

**Experiencing Art Through Synesthesia;
An Exploration into Sight and Sound**

Jacob Moseley

MA Commercial Music Producer

**Tileyard Education (University of Wales Trinity St.
David)**

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As a musician, having a key eye for artistic vision and evolving cultural zeitgeists is a necessary and difficult skillset to obtain. Also difficult is the ability to carve ones own path and carve an artistic vision of our own. In my final project, I will aim to combine my production and song writing capabilities with inspired pieces of work though synesthesia, whilst supporting this concept with academic material.

Throughout the duration of the MA programme, I have focused on diversifying my skillset, including producing rock and metal, pop, and hip-hop (more specifically lofi hip-hop), as well as working with clients for specific commercial works for visual media. Despite the successes of these previous works, I feel that by producing music for an artist profile I have set up, will allow me to springboard into the music industry with a strong portfolio of work and will build momentum for future releases with this project, and other commercial works. The core of my music production background is within the world of electronic music, but more specifically, house music and its related sub-genres such as “Tech House,” “Bass House,” and “Deep House.” This has spurred on the creation of a project known as “Blak Haus,” an artist profile featuring myself, and two other musicians focusing on these sub-genres of house music and others including drum and bass, and trap and dubstep with the aim of having a raw organic sound in a space dominated by digital sounds. To achieve this desired sound, I will employ the use of recording acoustic instruments, sampling, the use of analog equipment, and synthesis methods to create an organic analog quality in the final pieces. For this final project as part of the creation element of the masters programme, I will aim to create between six and eight original pieces of music based on the works of German sculptor, writer, and visual artist (digital arts, NFTs etc), Hedi Xandt. These pieces will be produced in various sub-genres of house music, as well as related genres in the dance and electronic music idiom with collaborations from other artists alongside solo productions. These pieces will also be

released as singles on a monthly basis. The challenge that I feel will arise during this will be with to produce music that suits the briefs that is also commercially viable.

Hamburg based sculptor, writer, and visual artist Hedi Xandt is described by his website as “an apt user of traditional and digital creation techniques, the artist blurs the lines between illusion and existence.” (Xandt, accessed 2022). The works that have been created by Xandt vary from sculptures made from materials such as marble and precious metals like gold and silver, to digital works for mediums such as NFTs (Non-Fungible Token). NFTs are described by ethereum.org as “tokens that we can use to represent ownership of unique items.” This allows a direct ownership of a digital work which is usually represented as art work via a jpeg file but this does extend to any file format. The works by Xandt are a dark and sometimes macabre twist on classic works of art and are deliberately produced to be diametrically opposed opulence, wealth, and status. Instead he creates works to glorify humanity and humanise idols.

“Xandt’s work literally drips with opulence, yet there is a menace to it too. Something to hold high and celebrate, but which just might kick you in the head when you’re not expecting it” (flaunt.com, 2016).

One medium that Xandt is known for is his use of gold in his sculpture work. In an interview with flaunt.com, Xandt describes his use of gold as a spiritual medium that transcends the more common way that gold is used in modern day society, as a currency. He describes that gold “does not age, it won’t oxidise, erode, or decay like most other metals that have to be polished to keep their glow.” (flaunt.com, 2016). In the same interview, Xandt also discusses his process for choosing a material to use in his works saying that no one process decides the outcome of a piece. A material does not define the sculpture, and a sculpture does not define the material. He states that “Technology now allows us to create almost anything out of everything, so each approach is always an experiment” (flaunt.com, 2016). This concept of creation that Xandt describes I have taken great inspiration

from for this project and others. The method does not define the outcome, nor does a preconceived outcome require a specific method. I will aim to combine synthesis, sampling, recording of real instruments and analog equipment but will not commit to using all four, or sticking to just one. A combination of these techniques. Xandt also combines images of classic renaissance art with macabre perceptions applied to them. When discussing the apparent superiority or inferiority of various eras and stylistic approaches in art Xandt simply says “there’s no such thing in art as superiority” (flaunt.com, 2016) The use of gold’s in sculptures and artwork across many mediums cannot be disputed as anything less than timeless, seductive, and commanding. This alongside the combination of artistic forms and eras, materials, and mediums are what makes the works by Xandt so iconic, but how does one communicate this musically? My aim is to rely on synesthesia whether it be my own, or from other sources such as my peers. The works in their current state can only be observed online and in a few select galleries such as the Unit London Gallery in Mayfair, London. This means that limited stimulus or source material can be obtained to inspire pieces of music other than the visuals themselves, hence the need to rely on synesthesia.

Put simply synesthesia is a phenomenon that is experienced by synesthetes (those who experience synesthesia) as a perception of media in cross-sensory stimuli (Xing, 2019). For example, certain days of the week will have particular colours, flavours, or sounds associated to them.

Famously, the American poet Edgar Allen Poe described associating the colour orange with the sensation of hearing a gnat fly near him saying “In hearing the gnat, I perceive the color. In perceiving the color, I seem to hear the gnat.” (eapoe.org, 2017).

“People with digit-color synesthesia, viewing a digit (say, 7) automatically elicits a simultaneous color percept (say, blue). Yet, however hard a synesthete may stare at the blue sky, she will never detect the digit 7 up there; digit-associated colors do not produce any numerical impression [6,7]”
(Knoch, 2005).

In my own life, association of colours, textures, and sounds have always been present. For example when I look out of my studio window, the sounds are akin to that of lofi hiphop, and producers such as J Dilla, Madlib, and Nujabes, but my bedroom window reminds me of the works of Hans Zimmer and Johan Söderqvist for their modern orchestral works in the world of cinema. Even with days of the week, they seem to have their own mood and colour (Tuesday is bright yellow, Wednesday is royal blue). When viewing the works of Hedi Xandt, I hear ethereal and suggestive sounds leading to dark and impactful moments all within the genres I've previously described including house, trap, and drum and bass.

The following works will serve as the inspiration for the pieces of music. The works will only serve as research material and will not be directly tied to the music composed and as a result the names of the pieces will not carry the name of the original artworks, nor will any album artwork or visual content be tied to the original pieces. Some of the images may be upsetting and inappropriate.

1. A Kings Bed.

“Concept for a sarcophagus.

The remains of the deceased are placed in a tomb carved from white granite and molten bronze is poured in, replacing the flesh with metal, which is then processed and finished into a sarcophagus lid.” (Xandt, 2022)

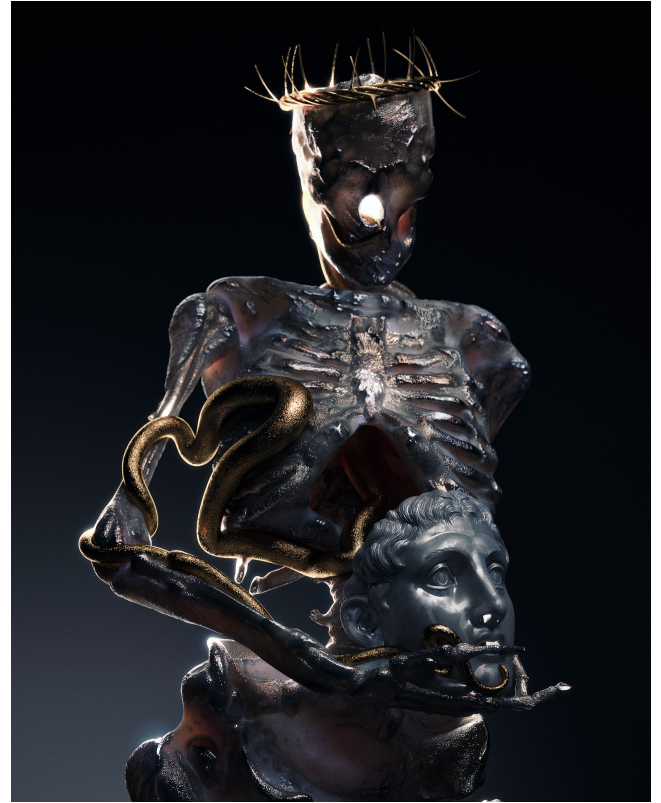


For the piece “A Kings Bed,” I hear roaring wavetable synthesis with elements of granular synthesis, and sound effects like metal striking surfaces and heat being produced similar to that of an industrial process alongside other metallic sounds like coins being dropped on a hard surface. This is alongside distorted and warbled orchestral elements such as string sections, brass sections, and choirs. With this in mind as well as the artwork as an inspiration I picture lyrical themes about strength, royalty, and overcoming hardship ideally performed as a rap. These themes are inspired by the image of ones body being immortalised in bronze which could be hypothetically argued due to the historical, cultural, or artistic influence of the individual being cast in the sarcophagus.

2. As a Man Thinketh.

“As A Man Thinketh.

Ongoing digital sculpture series based on works by James Allen.” (Xandt, 2022)



As Xandt describes, these images are inspired by the works of James Allen, namely his self help book titled “As A Man Thinketh.” The book divulges in philosophy over the power of thought and control of ones actions and states:

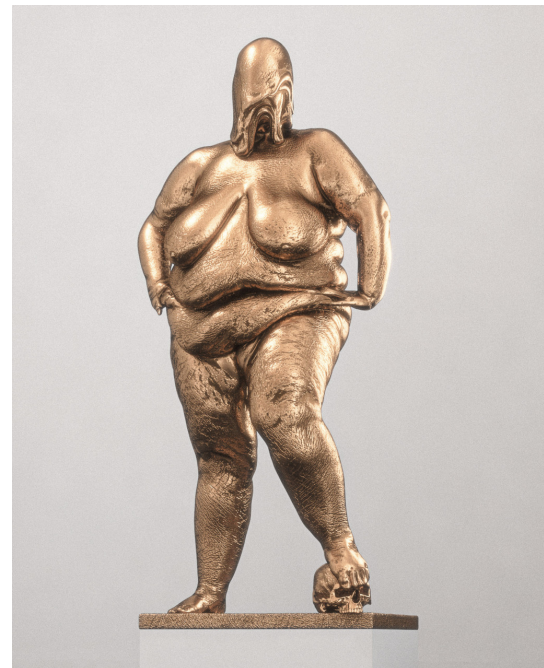
“As the plant springs from, and could not be without, the seed, so every act of a man springs from the hidden seeds of thought, and could not have appeared without them.” (Allen, 1903)

Along these lines, the images created by Xandt conjures thoughts of insecurity, with a weakened and almost decayed body, but equally narcissism with the figure holding a head perhaps holding

ones idea of self, a snake entering the body towards the heart, and a crown of thorns. This notion described by Allen and the imagery from Xandt inspires sounds such as falsetto voices, ethereal pads, and strong moments that still maintain atmosphere.

3. Bodilisk I and Bodilisk II, respectively.

"Digital Sculpture, Various Sizes, 2018" (Xandt, 2022)



The crass, and almost macabre images of human bodies made from some form precious metal inspire concepts of hedonism and the modern human succumbing to over indulgence whilst cheating death it seems seen by the statues stood over, or on a skull. “Bodilisk I” seen pictured on the left seems to be inspired by the physique of an exaggerated body builder with swollen muscles with a contorted and distressed expression on its face, perhaps implying an over obsession with bodily image. “Bodilisk II” features an overweight individual posing defiantly with their foot on a skull despite being suffocated by their own body. These images inspire sounds that are idiomatic of the house music sub-genre “tech house” which combines the musical elements of techno and house

music. This includes distorted electronic kicks, subtractive synthesis, and roaring atmospheres performed by simple melodies using repetition as a key musical device.

4. Femur Tanto and Stand (Xandt, 2022)



A “Tanto” is described as a “Japanese sword under the blade length of 30cm” (samuraimuseum.jp, 2022) and was a supplementary weapon specifically used by Samurai on horseback. It was also used as gifts for a bride from her family in traditional weddings as it was believed the Tanto would ward off evil spirits. The sound of compositions such as “The Death of Antoku” by Johan Söderqvist come to mind when viewing these images. “The Death of Antoku” combines traditional eastern instruments and compositional methods with western cinematic and orchestral instrumentation. The placement of a golden Tanto on a skull with horns perhaps symbolises the Tanto’s supremacy over evil. The use of the femur seems to humanise the Tanto. How this sound will materialise in an electronic music setting I believe will result in an interesting outcome as I have yet to experiment with sampling orchestras in house music as a key feature of the production.

5. God of the Deep II (Three Sisters)

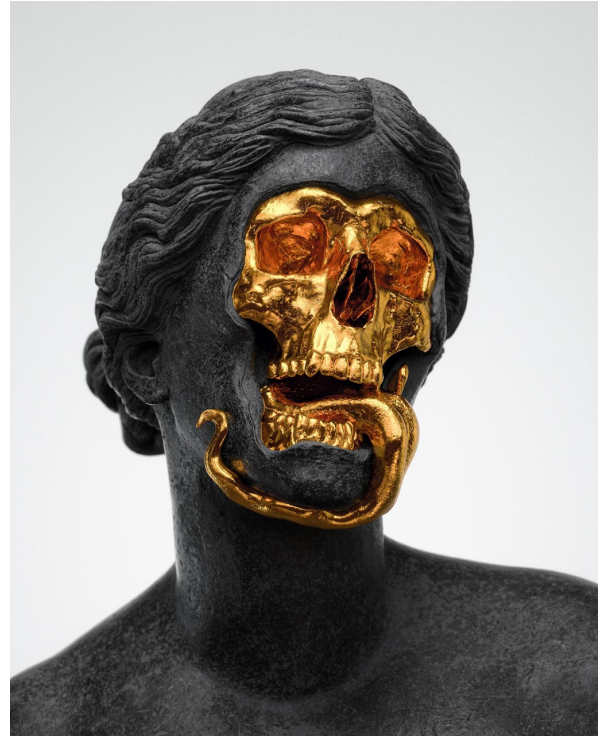
“Pentelic Marble, Powder Coated Steel” (Xandt, 2022)



Despite a relatively simple description, a lot can be taken from the images above. The sculpture seems to be that of a veiled, two-faced figure (possibly Medusa) with three distinct snakes wrapped around her neck in a position that suggest the veiled figure is in control of the snakes or that they are a part of her. The vail and two faces seem to imply that the figure may be hiding something, or that the snakes they carry are a source of shame. Again, roaring wavetable synthesis and subtractive synthesis with melodies particularly in a Phrygian Dominant scale come to mind as a result of my own personal syesthesia. A softly spoken or performed voice that gets distorted towards a heavily arranged and produced chorus also comes to mind that mirrors the reserved characteristic of the sculpture with a deadly and threatening edge.

6. God of the Grove

“God of the Grove (original version), Black bronze, partly gilded with black marble plinth, unique, 2013” (Xandt, 2022)

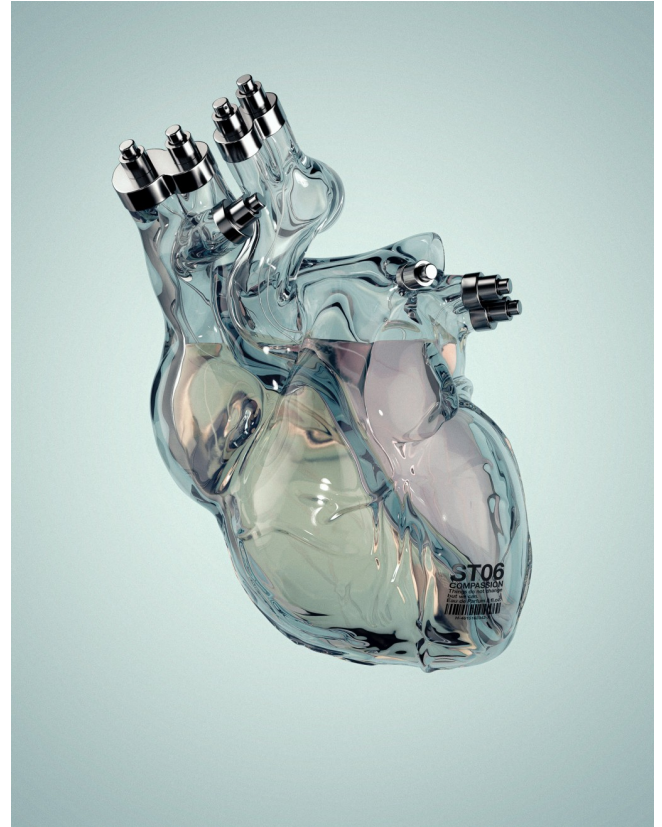
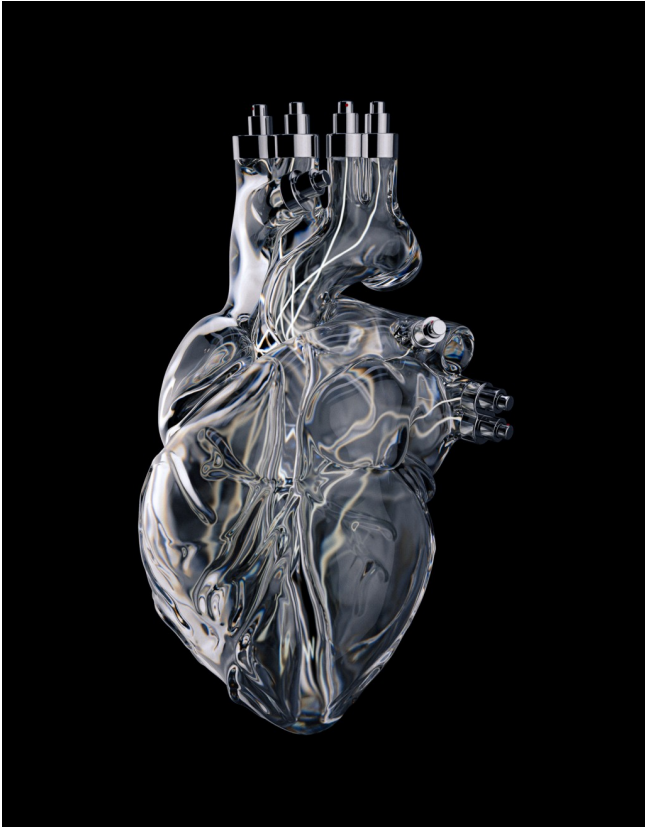


This sculpture was the first work by Xandt that I came across and was the original inspiration for this project. The disparity between the darkened and pitted Black Bronze depicting a classically styled body (likely Aphrodite) with a gilded skull featuring a snaking tongue immediately draws a viewer into its macabre twist on classical art. Strong, staccato strings and soaring choirs immediately come to mind with aggressive contrasting wavetable synthesis all enveloping dramatic neo-classical harmony.

7. Heart of Glass

“Heart of Glass,

Perfume Flask (Concept)” (Xandt, 2022)



As it is described by Xandt, the concept for the above sculpture is a perfume bottle inspired by a scent by Sissel Tolaas. Conceptually, I feel that the piece implies seduction due to it being a perfume bottle, but fragility and insecurity with it being a “Heart of Glass.” Perhaps this implies the wearer is masking how they truly are, despite an outward need to romance and seduce. Pizzicato strings over broken piano melodies, almost like a music box, with erratic percussive textures come to mind when viewing these images.

8. Xamurai

“Xamurai (Olexesh), Bronze, Partly Gilded and Resin, Lifesize.” (Xandt, 2022)



The final piece I've chosen as an inspiration for my final project is quite easily the darkest yet. The images depict a headless samurai committing ritual suicide with a femur. In the flaunt.com interview with Xandt, the interviewer asks Xandt if any of the works have injured him to which he answers:

“Of course, every single one. It shows me I'm alive, and they are as well.” (flaunt.com, 2016)

Perhaps the graphic nature of the sculpture is a take on how art is physically and emotionally taxing on Xandt and artists alike, especially with the name “Xamurai,” as opposed to Samurai. The “flesh” that is visible is gilded, unlike the outside of the body and the head of the samurai is served on a plate. This could be stating that in order to create great art, personal sacrifice must be made and how a piece of us is offered to those around us to enjoy. Over this I hear heavily distorted synthesis and

fast paced music. I will aim to use this art as a final piece for this project. In it, I will explore themes such as taking art, life, or pleasure too far both lyrically and musically.

In conclusion, I feel that this project will not only serve me academically, but artistically too. The combination of visual media and music have historically gone hand in hand, as well as the combination of artistic mediums. To further this tradition in a modern setting is truly exciting. Despite my initial estimates and aims for the project musically, I am excited to hear the music change and evolve with time as I collaborate with other artists, and test my ideas. An in the box approach will be used due to the nature of the music, and limitations with synthesis in my studio. An organic modular approach with real drums and drum machines would have been an interesting approach but my synthesis capabilities are much stronger in the box due to only possessing one subtractive synth. I also feel that sampling, despite being less unique than recording real instruments, is idiomatic to the music I am writing.

Timeline to follow on the next page.



PROJECT TIMELINE

Blak Haus x Hedi Xandt



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