



London's
real
street
artists

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Their extraordinary work is seen by millions of Londoners, but hardly anyone knows who they are. We reveal the designers behind the capital's most original window displays

Faye McLeod of Louis Vuitton has created some of the capital's most memorable windows

The maverick

Faye McLeod
Visual Image Director, Louis Vuitton

Faye McLeod's quirky, innovative work regularly stops London shoppers in their tracks. It was Faye who put an ostrich with a neck hung with handbags in the middle of Bond Street and created a spectacular dinosaur window with gold Stegosaurus and Velociraptor skeletons.

She particularly enjoys the close public interaction. 'There's no distance between the viewer and the work,' explains Faye. 'You can't control the way the viewer interacts with the window. That's what is exciting.'

In some cases the interaction is actually physical. When Faye collaborated in New York with acclaimed artist Yayoi Kusama, the resulting montage of polka dots and tentacles prompted a very tactile response.

'I have never seen so many people engage with these windows - noses against glass, handprints - it was crazy,' recalls Faye. 'We had to clean the glass every hour. That's when I know a window is a success.'

When she joined the company in 2009, Faye was concerned her occasionally outré ideas might not find favour with a brand that has such a strong heritage. But she was delighted to find that Louis Vuitton 'wanted to do things most brands would be too scared to do'.

The window displays change five times a year, which means there is plenty of scope for inspired thinking. So where do the ideas come from?

'We are "eyes wide open" people - architecture, travel, art, flea markets, stores, online - we constantly challenge ourselves,' she says about her team.

This approach has impressed CEO Bernard Arnault. 'She has the remarkable ability to convey an aesthetic that is striking and refined at the same time,' he says. 'She understands the combination of timelessness and modernity that is the essence of Vuitton products.'



The artist

Paul Symes
Head of Visual Presentation, Fortnum & Mason

'Store windows are London's biggest free art show,' says Paul Symes of Fortnum & Mason. 'And they are only getting better.' He faces an interesting creative challenge. Unlike many of the big department stores, the focus at Fortnum's doesn't tend to be on fashion, so for inspiration Paul is more likely to look to the areas of furniture, design and architecture. 'It's a lot more difficult to make jam look sexy,' he says with a laugh.

Paul likens the creative process to a painting. 'I use products like brush strokes - the window scheme is a backdrop, the products are characters,' he says. 'I have a rough idea of where they will go but it is not until I actually get into the window that I know what works.'

Paul and his team are responsible for window displays that change at least every quarter, with occasional seasonal promotions in between. 'We start with pen and ink sketches that become mood boards,' he explains. 'It can take a few months before we start talking to prop makers and make scale models of the windows. These are important because you need to be able to see how they scan - there has to be a natural flow.'

Being able to make changes and add visual flourishes, even when time is tight, is important to a successful window design. 'We have turned concepts around in less than four weeks,' says Paul. 'But if I had two years I think the paint would still be wet the day before.'

Passionate about his work, Paul believes window design is one of London's most creative areas. 'People have become sign blind,' he says. 'So visual display has come into its own. Every morning I walk to work and see something impressive - Liberty, Anthropologie - I love it. The more competition there is, the better the creative work.'



SHOPPING FOR IDEAS
Paul Symes of Fortnum & Mason reveals how to use the tricks of window design to update your home

Stay focused
Store displays require a focal point and this can also be applied to the home. Try to create an area of your room that draws attention with interesting objects or furniture.

Small is beautiful
When displaying objects, avoid placing them so that they are evenly spaced. Instead, arrange them in small groups and use objects of different heights.

Out of the shadows
Use lighting to create areas of light and shadow - reading lights on shelves, tall lamps by chairs and LED strips under shelves, which will give the illusion of depth.

Centre stage
Shops create a more dynamic space by making merchandise the centre of attention. Instead of placing your furniture around the perimeter of a room, bring the occasional piece, such as a high-backed chair, closer into the middle as this will create greater visual interest.

The curator

Liz Silvester
Head of Visual Identity, Liberty

Like most London stores, Christmas windows are crucial to Liberty's success. They can be inspired by anything from an exploding cracker to the grand interior of Brighton Pavilion, but are always designed for maximum, eye-catching impact.

This year, Liz Silvester is keen to showcase Liberty's connection to the capital's artistic life and has teamed up with the Royal Opera House, which will be staging a production of *The Nutcracker* over the festive season. 'The *Nutcracker* felt very Liberty and the Royal Opera House seemed the obvious choice,' says Liz. 'I was delighted when I was given access to the original drawings of the set design.'

Using these for inspiration, detailed designs for the windows were finalised in June before going into production over the summer. The Christmas windows will be unveiled to the public on 1 November.

Liz's talent was spotted very early on. After her show at the Royal Academy of Art, where she studied fine art, she was asked to take on a project for an *Under the Sea* themed window at Liberty, little knowing that in 2014 she would return to the store as the Head of Visual Identity.

For Liz, the process starts with research or a specific visual reference. 'I'll always have an initial idea,' she says. 'My starting point is often nostalgic research - a few pages of images and words that are gradually honed down and defined.'

In the two years since she's been in the job, she has overseen some impressive projects. 'I particularly loved *The Store That Launched a Thousand Gifts*,' she recalls. 'We had a ship's mast that went all the way up to the fourth floor.'

Liz has some big ideas for the future. 'I want to figure out how we can pull off successful live windows,' she says. 'I'd love to have real bands playing in the windows in festival season.' ■