

The Jim Henson Exhibition & Gallery (2017)

Museum of the Moving Image, New York, NY

In 2011, Museum of the Moving Image hosted the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) exhibition, [Jim Henson's Fantastic World](#). Through the success of that exhibition, including Walker's management and design of the installation, the Museum developed a strong relationship with the Henson family and associates. They had been searching for a home for Henson's story in New York for some time, and the new relationships resulted in a significant donation to the Museum's collection. The donation and new gallery were announced by Mayor Bloomberg and Miss Piggy at a special press event at the Museum in 2013 ([Major Henson Family Donation](#)).

Alongside the construction of the new gallery, Walker worked with Curator Barbara Miller and the team at MoMI to plan the facilities and materials required for storage of the new acquisition and developed plans for restoration of the many puppets, props, and other support material that was donated to the Museum. While going through plans for conservation, Miller determined the exhibition's story line, and which puppets and other objects would be included in the opening installation, and the design process was underway.

Walker played a major role in raising \$5.25 million, including all the funding received from New York City agencies, to create the new gallery that would be permanently dedicated to Jim Henson, and to do major artifact conservation. Walker oversaw the entire construction process while keeping the Museum open to the public, with the project split into three phases. The first was to convert raw basement space into new office facilities, freeing current office space for creations of the new gallery. The second phase was to create the new gallery space, and the third was to complete the impact on the office facilities.

In addition to indentifying the space within the Museum's building to create the new gallery, Walker worked with several teams to create the gallery design and infrastructure. The NYC agencies overseeing the project hired WASA/Studio A with Jack Esterson as the principle architect. Walker worked closely with them to physically and conceptually fit the new gallery alongside the Museum's core exhibition, *Behind the Screen*. Walker's idea was to use moving image content at the entrance and exit, and fill each of these spaces with a mix of familiar and unfamiliar Henson imagery and characters to clearly separate the gallery from the core exhibition gallery. Esterson brought Walker's concept to life at the entrance and exit by creating a tunnel effect for the passage between exhibitions. Walker worked closely with Miller and RadicalMedia to design the content, and finalize the equipment specifications to match the design. He also worked closely with Miller to design the overall flow and use of the space for the various exhibition sections. The gallery did not have the square footage ideally desired for a project with such a large story line, and Walker's theory was that angles and directional lighting could be used to create the illusion of more space. The Museum also developed a partnership with COLLINS ad agency to create the exhibition's graphic identity and some of the exhibition components, including two interactive exhibits: one for puppet performance, and the other for creating an Anything Muppet for TV. They also created a fantastic projection of all the Muppet Show episodes all at once in a grid format on the wall.

The Jim Henson Exhibition opened in July 2017, a month after Walker launched the national tour of [The Jim Henson Exhibition: Imagination Unlimited](#) at the Museum of POP Culture in Seattle. It traveled to 10 additional museums across the country, while the permanent gallery at the Museum has had periodic updates to its content that Walker's design easily accepts, and these updates keep fans engaged. Both exhibitions have received praise from visitors and the press, as well as from the Henson family, former associates, and fans.

[Summer Art Preview: 19 Travel-Worthy Museum Exhibitions to See Around the Globe This Season](#)

[New York Times](#)

[The New Yorker](#)

[The Economist](#)

[City Guide NY](#)

[New York Post](#)



Above: The main entrance. Right and Below: An introduction to who Jim Henson is and his early life and early work... leading to Kermit...



Left to right: MoMI Director Carl Goodman, NY City First Lady Charlene McCray, Curator Barbara Miller, Wendell Walker, MoMI Board Co-Chair Ivan Lustig.



Below: ...Kermit greets visitors at the main entrance



Above: Various puppets from various worlds sit across from Kermit



Right: The Swedish Chef puppet, a sketch by Carolyn Wilcox, and a Swedish language instruction tape.



Below: Miss Piggy puppet with original design sketches and early fan magazines.



Below: Zoot puppet

Above: Delbert the LaChoy Dragon puppet with a sketch of the puppet by Jim Henson.



Left: Hands for a Mystic puppet, showing both the interior mechanics of the hands next to finished hands. Above are partial views of original concept drawings by Brian Froud.

