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Curation Essay

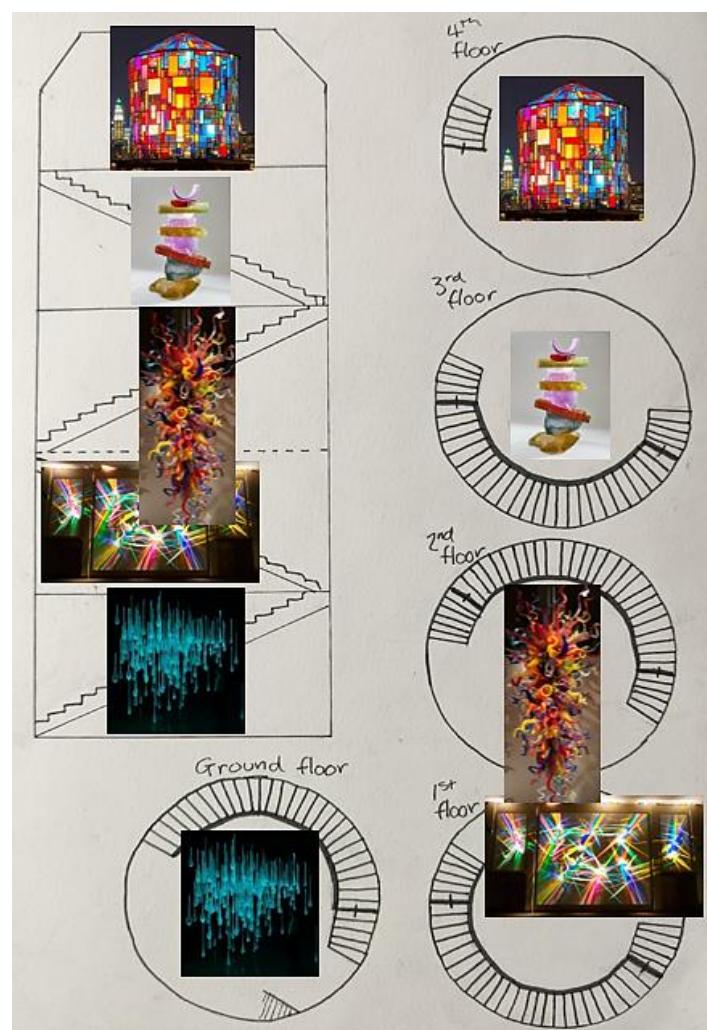


Fig 1

This is an exhibition called "Sensory Experience" featuring five glass artists who work with light and colour. This show interacts through the medium glass with the journey of light and colour through a rainbow. The gallery show is held at Mumbles Lighthouse and explores light and colour theory, linking themes of phenomenology, perception,

and proxemics. Discussing philosophers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Edward T Hall, with artists such as Dale Chihuly, Rui Sasaki, Dawn Bendick, Stephen Knapp, and Tom Fruin. Their pieces support ideas of how light and colour through the creative material glass can affect us and our senses.

Phenomenology is the study of the phenomena of conscious experience from a first-person viewpoint and looks at how our senses create these experiences for us, as the Dictionary of Critical Theory refers to it as “inner experience”. (Buchanan, 2018). Martin Heidegger a German philosopher went on further to explain that being in the world is vital to phenomenal experiences “‘Body’, ‘soul’, and ‘spirit’ may designate phenomenal domains which can be detached as themes for definite investigations [...], some idea of the being of the whole must be presupposed” (Heidegger, 1996, p45). Heidegger’s understanding of being “Dasein” is to be in the world, that we must have prior knowledge to have those experiences. This show puts conceptual glass art in a different context to create these phenomenal experiences.

Another influence on this exhibition is French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who looks at perception linking the mind and the body. Our consciousness is linked with our ‘body’ and ‘soul’. Merleau-Ponty states in his book Phenomenology of perception “the consciousness of the body invades the body, the soul spreads over all its parts, and behaviour overflows its central sector” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p87), explaining that our perception and experiences of the world come from our body and soul communicating and intertwining with each other. He describes phenomenology as “Transcendental philosophy” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p vii) a similar effect as glass. Glass is the perfect material to evoke these feelings, it can transcend you into the next dimension, playing with the viewer like no other material. As Bletter describes glass “translucent and reflective materials symbolize transcendence, spiritual light, or divine wisdom,” (Bletter, 1982, p27), the visual art of glass enlightens the public to connect with their body and mind.

The lighthouse as a space represents hope and light in the darkness, my chosen artworks mirror this idea as a lighthouse uses light and motion and works as a beacon of reassurance. The show is set at night creating an atmosphere, each artwork has its own appropriate lighting. I have redesigned the Mumbles Lighthouse to accommodate

the exhibition and to make it accessible to the public (see Fig 1). The use of proxemics has been applied in this exhibition similarly as phenomenology, the theories both involve the senses and are unique for everyone. Just as Edward T Hall explains man's awareness.

Man's sense of space is closely related to his sense of self, which is in an intimate transaction with his environment. Man can be viewed as having visual, kinesthetic, tactile, and thermal aspects of his self which may be either inhibited or encouraged to develop by his environment (Hall, 1966, p63)

Each environment consists of the consciousness re-evaluating the surroundings and accommodating to the individual.



Fig 2

The first piece to be displayed is "Liquid Sunshine" (see Fig 2) created by Rui Sasaki. In parallel to this exhibition, Sasaki's intention for the installation was to create an interactive experience, this piece will entice the senses and the mind. Once entering the room, the lights dim, making the phosphorescent glass bubbles glow. She asked herself "how can I visualize sunshine in glass?" (Sasaki, 2020). Using fluorescent blue

expresses the light in the darkness, with blue symbolizing not only water but a sense of calm, giving the feeling of hope and comfort. The falling droplets create an image of anticipated motion and sound, immersing the consciousness in familiar memories. As Bogdashina states “the sensory perceptions are joined with appropriate cognitive associations and are bound to general types of things in memory (concepts).” (Bogdashina, 2016, p47). The sensory organs are connected and link one other to the brain to register certain memories, which link back to perception and consciousness. The use of phosphorescent glass is interesting because it uses ultraviolet light, a clever way to communicate glass as a liquid. This work and its title convey the changes in the weather and our moods, expressing there will always be sunshine after rain.

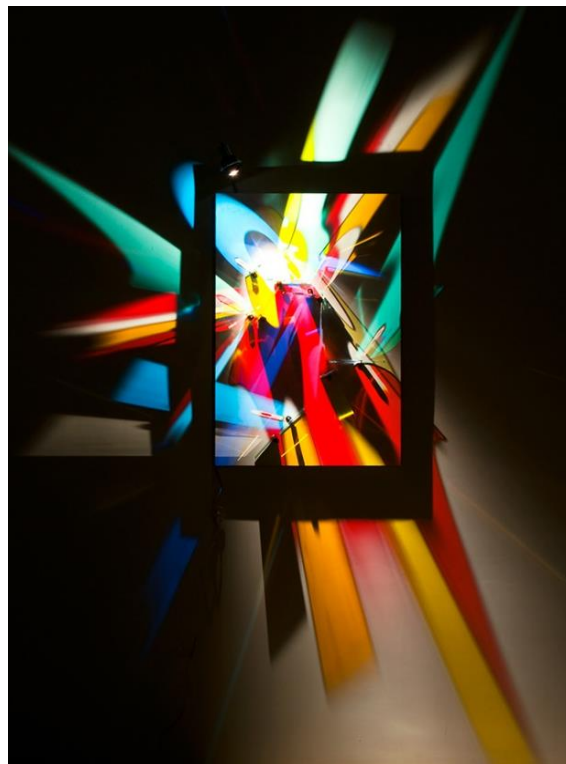


Fig 3

Stephan Knapp’s “No Boundaries” (see Fig 3) relies heavily on light, in the case of the exhibition referring to sunlight after the rain. The piece is positioned against the slightly curved wall with no interfering light so that it can be seen at its finest. Knapp describes his work as “light paintings” where he paints with light, using glass shapes and a spotlight he can produce these widespread rays of vibrant colour. Richard Gregory expands on Newton’s discoveries of how light works through glass, “When light is bent by a prism, [...] the beam of light comes out as a fan of light, with the spectral colours spread out.” (Gregory, 2015, p18). The goal of these artworks is to

challenge perception using dimension and space to enlighten our minds and mood, the bright coloured light rays give us a warm happy feeling. Viewing this from a certain distance can confuse our senses and concepts, sending us into a transcendent thought. As Bloomer discusses “As a way of looking at art, perceptual analysis can be both enlightening and difficult” (Bloomer, 1990, p212) explaining that art shows a new way of seeing and it also requires previous knowledge of context, viewers are able to change their perception of not only the piece but other factors relating to it.



Fig 4

Dale Chihuly is a glass artist who is famous for bringing glass alive, his creation entitled “Gibson Chandelier” (see Fig 4) is next in the gallery, the life after the light. The work is suspended from the second floor to the first floor as indicated in figure one, in doing so the piece has enough secure and visual space. While using the spiral staircase the audience has a 360° viewpoint allowing them to immerse fully in the art. Just as De Grandis mentions in Theory and use of colour “The distance between object and light source [...] and that between object and observer influence colour perception as well” (De Grandis, 1986, p90). Having lots of lights directed at

the chandelier and an appropriate distance, the colours and protuberances become more vibrant and realistic. The various shadows created from the piece in combination with the curved walls position the audience into another world. As he mentions on his website. "Glass is the most magical of all materials. It transmits light in a special way." (Chihuly, N.D) The way Chihuly has created these by glassblowing, allowed him to capture the essence of life in this work, and once again connect body and soul through the glass.



Fig 5



Fig 6



Fig 7

"Time Rock XVI" by Dawn Bendick (see Fig 5) is colourful casted glasswork and demonstrates how life is growing and changing in the exhibition. Bendick's rock stacks use dichroic glass combined with lighting to create the colour shifting, moving through the rainbow from warm reds to cool purple tones (see Fig 6 & 7). Bendick (2022) told Craft Council "The light is the material that triggers the magic in the glass," using the various lighting Bendick can conjure life in the stones, the stacking rocks change from season to season creating a sensory experience. The colours employed are light and playful resembling sweets, engaging the viewers to feel comfort and happiness." Colour evokes moods, expresses feelings, and even affects your physical sense of well-being." (Bloomer, 1990, p84), as Bloomer confirms, colours can evoke their own

phenomena of emotions, Bendick uses slightly transparent and reflective glass to magnify the hues making the work more appealing.



Fig 8

Tom Fruin's "Watertower" (see Fig 8) is the final piece in the exhibition, the final rays of light and colour. This stained-glass piece is replacing the light at the top of the lighthouse, generating a new ray of illuminating colours. To create the stained-glass looking patchwork, the water tower uses recycled plexiglass and steel rods found in New York. Fruin's artworks heavily relies on the environment for the most impact, placing them on top of buildings in various sites in the city. Having this piece in a different context is interesting and brings another experience with it. This work can transport the viewer through body and mind, as Knapp (1998, p6) states in the Art of Glass, "Alchemy, mystery, magic, and transformation- the luminous poetry of glass presents both spiritual and physical presence.". The viewers are not only able to walk around this piece, submerging themselves into the warm light, but also able to look out the window to observe the light beam across the seascape. The colours themselves are the ones from the rainbow, which are recreated outside. The rainbow, like this exhibition, forms an experience as well as a sign of hope.

Figures

Figure 1. Baldwin, T. (2022) *Exhibition Map*

Figure 2. Sasaki, R. (N.D) *Liquid Sunshine*. Available at: <https://rui-sasaki.com/home.html> (Accessed: 6 April 2022)

Figure 3. Knapp, S. (N.D) *No Boundaries*. Available at: <http://www.lightpaintings.com/lightpaintings-1/2mrczwhi4y6vrttj7stkaxkyn9590i> (Accessed: 6 April 2022)

Figure 4. Chihuly, D. (N.D) *Gibson Chandelier*. Available at: <https://www.museumofglass.org/spotlight-on-dale-chihuly> (Accessed: 6 April 2022)

Figure 5. Bendick, D. (2022) *Time Rock XVI*. Available at: <https://www.joannabird.com/artist/dawn-bendick/time-rock-stack-xvi/?from=exhibition&exhibition=13364> (Accessed: 6 April 2022)

Figure 6. Bendick, D. (2021) *Unequating Time*. Available at: <https://dawnbendick.squarespace.com/unequating-time> (Accessed: 6 April 2022)

Figure 7. Bendick, D. (2021) *Unequating Time*. Available at: <https://dawnbendick.squarespace.com/unequating-time> (Accessed: 6 April 2022)

Figure 8. Fruin, T. (2012) *Watertower*. Available at: <https://www.alumni.ucsb.edu/coastlines/summer-2019/icon-grows-in-brooklyn> (Accessed: 6 April 2022)

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