

THRESHOLD DESIGN PORTFOLIO

HASTA DESIGN BY MICHELLE BURK



What to Anticipate

As a multi-sensory threshold designer, synesthete, and strategic systems architect, I create products and experiences that fuse the symbolic with the concrete by bringing the metaphysical into material form. My work lives at the intersection of speculative design, systems thinking, and sensory storytelling. I'm drawn to re-imagining overlooked spaces and re-framing how we relate to technology, one another, and the unseen structures around us. What you'll find here are speculative Threshold Design projects reflecting the type of work I do, and the kinds of services I offer.

Please enjoy exploring.



INCLUDED HERE

IF YOU'RE STILL CURIOUS...

Projects



Museum of Textile History



U of Hampton First Year Seminar

Experiences



Pre-Human Olfactory Exhibit



Dinner with Dinosaurs

I don't like to inundate people with too much information. If you're interested in seeing more projects or case studies, such as **Dinner with Dinosaurs**..reach out!

The Limen Museum of Textile History

The Limen Museum of Textile History is a forward-thinking institution devoted to the preservation, reinterpretation, and innovation of global textile traditions. Located at the threshold between the historic and the emergent, the museum curates a living archive of cloth, craft, and culture, illuminating how textiles have shaped societies across time.

Signal Static

Despite its innovative work in sustainable textile research and curation, the museum faces a critical engagement gap: its exhibitions and initiatives remain largely siloed from the wider design ecosystem.

The museum seeks to activate a broader, more integrated relationship with two key communities: **professional designers** and **design students** from the nearby university.

However, without a structured, resonant programming strategy that bridges historical depth with contemporary design relevance, these audiences remain under-engaged. The museum needs a multi-modal solution that not only **elevates its current sustainable textile work** but also **invites co-creation, learning, and dialogue** across generational and professional thresholds.



The Hasta by Michelle Method

1. Signal Before Strategy

Before offering solutions, **I observe and listen deeply to people, spaces, and systems. This includes identifying subtle patterns, repeated friction points, and unspoken needs.**

General Action Steps:

Hold listening sessions with university design students, museum staff, and independent designers to identify gaps in engagement and overlooked ideas.

Conduct a resonance scan across past programming, communications, and exhibition materials to identify recurring themes and overlooked narratives.

Analyze visitor behavior patterns through observation and internal reports to detect moments of emotional engagement, confusion, or disengagement.

Review social media and press coverage to see what aspects of the museum's work were being highlighted, misunderstood, or ignored.

Interview "invisible stakeholders" such as custodial staff, visiting researchers, and adjacent community members to surface hidden friction points or opportunities.

Hasta Touchstones:

Map symbolic motifs used in the museum's visual identity and exhibit design to identify potential disconnects or resonances with target audiences.

Identify internal contradictions (e.g., a mission for innovation vs. static programming formats) as key signal sites for future transformation.

Locate institutional thresholds where the museum was already attempting to evolve (e.g., new sustainable textiles initiative) but lacked connective programming.

Synthesize findings into a Signal Map, highlighting emotional hotspots, missed opportunities, and emerging invitations for engagement.

2. Translate Into Structure

I take the raw signals uncovered earlier and begin shaping them into actionable, human-centered design elements. I identify core themes, align them with institutional goals, and create frameworks that transform insights into invitations. I define program formats, spatial flows, and partnership models that scaffold engagement without constraining it. At this stage, I don't prescribe content, **I design the *conditions* for resonance, co-creation, and evolution.** The structure holds space for the signal to stay alive.

- **Identify three core themes** from the Signal Map: *Material Futures*, *Community-as-Archive*, and *Co-Design as Dialogue*.
- **Develop a programming scaffold** that connects the museum's sustainable textile research with real-world application projects for design students.
- **Create a modular engagement framework**, enabling the museum to host workshops, exhibitions, and critiques in formats that flex between expert-led and student-generated.
- **Propose a cross-institutional residency model**, pairing university students with museum curators and local textile designers for seasonal collaborative research.
- **Outline spatial reconfigurations** for temporary installations that invite tactile interaction, process transparency, and participatory storytelling.
- **Define clear, tangible engagement pathways** for three audience groups: professional designers, students, and educators, ensuring each has a meaningful point of entry.
- **Establish a feedback loop structure** to gather qualitative insight after each event, enabling continuous refinement and mutual learning.

3. Exit With Architecture

I ensure that everything we've created together is structured to evolve beyond my involvement. This includes codifying the design principles that emerged during the process, establishing sustainable rhythms for future programming, and offering visual tools or templates that make the work replicable, scalable, and adaptive. The architecture I build at this stage is not static; it's a flexible framework that can respond to change while holding onto the integrity of the original signal.

- **Deliver a strategic playbook** that outlines the core programming model, engagement paths, and adaptable frameworks for future use.
- **Codify design principles** (e.g., *sustainability-as-process, co-creation over consumption, ritualized tactility*) drawn from the engagement.
- **Create a calendar scaffold** that guides the museum's year-long programming around seasonal themes and audience rhythms.
- **Design branded templates** for workshop invitations, community feedback collection, and cross-institutional collaboration pitches.
- **Develop a legacy map**, showing how each initiative connects to long-term museum goals, audience development, and cultural positioning.
- **Train internal teams** on how to use the tools and frameworks so that they can evolve the programming independently.
- **Recommend metrics for resonance**, not just attendance, but qualitative indicators like repeat participation, emotional impact, and project continuation.

Final Deliverables:

- A co-created *Internal Ethos*
- A *5 Year Plan* for integrating more interactive design
- An *Event Strategy Plan* for the first Textiles Museum Fashion Show
- A full *Curriculum & Internship Guide* for Design students
- A *Comprehensive Job Posting* for a Designer-in-Residence designated to work with the museum on outreach, scholarship, community engagement, and student guidance.

TIME PERIOD: 3 months

Pre-Human Olfactory Exhibit

The Natural History Institute is a leading cultural institution renowned for its immersive, interactive exhibits and its commitment to showcasing cutting-edge research. With a strong focus on public engagement, the museum highlights groundbreaking scholarship in Anthropology, Ethnography, Archaeology, Botany, and Entomology, offering visitors a dynamic window into both the ancient past and the evolving natural world.

Signal Static

Since its opening a decade ago, the Institute has become a respected fixture in the community, praised for its engaging exhibits, vibrant events, and its role in deepening public awareness of the region's natural and cultural heritage.

However, as the Institute approaches its **10th anniversary**, it faces a subtle but significant challenge: **visitor engagement has plateaued**. Recent surveys reveal that some of the once-interactive features are now seen as "stale" or "predictable." What was once novel has become expected.

The institute now seeks to mark this milestone not with nostalgia, but with **renewed curiosity**, offering an experience that feels fresh, surprising, and attuned to the evolving interests of its audience. The question becomes: **How can we reawaken wonder and reaffirm its role as a space of exploration?**



The Hasta by Michelle Method

1. Signal Before Strategy

In this phase, I listen before I lead. I investigate how audiences are currently engaging with the museum, what moments fall flat, and where latent excitement still lives. I gather both qualitative and symbolic data, reviewing visitor feedback, observing spatial behaviors, and interviewing staff across departments to surface hidden insights. The goal is to detect where friction and fatigue are emerging, and where energy is waiting to be reignited.

Actions Taken:

- **Review visitor survey data** to identify language patterns around engagement fatigue (“predictable,” “seen it before,” etc.).
- **Conduct staff interviews** across curatorial, education, and guest services teams to gather cross-perspective insights.
- **Observe visitor behavior** during live exhibit hours to note where guests linger, disengage, or show signs of surprise.
- **Audit the exhibit life cycle** to assess how long features have remained unchanged and what novelty cycles have historically looked like.
- **Analyze external inspiration sources**, from other global museums to immersive design trends in adjacent fields (retail, theater, gaming).
- **Identify thresholds of potential such as** spaces, technologies, or stories that seem underutilized or ripe for transformation.

2. Translate Into Structure

I take what's been uncovered and begin to shape the architecture of possibility. I define structural and thematic opportunities that can reawaken wonder, integrating temporal storytelling, speculative ecology, and sensory immersion. One of the core structural outcomes of this phase is the ideation and scaffolding of the **Pre-Human Olfactory Exhibit**, a sensory installation that invites visitors to experience the Earth *before us*, through scent.

Actions Taken:

- **Synthesize key themes:** *Unseen Worlds*, *Sensory Prehistory*, and *Co-Creation as Discovery*.
- **Develop the concept for the "Pre-Human Olfactory Exhibit"** as a sensorial journey through Earth's evolutionary past, using scent design and synesthetic interpretation.
- **Partner with olfactory artists and scent designers** to craft "Synescents" representing major pre-human eras (e.g., the Carboniferous swamps, Cambrian oceans, volcanic Hadean atmosphere).
- **Design speculative exhibit architecture** that allows scent, light, and ambient sound to converge into immersive, time-bending environments.
- **Embed co-creation models** into the exhibit, including live scent mixing labs, interpretive journaling stations, and collaborative fossil-inspired art.
- **Incorporate micro-interventions** museum-wide to tease the Olfactory Exhibit such as scent traces in unexpected spaces, QR-coded scent "trails," and ephemeral fragrance installations.

3. Exit With Architecture

I leave the museum not just with a celebration, but with a lasting system. I codify the frameworks that make the museum more agile, sensory, and visitor-responsive, ensuring the innovation sparked by the anniversary continues. The Pre-Human Olfactory Exhibit serves as both **pinnacle and prototype**, a new blueprint for how the museum can design with emotion, time, and atmosphere in mind.

Final Deliverables:

- **10th Anniversary Strategic Programming Framework**
 - **Signal Map + Thematic Synthesis Report**
 - **Pre-Human Olfactory Exhibit Concept Dossier**
 - **Scent Collaboration Brief + Partner Matrix**
 - **Micro-Intervention Trail**
 - **Interactive Exhibit Architecture Guide**
 - **Visitor Sensory Engagement Toolkit**
 - **Staff Training Manual: Sensory Experience Design**
 - **Legacy Engagement Calendar**
 - **Resonance Metrics Framework**
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TIME PERIOD: 4-6 months