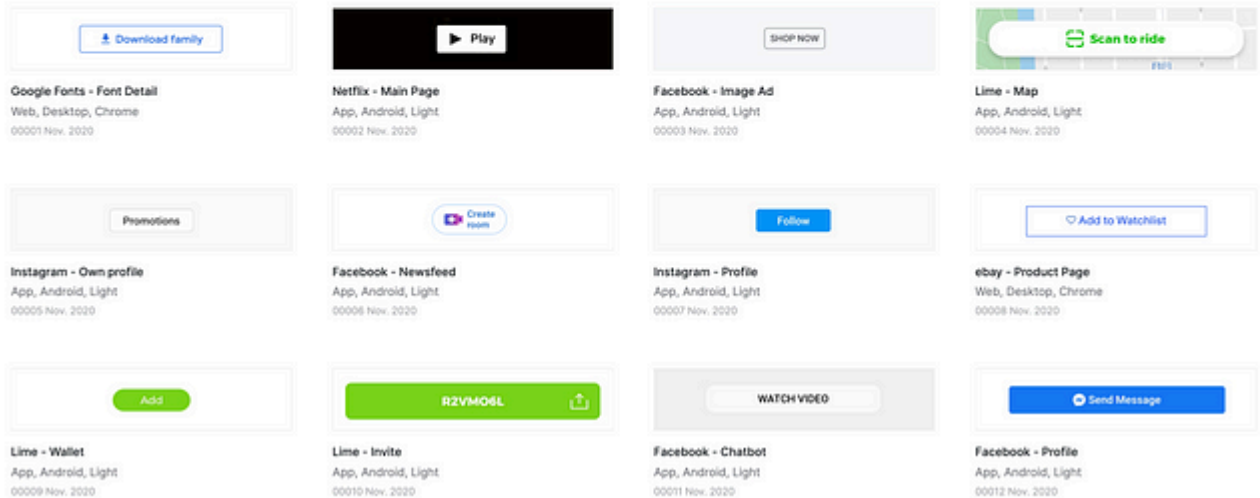


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WORLD'S BIGGEST BUTTON COLLECTION

Maybe...I didn't really check. [Who made this?](#)



Documenting the almighty button



Teisanu Tudor

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UX Collective a11y-light ~4 min read · June 1, 2021 (Updated: January 6, 2022) · Free: Yes

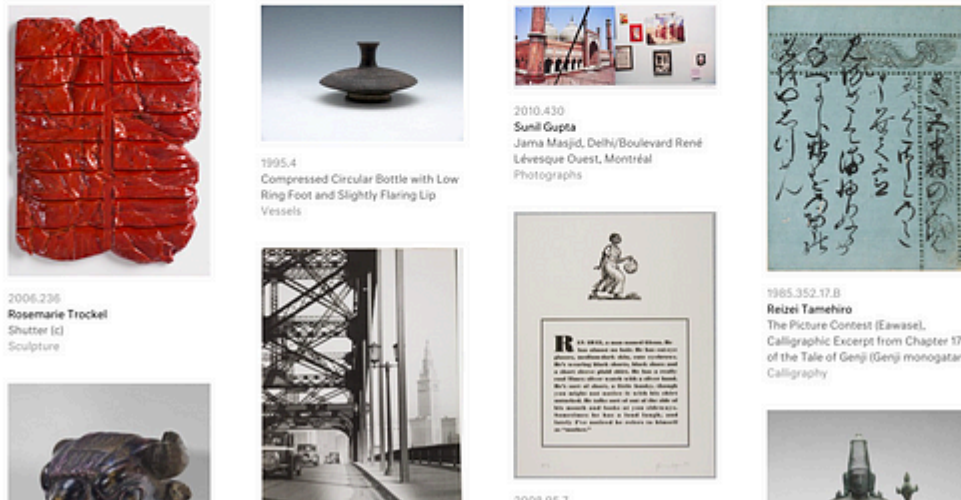
How do we look back in our field?

Browsing through several collections available on Harvard Art Museum's website triggered an interesting thought in my mind. We're getting better, as humans, at documenting and exposing artwork in all types of formats. One can find out about art in libraries, interactive museums, exhibitions, and even in mundane places as bus stops or airports.

Search by keyword, title, artist, object number, or gallery number

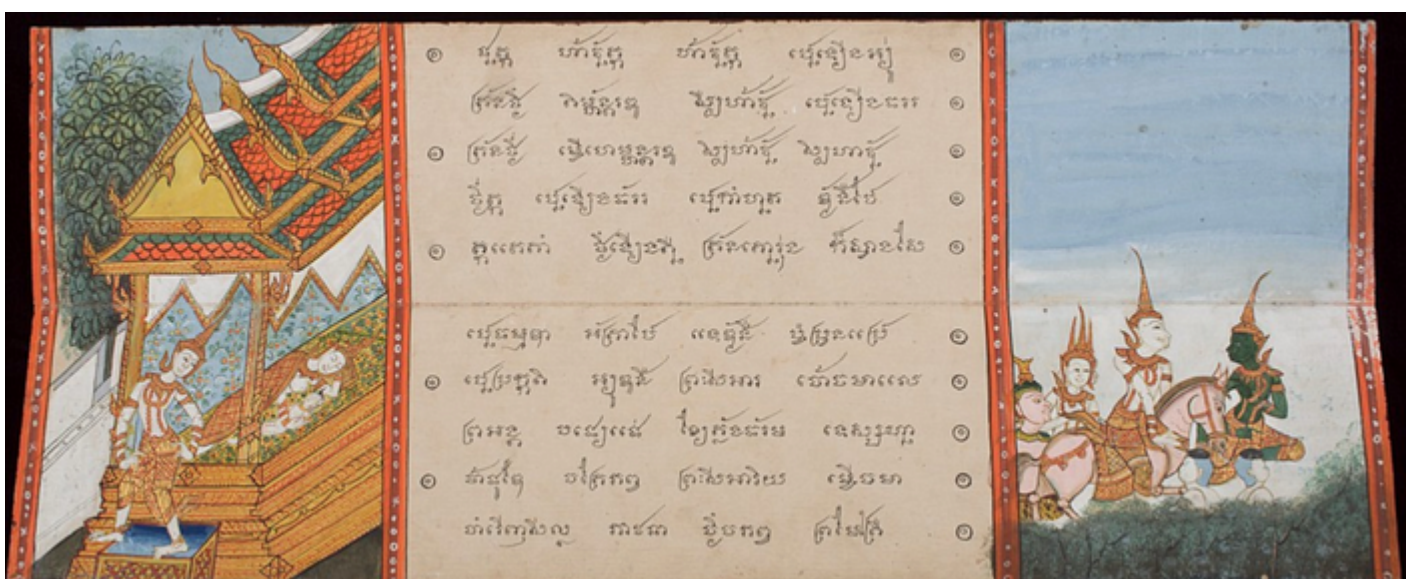
Classification
Work Type
Technique / Medium
Period
Place
Century
Culture
Gallery
On View

Showing 236,939 Works



Thousands of pieces of art are available for everyone with a decent internet connection
<https://harvardartmuseums.org/collections>

Artists, whether they're experienced or amateurs can then use any of these mediums to jump back hundreds of years in history and thousands of miles across the globe to see what's out there. They can then be inspired by illustration techniques used in ancient Malaysian manuscripts while also walking into an open exhibition in their neighbourhood later that day.



<https://harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/201521?position=5>

Compared to artists, how do we, as designers of products broaden our perspectives and look back in our field? I'm specifically intrigued by digital

processes, using examples from their time which simply got older. There's also the Way Back Machine, keeping track of some parts of the Internet. However, digital design evolved beyond the Internet and beyond a few big brands: there are apps, IOT systems, open-source software, wearable devices, operating systems, phones, panels, and more. All of them require digital interfaces to be created, still by humans.

How do we get to creating these interfaces? Well, we've got several processes, principles, and methods to make sure that the interfaces we create will make sense for the people using them. We look at existing designs in the form of market or competitor analysis, mainly to ensure that we are adopting successes while avoiding mistakes. These analyses, however, rarely get to look back more than a couple of years; most of the time ending up focusing on the same famous products. We fail to realise the amount and variety of solutions different designers came up with, somewhere else across the World 5, 10 or even 20 years ago. We tend to look at our nearby comfortable vicinity only, enclosing our imagination right from the start.



Pretty random group of famous brands, isn't it ? They seem to be just as randomly picked when looking at "what others do".

Let's take a closer look at a well-known website: Booking.com. One could easily assume their current search bar-dropdown-CTA combo has always been there, looking back in the past 3 years. However, broadening this timeline reveals that there was a dedicated area packed with UI controls to perform the same function for **14 years** (2004–2018). So, next time your company tries to push as many features as possible on their home page, you won't just point them to the

simpler design, pushing all those other options later in the flow.

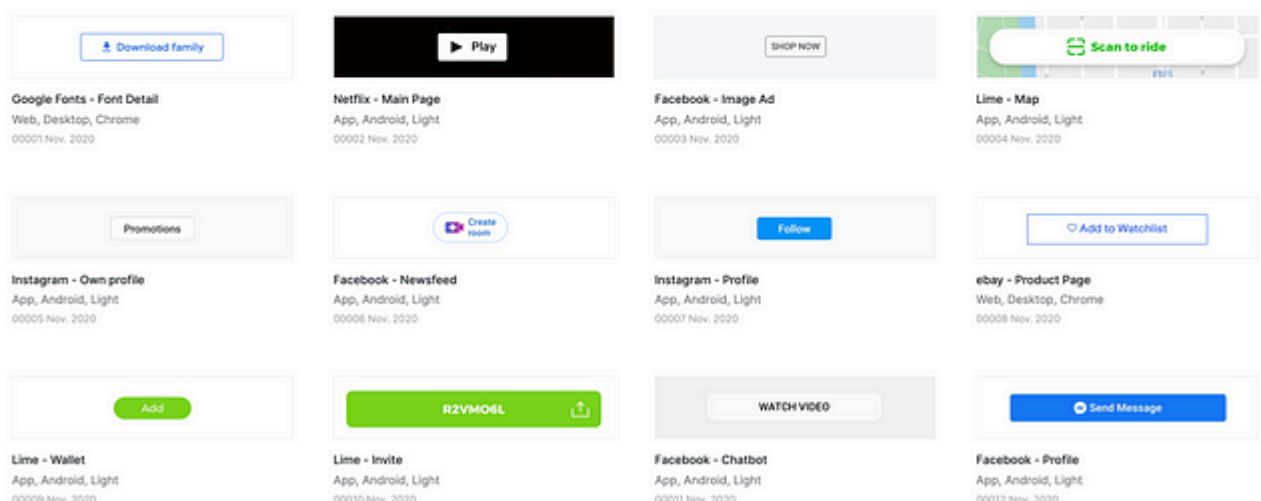
There's nobody to blame for our constant short-term reflection. It's difficult for example, for a designer working on a desktop-based graphics software to check how Adobe Photoshop changed since 2013 when they introduced the subscription model. Maybe there's an interesting influence of the business model into the interface that could be observed. Well, what if checking that would become easier? Designers of tomorrow should easily look back to learn from or get inspired by the past.

My humble reply to this challenge of documenting contemporary digital products started with a single UI element: the almighty button. Yes, products are much bigger than their UI elements; there's an entire mix of organisational, geopolitical, social influences that shaped them. Unfortunately though would require days if not weeks to be spent per product, which would then need to be updated every 4–6 months or so. Moreover, most of that would be packed with assumptions, unless this would be a global collaborative effort back by companies themselves.

So... what's left then?

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We can simply document what is visible, including any known context. Grouping products (or interface elements, to begin with) by context, be it: theme, topic, date, place within a product, product type, location, company size, evolution, etc. can actually lead to an interesting archive of what is created within our field. We could then get a first overview of how different cultures affect or not affect interfaces, whether successful companies have something in common when it comes to their interfaces, and even connect visual trends to social phenomena (e.g. are interfaces different depending on geopolitical stability within an area?). I believe that as designers, we could then look beyond our nearby surroundings and reach out across a different space and time.



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