

‘I prefer living in colour’

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I prefer living in colour

A personal exhibition exploring the use of colour in art.

Reviewing David Hockney's 2016 Royal Academy exhibition, Hero Magazine quoted the artist as saying, "I prefer living in colour" (McDowall, 2016). The quotation has become a personal statement for my own work and a realisation that colour is a determining factor in the creative process. In this exhibition, the importance of colour and its use by my three chosen artists is the prevailing motif.

In curating this exhibition, I was drawn to artists who I regard as having celebrated colour throughout their careers. Given my personal connection to each of the three chosen pieces of work, I want to share their emotional relationship with visitors and enable them to become immersed in the richness of the works on display.

I chose the white open space of the Mission Gallery in Swansea as representing a literal blank canvas for the exhibition, and the size and shape of the Gallery perfectly complements the assembled pieces. Built in 1868 as a Seaman's Mission, the Mission Gallery in Swansea with its white walls, provide the ideal combination of space and physical environment.

In enabling the works to shine and to enhance the visitors' visual experience, I was guided by the advice of the Zimmerman Gallery that the 'key aim should always be to create an environment in which the art works, and not the walls, take centre stage' (Zimmerman Gallery, 2020).

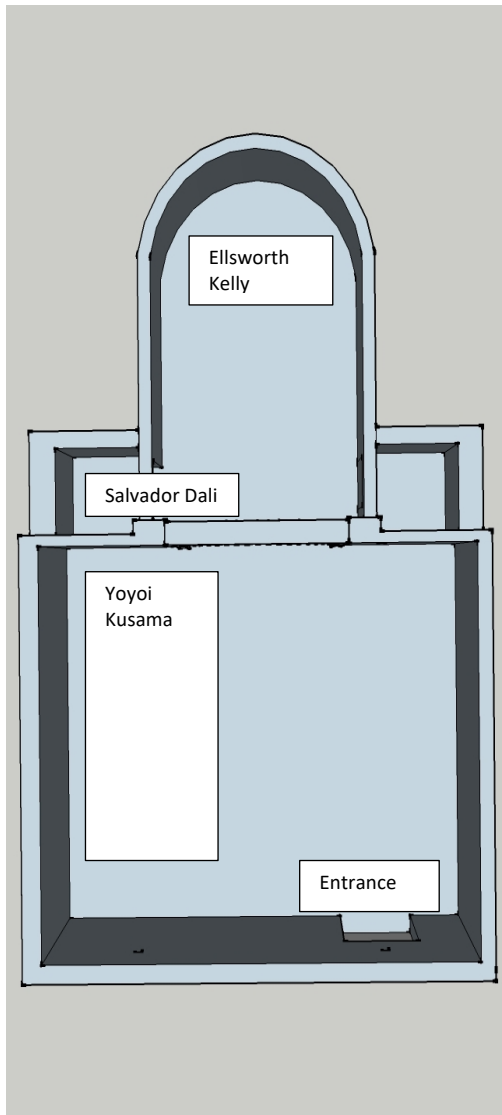


Figure 1: Floor Plan, Mission Gallery, Swansea.

The exhibition begins with Yoyoi Kusama's, 2011 installation, *Filled with the Brilliance of Life*. I first discovered Kusama's work on a visit to Japan in 2019. Born in Matsumoto, the town has a gallery to celebrate Kusama's work and her renowned spot paintings also feature on several buildings and even local buses. Such though is Kusama's international fame, that in 2018 *The Guardian's*, Tim Adams posed the rhetorical question, 'Yoyoi Kusama: the world's favourite artist?' (Adams, 2018).



Figure 2: Filled with the Brilliance of Life, Yayoi Kusama.

Filled with the Brilliance of Life is an infinity room created by installing hundreds of flashing coloured LEDs in a dark mirrored chamber. The pinpricks of light are reflected endlessly in the mirrors, giving the impression of being in endless space. The lights surround and engulf you, making it hard to tell where you are and where the rest of the room ends. I love the way Kusama encourages your direct involvement, whether it is through her large-scale environments or by encouraging you to add spots of colour to her installations. Her plan, and my intention in this exhibition is to breakdown boundaries between the visitor and her art.

Kusama's fascination with endless space, colours and forms is evident throughout her career and, executed across a range of media, her work is characterised by an obsession with patterns and repetition. (Miro, 2020). Although her early work and larger scale installations enabled visitors to become part of the phenomenological environment in experiencing

endless forms, her infinity mirrored rooms underline the importance of the role the visitor plays in the experiences of her installations. As Iain Thompson contends, Heidegger suggested, “a lived experience” is an experience that makes us feel “more alive”. (Thompson, 2019).

The popularity of Kusama’s infinity rooms has increased over the last few years, with the trend for galleries and museums to offer immersive and experiential experiences. As Cliff Lauson argues, art ‘has always been bound up with the viewer’s experience and ... installations and immersive art have become swept up in this cultural shift’. (Lauson, 2020). Kusama’s latest touring exhibition, “Infinity Mirror Rooms”, is due to appear at the Tate Modern, London in May 2020, when two of her installations will be on show. (Tate Modern, 2020).

My second exhibit, is Salvador Dali’s ‘The Royal Heart’ which is a gold heart inset with rubies and created in honour of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, (Salvador Dali Museum, 2020). This is an extraordinary piece of jewellery and I was compelled to include it in the exhibition.

Crafted from yellow gold, and encrusted with rubies, diamonds, emeralds, aquamarines, peridots, garnets, amethysts and pearls, the most astonishing and surprising element is the incorporation of a mechanism to enable the heart to replicate the beating of a human heart. The inscription on the reverse reads: ‘Beaten Gold heart with jewelled crown and inset with pulsating ruby centre, signifies “the ruler whose heart beats for his people”’ (www.house-of-francheska.co.uk. 2020)



Figure 3: The Royal Heart, Salvador Dali. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSO-uH4sf8Q> (Accessed 15/04/2020)

The jewellery collection in the Dali Museum, forms part of his design work and the collaboration with the American Millionaire Cummins Catherwood and the Argentinian silversmith Carlos Alemany, (Sporn, 2019). Each piece of jewellery is either animated or has an optical illusion created at its centre. Dali's collaboration and expansion of his creative skills into jewellery feature many of the familiar recurring themes which appears in his paintings and sculptures e.g. eyes with jewelled tear drops, ruby lips with pearl teeth, melting hearts and clocks and elephants with spindly legs.

Abigail Cain contends, that by the end of the 1940s, Dali no longer exhibited in Surrealist shows but saw himself in the tradition of the Renaissance masters, (Cain, 2016). In 1959, Dali confided in the original exhibition catalogue, "My object is to show the jeweller's art in true perspective, where the design and craftsmanship are to be values above the material worth of the gems, as in Renaissance times", (Gala – Salvador Dali Foundation, 2004)

I visited the Salvador Dali museum in Figueras, Spain, in 2018 and was overwhelmed by the jewellery collection and admiration for the skills of the craftspeople who created them. I love the shock of the ruby and gold heart and the way that it draws the viewer in to be dazzled, astonished and provoked by the design and overall impact.

My final exhibit is the stained-glass panel from the Austin Chapel in Texas, which is based on sketches Ellsworth Kelly made of a chapel in France between 1948 and 1954 (Cogley, 2018). The Austin Chapel has three window installations, and the one I have chosen to install in the Mission Gallery for this exhibition, is the 12 “tumbling” squares. I chose this window having seen photographs of the light coming into the chapel, as it resembles a watercolour painting with shimmering blurred effects and no sharp edges. The experience of being in an environment where sunlight strikes a building and floods through the coloured glass in windows is something that never fails to delight.

I have been aware of Ellsworth Kelly, and in particular his celebration of colour, but the stained-glass panels he created for this chapel are extraordinary and were my starting point for my exhibition of colour. As Harry Cooper contends, in his review of the Austin chapel, ‘the squares, which Kelly abstracted, or extracted, from the famous rose windows in the north transept of France’s Chartres Cathedral, are mesmerizing’ (Cooper, 2015). Kelly had a long-established career and his association with colour meant he played a pivotal role in the development of abstract art in America. (<https://ellsworthkelly.org/biography 2020>.) Visitors experience a place of calm and lights. This effect is what I wanted to create in this exhibition, as colours and patterns move and change with the light as the sun moves.

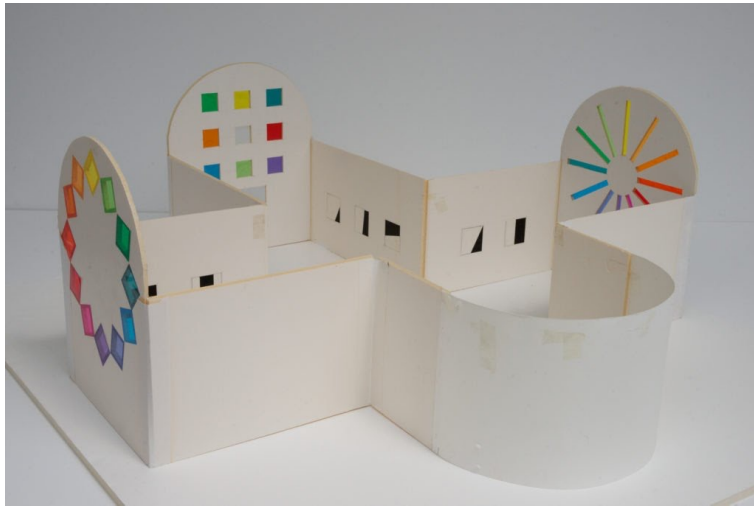


Figure 4: Model for the Austin Chapel.



Figure 5: Inside the Austin Chapel.

I want visitors to feel they are enveloped in saturated colours from the stained-glass windows as it tumbles across the floor and walls and forms a visual installation. It is something to be experienced rather than observed. I want visitors to the exhibition to share an immersive experience, to bathe in the warmth of the jewelled colours.

Having personally felt the emotional benefits of colour, I also want through this exhibition to investigate the theories and evidence behind the use of colours, from the way they feature in our everyday language, when we speak of being white with fear or in our political life, where

the Green Party is synonymous with the ecology movement. Similarly colour therapy, or chromotherapy, has been used to test the benefits of colour to improve wellbeing. Even in the nineteenth-century, Florence Nightingale in her 'Notes on Nursing' believed, 'The variety of form and brilliance of colours in objects presented to patients are actual means to recovery' (Nursing Standard 2006, p32). Colour therapy, and research into the use of light across the spectrum, and its impact on sleep, emotion and wellbeing, has been used to help people suffering from a variety of health conditions, including depression, the management of anxiety and improving confidence (Westland, 2020).

My original conception of this exhibition was to test colour therapy by inviting visitors to focus on and celebrate colour, as my chosen artists have, by being part of the colourful images. However, in the process of curating this exhibition, the emerging themes of art as an experience has come to dominate my thinking. As a consequence, I have come to share Guy Debord's reflection, that 'images influence our lives and beliefs on a daily basis' and of the way in which, 'spectacle actively alters human interactions and relationships'(Morgan and Purje, 2016)

I was conscious of creating a memorable and emotional experience and to take the idea of curation beyond the literal meaning of selecting objects to be shown in a museum. A broader and more appropriate definition is to *direct* towards the world of colour and in particular, to *orchestrate* an event in which all elements come together for maximum effect.

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