

MAGDALENA GYURKOVICH\*

## EXHIBITION – THE SPACE CREATED FOR THE EXHIBIT

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## WYSTAWA – PRZESTRZEŃ TWORZONA DLA EKSPONATU

### Abstract

Designing the architecture of exhibitions, especially the exhibition space, means a constant striving for attractiveness and diversity. To create a spectacular exhibition space requires talent, sensitivity and intuition from the creator, as well as experience, knowledge and the ability to apply it. The relationship between the architecture of the exhibition and the exhibit is space, tension – a dialogue that determines success and is often the essence of the balance between rationality and that which is elusive, unique for this event, impossible to guarantee. An exhibition is a place where the cognitive process should occur, but it should also be a space for the emotions of experience, and such a combination necessitates a rational and intuitive approach in the design process.

*Keywords: exhibit, narrative, presentation, exhibition*

### Streszczenie

Projektowanie architektury wystaw, szczególnie przestrzeni ekspozycji targowych, wymusza stałe dążenie do atrakcyjności i odmienności. Do zaistnienia spektakularnej przestrzeni ekspozycyjnej konieczne są: talent, wrażliwość i intuicja twórcy. Nieodzowne jest również jego doświadczenie, wiedza i umiejętność jej stosowania. Relacja architektura wystawy a ekspонат to przestrzeń, napięcie – dialog, który decyduje o sukcesie i jest często istotą balansu między racjonalnością a tym, co nieuchwytnie, indywidualne dla tego zdarzenia, niemożliwe do zagwarantowania. Wystawa to miejsce, w którym z jednej strony ma zaistnieć proces poznawczy, a z drugiej ma być to przestrzeń emocji przeżycia – ta kompilacja wymusza zaistnienie racjonalnego i intuicyjnego podejścia w procesie projektowym.

*Słowa kluczowe: ekspонат, narracja, prezentacja, wystawa*

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\* Ph.D. Arch. Magdalena Gyurkovich, Institute of Architecture and Spatial Planning, Faculty of Architecture, Poznań University of Technology, [magdalena.gyurkovich@put.poznan.pl](mailto:magdalena.gyurkovich@put.poznan.pl).

## 1. Development of exhibition forms

The date which marks the birth of exhibition design is the Great World Exhibition in London in 1851. This date begins a period of rapid development of World Exhibitions. It was also during this period that the first assumptions regarding museums were formulated, art exhibitions were organised and the role of both domestic and international industrial exhibitions came to the fore. The tradition of organising space for the purpose of a presentation is, of course, much older. Works of art were an indispensable element of sacral space, private and public, and were displayed in order to raise the rank of a place, as well as for communing with their beauty. Collections of material goods, works of art, books as well as those that would later give birth to, for example, museums of natural history, developed in Europe rapidly since the Renaissance. Collections were created by both nobles and burghers. A characteristic feature were the cabinets of curiosities<sup>1</sup> – specially arranged rooms dedicated for the sole purpose of storing and presenting collections.

The period that is assumed to be the beginning of exhibition design – that is, the shaping of the exhibition space and the presentation method itself – is the moment when the first concepts and designs appeared that were exclusively devoted to this issue. At first, previous experience guided the designers, who copied palace interiors, for example, although thriving commerce, the creation of the first storefronts<sup>2</sup> and the introduction of glass display units<sup>3</sup> created new and hitherto unused models that resulted in the emergence of new artistic and architectural vistas, opening the way towards a new approach.

The creation of industrial exhibitions was a way to present products, including handicrafts and industrial merchandise, and influenced the developing exhibitions of applied art. Exhibitions (e.g. building exhibitions) became a place for manifesting new outlooks at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. By breaking many academic dogmas, they were places of experimentation with exhibition space. Their management, guided by academic views, decided on how exhibits were to be displayed in museums. Exhibitions outside this circle gave a chance for the emergence of innovators who did not relate the artistic and spatial values found in the expression of an exhibition merely to the arrangement of the exhibits. The German Werkbund from 1914 and Bruno Taut's pavilion presented a new thought in the search for architectural form for pavilions and broke down patterns in the treatment of shape and material.

The exhibition 'International Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik' designed in 1924 by Freidrich Kiesler for the Music and Theatre Festival in Vienna is an example of a new way of shaping the exhibition space. Kiesler designed his own, independent exhibition system – the 'L and T system'. This structure was used to hang the objects and photos presented at the exhibition. The pragmatic concept of the presentation system itself created an innovative space and was the starting point for the architect's further exploration<sup>4</sup>. A year later, the same designer was invited to create an exhibition at the Austrian Pavilion at the Decorative Arts and Design

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<sup>1</sup> H. Kossman, S. Mudler, F. den Oudsten, *Narrative Spaces. One the Art of Exhibiting*, NAI publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> T. Morgan, *Marchandising. Projektowanie przestrzeni sklepu*, Arkady, Warszawa 2008, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> J. Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visula Culture*, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> A. Müller, F. Möhlmann, *New Exhibition Design 1900–2000. Neue Ausstellungen 1900–2000*, Avedition, Ludwigsburg, 2014, p. 41.

Exhibition in Paris. The exhibition was called 'City in Space'. Kiesler proposed a spatial installation. His concept was a futuristic vision of a floating city<sup>5</sup>. It was an exhibition without an exhibit, and the exhibition was the result of the creative interpretation of the designer. The 1920s gave us more important projects, such as the Werkbund exhibition in Stuttgart in 1927. The concept of this event was created in cooperation with Mies Van der Rohe. It introduced the division of the exhibition into product groups, with each part being uniformly designed and described. Divisions and colour codes were also introduced for zone designation, using coloured glass and linoleum. The hall presenting the linoleum featured a surprisingly modern approach. The linoleum was placed on platforms, but it was also suspended on the walls, treated as colour compositions, with modern letter-based graphics designed above the exhibition. The authors of the linoleum exhibition were Willi Baumeister and Karl Straub<sup>6</sup>. In the same year Lilly Reich in cooperation with Mies Van der Rohe designed an exhibition of fabrics combined with functional space – a café called 'Velvet and Silk'. The exposition was created for the 'Die Mode der Dame' (Women's Fashion) exhibition in Berlin<sup>7</sup>. The cooperation of both designers would result in several commercial exhibitions, their works characterised by spaciousness, a synergistic relationship between the exhibit, space and information graphics. In their projects, the designers presented pioneering exhibition aesthetics, which would later become the cornerstone of the art of exhibition much later.

The Russian pavilion at the 'Press' exhibition – an international press exhibition in Cologne in 1928 – was significant for the art of exhibition and for commercial graphics. El Lissitzky presented an innovative exhibition. In a spatial collage, he combined graphic art, set design, photography, lighting effects and moving objects into one coherent innovative whole<sup>8</sup>. He broke with previous conventions and created the exhibition as a separate work, as Freidrich Kiesler did at the Paris exhibition. The grand scope, the treatment of graphic elements as a medium that would increase the dynamism and the expression of the form found imitators in the art of exhibition in the future. The German Werkbund event in Paris designed by Herbert Bayer in 1930 was another important moment in terms of experimentation with the exhibition space, treating it as a spatial installation. Large slides (in various sizes), depicting the architectural projects of the Werkbund Group, were set in space at various angles within a non-uniform plan<sup>9</sup>.

The first Milan Triennial took place in 1923. It was supposed to present the relationship between industry, art and society. It went on to become an arena for excellent exhibition projects – it is enough to mention just a few names, such as: Max Bil, Giuseppe Pagano, Franco Albini<sup>10</sup>. The pre- and post-war exhibition projects presented as part of this exhibition series set contemporary exhibition trends.

The previously mentioned Freidrich Kiesler designed a contemporary art exhibition entitled 'Art of This Century' in New York in 1942, commissioned by Peggy Guggenheim. The

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> K. Schulte (red.), *Temporary Buildings. The Trade-fair Stand as a Conceptual Challenge*, Gingko Press, Berkeley, California, 2000, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> A. Müller, F. Möhlmann, *New Exhibition Design 1900–2000. Neue Ausstellungen 1900–2000*, Avedition, Ludwigsburg, 2014, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45.



designer was asked to create an exhibition consisting of four parts: a library of paintings with space for study, a gallery of surrealism, an abstract art gallery and a kinetic gallery. The author of the exhibition created an exceptional space, employing an unusual arrangement; *inter alia* he treated the paintings as objects in space, displaying them as if detached from the wall. He designed a system of multifunctional furniture for visitors to sit on and at the same time the same furniture served as easel platforms. It was an expression of the architect's special interest in designing open systems. The first experiments were a part of the 'L and T' system. Referring to the history of creating exhibition spaces, it is impossible not to mention the projects of Le Corbusier 'Pavilion de Temps Nouveaux'<sup>11</sup> and his modern exhibition based on graphics from the World Exhibition in Paris 1937, the Philips pavilion from Expo 1956 in Brussels created together with Iannis Xenakis<sup>12</sup>, as well as the pavilion and exhibition for Finland designed by Alvaro Alto, for World Exhibitions in Paris in 1937 and New York in 1939<sup>13</sup>.

This brief historical outline shows the beginnings of contemporary exhibition spaces, a place where the viewer encounters the object or topic of the exhibition. Further development of the art of exhibition took place in a multifaceted way; clear specialisations began to appear, along with the influence of accompanying issues, such as marketing theories and the emergence of new technological possibilities. This first period is an example of the strongest influence of style on exhibition projects, especially among designers associated with modernism. Another such clear stylistic exhibition manifesto in shaping the space appeared at the Expo in Osaka in 1970, where a new generation of Japanese architects presented their projects: Kenzo Tange, Kisho Noriaki Kurokawa, Kiyonori Kiyutake, who at that time were designing in the spirit of metabolism<sup>14</sup>. In the retrospective of shaping the space of exhibitions, one cannot overlook the influence of the arts, and especially performance art, spatial installations and multimedia art which were still in a developmental stage.

## 2. Development of exhibit presentation

An overview of the development of exhibition solutions and forms includes several types of exhibitions, primarily museum and gallery exhibitions, pavilions, exhibitions as part of the Great World Exhibitions and commercial exhibitions – trade fair stands.

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<sup>11</sup> K. Schulte (red.), *Temporary Buildings. The Trade-fair Stand as a Conceptual Challenge*, Gingko Press, Berkeley, California, 2000, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> A. Müller, F. Möhlmann, *New Exhibition Design 1900–2000. Neue Ausstellungen 1900–2000*, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>13</sup> K. Schulte (red.), *Temporary Buildings. The Trade-fair Stand as a Conceptual Challenge*, *op.cit.*, p. 33–34.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem* p. 41.

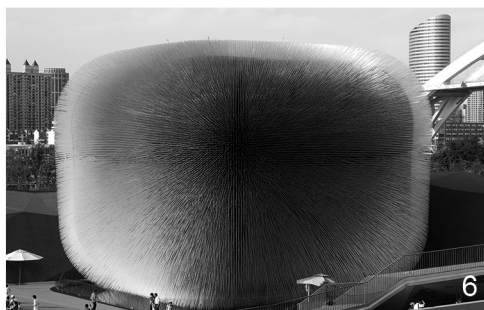
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III. 1. Art installation in pavilion of Korea, EXPO Milan 2015 (foto by the author)

III. 2. Exhibition in pavilion of Italy, EXPO Milan 2015 (foto by the author)

III. 3. Individual multimedia presentation, German Pavilion, EXPO Milan 2015 (foto by the author)





In discussing the development of exhibition methods, it is important to separate the method of approach to the exhibit from its substantive content, for which the designer is only minimally responsible. Initial assumptions for the selection of exhibits are the result of the work of curators, specialists in the presented field, and their work has a significant impact on the manner of presentation.

A synthetic view on how presentation concepts changed in the exhibition spaces was proposed by the authors A. Bertron, U. Schwartz and C. Frey<sup>15</sup>. In the opinion of the authors, the main methods of presentation were as follows:

- the 16th-18th centuries gave us cabinets of curiosities (places for storing and presenting collections).
- the 19th century saw the development of systematics, a view on the selection and presentation of collections, especially in museums, according to specialist criteria, chronology
- the beginning of the 20th century brought contextualism – dioramas. Dioramas are staged forms of presentation, recreating the often naturalist surroundings – the history associated with the exhibit.
- the 1980s brought didactics, ‘let the objects speak’. The exhibition is based on the object itself, supplemented with information.
- the 1990s resulted in scenographic solutions
- the beginning of the 21st century brought a multimedia-based perception of the exhibition

It is important to supplement this division with the changes that Wilhelm von Bode, director of the Imperial Museum in Berlin, implemented at the end of the 19th century in museum exhibitions<sup>16</sup>. His adaptations in the manner of exhibiting were the result of several conclusions he made after an analysis of the exhibition interiors at that time, paying particular attention to the viewers and their perception of the work. According to Julia Noordegraaf<sup>17</sup>, the transformation of museum exhibitions initiated in the Berlin museum was based on four principles:

- Selection of objects, qualitative selection, avoiding excess
- Particular parts of the exhibition should differ from each other in order to maintain interest and keep the visitors fresh and alert

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<sup>15</sup> A. Bertron, U. Schwarz, C. Frey, *Design Exhibitions. A Compendium for Architects, Designer and Museum Professionals*, Birkhäuser, Basel-Boston-Berlin, 2006, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> J. Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture*, op.cit., p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 92.

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III. 4. Polish Pavilion, EXPO Milan 2015 (foto by the author)

III. 5. Polish Pavilion, exposition on the roof, EXPO Milan 2015 (foto by the author)

III. 6. England Pavilion, EXPO Shanghai 2010, Source: Shutterstock.com, copyright parkisland

III. 7. Siemens trade fair stand, Hannover Messe 2017 (foto by A. Myślak)

- Every object – work of art, should have its own space
- The design and arrangement of the exhibition should support the aesthetic reception and be selected according to the type of exhibition.

The presented evolution of the treatment of objects at an exhibition shows what requirements are placed on their substantive presentation. The first nineteenth-century exhibitions were based strictly on the rules of knowledge; exhibits were strictly arranged, for example, by type, chronology, and school. This rigid canon translated directly into the way the exhibition was shaped. Subsequent practices such as contextuality, stage design and staging elements allowed for the introduction of elements that would individualise the presentation.

Nowadays, the diversity of exhibits and topics leads to different approaches; we have showpiece exhibitions, where the main, dominant element of the exhibition are selected objects. An alternative variation of the exhibition is the presentation of a topic – an issue, and here the exhibition elements take on a more major role. The content of the presentation is not based on exhibits alone but on information, atmosphere, reconstruction of the exhibit's surroundings or even its replication. In such cases, the exhibition design is the carrier of the content and moves from a background role to the focal point of the exhibition. These are narrative exhibitions, requiring credibility of information while also giving the designers space for their own interpretation.

These are two basic divisions of contemporary exhibitions, especially but not exclusively regarding museum exhibitions. They can also be found at trade fairs and Expo exhibitions.

### 3. The Exhibit in the exhibition space

The projects and concepts of how to approach the exhibit executed by two Italian architects – Franco Albini and Carlo Scarpa – constitute an important contribution to the discussion on the formation of exhibition space, especially the role of building a relationship between the exhibit and its surroundings.

Franco Albini, architect, designer of trade fairs as well as museum exhibitions, including exhibitions at the White Palace in Genoa, and Carlo Scarpa, author of exhibitions including at the Museum of Castelvecchio in Verona, and the exhibition in the Canovy Museum and Cast Gallery in Possagno, paved the way for Italian museology with their projects in the 1950s and 1960s<sup>18</sup>.

A characteristic feature of the exhibitions designed by Franco Albini was a focus on the object being presented, designing perfect details as simply as possible – for example, foundations, showcases, supports – with the work of art (the exhibit) considered as the only protagonist of the exhibition; therefore, it can be said that this is the creation of an exhibition starting from the exhibit. Carlo Scarpa also designed individual elements of the exhibition, but he was interested in building a relationship, a dialogue between the exhibits – for example, the mutual orientation of sculptures and the relationship of the exhibit with the space where it is exposed. He treated the elements he designed in the same way – not only to meet the needs of the exhibit presentation but also to be a coherent element of the composition, creating a relationship.

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<sup>18</sup> E. Bonfantii, M. Porta, *Citta'*, Museo e Architettura. Il Gruppo BBPR nella kultura architettonica Italiano 1932–1970, Hoepli, Milano 2009, pp. 151–152.



The juxtaposition of the approaches of these two artists constitutes an important voice in the discussion of the role of the exhibit in shaping its relationship with the location, and the role of the near and distant surroundings.

Franco Albini focused on the object, on its best exposure, creating details, referring to the rational features of the exhibit. Carlo Scarpe was interested in the intangible value that arises from the dialogue of forms that builds their relationship; such a phenomenon cannot be programmed; it is a feature of the designer's sensitivity, his intuition, the one who gives such a relationship the opportunity to exist

#### 4. An exhibition is a story

An exhibition is a 'story about...' an event, a work of art. It is the building of space in which the viewer discovers, learns, communicates with the issue on display. A presentation based on an exhibit is based on the contents it brings to the presentation. A different situation occurs when the exhibits are missing or provide only part of the information, and the required content must be added. In that case we are dealing with the aforementioned narrative exhibition. This concept of presentation has a long tradition – in the form of dioramas from the beginning of the century, staged presentations describing an exhibit or issue. Thanks to such presentations, especially at exhibitions popularising a given message, the message became more comprehensible to the viewers. The creators of contemporary exhibitions have a wide range of solutions at their disposal that build narratives: using graphic forms, reconstructions of space, drawing from stage design methods, as well as building their own allegories of the topic. Hans Dieter Schaal, who in his projects skilfully combines set design with abstract architectural forms, can be considered a representative of this concept. His exhibition from 1994 entitled '1200 years of the City of Frankfurt am Main'<sup>19</sup> was an extensive architectural composition. The architect introduced viewers to his originally designed world, and this new space was where the exhibits were presented.

Frank den Oudsten entitled the introduction to the deliberations on contemporary exhibition projects 'The Poetry of the Place about the Role of the Story'<sup>20</sup>, thus broadening the view of the exhibition as a space for storytelling, a place for conveying a message, not only for announcing or telling a story. In the title, Oudsten compared the exhibition space with a sublime literary form, one of whose materials is metaphor. In exhibition projects, it allows one to depart from literalness, to give an individual impression to the exhibition, adding uniqueness and distinctness. A metaphor can refer to the nature of the exhibition, its physical values as well as ideological ones. The creators of the scenario of the exhibition at the Polish pavilion at the Expo 2015 in Milan appealed to narration and metaphors<sup>21</sup>. On the roof, where the visitors started their exploration of the Polish exhibition, the authors placed a garden, or rather a metaphor of a magical garden, where the plants and

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<sup>19</sup> F. W. Werner, *Hans Dieter Schaal In-Between: Exhibition Architecture, Ausstellungsarchitektur*, Axel Menges, Stuttgart/London, 1999, p. 52.

<sup>20</sup> H. Kossman, S. Mudler, F. den Oudsten, *Narrative Spaces. One the Art of Exhibiting*, NAI publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Scenariusz ekspozycji w pawilonie polskim na wystawie Expo 2015 w Mediolanie*, Retrieved: [www.paih.gov.pl/files/?id\\_plik=24593](http://www.paih.gov.pl/files/?id_plik=24593), access: June 2018, p. 22.

flowers were supposed to represent the Polish landscape and symbolically made a reference to Polish painting; the illusion of space was obtained by laying the walls with a mirror. The space, according to the concept, transported the viewers into a mysterious fairy-tale world. A metaphor or symbolism is sometimes the core not only of the exhibition but the whole shape of the building, which integrates exhibition space into the architectural form. Such was the case with the British Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo in 2010, designed by Heatherwick Studio and constructed using 7.5 metre acrylic glass rods; the seed of a plant was placed at the end of rod from the interior; the authors referred to the mission of collecting 25% of plant seeds found on the Earth. Kew Gardens' Millennium Seedbank undertook this task and the institution joined the project. The so-called Seed Cathedral, as the pavilion was referred to, was illuminated inside during the day by daylight entering the interior through acrylic rods, which shone and lit up the seeds. In the evening and at night, the inner illumination emitted light to the outside through the structure of the pavilion. The pavilion was a synthesis of ideas and technologies.

Holzer Kobler Architekturen is an architectural design company that has many projects and exhibitions in its portfolio, including the design of an exhibition at the Museum of the History of the Army in Dresden. The author of the reconstruction architecture was Daniel Libenskind. This project demonstrates the special skill of building narratives and spatial metaphors in arranging the exhibits themselves. The compositions build a relationship with the architecture, while at the same time adding a dramatic touch to the exhibition<sup>22</sup>. The designers use the exhibit itself as the object and material of the exhibition.

## 5. Commercial exhibitions

A trade show stand is a space dedicated to the presentation of products, addressed to users and to visitors who are interested for professional reasons. The stands are surrounded by space with the same function and this forms a competitive relationship. The basic assumption is to stand out, mark what makes you different, highlight the uniqueness of the presented objects. This is often connected with the company's image and how it should be perceived, which translates directly into shaping the space. The criteria of attractiveness, readability and cost-effectiveness are the determinants of success for the investor. The input of the client in the style and form of the stand is an important factor defining the majority of projects. The client is guided in his decisions by fashion as well as tried-and-tested standards.

The styles and forms of the art of exhibition depend not only on the clients' decisions but also on significant technological changes such as the appearance at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s of systemic solutions, shortening the time needed for implementation, simultaneously leading to a partial unification of the architecture of trade show stands. This was influenced by marketing theories, such as Six Sigma from the 1990s, the assumption of which was to limit the costs incurred by enterprises, among others, on design<sup>23</sup>; as a result, no importance was attached to the quality of the stand space and the main focus was on

<sup>22</sup> Retrieved: [www.holzerkobler.com](http://www.holzerkobler.com), access: June 2018.

<sup>23</sup> J. Lorenc, L. Skolnick, C. Berger, *What is Exhibition Design*, Mies 2007, (*Czym jest Projektowanie Wystaw?*), RotoVision / ABE OM Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2008, p. 22.

efficiency. As indicated by A. Bertron, U. Schwartz and C. Frey<sup>24</sup>, in both museum and trade show exhibitions, multimedia technologies, implemented in the space of the stand as a construction decision in its entirety, dedicated individually to the visitor (e.g. monitors for the individual presentation of information), became an important building block of exhibitions in the 20th and 21st century. Almost every trade fair sees dozens of implementations of this type. Ephemeral, they last a few days, although some projects are documented and become design events. Following such examples, we can distinguish some great projects, with an exhibition area of a few thousand square metres, where the exhibition space is combined with reception and office functions. Characteristic here is the combination of high-quality stand space with changing architectural concepts that maintain a consistent appeal of each re-occurrence. The goal of the presentation is the product and its display, which play the main role in such projects.

The architecture and the concept of the stand often focuses on the background; this is crucial for the effective presentation of the products or services on offer. Siemens' large presentation at the Hannover trade fair can serve as an example. The company presents a very large number of exhibits in the same place every year; the exhibitions combine modern multimedia techniques with a classic form of presentation with some architectural narration – e.g. a city in 2017 – although the idea of storytelling lies in the background and is an addition to the overall concept. The idea for the exhibition, its character, was closely related to the nature of the exhibits, the visitor's expectations and the image of the exhibitor, an example of high-quality space where a rational approach prevails.

The investors and creators of original booths choose another route, where the idea and sensitivity of the designers leads to the creation of unique spaces with an individual character. Small companies as well as large enterprises opt for such projects. They employ simple associations as well as metaphors, guided by their own style and design intuition. An example of this are the projects by Karim Rashid, who makes a huge impact on each project with his characteristic style. He has created exhibits for Deutsche Bank, Pepsi, Audi, etc.<sup>25</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

The history and contemporary design of exhibitions in each of their aspects is a combination of rational arguments with design intuition. It often involves the weighing of arguments between rational and volatile elements that determine the uniqueness of the project. In the assessment of exhibitions, one of the criteria is its attractiveness, and in the case of trade show stands this combines with the need to stand out from the crowd. Rationality gives certain guarantees, but what intuition gives in the choice of the method of communication can achieve real success. Both of these aspects affect the shape of the architectural form as well as the way it interacts with the exhibit.

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<sup>24</sup> A. Bertron, U. Schwarz, C. Frey, *Design Exhibitions. A Compendium for Architects, Designer and Museum Professionals*, Birkhäuser, Basel-Boston-Berlin, 2006, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> Retrieved: [www.karimrashid.com](http://www.karimrashid.com), access: June 2018.

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