

Ways of Perceiving - How Art Shapes Feeling Curation Essay

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BA Illustration

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How Art Shapes Feeling

An Exhibition Exploring the Psychology Behind Art

My intention with How Art Shapes Feeling is to observe brain chemistry at work through the most beautiful form of self-expression. I have designed an almost experimentally structured exhibition, using subconscious signifiers relating to the observers' sensory and physical world of sound, lighting, scent, and temperature conditions to tailor the experience of each artwork to that described by our basic human emotions. I would like to immerse the viewer briefly in a complete experience, and later disclose the elements that made up the moment in a communal area featuring a wall of feedback for viewers to anonymously contribute individual experiences.

"Artworks are emotional, as is the experience of perceiving these works. The representational content of a work provokes emotions in us (such as sorrow at a sad scene in a painting), and the tone or expression of a work is also perceived and felt." (Winner, 2019, p.11)

What may calm one may unnerve another, and this phenomenon that artworks create should not go without admiration. "Each viewer may respond to the features of an artwork, connect these to their own expectations or history, and have a response which is unique to the individual" (Pelowski et al. 2020, p. 278)

I would host this event in (a fictional) hospital to emphasise the study of the human mind and valence – the art is the vehicle, and so I feel a gallery setting would shift this pretence - after a long drive on a continuous straight road to create a feeling of labour and otherworldliness. A journey that eludes the passenger to feel they have been going in circles for hours, representing the fragile and easily broken passageways of the brain.

In this paper I will introduce each piece I have chosen, and I will explain why. Inevitably these pieces will have personal connection with me, but I have also discussed with a range of people and researched what the immediate visual response is in the mind's eye toward the selected emotions of fear, anxiety, euphoria, grief, and love.

What I will *not* be doing, however, is attempting to differentiate between what has been explained as "...Genuine psychobiological emotions (in viewers) as opposed to merely "aesthetic" ones" (Konečni, 2015, p. 306)

To me they are both as valuable, unpredictable, and therefore fascinating, leading to endless creation.

This layout was constructed with the intention of movement and polarity to keep the mind moving. Corridors of nothing but slight suggestions of light from the proceeding door would ‘cleanse the palate’, free of stimuli, and to maintain uncertainty and arousal I would have the ‘Shepard’s tone’ playing over speakers.

“...the Shepard-Risset glissando illusion, both within the aesthetic context of a musical composition and on its own, was capable of evoking disruption of equilibrium, frequently leading to the associated feeling of falling.” (Vernooij et al. 2016)

The communal space would be a neutral design and layout by avoiding clutter, topical emblems, portraits, posters, or subjective stimuli (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2009)

Gallery Layout

How Art
Shapes Feeling

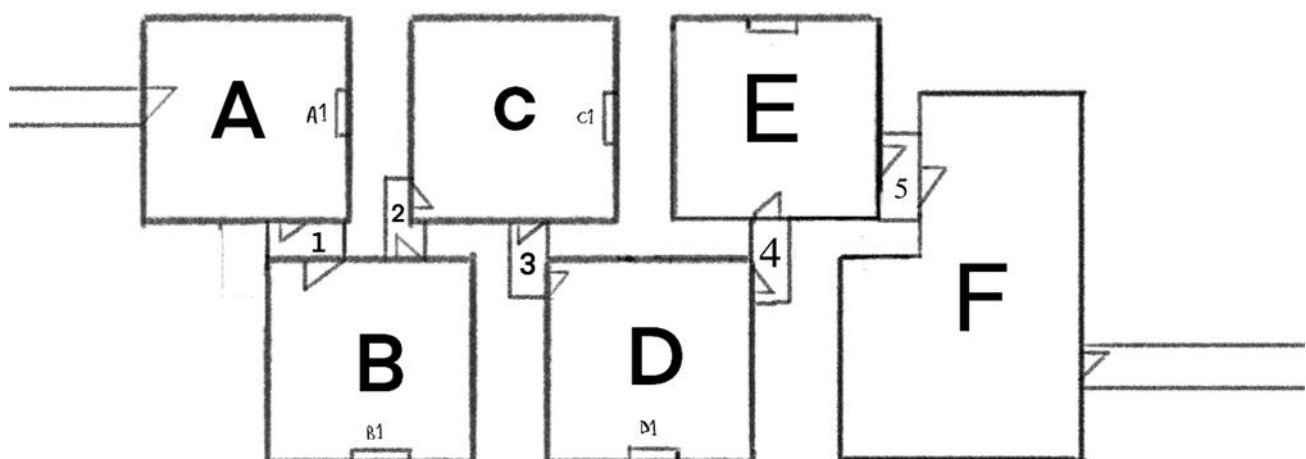


Figure 1

A – Fear	D - Grief
B – Anxiety	E - Love
C – Euphoria	F – Neutral, social space

A. Fear, Uncertainty

The temperature of this room would simulate the body’s response to fear. A slow heat would emanate from a radiator, directed at the viewers’ chest and face to replicate the physical events shown below in a map from NPR.org (2013) which is referred to throughout this exhibition. “In our colloquial speech and everyday life, emotions are linked to temperature (e.g., love “warms” our hearts, whereas fear leaves us “out in the cold” (Bruno et al. 2017, p. 302) (see below, fear is hot in the face and chest yet cold in the extremities)

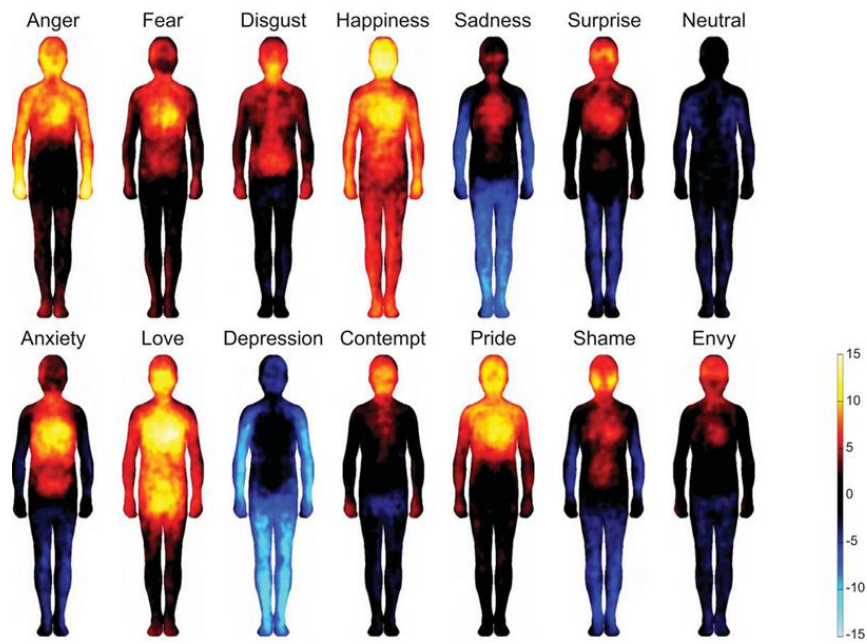


Figure 2



Figure 3

We feel vulnerable in the locked gaze of the Incubus and Henri Fuseli's widely speculated motivation behind "The Nightmare" (1781), investigated by Scharf to be "initially inspired by an unrequited love and by an intense feeling for vengeance that had been transformed into

the imagery of an erotic dream” (2014), I feel it is a frightening piece due to the enigma it carries alone.

B. Anxiety, Unease

Once again heat would be directed towards the viewers face; however, the room would be kept very cold towards the ground. By keeping the legs cool, we are ‘engineering’ anxiety.



Figure 4

Alongside the instant vulnerability this haunting composition conjures at first sight, the viewer would be shown that the title of this piece by Anton Semenov translates from its title “Oświęcim” (2000) to Auschwitz.

Immediately we are faced with unease at the autonomous association with the holocaust. The image delves deeper into the viewers’ emotions in its context. What are we observing? Why are we observing? Are we the perpetrator? A rescuer? No evidence is told through expression however their empty faces are extremely aware, not just of their situation, but of us. Hollow, gaunt, and empty, human nature’s fight or flight is triggered by the lack of eye contact.

This room would utilise elements of sound, inducing unease, and by reinforcing the content and title of the piece I would choose John Williams's harrowing "Schindler's List". This piece abides by every aural factor contributing to sadness and anxiety as studied by Gabrielsson and Lindström (2010, p. 39) who conclude that we associate "sadness with slower tempo and melodic and rhythmic complexity". Alongside the painting, the piece further wrenches us with unrest.

C. Euphoria



Figure 5

"Bright opaque yellow can put you on alert. Warm golden light can lull you into memory..." (Bellatoni, 2005, p. 44) Lighting would be manipulated in this room to create the nostalgic glow of tangerine, and to also drift softly around the viewers' face, utilising an ASMR approach.

"ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) is the experience of positive sensations in response to visual and aural stimuli...Objects [are] placed over the visual frame to simulate the ambient viewer's visual perspective on the action that is being represented." (Zappavigna, 2020)

In this case, the action being the movement in Salvador Dalí's "Temptation of Saint Anthony" (1946)

“ASMR ‘triggers’ produce a pleasant ‘tingling’ sensation in the viewer, often on the scalp or back” (Barratt et al., 2017) Whilst viewing Dali’s strange, manic subjects, the viewer is subconsciously registering topics from a multitude of subjects and so registering in different areas in their life. I feel the chance of a key ‘memory’ being engaged is exponentially heightened when observing Dali’s paranoid-critical method of a culmination of mismatching objects. Additionally, these creatures, humans and situations are inspiring of “dreams, desire, magic, sexuality, and the revolutionary power of artworks to transform how we understand the world.” (Art Institute Chicago, 2021)

D. Grief



Figure 6

The reaction I had observed from those around me to Paul Delaroche’s painting of “The Execution of Lady Jane Grey” (1833) was the wavering of the heart. From marvelling over the textures of the young queen’s soft skin, to the sudden awareness of the awful fate of it. Studies show smooth materials such as silk, along with marble and granite etc. are associated with sadness. This could be connected to objects made of these textures, such as silk lining coffins and marble “with monuments, which are often dedicated to dead people and found at cemeteries, and therefore are associated with sadness therefore connecting to

death.” (Iosifyan and Korolkova, 2019, p. 83)

The unaware, blameless, and almost trusting beauty beneath the silk handkerchief hesitantly feeling, kneeling to position is the point the viewer may be faced with the emotion of grief.

Across from this are her ladies in waiting, sobbing and heartbroken. You can almost hear their anguished cries, our sense of hearing is awoken, though there would be complete silence in this very cold room.

E. Love, intimacy

This room would carry a scent of chocolate, shown in a study by Schouteten et al. (2018) to invoke “positive emotions such as “polite”, “tender” and “loving” in tests carried out with a product that was rich in the scent of cocoa with an intense bitterness.



Figure 7

The painting itself would be “The Meeting on the Turret Stairs” by Frederic William Burton, (1864)

It tells a Danish ballad of the story of Hellelil and her personal guard Hildebrand Prince of Engelland, who fell in love. Her father disapproved, ordering her seven brothers to kill the young prince.

“Burton chose to imagine a romantic moment from the story before the terrible end: the final meeting of the two lovers.” (National Gallery of Ireland, 2021) This story would be displayed alongside the image.

The intimacy created between the two flows beyond the frame. Rather than feel an intrusion, the act of the prince almost taking his last inhale of his lovers’ scent coupled with the knowledge of this being the last time, we feel a sense of warmth, adoration, and union, albeit bittersweet.

This room would be a very comfortable warmth, and soft pink light suggesting innocence and romance would dimly illuminate the painting.

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Figures

Fig. One: Nicholas, A (2021) *Gallery Layout: How Art Shapes Feeling* [diagram] (private)

Fig. Two: Nummenmaa, L et al. (2013) *Mapping Emotions On The Body: Love Makes Us Warm All Over* Available at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2013/12/30/258313116/mapping-emotions-on-the-body-love-makes-us-warm-all-over?t=1618587778906> (Accessed: April 2021)

Fig. Three: Fuseli, H (1781) *The Nightmare* [oil on canvas] Detroit Institute of Art Available at: <https://smarthistory.org/henry-fuseli-the-nightmare/> (Accessed: April 2021)

Fig. Four: Semenov, A (2000) *Oświęcim* [digital] Available at: <https://www.artstation.com/artwork/bK5bgr> (Accessed: April 2021)

Fig. Five: Dali, S (1946) *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* [oil on canvas] Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium Available at: <http://salvadoraliprints.org/the-temptation-of-st-anthony/> (Accessed: April 2021)

Fig. Six: Delaroche, P (1833) *The Execution of Lady Jane Grey* [oil on canvas] The National Gallery, London Available at: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/paul-delaroche-the-execution-of-lady-jane-grey> (Accessed: April 2021)

Fig. Seven: Burton, F W (1864) *The Meeting on the Turret Stairs* [watercolour and gouache on paper] National Gallery of Ireland Available at: <https://www.nationalgallery.ie/art-and-artists/highlights-collection/hellelil-and-hildebrand-meeting-turret-stairs-frederic> (Accessed: April 2021)