Connections Through Contrast: The Built Environment Embracing Fine Art Exhibition

Josilyn Welch

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Connections Through Contrast

The Built Environment Embracing Art Exhibition

Josilyn S. Welch
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“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
Abstract

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.

*Physical: Engage & Explore*

**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.

*Psychological: Understand & Connect*

**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.

*Social: Foster Feelings of Belonging*

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.
How humans interact with and perceive art fundamentally impacts their emotional and cognitive functions including memory, attention, learning, self-understanding, and appreciation of life. The role of the environment in which people experience, interact with, and perceive art plays a critical role in the quality and depth of emotional connection people can have with artwork and curated spaces. Connections Through Contrast is about how intentionally designed environments and the experience of art within them can help an individual gain a better understanding of themselves and others.
PROJECT DEFINITION
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 effected 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 the 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, effect 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. It has been shown that viewing art can improve attention and concentration, as well as enhance a sense of connection to the viewer themselves, and others.

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Empathetic Immersion is the powerfully immersive experience that explores what it is to be human in our world by gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of others. This can allow visitors fully engage with and understand the emotions and experiences of themselves or another person. This can also manifest itself in sensory understanding of another individual, or to 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. The 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 context 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.

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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 is reflected in the art, the environment, and the 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.

PRECEDENT RESEARCH
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 the observers 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.

Karen Bondarchuk
Ergo Sum:
A Crow a Day

I began this series on August 1, 2014, as a way to honor my mother who was in the late stages of Alzheimer’s disease. I dedicated myself to creating a crow drawing every day for 365 days as a way of marking the passage of time that she no longer seemed to recognize. Crows have figured largely in my work for many years and represent both the quotidian and the extraordinary — akin to the Buddhist notion of “ordinary magic.”

The labor that went into producing each of the 365 panels – cutting the wood, preparing my own gesso from gelatin and powdered limestone, building up layers, and adding between coats in preparation for the actual process of creating an image – seemed to evoke the overwhelming labor and repetitive activities of motherhood. The series is simultaneously a marker of my mother’s lost time and a constant and acute reminder of my own days, my life, and an attempt to signal visually the preciousness and individuality of each day.

Although the project seemed sober to me at its outset, quirky cheer and tendril-like tentacles to whack many of the panels.

Karen Bondarchuk, A Crow A Day Poster
"I came to see this exhibit twice! I love it! The first time, I came with my 17 year old granddaughter and she was very interested and we spent a lot of time talking about each one and the beauty, color, and design. Second time I brought two women from an assisted living home, artist with dementia and we spent an hour looking, talking, and enjoying." 1

"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 more than any talk therapy, or traditional healing in the western world. I loved seeing the colors changing, slight comical, witty, deep, questioning each brush stroke. Such small yet large "canvases" to __ on & from. Amazing! You turned your hurt into healing and shared that personal experience with the audience. Beautiful.” 1

"So incredibly moving; Thank you for sharing your creative soul in your daily experience.” 1

"I found you(r) work “a crow a day” and your story moving. Your artistry is amazing and each piece of work can stand alone. However, the collection together make for an impressive statement to you as an artist during a painful time in your life. May the love of your mother continue to inspire you.” 1

"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.” 1

"Your exhibit is truly thought provocative—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—however, that might take away from our experience of your “crows”. May god bless you and your mother. It’s a wonderful exhibit.” 1

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"Beautiful and stunning artwork, thank you for sharing your beautiful story with us and being vulnerable with your story.” 1

"I found you(r) work “a crow a day” and your story moving. Your artistry is amazing and each piece of work can stand alone. However, the collection together make for an impressive statement to you as an artist during a painful time in your life. May the love of your mother continue to inspire you.” 1

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"This was stunning and left me speechless. Truly an inspiration.” 1

"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 more than any talk therapy, or traditional healing in the western world. I loved seeing the colors changing, slight comical, witty, deep, questioning each brush stroke. Such small yet large “canvases” to __ on & from. Amazing! You turned your hurt into healing and shared that personal experience with the audience. Beautiful.” 1

Fig. 14 Sompo Museum of Art, China
The Sompo Art Museum has chosen to place their Sunflower work behind glass.

Fig. 15 Philadelphia Art Museum, Philadelphia
Claiming its own wall, this painting is unobstructed - hanging right in the middle of the floor and the ceiling.

Fig. 16 Amsterdam Art Museum, Amsterdam
This painting has its own wall, protected by a small rope divider.

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 each of these spaces. Although the artwork that is 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.

KEY: Viewer Environment Art
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 situations subconsciously. Perceptions and expectations of art may differ based on their display types. Museums undertake the responsibility of establishing context for their pieces. What are these museums saying about their sunflowers?

The Sompo Museum of Art has chosen to display their piece behind glass, prohibiting viewers from getting too close. While the Philadelphia Art Museum and the Neue Museum in Munich have chosen to create no physical barriers between the museum goers and the artworks. 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 to the piece 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 space and at what distance they choose to appreciate it from. This study evaluated and tracked data in a real gallery setting giving insight on peoples 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.

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.¹ 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.²

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”.³ 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, 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 for us but for everyone.¹ 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. Viewing sad art can increase our ability to empathize with others viewing the art and experiences outside of the museum in everyday life. This can also have a cathartic effect for the viewer, allowing a space to express and confront internal sorrowful emotions can be constructive and therapeutic. Meaning and purpose can also be found though 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.²

Redefining The Museum Label

**Printer Ink on Paper**

Josilyn 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.


**Fig. 37 Redefining The Museum Label**

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

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

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

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.

**Positive Visual Qualities**

Fig. 22 Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers, Vincent van Gogh

Fig. 23 Jojulta Central Gardens, Estudio MMX

Fig. 24 Institute of Management, Bangalore, Balkrishna Doshi

Fig. 25 Terrace at Night, Vincent Van Gogh

Fig. 26 Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Seattle

Fig. 27 Proton Therapy Center, Denmark

Fig. 28 Sunday on La Grande Jette, Georges Seurat
Negative Visual Qualities

One of the common themes in art that was perceived to be sad is loss or separation. Examples include themes like death, grief, and abandonment that has manifested itself in empty spaces, dark or dim colors, desolate landscapes. Loneliness and isolation is also a common theme that can be visually perceived through solitary figures, empty spaces and desolate landscapes. Spaces that are perceived to have negative associations include a dark color palette, the use of concrete, tall/vertical structures, and a level of age or deterioration associated with them.

Visual Qualities Analysis

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
- Familiarity and nostalgic symbols

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

Fig. 29 Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial.
Fig. 30 Melancholy, Albert Gygory
Fig. 31 COUR Funeral Home, France
Fig. 32 In a Cafe, Edgard Degas
Fig. 33 Melancholy, Edvard Munch
Fig. 34 Liminal Spaces, @SpaceLiminalBot
Fig. 35 UK National Theatre Building

Fig. 36 Visual Experiences Graphs
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.

Where visitors are welcomed and shape their expectations for their visit.

Where visitors are immersed in the museum experience and discover new information.

Where visitors gather and converse. Making connections.

Where visitors recharge and digest what they have absorbed.

Where visitors can take a piece of their experience home. Brings the museum into their world beyond.

Fig. 38 Art Museum Spaces
The Louvre is one of the most prominent museums in the world. The mission is focused on retaining "loyal to the universal vocation assigned to (the French revolution)" with a focus on historical preservation and education. A majority of space is assigned to 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 hearken back to the age of enlightenment. The age of enlightenment was an era defined as a “period of rigorous scientific, political and philosophical discourse that characterized European society” which was founded on the sharing of ideas and creating discourse.

The pure size of the Louvre might lend itself to the inability to achieve empathetic immersion within it. Intimate interactions with art are difficult because of the prominence of this museum in society and the keystone pieces that are displayed within its walls.
MOMA: New York, New York

The MOMA is also a prominent museum in today’s art community. Holding pieces like Van Gogh’s Starry Night, and the Persistence of Memory by Salvadore Dali, it is on most art-lovers’ bucket lists. Its mission is more holistic, making a commitment to “catalyst for experimentation, learning, and creativity, a gathering place for all”.

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 the one located 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.” 1 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

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 due to the quality of the small gallery 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 MOMA 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 visitors, 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.

PROJECT CONTEXT
Location: Identified

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

1.2 Miles North From Downtown
Aerial Analysis

Building Location
Parks
Educational Buildings
Residential Communities
Museums
Downtown Border

Fig. 56 Aerial Analysis
Solar Study

June 15th, 2023

December 15th, 2023

June 15th, 9:00 am

December 15th, 9:00 am
Fig. 57 Solar Study

June 15th, 12:00 pm

June 15th, 3:00 pm

December 15th, 12:00 pm

December 15th, 3:00 pm
Site Survey - Section Locations

Fig. 58 Site Survey First Floor, 2005

Creation of Units Within the Building for Multiple Occupants

Use of Differing Flooring Materials to Delineate Space

No Doors Located on Plan
Fig. 59 Site Survey Second Floor, 2005

Unit 2 and 3 Open to Below

Unit 4 Previously Occupied by Fitness Center
Building Sections

Fig. 60 Site Survey, 2005
Sections A & B

- **32' 8" Vaulted Ceiling Height in Unit 4**
- **10' 3" Ceiling Height in Unit 1 with Dropped Ceiling**
- **Varying Ceiling Height in Unit 3**
Excavated Floor in Unit 3 to Accommodate for In-Ground Swimming Pool.
First Floor Existing Floorplan

- In-Ground Pool
- Current main entry off of Ottawa Ave.
Existing Conditions

Existing First Floor Plan

Fig. 62 Existing First Floor Plan

Existing Second Floor Plan

Fig. 63 Existing Second Floor Plan

Vacant Spectrum
Health Outpatient
Offices

Current Entries

In-Ground Swimming Pool

Basketball Courts

Current Main Entry
of Ottawa Ave.

Pickleball Courts

Balcony
Overlooking
Swimming Pool

Open to Below

Elevator Access
Code Considerations

**Occupy 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: 200 gross

**Plumbing Fixtures**

**Assembly - Museum**
- Water Closets:*
  - 1 per 125 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 more 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 1-500: 2
- Occupant load 501-1000: 3
- Occupant load 1001+: 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: A
- Rooms: C

**Mercantile:**
- Stairways: A
- Corridors: B
- Rooms: C

Fig. 64 Area of Use
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.

Fig. 65 Entryway Area Photo

Heavy timber construction in North portion of building

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

Fig. 66 Pool Area Photo

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

Large opening to east of building with windows overlooking Ottawa Ave.

Fig. 67 Upper Gym Photo

Steel truss structure with exposed wood ceiling

Fig. 68 Upper Gym Photo 2

Hardwood basketball courts throughout second level

Existing racquetball courts on west wall of the second level
Unfinished floor and ceiling on East side of second level

Exposed brick wall and ceiling structure

Sidewalk wraps around North side of building

Sidewalk wraps around North side of building

Damaged plinth facing Ottawa Ave.
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 spacial recommendations like "reflection rooms" are also included to help foster an environment that promotes empathetic immersion.
REFLECT
- Visitors reflect on and digest information presented in gallery space
- Thoughts and opinions are formed about presented information
Restroom Facilities, Gallery Seating, "Reflection Rooms"

25%

SHARE
- Interactions with others
- Visitors gather and converse
- Create interpersonal connections
- Thoughts & opinions, created in 'reflect' are shared and synthesized
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time (in Minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prepare (8%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking Lot</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walkway</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Entry</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobby / Reception Area</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Prepare</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absorb (45%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit Spaces</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Hallways</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersive Gallery Seating</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Absorb</strong></td>
<td><strong>85</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflect (37%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restroom Facilities</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secluded Gallery Seating</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Room</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Reflect</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Share (21%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops / Event Spaces</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cafes / Restaurants</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Share</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remember (8%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Shop</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Area (reception)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Remember</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 76 Distribution of Spaces
Breakdown
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space Name</th>
<th>Activities Hosted</th>
<th>Prominent Emotions</th>
<th>Important Adjacencies</th>
<th>Lighting</th>
<th>Furniture Requirements</th>
<th>Acoustics Considerations</th>
<th>Door Requirements</th>
<th>Privacy Level</th>
<th>Art Displayed</th>
<th>Color Considerations</th>
<th>Material Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parking Lot</td>
<td>Parking Cars</td>
<td>Excitement</td>
<td>Walking, Main Entry</td>
<td>Daylighting and safety outdoor lights</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not essential</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Clear representation of brand light: neutral with contrasting dark neutrals</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walkway</td>
<td>Walking up to building</td>
<td>Excitement</td>
<td>Walking, Main Entry</td>
<td>Walkway lighting on a scale up to building signage lighting</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not essential</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Showcase neutral &amp; black: tonal or soft with white highlights</td>
<td>Clear representation of brand light: neutral with contrasting dark neutrals</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Entry</td>
<td>Enter the building</td>
<td>Excitement</td>
<td>Walking, Parking Lot, Reception</td>
<td>Overhead lighting &amp; daylighting</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Acoustic considerations for variation of acoustics</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Resilient and cleanable finishes - high traffic area</td>
<td>Resilient and cleanable finishes - high traffic area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobby / Reception Area</td>
<td>Get direction for exhibits, called thoughtsilate meeting spaces, catering, street-level gallery openings.</td>
<td>Excitement</td>
<td>Walking, Main Entry</td>
<td>Overhead lighting &amp; daylighting, two contrasting styles.</td>
<td>Reception desk, bench, lounge seating</td>
<td>Acoustic considerations for reduction of echo and reverberation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Clear representation of brand light: neutral with contrasting dark neutrals</td>
<td>Resilient and cleanable finishes: high traffic area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit Spaces</td>
<td>Take in new information, view up close, be introduced to new products, nooks, tables, take photographs &amp; notes</td>
<td>Hope &amp; Wonder, Success, Success, Success, Success</td>
<td>Main Walkways, Immersive Gallery Seating, Intersection Rooms, Cafe</td>
<td>Bright indirect experiential lighting for dramatic effects, provide task lighting throughout for viewing, 100 lux for saleable objects, 700 lux for displayed objects, all layers of light taken into account</td>
<td>Bench &amp; lounge seating</td>
<td>Acoustic considerations for sound levels in gallery space: reduction of echo and reverberation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Yes, specially curated hope/wonder art pieces per gallery space</td>
<td>Reduced use of glass in front of spaces to increase visual flow, visual connection. Soft surfaces used when possible to help with sound transmission, high use of glass to create transparency and visibility.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Walkways</td>
<td>Get from one location to another</td>
<td>Hope &amp; Wonder</td>
<td>Between all major spaces.</td>
<td>Overhead lighting &amp; daylighting, Emergency lighting</td>
<td>Bench seating</td>
<td>Acoustic considerations for sound levels in gallery space: reduction of echo and reverberation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Yes, hope/wonder per gallery space</td>
<td>Corridor cols in corridor spaces: Resilient and cleanable finishes - high traffic area</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersive Gallery Seating</td>
<td>Gifting area optimized for viewing art pieces, patron conversations</td>
<td>Hope &amp; Wonder</td>
<td>Exhibit Spaces</td>
<td>Overhead lighting &amp; daylighting</td>
<td>Comfortable seating with multiple pictures considered, expected to be 3 minutes at time 10</td>
<td>Acoustic considerations for sound levels in gallery space: reduction of echo and reverberation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Yes, hope/wonder per gallery space</td>
<td>Corridor cols in corridor spaces: Resilient and cleanable finishes: high traffic area</td>
<td>Soft seating reserved to encourage sitting. Materials to be selected to coordinate with gallery spaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedroom Facilities</td>
<td>Use the bedroom, reflect on what you have seen, so far</td>
<td>Security, Privacy, Relaxation</td>
<td>Main Walkways</td>
<td>Overhead lighting &amp; daylighting, Emergency lighting</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Highly acoustically private</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Highly cleanable &amp; resilient hard surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secured Gallery Seating</td>
<td>Seating intentionally to have conversations with another rider on a place to reflect by yourself</td>
<td>Security, Privacy, Intimacy</td>
<td>Exhibit Spaces</td>
<td>Directly uplifting color field</td>
<td>Comfortable seating, expected 1 minute at time 1</td>
<td>Highly acoustically private</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Corridor cols in corridor spaces: Cleanable finishes - soft surfaces to encourage sitting and reflection. Finishes to coordinate with gallery spaces.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Spaces</td>
<td>Intimate places for decompression between gallery spaces</td>
<td>Security, Privacy, Intimacy</td>
<td>Between gallery spaces, a safe space to expect and space to reflect</td>
<td>Soft uplifting and daylighting</td>
<td>Comfortable seating for 1 to 4 occupants, expected 1 minute at time 1</td>
<td>Highly acoustically private</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Soft surfaces for extended sitting. Furniture for extended private interactions vs more social.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>Space to hold community discussions about the old and mental health community, instruction or workshops</td>
<td>Inspiration, Open-Mindedness, Learning, Healing, Absorbing Spaces</td>
<td>Customizable lighting for various events. Teaching/lectures, think tanks, charts, whiteboards, tables, screens, comfortable seating, for multiple workshop types</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Meditation academically private</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Light Neutral</td>
<td>Cleanable and durable finishes, standard painted throughout space.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cafe</td>
<td>Space to converse with others, sustain the body, a break between gallery spaces, and conversations</td>
<td>Thoughtfulness, Connectiveness</td>
<td>Centrally located</td>
<td>Soft uplifting and daylighting</td>
<td>Small cafes tables and seating, booth seating, lounge seating, cafe tables, chairs, food and beverage service, with applicable appliances.</td>
<td>Not essential</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Art visible from space</td>
<td>Visually different color from gallery to separate from exhibit spaces. Cleanable finishes - soft surfaces to encourage sitting and conversation. Finishes to coordinate with gallery spaces.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Space</td>
<td>Space to hold events with the community, suitable of typical operational hours, conferences, ceremonies perhaps</td>
<td>Community, Connectiveness, Inspiration</td>
<td>Centrally located, Event space</td>
<td>Daylighting, customizable lighting solutions</td>
<td>Minimize/ customize furniture setup for different events</td>
<td>Acoustic controllability</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Space</td>
<td>Art visible from space</td>
<td>Neutrals</td>
<td>Cleanable and durable finishes, standard painted throughout space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Shop</td>
<td>Space to purchase merchandise items to take home</td>
<td>Reflection, Prepare spaces</td>
<td>Showcases lighting for retail elements as well as customizable lighting solutions for changing</td>
<td>Retail display cases, tables, and pedestals. Checkout counter</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not essential</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Whitewash</td>
<td>Resilient and durable finishes, standard painted throughout space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Area (Inception)</td>
<td>Gain more information about the city, walk and do not stop, decompose after visit. Sense of completion and transformation</td>
<td>Prepare spaces</td>
<td>Overhead lighting &amp; daylighting</td>
<td>Reception desk, bench seating</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not essential</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Clear representation of brand light: neutral with contrasting dark neutrals</td>
<td>Resilient and cleanable finishes - high traffic area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Spatial Distribution in Square Feet

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

**01. 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

**SHARE**

**ABSORB**
- Interactions with art.
- Immersed in museum experience.
- Discover new information & visit landmark pieces.
  Exhibit Spaces, Main Hallways

**5,200 sf.**

**02. ABSORB**

**26,650 sf.**
REFLECT
- Visitors reflect on and digest information presented in gallery space
- Thoughts and opinions are formed about presented information
Restroom Facilities, Gallery Seating, "Reflection Rooms"

16,250 sf.

SHARE
- Interactions with others
- Visitors gather and converse
- Create interpersonal connections
- Thoughts & opinions, created in 'reflect' are shared and synthesized
Workshops, Event Spaces, Cafes, Public Areas

11,700 sf.

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 sf.
Physical Barriers and Enablers of Empathetic Immersion

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.

**BARRIERS**

- Overcrowded display walls
- Distracting finishes and fixtures
- Physical barriers separating viewer and artwork
- Organization of exhibits that are consistent in height, placed on center at 57” a.f.f
- Access to natural light
- Hanging works displayed 4’ from another to avoid overcrowding
- Museums label with appropriate text size and optimal length for readability

**ENABLERS**

- Comfortable options for seating to encourage extended exposure to artworks
- Spaces to reflect and digest within gallery with a higher level of privacy

Fig. 80 Physical Barriers and Enablers Illustration
Mental Barriers and Enablers of Empathetic Immersion

- Lengthy descriptions and use of jargon in museum label
- Varying heights and general disorganization of museum displays
- Windows connecting to exterior space
- Logical organization of displayed objects, share common theme for easier digestion
- Digestible & accessible information on museum label
- Cue to entrance of space, mentally prepares visitor for experience

Fig. 81 Mental Barriers and Enablers Illustration
Opportunity for chance and planned encounters

User’s choice for displayed art interactions

Areas for more private conversation or individual ponderation

High price of admission

Overcrowded and high capacity gallery spaces

Opportunity for chance and planned encounters

Social Barriers and Enablers of Empathetic Immersion

Fig. 82 Social Barriers and Enablers Illustration
DESIGN METHODOLOGY
EVALUATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

To promote psychological, physical, and social enablers within the museum setting to promote empathetic immersion within its visitors, this museum will consider the following strategies:

Psychological: Understand & Connect

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.

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.

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.
Reflection Room Prototyping

Prototyping allows for ideation of spaces, with reflection rooms being a new spacial 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 room 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 is important when many different renderings are to be created of differing spaces within the same project.
Rendering Styles

Fig. 85 Rendering Styles 1
Rendering Styles

Fig. 86 Rendering Styles 2
Emphasis on Light and Shadow

View of Exterior Through Windows

Paper Texture Underlay

Realistic Material Representation

Entourage Interacting Within Spaces

Sketchup - Enscape - Photoshop

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.
DESIGN RESPONSE
Bubble To Blocking 1st Floor

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.
Bubble To Blocking 3rd Floor

**THIRD FLOOR BUBBLE DIAGRAM**

**THIRD FLOOR BLOCKING PLAN**

Fig. 91 3rd Floor Bubble to Blocking
Gallery Spaces on the 2nd and 3rd Floors

Large Skylight Feature Aligned w/ Gallery Balconies to Connect all 3 levels

Restrooms Located on North Wall of Building on all 3 Levels

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

Centrally Located Monumental Stair

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

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 diagram 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. 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. Concentrating “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 floor as a community hub also allows people to choose to visit without immersing themselves the exhibit spaces, like taking a coffee break, or sitting in on an arts class. Keeping the community involved actively in the arts 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 though the exhibit space.

Spatial Categorization

Fig. 97 Spatial Categorization

- **Prepare**: Where visitors are welcomed and shape their expectations for their visit
- **Absorb**: Where visitors are immersed in the museum experience and discover new information.
- **Share**: Where visitors gather and converse. Making connections.
- **Reflect**: Where visitors recharge and digest what they have absorbed.
- **Remember**: Where visitors can take a piece of their experience home. Brings the museum into their world beyond.
- **Public Exhibit Space**
First Floor Site Plan

1. Main Entry
2. Reception
3. Cafe
4. Open Event Area
5. Loading & Storage
6. Admin. Offices
7. Workshop
8. Classroom
9. Gift Shop
10. Restrooms

Fig. 101 1st Floor Site Plan
11. Reflection Rooms
12. Sorrow Exhibit
13. Restrooms
14. Exhibit Storage

Fig. 102 2nd 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
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.
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.
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.
Sorrow Gallery

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, unsaturated 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.
Reflection Rooms

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 placed within, creating a more cohesive an immersive experience.
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. Using inspiration from the visual evaluation of positive and negative images, material palettes were created 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 with touchable, textural finishes.

1st Floor
Community Areas

2nd Floor
Sorrow Exhibit

3rd Floor
Hope Exhibit

Fig. 117 Material Palettes by Floor
Fig. 118 Building Section Cuts
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.
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.
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Fig. 2. Welch, Josilyn. Connections Through Contrast. November 21, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

Fig. 3. Welch, Josilyn. The Cycle of Inquiry. November 21, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

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

Fig. 5. Welch, Josilyn. Model of the Embodied Cognition Theory. November 21, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

Fig. 6. Welch, Josilyn. Empathic Immersion. December 10, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.

Fig. 7. Welch, Josilyn. Model of Empathic Immersion in a Museum Space. November 21, 2022. Self-Made Graphic.


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


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Fig. 20. Van Gogh, Vincent. "Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear," 1889.

Fig. 21. Van Gogh, Vincent. "Vase With 15 Sunflowers," 1888-1889.


Fig. 24. Van Gogh, Vincent. "Terrace at Night," 1888.


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Fig. 58: Site Survey First Floor, 2005. Nedervield Surveying Inc. June 15, 2005
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APPENDIX
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 and art 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.\(^1\) 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.\(^2\)

Art can have an immense emotional impact on us, actively viewing art has the ability to surface intense thoughts and emotions. Individual cognitive functions and lived experiences can inform what emotions we attach to different artworks.\(^3\) 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 they have an impact on us. The design elements in our interior environments such as space, line, form, light, color, texture, and pattern can have a large impact on our cognitive 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.\(^4\)

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This diagram shows the interconnected concepts between the design of the interior environment, visual arts, and the psyche. The exploration of these nuanced concepts helps explain the interrelationship of the 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 notated in color coordination. Orange references the design of the interior environment, blue represents the visual arts, and purple calls out concepts that are rooted in the psyche. All of these elements create a web of topics that are explored within Connections Through Contrast. These topics of research have helped guide the development and assist in the explanation of the core subjects and values in which the project addresses.
Programming Poster Notes & Layout

- Thesis Statement
- Abstract
- Project Definition (size, location, overarching theme, purpose)
- Project Outcomes
- Project Criteria (visually depict progress)

Project objectives:
- Elements of Museum Experiences
  - Attraction
  - Environment
  - Visual Art

- Show different types of barriers (graphically)
- Conceptual objectives
  - Work meta-cognitive
Project outcomes overarching goal:

- Recontextualize an art museum as a setting/built environment that creates intentional connections between the built environment, the art that it accommodates, and its occupants. Through empathetic immersion:
  - Create an environment where...
    - people have the freedom to connect to art in the way they wish/desire
    - people have the opportunity to connect with others and share their experiences (meaningful interactions)
    - environments evoke similar emotions that are reflected within the art so as to not distract/take away (challenging... has to be done tastefully)

Create level of discovery:

- Environments that invite you to see, feel, touch, and get close.

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A Crow A Day Visit Notes & Thoughts

- Pat + Food
- Small but large
- Is it art or music? What is art?
- Contrast
- Disconnection. E.g. a museum is a space, but it is disconnection.
- She made me feel

Images, diagrams, drawings etc.

Museum interiors reflect:

Topic:
- Subject Exploration:
- Research Questions:

Applied Design:
- Design Response:
- Evidence-Based Design:

Project Objectives:
- Case Studies:
- Precedent Studies:

Show progressive movement of topic + subject, outline thesis statement + provide evidence for conclusion of thesis statement.

Goal of modern museums: Secular space for public engagement and instruction through the presentation of objects.

Goal of my museum: Space for deep connections and inspiration through the presentation of objects and their environment.


Contrast: Museum vs. space.
Key Enablers and Barriers in Gallery Spaces

- Mental barriers
  - Too long or too short descriptions
  - Less factual, more generically informative
  - Lack of structural no expectation
  - Wayfinding space

- Mental Enablers
  - Organization of exhibits that are logically "easiest to digest"

- Social
  - Not too crowded, open, and inviting

- Physical
  - Not too small, highly visible, digestible spaces
  - High-quality finishes

- Wayfinding
  - Signage to connect with other
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.