: BE@RBRICK 400% Bluetooth Speaker*, 2023, 11h x 5w x 2.75"d in., plastic



Figure 4.20: Yoshitomo Nara, *Knife Behind Back*, 2000, acrylic on canvas, 234 by 208 cm.
92 $\frac{1}{8}$ by 81 $\frac{1}{8}$ in., private collection



Figure 4.21: Comparative example for how Nara transforms his artwork “characters” into toys

Above:

Yoshitomo Nara, *Pup King Plush*, 2020, Polyester Fibers and Plastic Pellets, 221 x 8.25"d.

Below:

Yoshitomo Nara, *Flying Pup King*, 2000, Acrylic on canvas, 40 x 44 inches (111.8 x 101.6 cm),
Museum purchase by exchange, The Dayton Art Institute, OH, 2004.1



Figure 4.22: Yoshitomo Nara, *123 Drumming Girls*, 2020, cast vinyl multiples, edition of unknown size, published by How2Work, Hong Kong © 2022, Each Overall: 7 1/2 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2 in.



Figure 4.23: Yoshitomo Nara, *Three Sisters* billboard series; **Top:** *Three Sisters Billboard (Aomori Version)*, 2006, Acrylic on paper mounted on wood frame, 120.0 x 240.0 cm;
Middle: *Three Sisters (Berlin Version)* 2007, Acrylic on wood, 102.0 x 182.5 cm.;
Bottom: *Three Sisters (New Castle Version)*, 2008, Acrylic on wood, 195.0 x 310.0 x 8.0 cm.

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