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THE PHOENIX PROJECT RESEARCH ANALYSIS & PROPOSED SOLUTION

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Sara is graduating May 2018 with a BFA in graphic design from Georgia State University. Design is more than just a talent or hobby to her, but a way of life. Structure, purpose, and research are all aspect that matter to Sara in her work.

This research project was made possible by her minor, Visual and Persuasive Communication. Sara hopes to achieve full understanding of communication in all aspects of design platforms.



THE PHOENIX PROJECT

During the fall semester of 2017, Dr. Wharton's upper-division Digital Writing and Publishing course focused on digital accessibility, usability, and content management—I was enrolled in this course. Being the first course of its kind, Dr. Wharton provided the class with the opportunity to envision and develop ideas for The Phoenix Project's digital platform. The class proposed four different digital presences that could possibly be utilized—these will be discussed below. After taking part in the month long class assignment, I decided to do a more in-depth analysis of the project. The goal of my analysis is propose a purpose for the artifacts and suggest their digital presence through a website structure, but also to address the project's challenges. To accompany my research and strengthen what I propose, I include my developed vision for the project's public-facing platform through an established brand, website, and virtual museum.

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THE PHOENIX PROJECT

THE PROJECT

TUCKED AWAY IN GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY'S ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT, 469 boxes containing slivers of Atlanta's history sit awaiting their exposure. These boxes contain artifacts that were recovered during the 1970s excavation of the Metro Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority's (MARTA) rail lines. Georgia State University's Anthropology professor, Dr. Jeffrey Baron Glover, has taken interest in these objects and wishes to establish the collection as "The Phoenix Project." Collaborating over the past three years with English lecturer, Dr. Robin Wharton, the two have begun the process of inventorying the 100,000+ artifacts recovered during the excavation. During this ever-evolving process, the two are faced with discovering the purpose and potential platforms for the project's display. Dr. Wharton describes the task as follows:

...The Phoenix Project collection is potentially an archival treasure trove for urban archaeologists, historians, and cultural studies researchers. For the most part, however, these thousands of objects still keep their secrets, inaccessible and perhaps even unknown to scholars who might make use of them. Simply to catalog the holdings digitally, so the information could be made available to off site researchers, represents a daunting task. The Phoenix Project collection stands as just one example of how physical cultural archives could benefit from the kind of trans-disciplinary collaborative digital scholarship conducted by the Atlanta Studies network.

The collaboration of Dr. Jeffrey Baron Glover as principle investigator and Dr. Wharton as a project collaborator and contributor, has initiated the process of bringing these objects of Atlanta's past to the present.

During the semesters of 2015, Dr. Wharton's upper-division Multimodal Exposition class was assigned a half-dozen of the more intact artifacts to research, analyze and develop specific content. The generated content provided in-depth object analyses, digital 3D models, and interactive timelines for each artifact. At the end of the semesters, the content was uploaded to an Omeka achieve platform—a common archival system used by Georgia State University for various purposes.

The content generated by the 2015 classes was only the beginning of The Phoenix Project. Dr. Glover and Dr. Wharton wish to establish a framework for the project that allows continuous development over time by several different contributors and collaborators. The two envision that the project eventually "create[s] a searchable online database of all of the objects in the collection, one that would include high-quality images and 3D models of most if not all of the objects." The ideal digital presence of the project should be used to "promote the collection and the project, in order to publicize its availability and also to help... in the quest to secure grants and funding to help with digital cataloging and digitization efforts."

THE CHALLENGES

The digital presence of The Phoenix Project is an open-ended platform as long as it can be considered a digital museum. With no clear vision from Dr. Glover or Dr. Wharton, the artifacts could be displayed and interacted with digitally in a wide variety of ways. This ambiguity of purpose causes some challenges for the public-facing website that need to be addressed before any clear digital platform can be established. These challenges are addressed below:

CEASELESS NATURE

FUTURE CONTRIBUTORS

The nature of the project that Dr. Wharton and Dr. Glover wish to establish is ceaseless with contributors and collaborators ranging from professors to students. Although ingenious, this academic structure includes several different insights from a broad range of people which could prove difficult. Equally, this approach requires a logical and accessible format for future contributors to access, contribute, and develop the project in a progressive way.

CONSISTENCY

The project's ceaseless, collaborative nature risks the consistency of the published content over time.

SOME QUESTIONS THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED ARE:

Should there be strict guidelines? Strict templates? Is a clearly established voice necessary? Is consistency even necessary?

THE OMEKA SITE

PURPOSE

The Omeka site is defined as a “content management system for online digital collections.” I cannot accurately assess the platform as a content management system due to not having experience with Omeka. What I can address is the project’s currently published pages which lack any cohesion of brand, structure, or navigation between the multiple cataloged objects which result in user confusion. The project administrators wish is for the Omeka site to serve only as a content management catalog, or the back-facing site, to accompany a front-facing site. Due to this reason, the cohesiveness of the Omeka site may not be of grand importance, but still puts the project at risk for user confusion and frustration.

PROBLEM

The main challenge facing this project’s digital platform is the integration of two separate content management systems. Omeka is the back-facing site with researchers being the main audience and Wordpress is the front-facing site with the general public being the main audience.

SOME QUESTIONS THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED ARE:

How should they be integrated? Is it necessary? If not, what is the purpose of both being in existence? The Omeka site is intended to be a research-oriented interface with direct access to content and references, but could the Wordpress site not do this also?

THE CHALLENGES *CONT.*

THE ARTIFACTS

TACTICAL NATURE

The tactical nature of the artifacts is the most interesting challenge that needs to be addressed. The Phoenix Project wishes to bring foreign, physical objects into a comfortable, digital platform—inevitably causing tension between the user and the artifacts. The user will browse the digital museum and wish to approach the object, analyze it, and be familiarized. The 3D render will provide the user with a very surface relationship, but will not relieve all tensions.

AMBIGUITY

The ambiguity of these artifacts is another fascinating challenge when addressing a digital museum. Although the artifacts have extensive research content, they don't address questions users are going to ask: Who owned the object and why was it abandoned?

FOUR PROPOSED APPROACHES

During Dr. Wharton's 2017 Digital Writing and Publishing course, four groups proposed different approaches for The Phoenix Project's digital presence. After establishing an audience, purpose, brand, and mockup, the four groups presented to Dr. Glover, Dr. Wharton, and three other colleagues that served as a "jury" and collaborators. During this mock client-to-contractor process, several noteworthy points were addressed.

CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL GAME

Two teams proposed The Phoenix Project as a children's educational game. The more predominate of the two suggestions was "The Cabinet of Curiosities," a children's game focusing on the eerie and somewhat creepy nature of the mysterious artifacts. The proposed platform being an app with a home page consisting of rotating artifacts in a "digital cabinet of curiosity." The goal of the app was somewhat lost on me, but as I understood, the user could either browse the cabinet to learn about each item or they play a digital scavenger hunt. The other group proposed a kid-friendly train map with a navigable, icons to establish a quick click-and-learn platform. Both of these ideas, while unique and valuable in their own way, seemed to be an illogical use of the artifacts. The complexities of designing an efficient children's games is utterly complex and would require experienced developers.

LEARNED

The artifacts should be cyclical over time and growth. This would allow a more objects to be featured over time without cluttering the site.

It should be noted that the objects do have a mysterious nature to them which could be associated with Atlanta's eerie history. This complexity could establish an interest with the user, especially if they live in Atlanta and are familiar with certain places.

The juxtaposition between old outdated objects in a new technological world creates a strange but interesting relationship.

FOUR PROPOSED APPROACHES *CONT.*

MAP APPROACH

Two groups approached the project's organization as a map format. This approach, although tactile and understandable to a local audience, is a flawed approach. The artifacts were most likely located in dumps, not the exact location where someone may have dropped it, thus an inaccurate representation. The map feature, unless structured with great complexity (which neither of their approaches were,) would be get very cluttered with the 100,000 artifacts.

LEARNED

Typical users are interested in the locational association of these artifacts. Although the artifacts prove to have no accurate location, finding another local connection to the user would prove beneficial.

TIME APPROACH

The last group, and the group in which I took part in, approached the project's organization as an interactive timeline specifically with Atlanta natives in mind. This approach seemed the most logical of the four proposed, but still contained flaws. Several artifacts have an estimated range of time as opposed to exact dates, this would inevitably clutter the timeline and create confusion. The broadness of a scrolling timeline loses the locality complex.

LEARNED

Due to the mystery of the artifacts, the objects should be categorized in terms of periods of history as opposed to precise dates. This would give each object context and relate to the local user and their city's history.

Reiterated that objects should be exchanged over time and not simply added to.

ATLANTA ARTIFACT EXPLORER

PRESENCE

WEBSITE

The Phoenix Project requires a user-friendly interface that previews the artifacts and allows the user to be informed while browsing, it also should provide an insight into the history of Atlanta, thus being a complete digital museum that localizes the objects. The website should consider Atlanta-natives as their audience since historically-rooted people would be more likely to have interest in the objects complex history. As someone who personally has an Atlanta lineage, I believe that the wonder of these objects will fascinate other natives and provide them pride and satisfaction. The site should be visually compelling with illustrations and a friendly character, this will fill the ambiguous void of the artifacts' context. The home page I envision will be full of excitement and intrigue. The page will scroll endlessly previewing the different organizational groups that the objects are divided into. This organizational system is by historical periods that Atlanta has personally faced, allowing a connection locally and historically with the user. The home page will summarize the general overview of the digital museum and will feature specific artifacts which could be exchanged easily in the future for a diverse and growing inventory of artifacts. The site will provide the user with specific information not only about the objects but of their historical context. Each object will have

PRESENCE *CONT.*

its individual page that is created from a template—which allows easy edits for future contributors. Each individual artifact page will be simple, but informational and will logically navigate the user back to the Omeka site's object analysis and digital timeline to provide more complex, research-oriented information for the users that require this. This relationship between the back-facing and front-facing site will hopefully prove efficient for both sites.

ORGANIZATION

The artifacts range from mid-19th century to mid-20th century, but do not collectively have specific manufacturing or disposal dates. Thus, the logical organization of the artifacts is by a broad-ranging historical period. These periods focus on the centrality of Georgia and its place in the nation. They are as follows: Civil War + Reconstruction (1860-1880), Victorian Era (1880-1930), and the Great Depression (1930-1950). This specific time range will also be beneficial for future object analysis inventorying research and context. For The Phoenix Project's digital public-facing site, this organization style should provide the user with clear navigation and browsing, efficiently educating the user on the history of the artifacts and of Atlanta.

VR EXPERIENCE

All of the pressing challenges at hand have been addressed to this point. The only challenge remaining is the complicated nature of the artifacts themselves. To solve the issue of physical tactility and contextual ambiguity, I suggest using one of the newest technologies that are now widely available in today's world

Creating a virtual reality (VR) museum will allow the user to experience the artifacts in a more tactile and complex nature than any website could. The collaboration of a virtual

museum and a digital museum should solve the tension created by the physical objects being placed into a digital environment. This virtual museum platform will be available on the website as a keyboard-navigation experience or in person through a more experiential platform such as Google Cardboard, Oculus, or Vive. These platforms all allow the users to virtually walk through The Phoenix Project and will establish a clearer use and purpose for the artifacts. The user will navigate the museum, read information, and get close-up to the artifacts themselves. The interactional relationship between the user and the artifacts will allow for a more imaginative narrative for the artifacts since the object will be completely tactile and realistic.

ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL & VIRTUAL MUSEUMS

Several different digital and virtual museums exist today, I researched some well-developed museums and gained some insight into what would work and wouldn't work for the unique challenges that The Phoenix Project faces.

LEADING THE USER TO THE VIRTUAL MUSEUM

The main issue that these virtual museums face is navigating the user from their home page to their virtual museum—this can be clearly seen on the Louvre and Natural History Museum websites. Not providing their virtual museum with prominent access forces the user to search for the experience if they even know it exists and dramatically impacts the user rate. Since The Phoenix Project has no physical museum, promoting both the digital and virtual platforms of the museum equally and with prominent access, would increase interaction of both the platforms. Some other tactics that should be noted, but would not work for The Phoenix Project in particular, are websites like the Virtual Museum of Canada and the Vatican Museum. These two website approaches combined the virtual and digital museum, allowing the user to both virtually “walk-through” the museum and view the objects individually.

ANALYSIS OF MUSEUMS *CONT.*

Good examples of a home page guiding the user to view exhibits or the digital museum would be the Atlanta History Center and the K-25 Virtual Museum. The Atlanta History Center's approach uses attractive hero images and feature images on their home page that promotes each individual exhibit. Although the exhibits don't require any interaction from the user, the visual intrigue that the site builds for the exhibits works well. The other site to note, the K-25 Virtual Museum has a beautiful, scrolling home page that allows the reader to get interested and view the different exhibits before entering them. Every click possibly on their scrolling home page scroll brings the user inside their digital museum.

USING THE VIRTUAL MUSEUM

Every virtual museum has a different, unique experience. I analyzed several well-developed virtual museums based out of the United States. The main complication of these museums is the ill navigation system. "Jumping" or "teleporting" is a better solution for navigating digital environments than "moving" or "walking," which commonly causes confusion and motion sickness. Several virtual museums also require a click-and-drag feature to direct the user's camera focus, this control is often touchy and results in camera jumping and limited user control. The Phoenix Project's virtual museum should only be navigable by clicking standing locations and then "teleporting" there.

It should be noted that every virtual museum discussed was created by a 360-degree camera which creates a realistic representation of the physical museum. Since no physical museum exists for The Phoenix Project, the virtual museum will be a render to simulate a theoretical experience for the user if the artifacts had a public repository. The creation of a rendered virtual museum also allows the creator to require more interaction with the user, whereas a 360-degree camera environment would be very limited.

ANALYSIS OF MUSEUMS *CONT.*

The navigation of the museum's artifacts was also a very common issue. No virtual museum I researched allowed the user to browse every object in the space. Some of these objects were clickable but had no obvious structure in place that informed the user of which objects were available for viewing. Sometimes when the user scrolls their mouse over objects a viewfinder appears framing the object. The user would have to scroll over every object in the space just to see if more information is available—a tedious and unnecessary task. Since The Phoenix Project will be established as a cyclical inventory of artifacts, the virtual museum will be quaint enough that every object will be interactive and informational.

LOGIC BEHIND THE LOOK

LOGIC BEHIND THE LOOK

As stated earlier, The Phoenix Project faces very interesting challenges. I believe that a lot of these images are solved simply by the branding of the project. All choices made during branding were to enlighten the project and give it a second layer of intrigue to fill the void that the ambiguous artifacts leave. The logo is simple yet elegant, just like The City of Atlanta. The colors are modern and colorful but still reference more vintage aspects of our society. The unique typeface designed specifically for this project is a mixture of old school serifs and modern style fonts. The illustrations reflect history but their style reflect our modern style. The whole brand of The Phoenix Project is inviting and allows any user to feel comfortable browsing either the digital museum collections or the virtual museum.

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COLORS

The colors selected for The Phoenix Project are a balance of mild and lively, vintage and modern, and serious and fun. Although they are not the typical color palette to work together, they bring visual intrigue to the project. Commonly used colors would be the dark gray, navy blue, dulled gold, and tan cream. The red and light blue colors are used as accents.

HEX: <code>#272727</code>	HEX: <code>#14374b</code>	HEX: <code>#e2c782</code>	HEX: <code>#ee4426</code>	HEX: <code>#82b8be</code>	HEX: <code>#ebEBDC</code>
RGB: 39 39 39	RGB: 20 55 75	RGB: 226 199 130	RGB: 238 68 38	RGB: 130 184 190	RGB: 235 235 220
CMYK: 71 65 64 69	CMYK: 94 71 48 43	CMYK: 12 19 58 0	CMYK: 1 88 99 0	CMYK: 49 13 24 0	CMYK: 7 4 13 0

TYPOGRAPHY

The typography selected for The Phoenix Project is modern with a vintage twist. Mr. and Mrs. Eaves are elegant fonts that are both unique in character but still work together in a very casual manner.

HEADER

SECONDARY HEADER – MRS. EAVES ROMAN PETITE CAPS

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

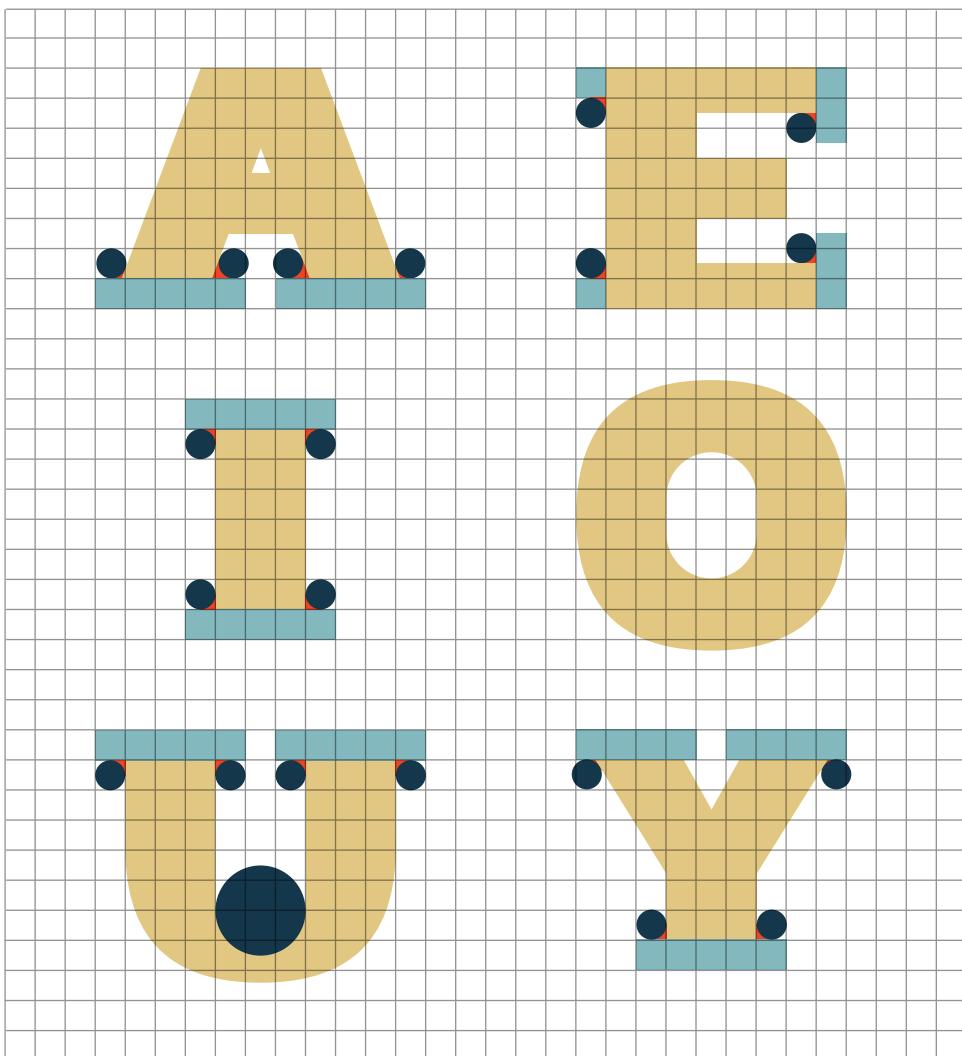
TERTIARY HEADER - MR. EAVES

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

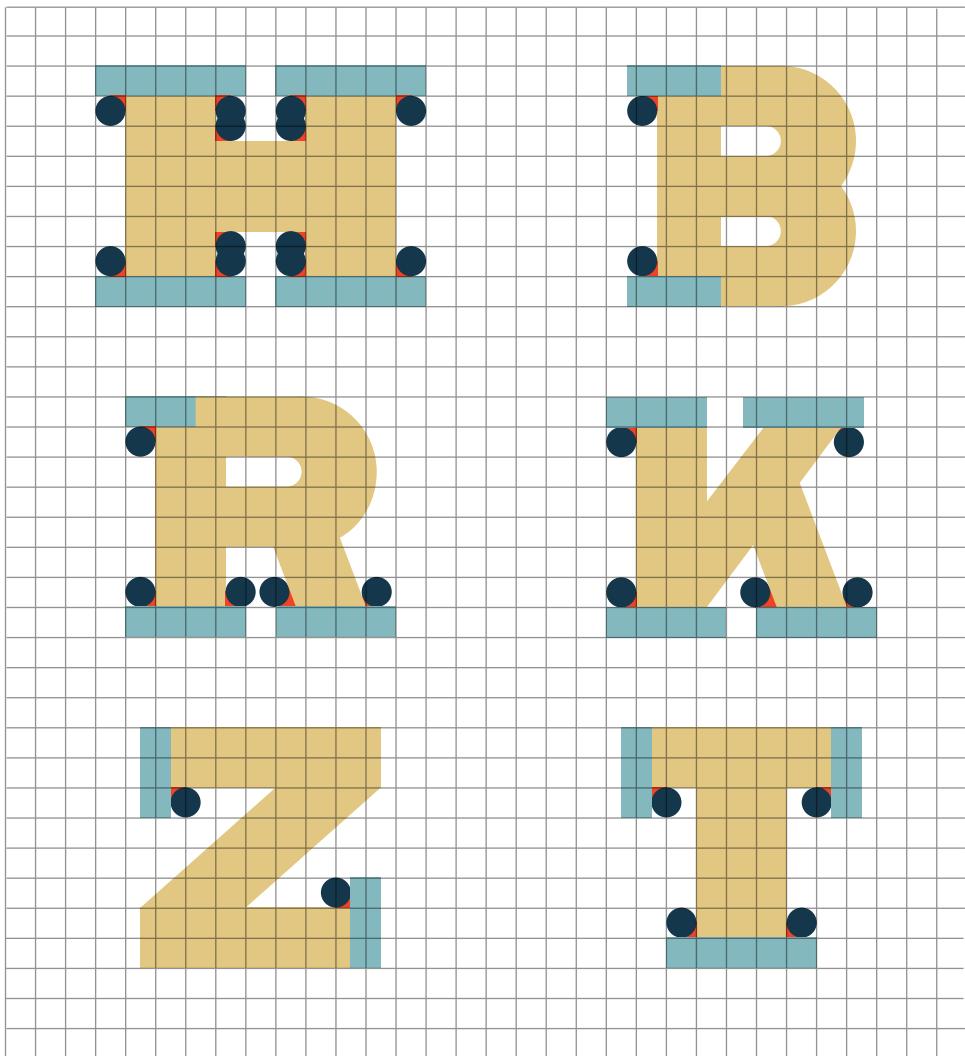
Body - Mr. Eaves

A a B b C c D d E e F f G g H h I i J j K k L l M m N n O o P p Q q R r S s T t U u V v W w X x Y y Z z 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

SPECIALLY MADE TYPEFACE



SPECIALLY MADE TYPEFACE



SPECIALLY MADE TYPEFACE

A B C D E
F G H I J
K L M N O
P R S T U
V W X Y Z

SPECIALLY MADE TYPEFACE

THE PHOENIX
PROJECT

VIRTUAL
MUSEUM

CIVIL WAR

Victorian
Era

Great
Depression

PERIOD-SPECIFIC ILLUSTRATIONS

CIVIL WAR +
RECONSTRUCTION



VICTORIAN
ERA



GREAT
DEPRESSION



IMAGE TREATMENT

CIVIL WAR +
RECONSTRUCTION



VICTORIAN
ERA



GREAT
DEPRESSION



PERIOD-SPECIFIC VISUALS

CIVIL WAR +
RECONSTRUCTION



VICTORIAN
ERA



GREAT
DEPRESSION



THE PHOENIX PROJECT

A FRIENDLY PRESENCE

The Phoenix Project's website is a colorful and intriguing site full of information, illustrations, and artifacts. The user is greeted by a visually intriguing hero collage full of various illustrations and image-treated artifacts. Scrolling down a little, the user is informed that the website is for The Phoenix Project and provides them with a short description about the project. Following this are the three time period collections each with their own unique visuals. At the bottom of the page, the user is invited to visit the virtual museum.

The website is designed to be a very simple and friendly site that doesn't allow navigation confusion. Each page has very formulaic placement of objects and creates a relationship with the user. Both the digital museum, with three separate collections, and the virtual museum have prominent visibility encouraging the user to use both platforms and immerse themselves in the project. The artifact pages themselves are very simple but yet very informational. It provides the average user with any basic information that is necessary but allows access to more in-depth information for the more research oriented user.

HOME PAGE



1 HOME PAGE HERO

This hero is the first thing that the user sees when visiting the page. The visual intrigue of the intriguing and colorful hero should draw the viewer in.

2 TIME PERIOD PREVIEW SECTION

Each time period collection gets a large section of the home page scrolling-area. This section gives the viewer an idea of each collection and invites them to view it.

3 VIRTUAL MUSEUM

The virtual museum is prominently promoted at the bottom of the home page. Although below the digital museums links, the virtual museum is still easily navigable.

TIME PERIOD PAGES



1 WEBSITE HEROES

Each historical period has its own unique hero that contains the artifacts located in the collection and its period illustrations.

2 TIME PERIOD DESCRIPTIONS

Each time period page has a brief summary of Atlanta's history during the time. This brings intrigue and context for the digital collection.

3 ARTIFACT DISPLAY

The unusual, modern display of artifacts gives the viewer a clear idea of the artifact being featured in the collection.

ARTIFACT PAGES



1 HERO / FEATURE IMAGE

The hero / feature image is a 3D render that allows the user a complete view of the artifact instead of configuring several images.

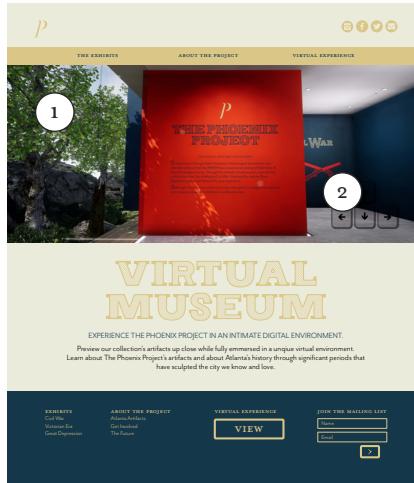
2 OMEKA BUTTONS

Located under each object description is two Omeka buttons, one guiding the user to the object's analysis and one to the objects timeline.

3 IMAGE SLIDER

Since the artifact is prominently featured as a 3D object, additional images that provide valuable context are located here.

VIRTUAL MUSEUM PAGE



1 BEGINNING

The user is automatically introduced to the virtual museum and invited to explore. The full-width hero experience provides an optimal experience.

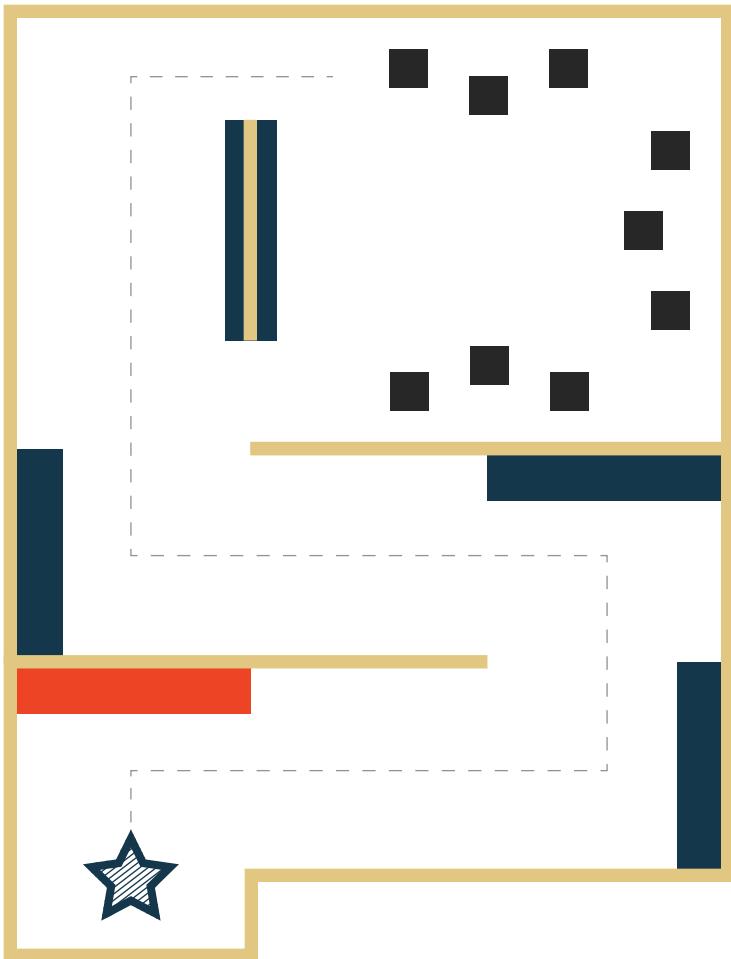
2 NAVIGATION BUTTONS

Navigating the virtual museum on a computer requires keyboard navigation. The buttons guiding the user will remain at the bottom of the screen.

VIRTUAL MUSEUM

A WALK THROUGH

The Phoenix Project's virtual museum is a simple room but also a complex rendering of a theoretical repository for the collection. The user initially starts at the end of the hallway and is welcomed by a short introduction about The Phoenix Project. After reading the introduction to the museum, they turn to their right. Walking closer and closer to the end of the hallway, the Civil War period informational wall animation appears. After viewing, the user turns to the left and triggers the Victorian Era period informational wall animation. Turning left again and walking down the hallway, the user triggers the last time period informational wall, the Great Depression. Once completing their way through the informational hallway, the user is greeted by sunlight and a wall-length window. To their left is a wall with an endless video of images and illustrations floating through space. After turning the corner from the floating wall, the user finally enters the virtual museum. Nine total podiums fill the space. With three items per time period, the room is simple and allows the user to freely browse the artifacts by time period. The information for the individual artifacts is reveal the closer that the user approaches each object, thus allowing easy access to the artifacts and their information.



VIRTUAL MUSEUM HALLWAY WALLS



VIRTUAL MUSEUM HALLWAY WALLS



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