

BODY PARTS

Body parts are a big trend in visual merchandising right now, but how effective are they? **John Ryan** looks at some highlights from the capital

Body of evidence

What is it about the human body that makes us all want to look? From the smallest babies, which are apparently gripped by the sight of a human face, to those lucky enough to become centenarians, we all seem to want to see bodies in one shape or another.

This means a rich seam for visual merchandisers to mine and is probably the reason why, in spite of so many digital options, mannequins continue to stand in shop windows. Yet a number of leading retailers are taking it one step further, using individual body parts as a display vehicle that will make shoppers take a second glance.

Or, put another way, Selfridges, Harvey Nichols and Fortnum & Mason are all using hands as props for the merchandise that they want to display – and in terms of ensuring that shoppers stop and stare, these are pretty efficient vehicles. There are, of course, limits to how far this particular trend can be taken, but it seems a fair bet that others will follow this visual merchandising trio that has a reputation for setting the pace when it comes to keeping shoppers looking and, ultimately, shopping.

Fortnum & Mason

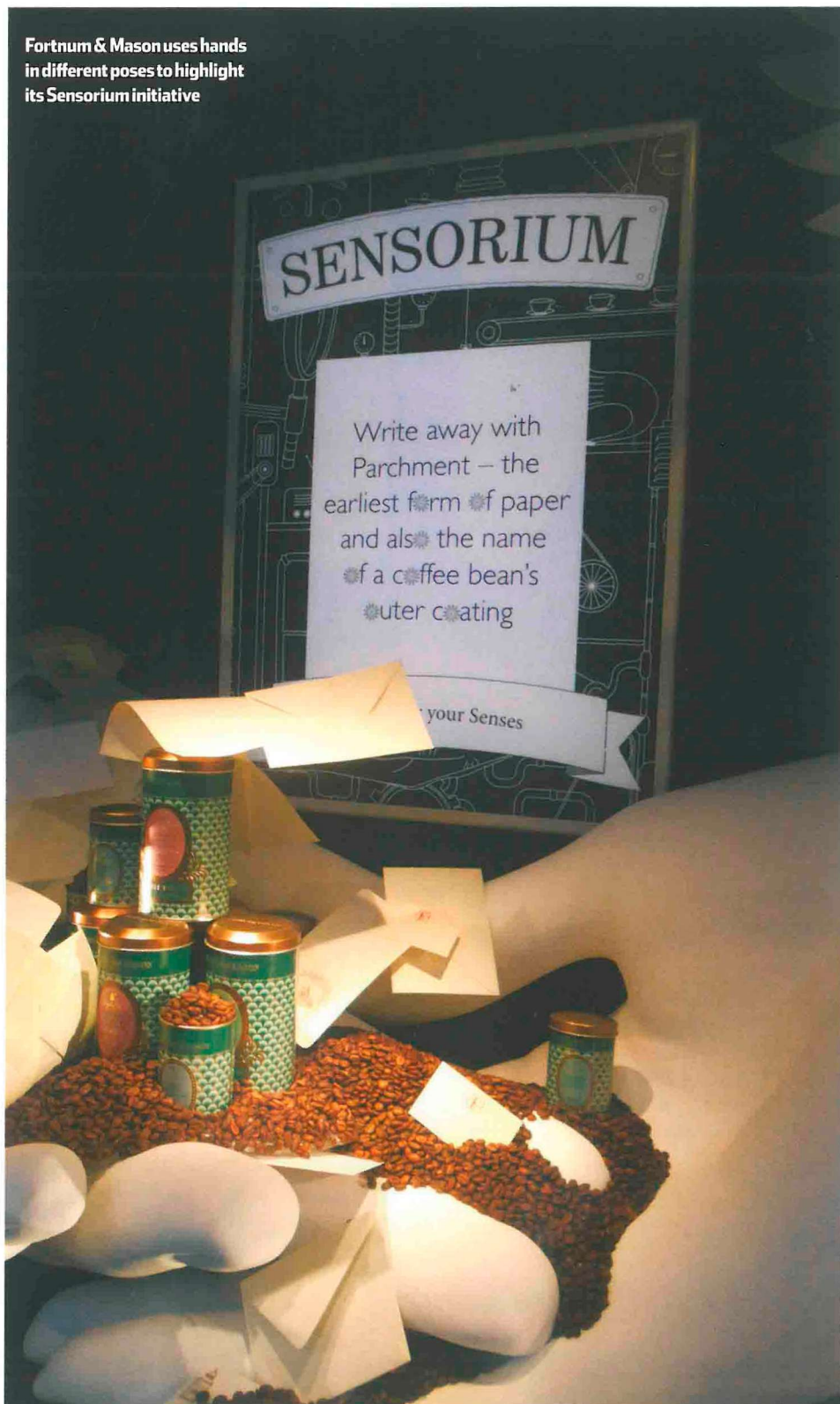
It's Sensorium time in Fortnum & Mason at the moment, which means big hands in the store windows. For the most part, Sensorium is a promotion that aims to play on our reactions to sight, smell and taste – all of which this upscale store is in a strong position to provide, at a price.

In the windows there is everything from Parmesan to red peppers, Turkish delight to fine wines, but the element that unites the displays across the building's frontage is the hands that are used to hold or cup the stock being promoted. In general, these come in pairs, with black backdrops and a sign announcing 'Sensorium' above a note that informs about the merchandise held by each pair of hands.

The easiest thing would have been to have the hands the same in each window, but Fortnum & Mason eschews the obvious and the pose adopted is different in every one.

These are, in fact, neutral displays where the hands, the window backdrop and the signage in no manner overwhelm the objects that are the star of each show. This is an innovative way to grab shoppers' attention and put Fortnum & Mason's products centre stage.

Fortnum & Mason uses hands in different poses to highlight its Sensorium initiative





The hands in Selfridges' window display wouldn't be out of place in an art shop



Selfridges

Like Fortnum & Mason, each of the windows in Selfridges at the moment is part of an overarching storewide theme, dubbed 'Work It'. And one of the windows features hands of the kind that might, on a smaller scale, be found in an art shop. These are the articulated wooden hands used as items to sketch by trainee artists and frequently used as props by retailers wanting to convince shoppers that they have a strong sense of the aesthetic.

In this instance, they are deployed as a group in a window with a strapline that reads, 'Many hands make light work'. The punning take on a familiar phrase is evident from the fact that draped around the hands are strings of lightbulbs. Once more, it's the props that are the focal point of this window with the associated words being almost secondary.

Selfridges has made something of a name for itself with no-stock window themes – having realised that shoppers may look, but they won't buy on the strength of a window. The best displays are about getting customers through the doors.

INTERIORS

BODY PARTS



Harvey Nichols has employed an array of body parts for its Crème de la Mer window display

► Harvey Nichols

Selfridges and Fortnum & Mason may have used hands as props and features within their windows, but for the full array of body parts the recent installation at Harvey Nichols promoting beauty products takes some beating.

Admittedly, while the displays occupied the whole of one side of the Knightsbridge emporium, they have been placed along the store's less travelled eastern side.

The idea is very attractive, consisting of selected parts of the body massively enlarged and used as display props for specific products. The Crème de la Mer display, for instance, has plaster of Paris-covered hands that appear to emerge from the backdrop and a tube of the expensive unguent is positioned on the outstretched palm.

Where this series of visual merchandising vignettes differs from others like it, however, is that eyes, legs and faces all appear in a similar manner from the backdrops and are used to support beauty products. In a way, the semi-hewn nature of the body parts provides an effective foil to the slick, finished nature of the products that are shown.

This is the most extreme example of a trend that does appear to be gathering some momentum. Expect more like this and not just in the arms, hands, legs and suchlike of the big



The semi-hewn nature of the body parts provides an effective foil to the slick products

luxury retailers. It also makes a definite move away from good old-fashioned mannequins.

Body parts, for the moment at least, are an effective means of saying 'look at me' and the majority of shoppers will be looking.

