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Connections Through Contrast
The Built Environment Embracing Art Exhibition

Josilyn S. Welch

Bachelor of Science - Interior Design Western Michigan University 2022-2023
Art has the power to render sorrow beautiful, make loneliness a shared experience, and transform despair into hope... the ability to both capture our pain and deliver us from it at the same time

- Brene Brown
An emotionally immersive experience within a museum setting can foster feelings of belonging, engagement, exploration, understanding and connection. Providing an environment where empathetic immersion can be achieved through physical, psychological, and social enablers lead to transformative experiences for the visitor. To promote physical, psychological, and social enablers within the museum setting to promote empathetic immersion within its visitors, this museum will consider the following strategies:

**Physical Enablers:** The museum space will address physical enablers by including environmental features such as diverse opportunities for seating, immersive lighting techniques, and curated finish selections for individual exhibit spaces as well as interactive displays that encourage visitors to engage with and explore the artwork on a deeper level.

**Psychological Enablers:** The museum space will address the psychological enablers in the museum space by including educational and interpretive materials that help visitors understand and connect with the artwork. This will include clear wayfinding strategies, digestible museum labels, along with educational workshop spaces. This museum will also create designated opportunities for reflection and contemplation with the inclusion of “reflection rooms” within the floor plan.

**Social Enablers:** The museum space will address the social enablers by encouraging visitors to engage with others and the artwork in their chosen method and setting. This will include the incorporation of “share” spaces such as workshops, event spaces, and cafes. As well as museum displays that invite questions and discourse. This will encourage visitors to absorb others and share their own experiences and thoughts on the artwork through written and spoken dialogue fostering feelings of belonging within the community.

By implementing physical, psychological, and social enablers within contrasting hope and sorrow galleries, this museum will foster an emotional connection within its visitors and promote empathetic immersion. By encouraging visitors within the museum space to engage with the artwork on a physical, psychological, and social level they will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the artwork displayed and experience a transformative and immersive experience within the museum.
Project Objectives

01. Recontextualize the critical role of the museum space as an environment that creates connections between the built environment, the art that it accommodates, and its occupants.

02. Mitigate common mental, physical, and social barriers that exist within the current museum model.

03. Promote identified mental, physical, and social enablers within the redefined museum context.

04. Create contrasting exhibit spaces designed to reflect the pieces they contain to achieve empathetic immersion within visitors to elevate the museum experience.
Embodied cognition is an attempt to explain how we perceive and digest the world around us. It theorizes that our cognition is determined by our entire bodies, not just our brains. Embodied cognition recognizes that our mentalities are affected by many aspects of the world around us, and that our senses and motor systems are deeply integrated within our cognitive processing.

The Scientific American states that "Our cognition is influenced, perhaps determined by, our experiences in the physical world." This explains why we might "understand warmth with affection; as infants and children the subjective judgment of affection almost always corresponded with the sensation of warmth, thus giving way to metaphors such as 'I'm warming up to her.'"

The embodied cognition theory can help explain the users occupying a physical space, and their motivations behind their actions. Within an art museum context, this can help explain how long a user looks at a piece of art, their traffic patterns, and their internal dialogue as they make their way through the space just to name a few. This theory argues that factors of cognition, sensation, emotion, memory, perception, self-regulation, behavior, and decision making can be shaped by our surroundings in a museum setting. For example, the perception of art is influenced by our previous experience, knowledge, and cultural background which can in turn affect how we interpret and understand the art that is displayed before us. In the same way, the art that we view can have a significant impact on our own cognition.

In a museum, empathetic immersion can be achieved when simultaneous connections are made between the Viewer, the Art, and the Environment.

Empathetic Immersion

Empathetic Immersion is the powerfully immersive experience of understanding and it is to be harnessed in our world by gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of others. This can allow visitors fully engage with and understand the emotions that create empathy with another person. This can also modeled itself or sensory understanding of another individual, or it appreciate a different perspective that may be foreign to you. In recent times, there has been an increase in empathetic immersion training in the workplace with the emergence of virtual reality environments. This current application in this work environment could be extended to the critical role of the art museum. This is an important factor within the exhibition space because it can help the visitors better understand and appreciate the art on display.

In a museum, empathetic immersion can be achieved when simultaneous connections are made between the Viewer, the Art, and the Environment.
Empathetic Immersion

The three layers of empathetic immersion in a museum setting include the viewer, the environment, and the art within it. When these three layers overlap, empathetic immersion within an art museum space can be achieved. Empathetic immersion could be a key factor in how much people enjoy, the level at which they interact with the art that is displayed before them, and fostering a sense of connection or community among all museum visitors. By allowing visitors to understand and relate to the emotions that are reflected in the art, the environment of the space, and other occupants within the space, empathetic immersion can foster a sense of shared humanity and belonging within this new critical role of the museum model.


Fig. 5 Layers of Empathetic Immersion in a Museum Environment
Exhibit Analysis: The Disconnect of a Small Gallery Space

This temporary exhibit displayed at the Western Michigan Monroe-Brown Gallery provides an example of the disconnect between the contents of an exhibition and its display space. A diary at the back of the room allows for a dive into individual viewers' minds. A compilation of the “Messages to the Artist” are transcribed on page 13, omitting the authors' names to retain confidentiality. These personal messages give insight to different emotions and cognitive processes. Some common themes in the passages include inspiration, intimacy, vulnerability, and overall enjoyment.

However, the gallery space itself may not reflect those same values. Feelings of intimacy could be inhibited by the surveillance cameras peppering the walls. Further calling towards inspiration could be stifled by the expected beige walls and visually disruptive neon green exit signs. Because of these inconsistencies, this gallery space might not lend itself towards a fully immersive experience with the art. One of the main inspirations towards this collection authored by Karen Bondarchuck was the passage of time. To remedy these inconsistencies, one might ask how the design of this gallery space could better reflect the passage of time or the evocative emotions the viewers are reporting, such as vulnerability or intimacy. A truly immersive experience might only be reachable if these factors are taken into account.

Fig. 8 A Crow A Day Poster
Fig. 9 Monroe-Brown Gallery Space
Fig. 10 A Crow A Day #1
Fig. 11 A Crow A Day #2
Fig. 12 A Crow A Day #3
Fig. 13 A Crow A Day #4

Fig. 10 A Crow A Day #5
Fig. 11 A Crow A Day #6

Messages to the Artist


Karen, I loved walking into the gallery—knowing nothing of this. “A Crow a Day” I love the concept. Art therapy is so turbulent and transformative. I always found healing in the visual and the written word. Thank you for being so vulnerable and sharing your beautiful story with us. Amazing!”

So incredibly moving; Thank you for sharing your creative soul in your daily experience.”

Beautiful and stunning artwork, thank you for sharing your journey! I leave with soul looking, feeling, and enjoying.”

Karen, I could not walk into the gallery—knowing nothing of this. “A Crow a Day” I loved. Thank you for sharing your beautiful story. Art therapy is so turbulent and transformative. I always found healing in your visual and the written word. Thank you for being so vulnerable and sharing your beautiful story with us. Amazing!”

I came to see this exhibit twice! I love it! The first time, I came solo. I was just and unable to stop admiring the art and all it evoked. I brought two women from an assisted living home, an artist with dementia and we spent an hour looking, talking, and enjoying.”

Your exhibit is truly thought provoking—there are so many ways to enjoy your “crows”. I would love to see them in a book with a little written insight about each but would love your artwork as it is.”

Karen, this is such a beautiful series that introduces the world to “ordinary magic”. The marking of time using such an ever present and spiritual creature the crow helps to invite all of your viewers into your 365 days. I hope this would inspire many of us to remember the ordinary magic of a day before we too no longer recognize the passing of time.”

“I found your words “A crow a day” and your story moving. Your depicting is amazing and true spirit of each piece, true magic. Involves me in a connection between you and me. I am inspired by your insights, knowledge, and your wisdom. I feel as if you are speaking to me with your words. I am grateful for your written wisdom to inspire me.”

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Empathetic immersion filters are applied within these diagrams, showing how one might interact with the art, perceive the environment, and connect with one another in these spaces. Although the artworks that are displayed in each view is essentially the same, notice how the design of the display space alters each view. Some design elements to take note of that are visible in these diagrams are physical barriers, space, line, form, light, color, texture, pattern, and materials just to name a few.

These 5 paintings by Van Gogh are a collection done in a span of 2 years in 1888-1889. Being so similar, it allows us to cross compare their display spaces. Context clues in our surroundings to give us an idea of how to behave and act in subdivisions subconsciously. Perceptions and expectations of art may differ based on their display types. Museums undertake the responsibility of establishing context for these clues. How are these museums saying about their sunflowers?

The Sompo Museum of Art has chosen to display their Sunflower painting behind glass, prohibiting viewers from getting too close. While the Philadelphia Art Museum and the Neue Museum in Munich have chosen to make no physical barriers between the museum goers and the artwork. A simple rope divider is used in The National Gallery in London as well as the Amsterdam Art Museum. The simple cue is given to how close you should be standing is appropriate, done in three different ways with very similar works.

A study done in 2017 evaluated how much time gallery observers spend in front of a single piece in a display. They evaluated 97 paintings in a real gallery setting, giving insight on viewers behavior while observing artworks. Two conclusions were drawn from the study: that people spend on average 25.7 and 41.0 seconds per piece and that they prefer to stand a distance of 1.72 m away. The gallery space that this study was conducted in provided no physical barriers between the piece and the viewer. Some viewers in the study chose to stand less than .5 m away, noting that the Sompo Art Museum puts their Sunflower painting behind glass, this could be excluding those who like to view art at a closer range and having the experience they prefer with the artwork.

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The Emotions of Artworks

The "Happy Art" Discourse

Critics of happy art believe that it is naive, over-optimistic, misleading or even downright insensitive towards the pain and suffering that people endure in real life. This has been recently brought to attention in the Van Gogh Sunflower soup incident. One of the activists, Phoebe Plummer, said, “What is worth more, art or life?” Bringing attention to the climate and fuel crisis.

However, it would be naive to think that all consumers of sunflowers and sunsets are ignorant or uninformed about the problems in society today. This genre of art can actually provide us with an opportunity to appreciate the joys of everyday life. Happy art may know that we, as humans, may “despair too easily.”

This genre of art can provide an invaluable element of hope in times of hardship, and connectivity between community. In addition to self-understanding qualities, viewing art can also improve our cognitive functioning. This can improve attention, memory, and concentration as well as the ability to concentrate and find beauty in things outside of the museum setting.

Perspectives on "Sad Art"

Though it may be tougher to view, sad art may be able to provide something invaluable to us as well.梅大能, the ability for connection during times of suffering. It could console us by giving us the welcome feeling that pain and suffering are an inevitable truth, not just us but for everyone. The ability to gain perspective by observing your own and others’ sorrow will bring you peace during a tough time.

Viewing sad art can help us better understand and empathize with the emotions and experiences of others. Viewers can also increase our ability to empathize with others viewing the art and experiencing outside of the museum or everyday life. This can also have a cathartic effect for the viewer, allowing a space to express and confront internal sorrowful emotions that can be constructive and therapeutic. Meaning and purpose can also be found through viewing sorrowful art, gaining an understanding of the basic human experience and the complexities of the human condition. The engagement in sorrowful art can be beneficial in helping us feel more connected to others and to the world that surrounds us.

The Anatomy of a Museum Label

Recommended size for museum labels for readability is between 18 and 24 point font, sans serif.

Redefining The Museum Label

Printer Ink on Paper
Joselyn Welch, 2022

Museum labels should seek to provide users with information that can assist them in having a more fruitful interaction with the displayed piece. Some common themes among these descriptive labels aside from the title and the artist is a lengthy historical dive into who had previously owned the piece, nuanced contextual information, and historically relevant dates commonly paired with the use of industry jargon. While this may be insightful information to someone who has prior knowledge about the piece, it leaves something to be desired for those who are viewing it for the first time. Museum labels should strive to provide digestible and accessible information pertaining to what is going on in the piece, what the artist’s message might have been, and why it might be relevant to society today. A museum label’s ultimate purpose is to serve the user and aid them in the interaction with the art, allowing space for them to form their own ideas and opinions that can be carried outside of the museum setting.

Content should “talk to the reader” and ask questions to engage them.

Reducing the amount of industry jargon, keeping it short and simple to promote clarity and comprehension.

Fig. 37 Redefining The Museum Label

Museum labels allow us an introduction to the museum piece. The current model of museums address historical context and nuanced information that may not be accessible to all viewers. A museum label that addresses the user is conducive to a more fruitful experience with the piece. Bisgood recommends to “Reduce mental effort required to understand the piece: reduce museum fatigue and increase visitor interest.”
Visual Evaluation of Art & Environments

A visual case study was done on images of art and built environments to gain an understanding of what a visually positive & negative experience may be for a subject. A graph is shown above the image indicating how high the correlation between negative & positive experiences might be. Believed visually positive experiences are indicated with a larger number to the left, with visually negative experiences to the right. Large commonalities between images were found when grouping them together and common themes were drawn from these images accordingly.

Positive Visual Qualities

One of the common themes in happy art is the quality of growth and renewal, this can contain images of nature, children, animals, and landscapes. Connection and community are also common themes, shown in Sunday on La Grande Jette. The Proton Therapy Center and Terrace at night, subjects can be seen in a community setting, interacting with one another. Elements of motion and movement are also represented in art and environments through the use of dynamic light and shadow, subjects that are interacting with one another.

Negative Visual Qualities

One of the common themes in art that was perceived to be sad or sorrowful are: connection to nature, sun light, and familiar and nostalgic symbols. Some common themes can be drawn from evaluating the compositions, colors, shapes, forms and design elements of each image.

Visually positive experiences contain elements such as:
- Connection to nature
- Rich colors
- Sunlight
- Balanced compositions
- Familiar and nostalgic symbols

Visually negative experiences contain elements such as:
- Disconnect from nature
- Unsaturated and cool colors
- Subjects in distress
- Vast and open spaces
- Unbalanced compositions

Some common themes can be drawn from evaluating the compositions, colors, shapes, forms and design elements of each image.

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- Disconnect from nature
- Unsaturated and cool colors
- Subjects in distress
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- Unbalanced compositions

Some common themes can be drawn from evaluating the compositions, colors, shapes, forms and design elements of each image.
A Visitor Walk-through of the Art Museum Experience

While all museum experiences will differ based on their size, their mission, and their contents, these 5 categories of spaces could be experienced by an individual when visiting this new critical role of an art museum. Museum curators should work to create a story as you progress through the space though the selection of art pieces and their display. Based on the embodied cognition theory, your ideas and perceptions about yourself and the art will follow as you make your way through the museum if empathetic immersion is achieved.

- **Lobby / Reception Area**: Where visitors are welcomed and shape their expectations for their visit.
- **Public Exhibit Space**: Where visitors are immersed in the museum experience and discover new information.
- **Cafe & Restroom Facilities**: Where visitors recharge and digest what they have absorbed.
- **Workshop / Event Spaces**: Where visitors gather and converse. Making connections.
- **Sales / Gift Shop**: Where visitors can take a piece of their experience home. Brings the museum into their world beyond.
- **Reflect**: Where visitors can take a place of their own and reflect what they have absorbed.
- **Share**: Where visitors are immersed in the museum experience and discover new information.

The Louvre: Paris, France

“The Musée du Louvre is heir to the Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Ever since it was founded in 1793, it has striven to remain loyal to the universal vocation assigned to it. The mission is focused on retaining "tough to the universal vocation assigned to it." The focus on historical preservation and education, a majority of space is assigned display space that is spread among 5 levels, with the most focus on preparation and reflection spaces on the -2 level. One space that is not emphasized in this case study is the "share" category, which is comprised of workshops and event spaces. This does not seem to directly align with the mission stated in the museum, which claims to be a "period of rigorous scientific, political and philosophical discourse that characterized European society" which was founded on the sharing of ideas and creating dialogue.

The pure size of the Louvre might lend itself to the inability to achieve empathetic immersion within intimate interactions with art as difficult because of the prominence of this museum in society, and the key pieces that are displayed within its walls.

The MOMA is a prominent museum in today's art community. Holding pieces like Van Gogh’s Starry Night and the Persistence of Memory by Salvador Dalí, it is on most art lovers’ bucket lists. Its mission is more holistic, making a commitment to “catalyze experimentation, learning, and creativity; a gathering place for all; and a home for artists and their ideas.”

The mission is reflected in the distribution of spaces with an equal percentage of space allotted for “share” and “reflect” spaces as the “absorb” spaces. This theoretically, would inspire the community to engage with one another and provide plenty of space for personal self-reflection and digestion within its walls. While empathetic immersion may be a bit more accessible in this space compared to the Louvre, the floor plan is very open to accommodate for the flexibility of gallery spaces. However, this does not provide much space for “reflection” spaces within the gallery setting, which could be an inhibitor to empathetic immersion within the museum.

The Louvre in Abu Dhabi is a bit different than its counterparts in Paris, France. The mission of this museum addresses inclusivity: claiming to “Celebrate stories of cultural connections to build understanding across cultures and reveal we have more in common than we know.” Which seems very close to the mission of achieving empathetic immersion across cultures.

This museum boasts the largest proportion of “reflect” and “prepare” spaces to “absorb” spaces out of the case studies analyzed. This is unique because it focuses on preparing the visitors’ experience they will have with the art, and encourages them to reflect and digest the information presented to them on a higher level than most museum footprints. Unfortunately, there is less designated “share” space allotted because of this. This may be due to the fact that the museum expects for sharing of ideas to be able to be captured within the gallery spaces, or large circulation space within the museum.
The Dune Art Museum: Qinhuangdao, China

Inspired by children’s tireless digging in the sand, the museum lies beneath this dune. "Digging" creates a series of interconnected, organically shaped spaces which, enveloped by sand, resemble caves—the primeval home of man, whose walls were once a canvas for some of humanity’s earliest works of art. Hidden between the sea and the sand, the design of the Dune Art Museum is simple, pure, and touching—a return to primal and timeless forms of space.

The Dune Art Museum in China is the smallest museum examined within this case study evaluation. It is comprised of just 5 main gallery spaces and is nestled on the beach with only one floor. The small size of this museum may be a catalyst for empathetic immersion space lending to a more intimate experience.

The museum’s mission is not stated on its website but the mission is described by the designer as a Return to primal and timeless forms of space.1 The location of this museum cannot be overlooked when evaluating its major qualities, one can hear the sound of the waves crashing and the ocean breeze as they enter the space.

The museum prioritizes “preparation” space more than the MOA and the Louvre. A combination of the small gallery spaces, experiential and interactive design of the interior, and the large proportion of the space being allocated to shape expectations for the visitor, it can be concluded that empathetic immersion may be possible in this museum even though there is proportionately very little amount of space allocated for sharing.

Grand Rapids is a diverse cultural hub that celebrates the arts culture, host of the annual Art Prize and home to over 20 exhibition spaces in the downtown area. It has established itself as a prominent location of the fine arts community in Michigan.

Location Highlights:
- Walkable neighborhood
- Accessible by bus route and bike lanes
- Grand Rapids Central Business District
- Access to boardwalk 200 ft away
- Surface parking for commuter visitors
- 65,000 s.f. usable area

Grand Rapids is a diverse cultural hub that celebrates the arts culture, host of the annual Art Prize and home to over 20 exhibition spaces in the downtown area. It has established itself as a prominent location of the fine arts community in Michigan.
Solar Study

June 15th, 2023

9:00 am
12:00 pm
3:00 pm

Sunrise
Sunset

December 15th, 2023

9:00 am
12:00 pm
3:00 pm

Sunrise
Sunset

Fig. 57 Solar Study
Site Survey - Section Locations

Creation of Units Within the Building for Multiple Occupants

Use of Differing Flooring Materials to Delineate Space

No Doors Located on Plan

Unit 2 and 3 Open to Below

Fig. 58 Site Survey First Floor, 2005

Unit 4 Previously Occupied by Fitness Center

Unit 2 and 3 Open to Below

Fig. 59 Site Survey Second Floor, 2005
Building Sections

Fig. 60 Site Survey, 2005
Sections A & B

32' 8" Vaulted Ceiling Height in Unit 4

Varying Ceiling Height in Unit 3

10' 3" Ceiling Height in Unit 1 w/ Dropped Ceiling

Fig. 61 Site Survey, 2005
Sections C & D

Excavated Floor in Unit 3 to Accommodate an Inground Swimming Pool

Fig. 61 Site Survey, 2005
Sections C & D

Varying Ceiling Height in Unit 3

Building Sections
First Floor Existing Floorplan

Fig. 62 Existing First Floor Plan

Second Floor Existing Floorplan

Fig. 63 Existing Second Floor Plan

In-Ground Pool

Current main entry off of Ottawa Ave.

Open to Below
Existing Conditions

Occupancy Classification: A-3
Construction Type: 1A

Occupancy Load
Maximum Floor Area Allowances Per Occupant
Assembly
Exhibit Gallery & Museum: 30 net
Unconcentrated Assembly: 15 net
Mercantile
Retail: 60 gross
Storage & Stock: 300 gross
Kitchens
Commercial Kitchens: 700 gross

In-Ground Swimming Pool

Vacant Spectrum
Health Outpatient
Offices

First Floor Area Usage
Fig. 64 Area of Use

Code Considerations

Existing Conditions

Vacant Spectrum
Health Outpatient
Offices

First Floor Area Usage
Fig. 64 Area of Use

South Facade

Exterior Access

In- Ground Swimming Pool

Existing First Floor Plan
Fig. 62 Existing First Floor Plan

Existing Second Floor Plan
Fig. 63 Existing Second Floor Plan

Current Main Entry

Outside Escalators

 handicapped access

In- Ground Swimming Pool

Existing Conditions

Fig. 62 Existing First Floor Plan

Fig. 63 Existing Second Floor Plan

Plumbing Fixtures
Assembly: Museum
Water Closets:
1 per 100 male, 1 per 65 female
Lavatories:
1 per 200
Water Fountains:
1 per 1,000

Mercantile
Retail:
Water Closets:
1 per 500
Lavatories:
1 per 750
Water Fountains:
1 per 500

*In each bathroom or toilet room, urinals shall not be substituted for more than 67 percent of the required water closets in assembly and educational occupancies. Urinals shall not be substituted for less than 50 percent of the required water closets in all other occupancies.

Exit Access

Maximum Travel Distance With One Doorway**
Assembly: 75
Mercantile: 75

Maximum Occupant Load With One Doorway***
Assembly: 49
Mercantile: 49

Minimum Number of Exits Per Story
Occupant load 1-100: 1
Occupant load 101-300: 2
Occupant load 301-1,000: 3
Occupant load over 1,000: 4

** Two exits or exit access doorways required if occupant load exceeds number listed up to 500. Three exits or exit access doorways shall be provided from any space with an occupant load of 501 to 1,000. Four exits or exits or exit access doorways shall be provided from any space with an occupant load greater than 1,000.

Interior Finish Requirements:

Assembly: 3
Stairways: A
Corridors: B
Rooms: C

Mercantile
Stairways: A
Corridors: B
Rooms: C

Exit Access

Maximum Travel Distance With One Doorway**
Assembly: 75
Mercantile: 75

Maximum Occupant Load With One Doorway***
Assembly: 49
Mercantile: 49

Minimum Number of Exits Per Story
Occupant load 1-100: 1
Occupant load 101-300: 2
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Stairways: A
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Rooms: C

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Existing Condition Analysis

On 1/19/2023 a site visit was conducted to verify the existing conditions of the building. These photographs document the interior and exterior existing conditions of the building.

Heavy timber construction in North portion of building

Previous tenant filled in portion of the in-ground swimming pool

Steel truss structure with exposed wood ceiling

Current main entry located on east wall of building facing Ottawa Ave.

Fig. 69 Ceiling Structure Photo

Fig. 74 Sidewalk View Photo

Unfinished floor and ceiling on East side of second level

Existing racquetball courts on west wall of the second level

Fig. 66 Pool Area Photo

Fig. 68 Upper Gym Photo 2

Fig. 71 West Facing Windows Photo

Fig. 72 Northwest Corner Exterior Photo

Fig. 73 Exterior Facade Photo

Fig. 65 Entryway Area Photo

Fig. 67 Upper Gym Photo

Fig. 68 Upper Gym Photo

Fig. 69 North Facing Windows Photo

Sidewalk wraps around North side of building

Hardwood/racquetball courts throughout second level

Exposed brick wall and ceiling structure

Exposed brick wall and ceiling structure

Damaged plinth facing Ottawa Ave.

Fig. 70 North Facing Windows Photo

Fig. 75 North Facing Windows Photo

Fig. 75 Exterior Facade Photo

Fig. 76 Northwest Corner Exterior Photo

Fig. 75 East Facing Windows Photo

Unfinished floor and ceiling on East side of second level

Current main entry located on east wall of building facing Ottawa Ave.

Fig. 69 Ceiling Structure Photo

Fig. 74 Sidewalk View Photo

Unfinished floor and ceiling on East side of second level

Existing racquetball courts on west wall of the second level

Fig. 66 Pool Area Photo

Fig. 68 Upper Gym Photo 2

Fig. 71 West Facing Windows Photo

Fig. 72 Northwest Corner Exterior Photo

Fig. 73 Exterior Facade Photo

Fig. 65 Entryway Area Photo

Fig. 67 Upper Gym Photo

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Exposed brick wall and ceiling structure

Exposed brick wall and ceiling structure

Damaged plinth facing Ottawa Ave.
Spatial Distribution For Empathetic Immersion

In order for empathetic immersion to be achieved in the new critical role of the art museum, the spatial distribution of prepare, absorb, share, reflect, and remember spaces must be closely evaluated and dissected. This graphic shows a recommendation for the percentage of square footage the space consumes compared to the entire museum space. New spatial recommendations like “reflection rooms” are also included to help foster an environment that promotes empathetic immersion.

PREPARE
- Visitor arrival & entry to built env. - Shape expectations & plan for the visit ahead - Initial contact made with staff Parking Lot, Walkway, Main Entry, Lobby Area 8%

ABSORB
- Experiences gift act - Enhance in museum experience - Visitor retention & visit landmarks pieces Exhibit Spaces, Main Hallways 41%

REFLECT
- Visitors reflect on & digest information presented in gallery space - Thoughts and opinions are formed Restroom Facilities, Gallery Seating, “Reflection Rooms” 25%

SHARE
- Interactions with others - Visitor interaction loops - Create relationships & connections Workshops, Event Spaces, Cafes, Public Areas 18%

REMEMBER
- Visitors reflect back to gallery spaces - Where pieces of experiences are taken home - Bridge between the exhibit space and the world beyond Sales/Gift Shop 8%

Fig. 75 Spatial Distribution Categorization
Spatial Distribution Data

The distribution of spaces chart demonstrates how the end space will be used. The amount of space allocated for each location is dependent on how many minutes a user will spend in that space. On the left is a characteristics chart which identifies key characteristics to be achieved within the end space. These “design considerations” will inform the project in its development as measurable and guiding conditions to be met for a successful design solution.

### Location Time (in minutes)
- **Private Office**: 3
- **Workshop**: 3
- **Main Entry**: 3
- **Lobby / Reception Area**: 2
  - **Total Private**: 14

### Work (50%)
- **Exhibit Spaces**: 8
- **Main Hallway**: 8
- **Interior Core Gallery Seating**: 8
- **Total Exhibition**: 8

### Relax (20%)
- **Recreation Facilities**: 7
- **Seminars / Fallow Seating**: 6
- **Recreation Space**: 6
- **Total Relax**: 20

### Make (30%)
- **Workshop / Event Spaces**: 15
- **Coffee / Restaurants**: 9
- **Total Make**: 30

### Assessment (10%)
- **API Shop**: 10
- **End Area Transparency**: 5
- **Total Remember**: 15

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Fig. 76 Distribution of Spaces Breakdown

**Design Considerations Chart**
Spatial Distribution in Square Feet

Applying the percentage of spaces from the spatial distribution data, a square footage estimation was calculated. This can then be translated into bubble diagrams and inform the programmatic processes to follow.

PREPARE
- Visitor arrival & entry to built env. - Shape expectations & plan for the visit ahead - Initial contact made with staff
Parking Lot, Walkway, Main Entry, Lobby Area
5,200 sq. ft.

ABSORB
- Interactions within art exhibit or immersion in museum experience - Discover new information & visit landmark pieces
Exhibit Spaces, Main Hallways
26,650 sq. ft.

REFLECT
- Visitors reflect on and digest information presented in gallery space - Thoughts and opinions are formed
Restroom Facilities, Gallery Seating, "Reflection Rooms"
16,250 sq. ft.

SHARE
- Interactions with others - Create personal connections, exchange thoughts & opinions, created in "reflect" are shared and synthesized
Workshops, Event Spaces, Cafes, Public Areas
11,700 sq. ft.

REMEMBER
- Visitors reflect back to gallery spaces - Where pieces of experiences are taken home - Bridge between the exhibit space and the world beyond
Sales/Gift Shop
5,200 sq. ft.

Fig. 78: Spatial Distribution in Square Feet
In the following graphics, barriers and enablers are called out in a typical gallery space to draw out quantifiable elements of exhibit space that must be retained or mitigated within this critical role of a museum that fosters empathetic immersion through connections and contrast. No matter if the gallery space accommodates and is designed around “happy” or “sad” art, these key enablers must be present.

**Fig. 80 Physical Barriers and Enablers Illustration**

- Overcrowded display walls
- Distracting finishes and fixtures
- Organization of exhibits that are inconsistent in height and not centered at 57” a.f.f
- Spaces to reflect and digest within gallery with a higher level of privacy
- Access to natural light
- Hanging works displayed 4’ from another to avoid overcrowding
- Museum label with appropriate text size and optimal length for readability
- Comfortable options for seating to encourage extended exposure to artworks
Mental Barriers and Enablers of Empathetic Immersion

- Varying heights and general disorganization of museum displays
- Lengthy descriptions and use of jargon in museum label

BARRIERS

- Cue to entrance of space: mentally prepares visitor for experience
- Logical organization of displayed objects share common theme for easier digestion

ENABLERS

- Windows connecting to exterior space
- Digestible & accessible information on museum label

Social Barriers and Enablers of Empathetic Immersion

- High price of admission
- Overcrowded and high capacity gallery spaces

BARRIERS

- User's choice for displayed art interactions
- Areas for more private conversation or individual ponderation

ENABLERS

- High price of admission
- User's choice for displayed art interactions

Fig. 81 Mental Barriers and Enablers Illustration

Fig. 82 Social Barriers and Enablers Illustration
DESIGN METHODOLOGY

Design Methodology includes the following steps:
- Define Evaluative Process
- Overall Preliminary Floor Plans & Level Organization
- 3D Model & Visual Styles
- Rendered Rendering Locations
- Design Methodology Poster & Packet Submission

PRESENTATION GRAPHICS
- Rendered Floor Plans
- Rendered 3D Visuals
- Final Material Palette Selection
- Stereo Panoramic or Walkthrough
- Final Presentations
- Finalize Showcase Poster & Packet Development
- Senior Showcase Presentation Submission

EVALUATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

- Psychological: Understand & Connect
  - The museum space will address the psychological enablers in the museum space by including educational and interpretative materials that help visitors understand and connect with the artwork. This will include clear wayfinding strategies, digestible museum labels, along with educational workshop spaces.
  - This museum will also create designated opportunities for reflection and contemplation with the inclusion of “reflection rooms” within the floor plan.

- Social: Foster Feelings of Belonging
  - The museum space will address the social enablers by encouraging visitors to engage with others and the artwork in their chosen method and setting. This will include the incorporation of “share” spaces such as workshops, event spaces, and cafes, as well as conversational museum labels that invite questions and discourse. This will encourage visitors to absorb others and share their own experiences and thoughts on the artwork through written and spoken dialogue fostering feelings of belonging within the community.

- Physical: Engage & Explore
  - The museum space will address physical enablers by including environmental features such as diverse opportunities for seating, immersive lighting techniques, and curated finish selections for individual exhibit spaces as well as interactive displays that encourage visitors to engage with and explore the artwork on a deeper level.

The Gantt chart provides a visual representation of the project’s timeline, tasks, and deadlines. This horizontal chart is designed with the timeline on the x-axis, while the activities to be accomplished are on the y-axis. Evaluative characteristics are used to determine project success at completion.

Gantt Chart

Fig. 83 Gantt Chart
Reflection Room Prototyping

Prototyping allows for ideation of spaces, with reflection rooms being a new spatial typology, prototyping is necessary to explore options and arrive at a final solution before implementation. These sketches are helpful in showing the connection of reflection rooms to the overall exhibit space, materiality, and overall visual style.

Prototyping rendering styles is also important for the final product, vetting visual style options so that the final product is cohesive and reads well when many different renderings are to be created of differing spaces within the same project.

Rendering Styles

*Sketchup - Enscape - Photoshop*

Fig. 84 Prototyping Sketches

Fig. 85 Rendering Styles 1

Fig. 86 Rendering Styles 2
Rendering Styles

Fig. 86 Rendering Styles

Selected Rendering Style

Emphasis on Light and Shadow
View of Exterior Through Windows
Realistic Material Representation
Entourage Interacting Within Spaces
Paper Texture Underlay

Fig. 87 Chosen Rendering Style
Location of Interior Renderings

Key views of the proposed interior spaces were chosen to highlight major aspects of the plan. Stereo panoramas of the gallery spaces, entry, and café will allow for 360° views and an interactive viewing experience for the observer.
The plans most public areas are located on the first floor, including the open event space, the gift shop, the workshops, and the café, allowing the public to have easier access to these spaces. The main entry and lobby located at the South of the building allows access from the parking lot.

Galleries 1 and 2 are located on the second and third floors, creating a more private space. Within these gallery spaces, "Reflection Rooms" are included to allow for a place of contemplation between exhibits. Gallery 1, being the sorrow gallery, is located on the second floor with gallery 2 being the hope gallery located above it. As the visitor passes through the sorrow gallery into the hope gallery, they become closer in elevation to the large skylight and the environment becomes brighter and more open. The core of the building remains open to allow sunlight to pass between levels to unify the space.
THIRD FLOOR BUBBLE DIAGRAM

Bubble To Blocking 3rd Floor

THIRD FLOOR BLOCKING PLAN

Large Skylight Feature Aligned with Gallery Balconies to Connect all 3 levels

Gallery Spaces on the 2nd and 3rd Floors

Restrooms Located on North Wall of Building on all 3 Levels

Centrally Located Monumental Stair

Gift Shop and Lobby Area Adjacent to Main Entry and Exit Area

“Share” Spaces Located on First Level for Ease of Access & Connection to Community

Diagrammatic Section Cut

Fig. 91 3rd Floor Bubble to Blocking

Fig. 92 Diagrammatic Section Cut
Proposed Floor Plans

The following floor plans were created by taking the spatial relationships identified in the bubble diagrams and then the blocking diagrams and refining them to create the specific rooms and spaces. Optimizing circulation routes towards the gallery spaces and providing a clear public to private separation between floors with clear sightlines between the spaces. The inspiration photos included below indicate the desired visual style of some of the key spaces called out in the plan.

Fig. 93 Visual Styles of Interior Spaces

Fig. 94 First Floor Plan

Fig. 95 Second Floor Plan

Fig. 96 Third Floor Plan
Final Floor Plans

The final floor plans were created with a concentration of community and connectivity spaces on the lower level, with the exhibit spaces separated by floor above. Centering “share” spaces on the first level allows for visitor interaction between one another and engagement in meaningful conversations. This can help to create a sense of community and shared experience among visitors, beyond the typical exhibit. Using the first level as a community hub also allows people to choose to visit without immersing themselves in the exhibit spaces, like taking a coffee break, or sitting in on an arts class. Keeping the community involved actively in the art community on a regular basis is another important aspect of all museum environments. The second floor plan shows the “sorrow” exhibit space, and has heavily focused on the use of angular lines and sharp corners, without sacrificing the wandering spirit of the museum experience. The third floor opens up to the rest of the museum space with a large balcony overlooking the open core of the building and a skylight above, the third floor primarily focuses on undulating and curved lines to create a sense of openness as one wanders through the exhibit space.
Third Floor Site Plan

15. Reflection Rooms
16. Hope Exhibit
17. Restrooms
18. Exhibit Storage

Exploded Axonometric Diagram

- Large skylight feature connecting all levels
- Large open core brings sunlight in the center of each floor
- Reflection rooms & seating areas
- Floor to ceiling light diffusing glass
- Ceiling feature connecting community spaces
Entry & Monumental Stair

The Entry & Monumental Stair is a vital part of the first floor community space of the museum. As visitors enter the museum, they are welcomed by a large amount of light that comes from the dappled skylight above. The colorful and inviting finishes, such as the large mural and open community space, make the visitors feel more connected to the community. The open community space is ideal for hosting large events, allowing the museum to become a center for community building and togetherness.

Reception & Gift Shop

The Reception & Gift Shop is the first and last visit point for visitors when they come to the museum. This space is where visitors can turn for information and assistance, ensuring that their visit is enjoyable and memorable. The gift shop includes lots of display areas for merchandise and has a clear reception area to receive information, making it easy for visitors to explore and find the information they need.
Café & Lounge

The Café is a space where visitors can sit and talk while enjoying a variety of seating options, including booths, family-style seating, and more comfortable individual chairs. The playful yet simple finishes in the space create a welcoming atmosphere that welcomes visitors visiting the museum & the broader Grand Rapids community. The large ceiling feature above connects the community spaces on the first level, creating a more subtle wayfinding technique.

Classroom & Workshop

The Classroom & Workshop areas are designed to cater to both formal and informal learning environments. The classroom has stadium-style seating for lectures and more "formal" teaching opportunities, while the workshop area allows for more "hands-on" experiences with large lab-style tables. Both areas have access to plentiful natural light, making them conducive towards a positive learning environment.
The Sorrow Gallery is designed to create a unique and immersive experience for visitors. The ceilings in the space are low, and the finishes used are dark, unadulterated and more solid, creating a somber and reflective atmosphere. The large curved glass wall includes a gradient film that lets in a bit of light from the large skylight above. Visitors are carried through the exhibit space through the use of the undulating ceiling feature, spotlighting art pieces and flooring transitions.

The Hope Gallery celebrates the beauty of nature and its relationship with the museum. Visitors can closely see the large skylight that creates a dappled light effect on the floor and walls of the first and third levels. The use of light, bright, and more touchable tactile finishes create a connection to nature making visitors feel more at peace. Reflection rooms in the Hope Gallery have small skylights above them to bring in additional natural light to the space, adding to the overall calm and soothing atmosphere.
Materiality by Floor

Concentrating bright and colorful finishes on the first floor creates an inviting and energetic atmosphere for community events and involvement. The diverse color palette reflects the Grand Rapids arts culture, drawing members of the community in. Taking inspiration from the visual evaluation of positive and negative images, material palettes were developed to reflect common themes of colors, textures, and forms for the second and third gallery floors. The sorrow exhibit floor utilizing dark colors, reflective, and hard surfaces in contrast to the hope exhibit floor with light & bright colors in touchable, textural finishes.

1st Floor
Community Areas

2nd Floor
Sorrow Exhibit

3rd Floor
Hope Exhibit

The Reflection Rooms are spaces created for visitors to take a moment of pause and self-reflection. Two reflection rooms are shown side by side to show contrasting visual styles that achieve similar results in each exhibit space. Visitors can have conversations with others or can individually reflect on their experience in a quiet and secluded atmosphere. The contrasting visual styles reflect the design choices of the exhibit spaces that they passed within, creating a more cohesive and immersive experience.

Reflect

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Providing an environment where visitors can achieve empathetic immersion through physical, psychological, and social factors is essential for fostering transformative experiences within museums. In today's society, where empathy and understanding are more important than ever, museums have the potential to play a vital role in promoting compassion and connection between individuals from diverse backgrounds. By providing a space where visitors can engage with and explore artwork on a deeper level, museums can serve as a platform for community building and interpersonal understanding. With a focus on creating a space that encourages diverse perspectives and experiences, visitors can learn to appreciate and embrace the difference that make us unique.

Connections Through Contrast offers an approach to creating environmentally immersive museum experiences that foster empathy, understanding, and community while serving as an example for other institutions to follow. As museums continue to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of society, it is essential that they prioritize the encouragement of dialogue, interpersonal understanding, and creating connections in their programming and exhibitions. Through the creation of immersive museum experiences that prioritize empathy and diversity, museums can play a vital role in forging a more compassionate and connected world.

Conclusion

First and foremost, I would like to thank Philip Repp, my thesis chair, for his guidance and support throughout the development of Connections Through Contrast. His insights and feedback have been invaluable in shaping this thesis into its final form. I would like to extend my appreciation to David DeMaagd who generously offered his time and expertise, as his assistance in the collection of site research was essential for the successful completion of this project. I would also like to express my gratitude to my professors Kim Buchholz and Dustin Altschul for their insights and critique throughout my thesis journey. Their insight and feedback were instrumental in the successful culmination of my research. I would finally like to thank the Western Michigan University interior design class of 2023, your encouragement and camaraderie throughout my academic career have been truly uplifting and inspiring, I feel privileged to have shared this journey with you.
Fig. 16: Welch, Josilyn, S. Amsterdam Art Museum, Amsterdam. November 10, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.


Fig. 11: Bondarchuk, Karen. “A Crow a Day (#1),” 2014. Monroe-Brown Gallery. Western Michigan University.

Fig. 10: Bondarchuk, Karen. “A Crow a Day (#2),” 2014. Monroe-Brown Gallery. Western Michigan University.

Fig. 9: Monroe-Brown Gallery Space. October 5, 2022. Photograph.

Fig. 8: Welch, Josilyn, S. The Cycle of Inquiry. November 21, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

Fig. 7: Welch, Josilyn, S. Connections Through Contrast. November 21, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.


Fig. 5: Welch, Josilyn, S. Model of the Embodied Immersion in a Museum Space. December 10, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

Fig. 4: Welch, Josilyn, S. Art, Design, and the Psyche. November 12, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

Fig. 3: Welch, Josilyn, S. Redefining the Museum Label. December 10, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

Fig. 2: Welch, Josilyn, S. LOHMA, New York Spacial Relationships Diagram. November 15, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

Fig. 1: Welch, Josilyn, S. MOHMA, New York Special Relationships Diagram. November 15, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.


Fig. 47: Welch, Josilyn, S. The Louvre, Abu Dhabi, Spacial Relationships Diagram. November 16, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.


Fig. 44: Welch, Josilyn, S. The Louvre, France, Spacial Relationships Diagram. November 10, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

Fig. 43: Welch, Josilyn, S. MOMA, New York Spacial Relationships Diagram. November 15, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

Fig. 42: Louvre Atrium. 2022. Everything You Need to Know before Visiting the Museum. https://www.louvre.fr/en/visit.

Fig. 41: Louvre Gallery Hall. 2022. Everything You Need to Know before Visiting the Museum. https://www.louvre.fr/en/visit.


Fig. 39: Welch, Josilyn, S. The Louvre, France, Spacial Relationships Diagram. November 10, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

Fig. 38: Welch, Josilyn, S. Art Museum Spaces. November 15, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

Fig. 37: Welch, Josilyn, S. Redefining the Museum Label. December 10, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.


Fig. 34: Unknown. Liminal Spaces. 2022. @SpaceLiminalBot. https://twitter.com/spaceliminalbot.


Fig. 31: Bondarchuk, Karen. “A Crow a Day,” 2014. Monroe-Brown Gallery, Western Michigan University.

Fig. 30: Bondarchuk, Karen. “A Crow a Day,” 2014. Monroe-Brown Gallery, Western Michigan University.

Fig. 29: Hursley, Timothy. Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum / Safdie Architects. https://www.archdaily.com/37957/yad-vashem-holocaust-museum-safdie-architects.


Fig. 27: Santos, Sabrina. Proton Therapy Center for Denmark. https://www.archdaily.com/772763/denmarks-revolutionary-proton-therapy-center.

Fig. 26: 2022. Gethsemane Lutheran Church. https://www.lutheransnw.org/central-seattle/.


Fig. 24: Welch, Josilyn, S. Art Museum Spaces. November 19, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.


Using the five key questions composing the cycle of inquiry, the main question of how the built environment can embrace exhibitions that create connections between people can be addressed and answered. Firstly, the main way in which we connect with others is through shared experiences. Shared experiences allow us to connect with one another on a deeper level and the connectivity that is fostered through them has been shown to activate the brain’s reward system.


This desire for connectedness calls back to the primal desire to feel connectivity within communities. Sharing positive and negative experiences with others can foster this sense of community and remind us that we are not alone in our journey that is life.


The importance of art has been a long-debated question that many philosophers and thought leaders have attempted to answer. The importance of art is decided by the beholder, it can offer us perspective and insight whilst educating us about important events and concepts. Although there have been many different perspectives on this singular question, the underlying factor in the importance of art is so that we can lead more fulfilling lives and access a better version of ourselves.


Art can have an immense emotional impact on us. Actively viewing art has the ability to not only inspire but also to stir up intense thoughts and emotions. Individual cognitive functions and lived experiences can inform what emotions we attach to different artworks. In the same way, humans attach emotional value to the environments in which we find ourselves. Environmental psychology explains how humans interact with their surroundings, and in turn, how these how affect our mood. The design elements in our interior environments such as space, line, form, light, color, texture, and pattern can have a large impact on our emotional perception of space.

Lastly, we visit museums because of the myriad of benefits they offer us. Museum visits have an impact on not only our learning but also as a setting to spark contemplation, encourage empathy, make us more curious, and increase creativity.


This diagram shows the interconnected concepts between the design of the interior environment, visual arts, and the psyche. The exploration of these three elements allows us to expand and explore the interconnected relationship of these three core elements of this project. Subjects that are directly related to one another are connected visually via this diagram, with the key elements of design, art, and the psyche located in color coordination. This design of the interior environment reflects the visual arts, and pulls out concepts that are noted in the psyche. All of these elements create a web of topics that are explained in Connection Through Contrast. These topics of research have helped guide the development and explain the project.

Design, Art, & The Psyche

Design Elements & Principles

- Cognition, Emotion, Perception, & Behavior
- Embodied Cognition Theory
- Muses of Design & Curation Process

Reflection of Organization’s Values
- Art as Therapy
- The Positive Impact of Art
- Art as Therapy and the Psyche

An Alternative Importance of Museums

Empathic Immersion

Between Curation & Environmental Design

Between People Creating Connections

Fig. 3 The Cycle of Inquiry

Fig. 4 Design, Art, and the Psyche

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A Crow A Day Visit Notes & Thoughts

Key Enablers and Barriers in Gallery Spaces
In 2009, these plans designed by Serve Studio were created to accommodate a fitness center at 975 Ottawa Ave named "Core Fitness." However, these plans were never constructed, and Core Fitness never moved into the building.