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Art at the point of sale:

Its communicative potential and four different possibilities of application

Elena Bellido-Pérez

University of Seville

ebellido@us.es

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3107-5481>

Abstract

In this text, the potential of art for retail stores is explored. No matter what product or service the store is offering than the art can always be an effective tool for pursuing certain communication goals. Being one of the most ancient communication forms, art is a wide field in which emotion plays a key role. That is why the retail sector can take advantage of the proved effectiveness of art while transferring its suggested feeling to the spatial management of the store. Thus, in this study, four different possibilities of artistic decoration in stores are described: (1) the retail management as an artistic activity, (2) the retail store as a museum space, (3) the retail store and the (integrated or recreated) artworks, and (4) the retail store and the artistic movements.

Keywords

Art; communication; retail; point of sale; store.

1. Introduction

At first glance, the concept of art can be seen as a totally different area from the retail store. Nevertheless, both are in a close relationship that is getting more stability nowadays. Although the commercial transaction is always the final goal of stores and the contemplative experience is the main aim in the art gallery, there is a powerful understanding between these both spheres. The evolution of shops and museums is happening in a frame of permanent dialogue with the public expectation, where both are trying to gain a good position in the public memory through provocation and visual moving. In this sense, the well-known quotation of the pop artist Andy Warhol has become commonplace nowadays: "all department stores will become museums and all museums will become department stores", said once.

Being Warhol a visionary or not, the truth is that the vertiginous growing of the consumption society is making a great number of museums to adopt some of the retail techniques. That is not only happening at the exit of the museum, where the public can always find a souvenir shop (being sometimes forced to pass by it if they want to exit the museum) (cfr. Larkin, 2016), but also when sometimes the museum is sharing the building with a shopping centre¹. However, this adaptation is also given in the opposite direction, as Warhol said: we are talking now about art as an advertising tool inside the retail store. Here, the consumption society is not the one who is swallowing the museum, but the stores are now trying to show an image far from their economic goals, encouraging the client's interest and curiosity.

The truth is that several stores keep and show their products as they were artworks, reproducing a museum atmosphere. However, farther than that, other shops usually integrate well-known artworks, or reproduce them with the product that they offer, making a link with the target. All these artistic decoration possibilities, inside the store and in its window displays, will be described in this text.

1.1. Retail store and art: a visual experience

Throughout the centuries, art, when addressing the emotional part of humans, has always been characterized by an extraordinary capacity for persuasion. And this potential has been conveniently used as a strategy by advertising, as commented by Eguizábal (2018) and demonstrated by Jiménez-Marín (2012). In this way, delving into the artistic strategies followed by the commercial space is to complete the network of relationships that have traditionally been between art and advertising.

To begin to describe these strategies, we depart from a fundamental basis already proposed by several theorists: art is communication (Eco, 1990, 2005; Berger, 1976; Panofsky, 1987; Read, 1973; Dewey, 2008). And what does art communicate? According to Herbert Read, the goal of art "is the communication of feeling" (1973: 13). Completing the latter, Tatarkiewicz indicates that for the work of art to be considered as such it has to "delight, excite or produce a shock" (2008: 67). In this line, Bellido-Pérez, Jiménez-Marín and García Media (2017) point out the added value of art even with specific delimited purposes (politics, propaganda...). For all these reasons, it can be affirmed that from this communicative purpose of art through which it produces pleasure, emotion or impact on the spectator, its persuasive potential is derived. In addition, this potential can be even stronger in the visual arts (since vision is the most developed sense of the human being), which are the field that we are discussing here under the term art; we refer to architecture, sculpture and painting, in line with the statements of Caro González and Jiménez-Marín (2006).

From here we can begin to trace the relationship between art and retail store: both suppose visual experiences for the public. The decoration, setting and layout of the products in the store is perceived mainly by the sense of sight. Therefore, integrating the intrinsic features of the visual arts strategically into the commercial space brings with it the benefit of managing the persuasive potential of art. The commercial environment ends up becoming a contemplative experience. It is intended, in this way, to persuade the client by provoking emotion, pleasure or visual impact. Therefore, visitors to the store will feel attracted from the beginning by the use of art or by references to artistic works, so that their possible purchase decision will have a strong initial impulse.

¹ This is the case of Louvre Museum in Paris, where you can find the Carrousel du Louvre underneath, a wide shopping centre with a direct entrance to the museum.

2. Methodology

The results depart from an initial observation and a theory review of the different integration ways of art inside the store. With the aim of creating a preliminary classification for the possibilities of art for retailing, this text explores broad categories of action that can be amplified or subdivided in future studies.

3. Results and discussion: Four categories of art integration in retailing

3.1. The retail spatial management as artistic activity

In the first place, the most general way of dealing with the interrelation between art and commercial space is to consider the spatial and decorative management of the establishment as an artistic activity, the result of which a work of art is generated. Mary Portas, in her work on the creative possibilities of the window display, defends this idea by expressing it in the following way: "Windows can be art. When creative energy is your brief, what's the difference between exhibiting in a gallery, designing a stage set or going into a window?" (1999: 14). In fact, there is a long tradition of consecrated artists who designed shop windows, and "vindicated [...] them as a magical space in which a work could be exhibited, or stand in front of it to be surprised with its content" (Jiménez-Marín, 2016: 65, TA).

One of the first, and most famous, incursions of the artist's work in the commercial area was the design of shop windows that was required from Salvador Dalí in 1939 for the Bonwit Teller department store on Fifth Avenue in New York (Pérez, 2003: 192; Jiménez-Marín, 2016). Since then, Portas narrates, shop windows began to evolve along with the artistic currents of the moment, especially after the transfer of the artistic capital from Paris to New York in the second half of the 20th century (1999: 9). In this context, Portas highlights the figure of the designer Gene Moore, who, as an exhibition director for the firm Tiffany & Co since 1956, came to hire more than 900 artists (except Warhol, all anonymous) during his years of work in the shop windows (1999: 9). It was Moore, in fact, "the first professional window designer in the United States" (Jiménez-Marín, 2016: 67, TA).

Because of this tradition, and thanks to the acceptance of the commercial space as a work of art, nowadays different designs and store layouts resulting from the work of an artist can be appreciated. These artists can, on the one hand, be inspired by movements, styles, works and other artists already consecrated, and, on the other hand, print their own style, leaving their personal mark. Above all, the fundamental thing when an artistic design and creation is done for a window display or for the interior of an establishment is to do it in consonance with the philosophy and the strategic objectives of the brand and the store. That is, when integrating art into the commercial space we must always keep in mind that the ultimate goal is still the purchase of the product, so we must work for the target of the brand and for the image of it. Art must never be *l'art pour l'art* in retailing, since art here is not an end itself, but a mean to achieve an economic transaction. In this line, a first case of a studied artistic creation in the commercial establishment are the windows of the French firm Hermès, designed by the studio Kiki van Eijk (Figures 1 and 2). It was a series of five shop windows in which, despite not directly identifying any concrete artwork or style, one can appreciate the influence of several artistic trends, such as Picasso's pink period (and its circus scenes), similar strokes to those of Cezanne or the work in general of Chagall (more prominent in figure 1). Something that also draws attention might be the references to Alice in Wonderland seen in the clocks (Fig. 1 and 2) and in the rabbit (Fig. 2), since the creative study wanted to express the concept of "the gift of time", devised by the brand Hermès (Chin, 2012). Hence, this is a good example of a joint work between the theme proposed by the brand and the artistic freedom of the studio contracted.

Fig. 1: Window display of Hermès (1), Ámsterdam. By Kiji Van Eijk (2012)



Source: designboom.com

Fig. 2: Window display of Hermès (1), Ámsterdam. By Kiji Van Eijk (2012)



Source: designboom.com

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Fig. 3: Chinese artist Wang Qingsong seated in a window display of Selfridges (London, 2006)



Source: designboom.com

As a final case to this first point, the reference to the world of painting made by Joann Tan Studio for Hermès is worth mentioning, in terms of the artistic setting in general in the store (Figure 4). It is a great example of integration of the product in the theme of decoration, since one of the main reasons that lead to the artistic setting of the store is to highlight the product in an original and striking way. With this assembly, Hermès is highlighting the quality of his handkerchiefs: his tones and his material, enhancing his fluid, silky and, of course, artistic appearance.

Fig. 4: Window display of Hermès. By Joann Tan Studio



Source: [Pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)

With all this, it can be said that, in order to delve into a functional categorization of how to set the commercial space artistically, we must bear in mind the considerations that have been broken down here:

1. The artistic vision of the spatial management of commerce.
2. The harmony and understanding between artistic freedom and commercial objectives.
3. The values that a certain artist or artistic movement can provide as an additional benefit for the brand or store image.
4. The strategic integration of products in the artistic recreation to give them prominence and to highlight their qualities, making them equal to art qualities.

In this way, by adequately treating these four points, effective artistic (visual) experiences can be carried out in the commercial space, resulting from the application of the persuasive component of art to the purchase motivation that is intended to enhance in the client or visitor.

3.2. The retail store as a museum space

Sometimes, the predisposition that the public may have when enter the store, perhaps being previously seduced by its shop window, does not differ too much from the attitude of one who enters an art gallery, seduced by its façade or its explanatory brochure. In both cases, the visitor is waiting to receive a visual experience, and it may even, in general, be sensitive. For this reason, more and more frequently, the commercial spaces express to the maximum those sensations and create, in advance, a museum environment in which to receive the public.

Therefore, the objective of this strategy is to make the client believe that, in a certain way, he or she is facing a unique product, as unique a museum piece is. Thus, the exclusivity, the value and the aesthetical features of the product are enhanced. For this, the willing environment has to incite contemplation, encouraging a slow

pace of purchase. In this way, taking the characteristics of the museum to the commercial space, the public can enjoy the visual experience without feeling that a quick transaction is expected from them.

In this sense, we can differentiate broadly two types of museum settings in the commercial space, derived, in turn, from two major types of spatial design in museums: minimalism (e.g. Guggenheim or MoMA in New York) and classicism (e.g. Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg or Vatican Museums).

- On the one hand, minimalism suggests a futuristic environment playing with whites and pure forms.
- And, on the other hand, classicism or baroque creates a sense of nostalgia, an added value derived from tradition and history.

Thus, as an example of a minimalist museum setting in a commercial space, we can refer to two of the interiors designed by Oki Sato (creator of the Nendo studio): the Beige women's clothing store in Tokyo (Figure 5) and the store of Camper shoes in Osaka (Figure 6). As for the first, the recreation of the general atmosphere of a museum is evident. By separating objects, offering each one an outstanding space inside the establishment, and with the studied lighting, Beige invites the visitor to the store to stop at each product to admire it. In this way, the leisurely rhythm of transit is fostered, similar to that existing in a museum, thus allowing reflection for purchase. The same happens in the second case, in Camper's store: the product is exposed giving it the maximum spatial prominence and inviting contemplation. Here, in addition to the exclusivity with which the product is treated, the store also plays with the sensation of movement through the placement of shoes, which further encourages admiration. What, in short, is achieved by managing the interior of the store with the inspiration of a minimalist museum is to highlight as much as possible the product, because there will always be a high contrast between it and the white background in which it is, a contrast that also is powered with a good lighting.

Fig. 5: Interior of Beige, Tokio (Japan). By Nendo



Source: azuremagazine.com

Fig. 6: Interior of Camper, Osaka (Japan). By NendoSource: azuremagazine.com

The objective when working in a classicist museum setting must also be the same: highlight the product. Developing a theatrical, baroque and pompous decoration does not have to interfere with the prominence of the product. While it is true that the contrast between the background and the product is greater in a minimalist environment, here we are still talking about a museum inspiration, and in the spatial management of a museum we always try to find the best way to highlight the work of art exhibited. Figure 7, where we see the interior of the Tommy Hilfiger store in Valletta (Malta), exemplifies this work of enhancing the luxury and exclusivity of a product in a baroque atmosphere. Again, lighting plays a fundamental role in this store: the spotlights highlight the mannequin with the clothes and make it more relevant than the Greco-Roman style sculpture that is located right next to it. In this way, the sculpture, as well as all the classicist setting of the store, is only an excuse to bring the value of work of art to the product, which is the true protagonist of the space.

Fig. 7: Interior of Tommy Hilfiger, La Valeta (Malta)

Source: Gloria Jiménez-Marín

In short, both in one museum style and in another, the goal is always the same: to arouse admiration for the product using the museum techniques so that the public stops to contemplate a work of art. Therefore, you can deduct two benefits for the brand or the store with this technique: the (automatic) categorization of the product as a work of art and the admiration of the visitor or client.

3.3. The retail store and the artworks

Regarding the field of artworks that are part of the general culture, we will see two possibilities when inserting them into the commercial space: they can be integrated directly into the store, using them as a thematic setting, or they can also be recreated (or suggested) with the products for sale. In both cases, the main thing to take into account is, on the one hand, that the work or art will be recognizable by the target audience and, on the other, the affinity of the theme, style or author of the work with both the target audience and the philosophy of the brand and the store.

Works of art integrated in the store

There are works of art that are recognized quite easily by the majority of the population. Without necessarily being experts or art connoisseurs. There are some paintings or sculptures that are part of our cultural imaginary, since they have often been used in decorations and mass communication products. This is the case, for example, of Picasso's *Guernica*, David or Michelangelo's *Pietà*, Munch's *The Scream* or Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. However, when you intend to use a well-known work of art as setting in a store, all the connotations that this work brings with it must be considered. In this way, more than (or in addition to) producing sympathy in the public when they recognize the work, it is sought that those who can know the author's story or the value of the theme and style of the work feel attraction for the store by relating it positively with the work of art.

As a first example of an artwork integrated in the establishment, the "pizz-art galleries" campaign launched by Domino's Pizza in its stores throughout the United Kingdom during November 2016 to promote its new "masterpizzas" stands out (Figure 8). To carry out this campaign, they hired an artist, China Jordan, to paint the protagonists of Renaissance masterpieces making, eating or holding a pizza (corporate.dominos.co.uk). Figure 9 shows a girl who, while eating a pizza, admires the oil version of Da Vinci's *Gioconda*, Michelangelo's *Angels and Boy with a Basket of Fruit* by Caravaggio. In this way, the sense in the choice of works is evident: they all are well-known Italian works of art, as an Italian work of art is also pizza. Thus, the works are exhibited in the pizzeria with the pretension that the public will recognize them at first, and then feel sympathy and attraction for the relationship between the new product "masterpizza" and the Italian works of art.

Fig. 8: Interior of Domino's Pizza, Glasgow (United Kingdom). By China Jordan



Source: glasgowlive.co.uk

The window display of Bergdorf Goodman also stands out as an example, in the sense we are dealing with (Figure 9). It has recreated, in the background, some faces of works of art built from post-it of different colours. In the image we can see, concretely, *Girl with a pearl earring*, work of the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. We place this strategy of management of works of art in the store inside this category (and not in the following, which is about the recreated works) because the offered product is not part of that work; that is, the clothes have not been used to recreate the work. In this case, the reason that has led to the reproduction of the work of art through post-its is the colour: the range of colours used in the window display is similar to the range present in the clothes of the mannequin. The choice of the works, therefore, could be arbitrary, since the original colours have been versioned. However, in the case of the aforementioned image, a well-known (and appreciated by the public) work has been chosen, which reveals values of elegance and sensuality that can be in tune with the product that is being offered in the window display.

Fig. 9: Window display of Bergdorf Goodman, New York (NY)



Source: stylebubble.co.uk

Works of art recreated in the store

Depending on the commercial goals (or the spatial management possibilities in relation with the product) when choosing a work of art for the setting, it can be recreated with the same products for sale. It is, without a doubt, a striking and novel way to highlight the product, to match it to the work of art and to fill it with its values. These are the three main advantages of the recreation of a work of art with the products of the store. A good visualization of this strategy is the Providence Optical window display in 2014: on one occasion it recreated Marc Chagall's *The Love Story* (Figure 10) and, on another occasion, the picture of René Magritte's *The Son of Man* (Figure 11). In both windows display, the glasses (the product that this store sells) have been integrated into the work of art. The interesting thing about appropriating a work to interpret in the store is the creative freedom that this strategy offers. For example, in Figure 10, the landscape that overlies the protagonists of the window is the city in which the optics (Providence) is located (providenceoptical. net, 2014). In this way, in addition to the sympathy and personal satisfaction that recognizing the picture can motivate in the public, they can also feel attracted to the identification of the city in the window.

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Fig. 10: Window display of Providence Optical, Providence (RI). By Ieva Liepina



Source: providenceoptical.net

Fig. 11: Window display of Providence Optical, Providence (RI)



Source: providenceoptical.net

Another option, besides the recreation of concrete works, can be the inspiration in the recurring images in a certain author. This is the case of the windows display of Tiffany (Figure 12) and Loreak Mendián (Figure 13). In the first one, the clear reference to the sky of Magritte (similar to the *Les Mémoires d'un saint*, where the same curtains appears) can be seen, as well as some of his works in which a canvas appears (*The telescope* or *The human condition*). Thus, the jewellery achieves a powerful visual effect by resorting to the surrealist painter's technique, by means of which it suggests an infinite space behind the wall of its façade. On the other hand, in the window of Loreak, the forms and functions that Salvador Dalí gave to elephants in works such as *The elephants* or *The Temptation of St. Anthony* are appreciated. In both windows display the product is completely integrated into the work: Magritte's canvas frames Tiffany's jewel and Dalí's elephants carry Loreak's shoes.

Fig. 12: Window display of Tiffany, New York (NY)



Source: indulgy.com

Fig. 13: Window display of Loreak Mendián, Barcelona (Spain)



Source: inshop.es

3.4. The retail store and the artistic movements

In this last category we will deal with art in the retail store from the artistic style or from the personality of the artist who has provoked such inspiration. We separate this category from the previous subset because it does not recreate concrete works or recurring images of the artist, but rather a general movement (Renaissance, Impressionism, Cubism, etc.), or an artistic personality who is emblem of a certain movement (Michelangelo, Monet, Picasso, etc.).

Artistic styles recreated in the store

Art, over the years, has been creating a wide range of movements and schools that, in addition to marking times and being historical references, prevail today as a source of inspiration for many artistic activities and many others, such as commercial ones, that do not pursue aesthetic purposes as a main aim. From basic interior design concepts, such as classicism and minimalism that we were dealing with before, to more concrete styles such as Fauvism or Art Deco, all have been gradually internalized in spatial designs, reaching to form and transform our aesthetic tastes. For this reason, when a store chooses a certain artistic style, it is laying down its particular tastes, attracting similar tastes among the public and making the product participate of the style's aura.

The shop windows of the Bygone vintage clothing store are a clear example of this symbiosis between the artistic movement, the philosophy of the store and the attention to a particular audience (Figures 14 and 15). Regarding the latter, it is noteworthy that, for the product offered by the establishment, a nostalgic audience is presupposed and, perhaps because of this, knowledgeable about artistic trends. In the first window (Figure 14) a cubist scene is observed, where the store plays with the forms, the perspective and the contrasts of colour; and, in the second one (Figure 15), we can see an impressionist scene, characterized by representing a painting that is being made outdoors (technique intrinsic to the impressionist movement). In both, clothing and accessories are integrated into the landscape: they form a fundamental part of the scene, without which the meaning of the window display is not completed.

Fig. 14: Window display of Bygones, Richmond (VA) (1)



Source: bygonesvintage.81.as26286.com

Fig. 15: Window display of Bygones, Richmond (VA) (2)

Source: bygonesvintage.81.as26286.com

The management of an artistic movement in the commercial space to produce a visual impact on the public is also exemplified in figures 16 and 17. In the first one, there is a shop window of the shopping centre Aizone from Beirut, inspired by pop art: striking colours, comic pictorial techniques, two-dimensional spaces... The products that are shown to the public (the garments of the two mannequins) represent a dispensable piece for the general interpretation of the window display, but they are visually integrated in the background and they rescue from it the pop style that they intend to show. Something similar occurs in Figure 18, where the clothing acquires the artistic style that is around it. In this case, the Anthropologie store in Boston has used the abstract expressionism and, in addition, this univocal interpretation has been assured in the public through a vinyl placed in the same glass of the shop window, where we can read "inspired by abstract expressionism". With this, not only are the garments being wrapped in this artistic universe (in which the study of an artist is reproduced), but also a declaration of intentions is made explicitly. In general, both in one image and in another, the strategy followed by the store is to create a window display that is visually striking and that provides a concrete artistic interpretation to the product that is exposed in it. With this same idea, a vertiginous interior was designed in Alter Store (Figure 18) where the universe of impossible spaces that M. C. Escher is recreated. By transferring this particular style to the interior of the establishment, the public is immersed in the puzzling and imaginary world that Alter Store extracts from Escher, thus increasing the interaction between the artistic setting, the product and the public, making the three part of a whole.

Fig. 16: Window display of Aizone, Beirut (Lebanon). By Arte Vetrina Project

Source: www.glamshops.ro

Fig. 17: Window display of Anthropologie, Boston (MA).



Source: iheartinteriors.blogspot.com

Fig. 18: Window display of Alter Store, Shanghai (China)



Source: yolattaescapartes.com

Artists recreated in the retail store

To finish this brief review for the possibilities of artistic setting in the store, we can refer to the recreation of the artist's personal and internal universe. His or her phrases, gestures, style of dress or anecdotes are chosen from him or her, and they are used to legitimize the product, making it part of that artistic world.

To carry out this task, personalities of strong character and quite recognized among the public are usually chosen. This is the case of Frida Kahlo, inspiration for the window display of Beads of Paradise in New York (Figure 19). This store is dedicated to sell products to make costume jewellery, which motivated the use of Kahlo as a reference: an artist with a fighting spirit who always wore his body and hair decorated with beads that referred to pre-Columbian Mexico. Therefore, Beads of Paradise launched a line in their products inspired by the artist and decorated the window with her face (formed by a curtain of beads) and mannequins overloaded with necklaces similar to those that Frida used to wear.

Fig. 19: Window display of Beads of Paradise, Nueva York (NY)



Source: [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)

4. Conclusion

As Jiménez-Marín indicates, one of the technical-aesthetic objectives of the window display (which we can apply here to the commercial space in general) is to "produce sensations" (2016: 140). All the examples of artistic setting that have been described in this text can be included in that common goal: to provoke certain sensations in the audience. Art is, therefore, the enhancing element of that effect that pursues the commercial space, since art is directed to the human emotional part. The main aim is to integrate the communication and persuasion capacity of the art in the commercial space to always obtain the purchase of the product or service as an end.

For a good management of the art in the store, it must be taken into account, as Crewe states, that "the store is never simply a visual backdrop but actively engages the consumer's imagination and shapes our

experiences, understandings and perceptions" (2016: 3). Thus, attempting that the visit of the public to the retail store is an experience full of sensations, the strategic management of art inside and outside of it is one of the most valid tools to pursue this objective.

In addition, in a more practical sense, studies such as those of Hagtvedt and Patrick, confirm the great ability of art to increase the value of product perception, transferring the qualities of luxury and exclusivity directly from art to the product (2011). On a previous occasion, Hagtvedt and Patrick focused on well-known works of art, demonstrating that "what matters [...] is that consumers recognize the image / object to be an artwork. On average, an object perceived as belonging to a general category of art will tend to elicit a set of general connotations" (2008: 219). In fact, as Jiménez-Marín also concludes, the advertising that integrates some artistic reference usually does it to advertise high prestige brands (2011). If we apply all of this to the retail store, the result is the same: an art management that elevates the prestige of the establishment (and, therefore, the brand and the products it houses).

In short, the transmission of sensations to the public, the increase of the prestige of the brand and the creation of complicity with the cultural knowledge of the visitors is what is fundamentally derived from the strategic management of the art in the retail store, using it as a tool of persuasion.

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