

The relationship between the sensory factors and art and how they
can benefit individuals with mental illnesses.

Amy Monaghan

1901280

Word count:4779

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA (Hons)
University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Swansea
10 December 2021

The relationship between sensory artwork and mental illnesses.

Introduction:

Within this body of text I will be exploring the three sensory factors of the human body that can be manipulated by art to benefit individuals who suffer from mental illnesses. The sensory factors that can be manipulated are sight, sound and touch, each of these factors holds properties that make art an interactive experience for individuals who might not have the concentration, cognitive or interactive skills to understand and appreciate the 'stranded' art gallery/ exhibition space. The three factors normally fall hand in hand together and complement each other however when divided and explored separately each factor flourishes with possibilities for the artist. I aim to explore a wide range of techniques, materials, cultural differences in beliefs of mental illness benefits and art, decorating each element in order to rebuild a new and better understanding of how art can be beneficial for individuals who suffer from mental illnesses and how this can be achieved. I will be exploring artist such as, Leonard de Vinci , Pieter Claesz , Jeffrey Hayes , Rachel Ruysch , Carsten Nicolai , Camille Norment , Christine Sun Kim , the vacuum cleaner , Sue Webster, Kelly Odell, Sean Kelly, Carter Nicolai and Kenichi Kanazawa and more, this individual group of artists , the work produced by each of these unique artists forms can be transferred into my practice allowing me to explore different possibilities within my work.

Visual perception/ sight, in a nutshell, is the ability to decipher surrounding environments through colours, shapes, light and reflections forming objects, the ability to observe the object and its surroundings deconstructing and reconstructing to come to an understanding. This observation to sight has been transferred to the strongest factor of the arts and is one of the most vital acts to modern-day art education. Observational work is better known as 'drawing from life' demonstrates how an artist can interpret the world and how to make a compositional judgment, how light can be separated from shadow. Observational drawing is the influence of centuries of art to this day. One of the first examples of observational drawing is prehistoric drawings and sculptures dating as old as 64,000 years old, prehistoric cave paintings are the worlds first known works of art. Over two hundred cave paintings, some being created as early as 30,000 BC have been found all through the Pyrenees regions of France and Spain. The painting and drawings fundamentally characterise animals, human forms, a variety of non-descriptive symbols, positive and negative handprints and engravings. However the usual appliance of the art historians inquires are written documentations, the intelligence of the social and political disposition of the time period, and other art and artefacts to use as comparison simply do not exist for the prehistoric time period, uneducated societies are extremely important, scarce and similarly not understood but if anything prehistoric art shows that it is human instinct to make art, observe and understand. The human mind has always been curious about its surroundings wanting to know more, artist Leonardo De Vinci is a prime example of this as his interest in observing have had an influence on centuries of art, science and technology approaching disciplines from chemistry to astronomy. Leonardo's vision is probably one of the noblest of the senses and of outstanding importance, his appetite and excitement for vision were extreme. "The eye is the window of the human body through which the soul views and enjoys the beauties of the world. Because of it, the soul is content in its human prison, and without it, this human prison is its torment" he writes in his *Paragone* (comparison of the arts). Leonardo emphasised the way to envision knowledge and he developed anatomical illustrations, and thought of painting as a science, and the ingenious act of painting is effective to visualise the workings of the world. He had many talents in exploring his mind and the mind of others and as a physiologist and an anatomist he established the importance of the sense of vision and how vision must be studied and investigated. Observation and perceiving also have the content of paying attention, and Leonardo executed this throughout his practice exquisitely. Leonardo would afflict a strike a dusty table and would depict the pattern on which the dust would settle again describing the change information. He consummated a repeated process of the human

body, if and when his observations differed with those of his authorities, he was able to emancipate himself and avant-garde his original discoveries.

These examples of intense observation can be carried out by day-to-day exercises on interactions, however, individuals who suffer from mental illnesses can interpret their observations differently depending on the illness. People with mental illnesses can encounter five different stages of a change in perception and/or hallucinations involve seeing things that are not there. Hallucinations are sensory experiences that may appear real however are created by the mind, visual hallucinations can be made up of flashing lights, bright colours, misjudgment of space and seeing people/animals which are not there. This is why exploring human senses in art is so important for individuals with mental illnesses and how it can benefit them by allowing them to understand and appreciate the form of quality of life that can be introduced to them. This can be introduced to them through many forms of art including painting, print, photography, image manipulation and colour perception as each element of art refers to a different sensory factor. I have explored the seance sight throughout my practice by highlighting and/or eliminating particular elements to sight that can be affected by mental illnesses enabling me to create a better understanding for the audience of the effects of mental illnesses.

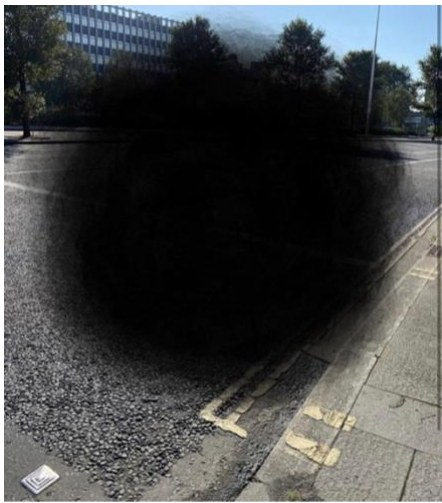


Image Example (5)

This piece was created in inspiration of an individual who suffers from a rear eye condition, Stargardt

"The most common symptom of Stargardt disease is a slow loss of central vision in both eyes"(1) personally I think this piece is a strong image as it is capable of introducing a different quality of life for the audience placing themselves into others perception of sight. This can be applied in various ways in the form of art and could be an extended process of working with photography and/or videography.



Image Example (6)

This sculpted is approximately 1.8 meters tall made from coats and jackets dipped in a plaster cast and the casting of three faces. This is an example of the possible effects of some forms of dementia, dementia affects and damages different parts of the brain - "The occipital lobes at the back of the brain process visual information. If the occipital lobes become damaged, a person may find it hard to work out what they see in front of them."(2) one effect that can be caused by the occipital being damaged is that an individual may mistaken a coat hanging for a person. By creating this sculpture it has allowed a visual representation that would not be able to be seen another way as it has been. Using art to benefit the understanding of the

unknown has come to be more important than I initially thought as it has allowed me to understand the confusion and disorientation of mentally ill patients and how they can be prevented by removing the triggers.

Artist such as Leonardo de Vinci, Pieter Claesz, Jeffrey Hayes, and Rachel Ruysch each explored the powerful use of visual observation techniques and used them as an advantage to take them beyond



just a visual experience for example Pieter Claesz oil painting “Allegory of the five senses (still life smoking implements and musical instruments)”(4),

by depicting each element included within the painting it introduces each different sensory factors bringing them to life, of course the musical instruments captive the sense of sound, the food platters spread

across the centre of the table applied to the scene of taste making the food look irresistible, a sight of hot coal triggers the scene of smell with capturing the warmth of the room touching on a memory of walking into a warm room when its been cold out side and smell the wood burning. The mirror in the background demonstrates the human ability of sight by reflecting the flute of wine “the mirror symbolised the eyes beholding the object”(4).

Another sensory factor that can be influenced and manipulated is the use of sound, this can apply to may of the arts including performance and installation art, sound manipulation and contemporary art. Abstraction sometimes mean non-figurative paintings however art has broadened it emotive medium to the point where abstraction doesn’t necessarily need to be seen, touched or felt. There is no argument that working with sound art is rising up and having its moment. Artist are starting to explore the possibilities in using sound in their art in its pure state, synchronously combining and complexity sound, noise and music in the contemporary sense. Other artists have been known to investigate the political and cultural effects of using sound within their work. Sound art is one of the most direct ways of captivating forms of art as the audience is able to enjoy the art even if they are unable to see the art, and using music as an indication, sound has the ability to form emotions without any thoughts and/or explanation. I have explored artists which in their own way through engaging with sound wether it is through performance, installation, analogue machines, and custom instruments. One artist that has been brought to light is Carsten Nicolai who created the piece “sound and not sound” (7) this particular piece was built up of a basin of water which reflected an continuous row of neon lights bright white the installation showed the footage of silent frequencies shuffling through the basin of water moving the reflection of the white neon lights “sound and not sound” the piece it is capturing leaving the audience in anticipation, waiting for the sound although there is non. Relating artists include artist Camille Norment, Norment is an Oslo-based artist who uses large-scale installations with sound showing in the Venice biennale in representation of the Norway pavilion in 2015, this particular installation was called (rupture) crated using large shards of glass panels placed in a particular way that when struck with a high frequency would shatter under the stress “getting shaken up” (8). The high level frequency sound was made using an instrument called a glass harmonica “Responding to the sound and noise in its environment” this was created for the audience to experience emotions through the sense of sound, emotions such as fear and excitement. This level of focus and attention can be applied to art in a way that can benefit individuals which suffer from mental illnesses although with most mental illnesses sensory factors can me interrupted and effected by damage to the brain as some senses are lost others can heighten, and with most illnesses sight, taste and touch are normally one of the first senses to be effected leaving sound/hearing to be left, high tend. Studies how that sound can be used to trigger emotions, this can be a psychological response that an individual respond to differently as the sounds hold different memories for each individual some good some bad, however what can make this more confusing for individuals with mental

illnesses these sounds can be internal or external meaning the sounds may only be heard by them as part of their condition, when taking this into consideration using sound in art when dealing with individuals with mental illnesses is a sensitive matter as the audience it applies to will need different needs met this can be achieved by focusing on positive sounds such as birds chirping, bells/charms and laughter, these positive sounds may not appeal to each individual however a high percentage would find these particular sounds easy to listen too, sounds that could be manipulated and influential to positive responses. Sounds that can be found to be discomforting and irritable are chewing noises, whistling, breathing and tapping/ keyboard sound although these are the sounds that are most common in our day-to-day lives, individuals who are irritated by these sounds often have a visual response to the actions made by these sound causing anxiety, stress and discomfort within interactions so by using the factor of art and creating a space to eliminate these sounds for a calm sensory environment. Another artist that explores the manipulation of sound within art is artist Christine Sun Kim instead of thinking of sound as a noise she uses sound as a language, a form of communication using different platforms of art such as drawing, installation, video and performance to enhance her work in a world of silence. Christine was born deaf, however she has not let this affect her ability to connect with sound through connection on performance and perception. (9) the last example showed the extent of sound in its element, captivating the whole use of the sensory factor showing that even without sound, sound can be heard.



Image Example (10).

This image consists of an experimental example of how sound can be heard without sound. This installation was created with the use of sheets of tinfoil lightly sellotape to the wall, originally this piece was created exploring sight however I never processed the idea of the sound of the tinfoil shimmering together creating its own music.

This is an interesting approach to the sense of sound in the arts, never less by taking away or adding to an element of everyday living can be disruptive, agitating, frustrating however the techniques used can show the extent of a mental illness and/or used in the reverse affect and be used as a soothing strategy designed for individuals that suffer with the loss or manipulated hearing through a mental illness, this sensory factor can be related back to the sense 'sight' as mentioned prior when one sense is lost others enhance making it possible that art can be used to create an image for the ears.

Another sensory factor that has been introduced within the art community is interactive art working, first emerging in the late 1950s, doing pursuing in the same direction as artists' newfound desire to find environments that are less formal and limited, environments that art is displayed within such as private/public gallery spaces and exhibition spaces (11) this urge to touch and interact with the arts within the space/ environment is relatable as when experiencing a space as such elegance it often for fills individual is human nature of curiosity, touching upon emotions, triggering memories. Throughout my personal experience wherever myself and/or a group have visited a gallery/ exhibition space and notice stating 'not to touch with the displayed objects' the object itself then becomes irresistible to touch. Most individuals know art that is displayed is meant to be seen not touched; however when individuals are interested in a particular artist's approach to a technique their mind leads them to want to explore further. A wide variety of modern and contemporary art could awaken the inquisitiveness

within about what the object in mind is made out of leaving the object vulnerable. The most intriguing materials consist of plastic, “ whose original life span was meant to be temporary”(12) choose plastic as a material to represent their creations, appear to be strong structures, however plastic can actually be vulgarised and are more delicate and easily damaged when they first appear as a result of this contemporary sculptures and structures are often intriguing by the use of the artists colour, tone and texture making the piece ‘ fun’, appearing to look interactive, especially to a young audience. One of the main reasons why art spaces slash environments should not be touched or handled apart from the fragility of the work is the human trace of fingerprints which carry self created oils, sweats, acid and dirt which could be destructive to the structures within the space by the transfer to the artwork. Metal, painted surfaces, works on paper, textiles and photographs are all vulnerable contestants to unclean hands. However some artwork is made to be touched and interacted with to create an experience for its audience and sometimes the interaction can create the artwork its self for example artist Roman Ondák Who has brought some of his works together in a way that deals with time, a type of measurement and displacement of individuals from all different backgrounds and cultures, in the press once and absences, making a visual a visible by pushing the boundaries through his personal experiences. Documenting and exhibiting work in an exhibition space at each stage ‘measuring the universe’ This particular piece consisted of this space that invited the audience along to be measured and documented by documenting each attendees height along the wall of the space created two individual pieces itself firstly the installation of the piece i.e (the right thing of the height on the wall) and the performance piece of the documentation i.e (being able to visually see the piece be created).



(13) working with installation spaces Roman Ondák is able to underpin the techniques of his works with the processes, embedding them into the action of performance, whether that being the action of photography, painting and/or drawing. The action can be extended and stretched out over time being transformed and transcribed into scenarios rather than having to explain his artwork relating to minimalist objects and observations.

(14)- image

Another artist that explores it they work that relies on human interaction is Candy Chang with the peace titled ‘before I die’. This particular piece was inspired by the death of a loved one, artist candy chang started by paint in the side of an abandoned property and in the neighbourhood of New Orleans with a charcoal talk board based paint and sketch the sentence “before I die I want to (blank)” this was an invitation for The public to express themselves through her work stating in chalk what they wish to do before they die, reflecting on death and life, and to share their personal aspirations within the public that they walk upon. The messages left behind on the piece of art included:

“Before i die I want to See my daughter graduate”

“Before i die I want to Sing for millions”



“Before I die I want to Abandon all my insecurities”

“Before i die I want to.... Have a student come back and tell me it mattered” (15)

Image Example (16)

Here are just some examples of the statements used by the public expressing themselves, creating a neutral platform for all types of people

with different mindsets, personalities and perceptions upon life itself. It has been said to be “one of the most creative community projects ever”(17), the popularity of the piece soon becomes known to the world and artists worldwide wanted to be involved in the project and place the artwork within their communities so in response to this Candy Chang made multiple online resources in order for the artists to create their own. In addition to this over 5,000 Before I Die walls have now been known to communities over 75 countries being viewed over 5 million times and translated into over 40 different languages (18) the statistics show the importance of the artwork created and how important it is to connect with the community when creating an interactive piece of art as its away of expressing a new way of understanding the audience of a world wide scale. This technique can be applied in many different aspects of life not just art by reaching out the community, audience and the general understanding of life it allows art to come out of the studio. Studies at the University of Liverpool based on the media platforms of art are Collaborating with that psychologists. Artist Jamie Leadbitter and Professor Peter Kinderman created a piece called ‘the vacuum cleaner’ description is an interactive art installation which reimagines a psychiatric unit. The combination of knowledge and understanding was used to develop an idea for a creation for a temporary installation within a psychiatric unit later to be displayed to the public as part of it ‘group therapy exhibition’(19) Professor Kinderman said: “We are extremely pleased to have received this BPS grant to help facilitate this opportunity for an arts and science collaboration. We hope that involving the public in the creation of a dynamic designer asylum they can actually visit and engage with will encourage people to consider current perceptions of mental health.”(20) the aim of this project was to promote the relevance of evident based psychology to a wider audience, either/ or through direct research and work or by organisation of specific activities to involve individuals with mental illnesses. ‘the vacuum cleaner’ although a powerful body of work has had negative responses such as:

“ Dangerous” – Metropolitan Police

“Disgusting” – The Big Issue

“ It’s not entertaining” – The Scotsman

(21) Although the vacuum cleaner is a prime example of proactive and playful ways of working with the arts and activity speaks his mind about the world troubles and problems, highlighting the negatives as well as the positives. The vacuum cleaner wants to find better ways to go mad. Drawing on his own experience of mental health disability, he works with groups including young people, health professionals and vulnerable adults to challenge how mental health is understood, treated and experienced with roots in activism and radical art, the vacuum cleaner has created one-man interventions and large-scale actions as well as performance, installation and film. His work has been shown in galleries, theatres, hospitals and schools and has appeared on streets and in public spaces internationally. (22)

The examples provided show three demonstrations of how artwork can be interacted with through the audience and how that can benefit the artists work, the same properties can be applied to creating artwork for an audience that may suffer from mental illnesses, however it can depend on the illness itself as some illnesses cause perception to change including touch, some artists may find it beneficial for the interactive artwork to be based upon textured touch and others may included the involvement of the individuals either way touching apron the sensory factor of touch maybe the most beneficial method of art to be used. This is because the sense of touch is the most powerful element as it requires no sight, no sound so even if an individual was to have their sensory factors such as sight or sound manipulated or lost they could still benefit from the interactions of touch, this can trigger memories and emotional, example: Our emotions and sensory cortices can impact one another in both directions. A review by Vuilleumier (2005) explained that emotions provide a boost to our sensory cortices. Neuroimaging showed that in response emotional, our sensory cortices have increased activation. Vuilleumier (2005) hypothesised that this is due to learning from the sensory characteristics of emotional situations. Think about if you heard a fire alarm or smelled smoke. These sensory cues mean it’s time to run (or walk safely to your nearest exit)(24) Similar findings were present in the research of fear memory. Using fear conditioning, Sacco and Sacchetti (2010) found

that sensory cortices affect emotional memory. Rats were trained to associate visual, auditory, or olfactory cues with an aversive stimulus. When the respective secondary cortex was lesioned, the cues that were previously learned were lost. This means that there is some storage in the secondary sensory cortices when it comes to emotional memory. Unless the ethical standards of human research change – and let's hope they don't – these findings can't be replicated in humans.(25) More research, perhaps with preexisting lesions or artificial ones from methods like TMS, would need to be done to see if we can generalise these findings. As stated throughout this blog, our emotions and senses are very tightly intertwined. What we hear, see, taste, smell, and touch can provide us with information on how to feel. In the other direction, what we feel can be heavily influenced by what our senses are taking in. The next time you feel happy; know that something you're sensing may have an impact in that euphoria. In the next blog, we'll dive into how vision plays a role in our emotions.(26).

In conclusion the evidence and research provided within this paper show the support needed to create a more broad and better understanding on how art can be influenced by the use of sensory factors such as sight, sound and touch and how this can impact the knowledge and understanding of mental illnesses. I have achieved this by researching artists such as Sue Webster, Kelly Odell, Sean Kelly, Carter Nicolai and Kenichi Kanazawa and more, this individual group of artists have all explored the use of different sensory factors and techniques and how they trigger an audience reaction, stimulating the mind and the body as much as an experience as sensory artwork develops hand-eye coordination, stimulation of perception and encourages individuals to pay attention to the physical space around them. However the senses of an individual who may suffer from a mental illness can be manipulated by their illnesses which can change the interpretation and/or the perception of the artwork in its environment, and how artists can take this factor into consideration for future audiences as 1 in 4 people in the uk suffer from a form of mental illness. In the last year our collective reality has shifted from an in person, hands-on, interactive environment to an online life, reliant on screen based media for our day to day interactions with colleagues, family and friends. This transition has altered our social behaviours, where face-to-face interactions feel limited, to the point that seeing someone in person feels unusual, during this research I have aimed to explore this altered reality and how it has affected one's mental health and how sensory artwork can be used to benefit individuals daily experience.

Bibliography

(1) Author: National eye institute (29.09.21) latest update. Stargardt disease <https://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/eye-conditions-and-diseases/stargardt-disease> Quote: The most common symptom of Stargardt disease is a slow loss of central vision in both eyes" [accessed: 19.10.21].

(2) Author: Alzheimer's society, united against dementia- how can dementia change a person's perception. (27.02.21) <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/how-dementia-changes-perception> " The occipital lobes at the back of the brain process visual information. If the occipital lobes become damaged, a person may find it hard to work out what they see in front of them." [accessed: 19.10.21].

(3) image sourced from: <https://www.jeffhayes.com/aesthetics-of-art/appealing-to-every-sense/> [accessed: 20.10.21].

(4) Author: unknown. Jeffery Hayes: still life painting (04.11.18) <https://www.jeffhayes.com/aesthetics-of-art/appealing-to-every-sense/> "Allegory of the five senses (still life smoking implements and musical instruments)" "the mirror symbolised the eyes beholding the object" [20.10.21].

(5) image example from primary sources

(6) image example from primary sources

(7) Author: Alyssa Buffenstein (04.08.16) 12 sound artists changing the perception of art- Carsten Nicolai "sound and not sound" <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/12-sound-artists-changing-perception-art-587054> [accessed: 23.10.21].

(8) Author: Alyssa Buffenstein (04.08.16) 12 sound artists changing the perception of art- Camille Norment, "getting shaken up" [accessed: 23.10.21].
<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/12-sound-artists-changing-perception-art-587054>

(9) Author: Emily Wellington (07.05.21) Manchester International Festival- Christine Sun Kim and the deaf artist claiming sound as their subject. <https://mif.co.uk/news/christine-sun-kim-deaf-artists-work-about-sound-captioning/> [accessed: 26.10.21].

(10) image example from primary source

(11) author: Tate, art team- interactive art <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/i/interactive-art> [accessed: 30.10.21].

(12) Author: Kathy Bond. (20.08.2020) why we like to touch art, and why we shouldn't. (Magazine) "whose original lifespan was meant to be temporary" <https://www.gallery.ca/magazine/in-the-spotlight/why-we-like-to-touch-art-and-why-we-shouldnt> [accessed: 30.10.21].

(13) Author: Roman Ondák, published 2009, edited by Bawag Foundation. <https://www.lespressesdureel.com/EN/ouvrage.php?id=1589> [accessed: 2.11.21].

(14) image example of 'measuring the universe' found on google images

(15) Author: Candy Chang is an artist, TED Fellow, and public speaker. She is represented by The Lavin Agency.

<https://beforeidieproject.com> [accessed: 15.11.21].

(16) image Example 'Before I die I want to...' found on google images

(17) Candy Chang, before I die campaign-work <http://candychang.com/work/before-i-die-in-nola/> [accesses:15.11.21].

(18),(19) ,(20), (21) ,(22) : the vacuum cleaner <http://www.thevacuumcleaner.co.uk> [accessed 10.12.21].

(24) Sacco, T., & Sacchetti, B. (2010). Role of secondary sensory cortices in emotional memory storage and retrieval in rats. *Science*, 329(5992), 649-656. doi: 10.1126/science.1183165. [accessed:10.12.21].

(25) Thomson, D. M., Crocker, C., & Marketo, C. G. (2010). Linking sensory characteristics to emotions: An example using dark chocolate. *Food quality and preference*, 21(8), 1117-1125. doi: 10.1016/j.foodqual.2010.04.011. [accessed:10.12.21].

(26) Vuilleumier, P. (2005). How brains beware: neural mechanisms of emotional attention. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 9(12), 585-594. doi: 10.1016/j.tics.2005.10.011.[accessed:10.12.21].