Intensifying the Experience of Contemporary Art

A New Model for Immersive Multisensory Experiences Exhibition

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Thesis Book
Rhode Island School of Design
Intensifying the Experience of Contemporary Art: 
A New Model for Immersive Multisensory Experience in Exhibitions

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Design in 
Interior Studies (Exhibitions & Narrative Environments) in the Department of Interior Architec-
ture of the Rhode Island School of Design

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2023

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“The giant white cube is now impeding rather than enhancing the rhythms of art. It preprograms a viewer’s journey, shifts the emphasis from process to product, and lacks individuality and openness. It’s not that art should be seen only in rutty bombed-out environments, but it should seem alive.”

— Jerry Saltz
Contemporary Art museums, emphasizing visual experiences, struggle to accommodate multisensory art forms. This thesis introduces a groundbreaking exhibition design model focused on creating immersive, multisensory experiences for visitors. The model transitions from a passive observation paradigm to an interactive perception approach, fostering a deeper understanding and emotional connection to art.

Applied to the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), the model introduces strategies such as narrative sculptures, interactive drawing spaces, integrated reading within exhibitions, and emotionally-driven spatial design. These strategies aim to make art more accessible, promoting personal connections with artworks.

In conclusion, the proposed model transforms contemporary art museums into engaging spaces offering rich multisensory experiences. This innovative approach not only enhances the visitor experience but also broadens our understanding of what a museum can offer, challenging conventional notions of museum design.
Introduction

“White Cube” Gallery

“By entering into the white cube. In return for the glimpse of ersatz eternity that the white cube affords us-and as a token of our solidarity with the special interests of a group-we give up our humanness and become the cardboard Spectator with the disembodied Eye. For the sake of the intensity of the separate and autonomous activity of the Eye we accept a reduced level of life and self.” —— Brian O’Doherty.

The “White Cube” Gallery is not about colors or shapes, but rather a neutral environment that isolates art. This approach has been prevalent in museums and commercial galleries for a long time. The history of the “White Cube” goes back even further, with the Museum of Modern Art representing the culmination of a lengthy period of experimentation and discussion among museum directors and curators across continents and centuries. It’s evident that the American “White Cube” is perfectly embodied in MoMA’s 53rd Street building. From James Abbott McNeill Whistler’s 1883 exhibit at London’s Fine Art Society until now, this exhibition method remains the mainstream, and it’s challenging to think beyond the “White Cube”.

Thesis Statement

Whereas modern art featured painting, sculpture, and other primarily visual mediums, contemporary artists work in many multisensory mediums, from sound to performance to digital. However, in art museums today, much of the experience is still visual, and fraught with unwelcome rules: no touching, no proximity to the work, no loud noise, no photography, etc. Museums do not serve those visual medium artworks well. It is difficult for the visitor to explore the artworks themselves or even the stories behind them, as there is an invisible wall between the visitor and the work. Museums provide a relatively one-sided experience and education, which makes it difficult for visitors to acquire experience and knowledge from various perspectives.

I want to introduce a new model for exhibition design which will invite audiences to engage in multisensory, immersive experiences of art and to feel in the world of the artists and their practice are. The audience will shift from one-sided observation to multi-angle perception and interaction. They will develop a deeper understanding of the art and make connections between emotion and imagination in different contexts.

The project Brake Run Helix created by EJ Hill comes from the “closed circuit” of a roller coaster, and refers to two elements of roller coaster design: a brake run and a helix. For Hill, the roller coaster is a public monument to the possibility of happiness, “a key component of social justice.” Black people have been barred from amusement parks, pools and ice skating rinks in the past, and in the decade since the Supreme Court ruled, the ruling cited fair but equal rights. Hill uses roller coaster elements to evoke fear and joy by introducing individuals’ experiences on display—and addressing systems that have historically rejected disenfranchised minorities groups such as black, poor, and queer population that did not have access to leisure, and pleasure. At Mass MoCA, this exhibition reimagined the context and function of roller coasters by placing them in museums, which are often considered places of high valued art rather than art that encourage multi-sensory experience through leisure. Hill’s sculptural coaster is a fluid subversion of the monument function of roller coasters to evoke fear and joy by introducing individuals’ elements of roller coaster design: a brake run and a helix. For EJ Hill, the project Brake Run Helix comes from the “closed circuit” of a roller coaster, and refers to two elements of roller coaster design: a brake run and a helix. For Hill, the roller coaster is a public monument to the possibility of happiness, “a key component of social justice.” Black people have been barred from amusement parks, pools and ice skating rinks in the past, and in the decade since the Supreme Court ruled, the ruling cited fair but equal rights. Hill uses roller coaster elements to evoke fear and joy by introducing individuals’ experiences on display—and addressing systems that have historically rejected disenfranchised minorities groups such as black, poor, and queer population that did not have access to leisure, and pleasure.

Photo Credit: Kaelan Burkett, Mass MoCA


A visit to a museum is more than just an encounter between an eager visiting public, they absorb the knowledge articulated by the curatorial team. The museum experience is a multi-layered journey that includes proprioceptive, sensory, intellectual, aesthetic, and social aspects. The end result may be learning, wonder, reflection and relaxation, sensory stimulation, conversations with friends, new social connections, the creation of lasting memories, or the recollection of past events. In redefining the meaning and purpose of museums, the study of the human brain and its functions can profoundly change our understanding of perception, cognition, and knowledge. Thus, museums need to consider the combinations and complex interactions between the visual, auditory, olfactory, spatial, and other aspects of the visitor experience. Our experiential world encompasses a range of senses including, but not limited to, sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. The multisensory hypothesis is supported by studies of effective connectivity derived a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) data indicating the existence of bottom-up projections (that is, from primary sensory regions) from S1 to the LOC. These senses are not isolated, they work together to provide a powerful and coherent awareness of our environment. The senses and their corresponding functions are central to the formation of object impressions, even in the absence of real objects. These different senses work together, possibly involving the coordinated use of sensory organs. And these senses are intertwined to make us consciously or unconsciously produce emotions, perceptions, imaginations, etc. So when it comes to multi-sensory experiences, the “design” part is implicit. However, these experiences have been neglected in contemporary museum exhibition design, compared to works of art in a variety of mediums.

Whatever the shape of the museum’s architecture, the exhibition designer’s task is to make the visible and invisible accessible; not to offer visitors the transcendent contemplation of the display, but to lure them into the working environment. When the museum ceases to be a hall of reverence and quiet contemplation of what is, by sheer dint of being inside it, granted authority and transparency, and becomes another landscape, another place, just like the street outside, then our experience of the work becomes one of active exploration, finding paths rather than following them, and hearing relationships rather than muting them to distill the art. The idea of a white, featureless exhibition space is clearly a modernist idea and aesthetic bias and prejudice. In my opinion, museum spaces should mediate the psychological and perceptual conditions between objects and visitors, creating a sense of intimacy and concrete reality that is appropriate for the work. The ideal museum space needs to enhance and focus perception, activate and sensitize the visitor’s senses, and facilitate an intense dialogue between exhibit and visitor. A sensitive museum and exhibition design uses all preconceived and embodied means of nonverbal communication to transform experiences into silent theaters in which spaces, objects, and audiences are in constant, if mostly unconscious, interaction and dialogue.

Rosa Yau, a curator of the Hong Kong Museum of History, pointed out that museums in the past were focused on collecting, preserving cultural relics of human experience and relevance, and using them through research to create and disseminate knowledge, educational activities, and permanent and temporary exhibitions. Today, however, museums are becoming more people-oriented. With the concept of museology introduced as early as the 1980s, as stated by Hooper-Greenhill (1994), “museums are changing from being static storehouses for artifacts into active learning environments for people.”

Maurice Merleau-Ponty regards that perception is both a physical event and an intellectual judgment, since each object of perception is contained in a context. Thus, the perceptive mind is a kind of incarnate mind, and the perceptive ability becomes an acquired physical skill. These skills are learned early in life through trial, error and/or observation and through participation, practice and experience. There is a mutual aspect to skill acquisition that determines how to use appropriate responses to deal with future situations or things.

Perception is as much an intellectual judgment as it is a physical one, because perceiving an object requires grasping the object as a whole as well as its parts. It is also closely related to imagination, because it is through virtual physical performance that creative projection is made possible and the acquisition of individual skills is enhanced. Although one acquires knowledge primarily through eyes and movement or vision, many participants find themselves in situations where vision is combined with other senses (touch, taste, and smell). The sequential experience of these sensations depends on the stimulus in question. Thus, depending on the order of presentation of the body provides constraints on how objects or events are perceived. Each feeling may then be summoned by the viewer, whose virtual body allows them to participate in all of the feelings body by body.

Our conceptual understanding of multisensory experience has been greatly enhanced by recent findings in the fields of cognitive psychology and neuroscience. These often reinforce long-held intuitive understandings of museum educators. Recent developments in cognitive science reveal that cognition is not only a process of thinking, but also a process of interaction between our mind, body and environment. We are learning that cognition is embodied, which means that it takes place not only in our brains and minds, but throughout our entire bodies.

With a fundamental shift in museum function, purpose and priorities, museums have taken on new roles, defining themselves as places of learning and enjoyment where visitors can not only view collections, but learn about them through excitement and enhanced interest. It seems that today, the public is looking for an infotainment or edutainment, a combination of information or education and museum entertainment. Therefore, museums need to consider the combination and complex interplay between the visual, auditory, olfactory, spatial and other aspects of the visitor's experience. Considering our overexposure to visual inputs and images in the modern world, creating and curating immersive artistic content that engages a variety of senses and challenges the inadequate presentation of sensory encompassment creates novel environments for insightful experiencing and learning.

Psychology of Space

Sensory experience dictates that the body will feel it. In a sensory immersive environment, the audience is at the same time a participant, experimenter, immerser, interacting with the space and the artwork in real time through their existing body and spirit. Completely engrossing sensory spaces are places of natural expression, with an omnipresent unifying quality. The environment setting is not a neutral, valuable free space; it’s culturally constrained. It constantly conveys meaning and information. It is an essential part of human functioning. It is also an integral part of human action. The context in which perception, attitude formation and behavior occur also has a time dimension. We cannot understand space and place without considering time. When we encounter an environment, we encounter it not only in the present, but also in the past and future. We experience places not only in the present, but also in the past, and these places influence and influence our interpretation of the present.

Each of these senses adds a different dimension to our reality, so that the more senses involved in any given event, the more comprehensive and rich the characteristics of that particular experience will be. Not surprisingly, the memories that people find most fascinating are those that comprehensively involve many or all of their senses. The architectural and design solutions properly support the immersive experience. Barbara Erwine has described the architectural possibilities open up in enhancing the sensitivity of various sensory categories, such as light space, which is intended to cater to the visual, and body space which contains thermal space, which he discusses about touch, texture, temperature and movement. There are acoustic Spaces and olfactory Spaces that activate people’s hearing and smell, respectively. In such Spaces personal experiences may coherently evoke specific feelings, thoughts or memories, or they may coordinate the occurrence and shape of sensory inputs to create experiences.

There is no doubt that the size, shape, color, material, and lighting of a space affect people’s perception. And this psychology is not considered in the spatial design of the Contemporary Art museums. If we try to consider the relationship of the exhibits to the space and their impact on the viewer, it will also be a multi-sensory experience in the exhibition.

Implementing sensory experiences into exhibition design means acknowledging that our physical senses are the primary channels through which we connect with our surroundings. Creating an immersive and engaging environment calls for spaces that invite visitors to be participants, interact, and immerse themselves in a meaningful exchange with the artwork. This approach necessitates a broad appreciation of architectural and design capabilities to enhance the engagement of all sensory categories, including light space for visual stimuli, body space for touch and temperature sensitivity, acoustic spaces for sound, and olfactory spaces for scent. By carefully considering variables such as size, shape, color, material, and lighting, we can shape spaces that influence visitors’ perceptions, fostering a multisensory experience that allows visitors to establish a deeper connection with the artworks. Thus, the transformation of exhibition design into a multisensory engagement fundamentally redefines the traditional visitor-artwork interaction.

Hi Danyang, Can you introduce yourself?
Hi, I am Danyang Song, a ceramic artist and designer. I got my BFA from Tsinghua University and worked there as a researcher at The Institute of Tea Culture & Art. My work involves contemporary ceramic art, industrial design and digital art with explorations in different materials. The topics I explored include individual emotion and feelings, culture conflict and social issues. The aim of my artwork is to arouse the audience’s introspection, thinking and vigilance without being limited to self-expression.

What motivates you to create? and which art trends inspire your current work?
My observations of life, my feelings and the questions I think need to be asked of the public motivate me to create my art work. Actually it is hard to say which trend inspires me, my life inspires me. But I love impressionism, surrealism and modern contemporary art a lot. I learn from these trends and all these artists, they influence me a lot for sure.

Can you describe the best piece of art you’ve created?
If I must pick one, I will choose a ceramics installation I made in 2020 called “I am fine, and you?”. It consists of more than one hundred objects. Through the changes in the shape of the utensils, this work expresses the insecurity, anxiety and mental recovery process I feel under the Covid-19 epidemic. I hope this work can bring positive psychological hints, humanistic care and confidence to overcome the challenges.

What themes do you explore in your work and how do you represent them?
The topics I explored include individual emotion and feelings, culture conflict and social issues. For individual emotion and feelings, I try to visualize the shape of the negative emotion and how these negative emotions influence our body. For social issues, I concentrate on the symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature.

Do you think you are satisfied with the exhibition that happened before? Did the way, space, layout, and narrative of the exhibition meet your expectations?
Some are satisfied, some are not, I think half and half. There are two problems I encountered a lot, one is the lighting of the exhibition space, and one is the position to display ceramic work. In a group exhibition, when the space is limited, sometimes it cannot achieve the desired dark environment atmosphere. Also sometimes, Because ceramics are fragile, they are displayed against walls for safety reasons. However, some ceramic works need to be shown to the audience in 360 degrees. Once displayed against the wall, the viewability of some works will be lost.

If so, how can they be exhibited? Please describe one very carefully.
Our experiential world encompasses a range of senses including, but not limited to, sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. These senses are not isolated, they work together to provide a powerful and coherent awareness of our environment. The senses and their corresponding functions are central to the formation of object impressions, even in the absence of real objects. These different senses work together, possibly involving the coordinated use of sensory organs. And these senses are intertwined to make us consciously or unconsciously produce emotions, perceptions, imaginations, etc. So when it comes to multisensory experiences, the "design" part is implicit. However, these experiences have been neglected in contemporary museum exhibition design, compared to works of art in a variety of mediums.
Wuhan Zhangzhidong Museum is located in Hanyang District, Wuhan City, with a floor area of more than 7,200 square meters, including an exhibition area of about 6,200 square meters. The main structure, completed in 2014, was designed by renowned architect Daniel Liebeskind.

Through the design of the exhibition inside Wuhan Zhangzhidong Museum, Diameter Narrative Design Studio opened a new set of narrative perspectives. Looking back on history from the present standpoint, we can still see that Zhang Zhidong’s performance in Wuhan continues to this day. The process of urban modernization and transformation took place during Zhang’s Wuhan period.

Visitors to the museum are led into a theater-like space. The audience is invited into a complex narrative field, examining the city as a watchman or watching the changes in the bar as a jailer. Sometimes they become eager to learn new era students, sometimes stand on the platform, incarnation of Zhang Zhidong himself, taste the reform of the lonely and helpless. Overlapping experiences and changes in perspective gradually make clear the truth hidden behind the history, which is the reality that the audience constantly perceives space and sensitively perceives through identity transformation.

Today, a museum is more than just an “exhibition” place. In the integration of this concept, even spatial layouts that are not conducive to display (such as the corners and oblique planes of buildings) become exquisite narrative language, shaping extraordinary spatial narrative experiences. With the ingenious design of Didian narrative, Zhangzhidong and Wuhan Museum become unique narrative context and game space for thinking based on the history of Wuhan.

The space design of this exhibition has a strong narrative sense, bringing the historical figures of the exhibition infinitely closer to the audience, and affecting the psychology and perception of the audience through the angle, light and shade, and size of the space. I will bring this design concept into my design, dig out the meaning behind the artwork, take the audience away from the museum, and put themselves in the world I created.

Photo Credit: Diameter Narrative Design Studio, The Museum of Zhang Zhidong

“Pipilotti Rist: Pixel Forest”, New Museum

“Pipilotti Rist: Pixel Forest” includes Rist’s work spanning the artist’s entire career, from her early 1980s single-channel videos exploring the representation of women’s bodies in popular culture to her expansive video installations that transform architectural spaces into vast dreamlike environments enhanced by hypnotic music. Her work allows the viewer to have unexpected, rapt encounters with the texture, form, and function of the living universe around us.14

Two amorphous screens hang horizontally from the ceiling, showing fragmented views of bodies, plants, and other elements captured underwater. These projections on the ceiling cleverly mimic the underwater experience when viewed from below. The music transports the audience into a dreamlike state. In addition, visitors are encouraged to experience the works horizontally while lying on beds scattered throughout the room. Here the exhibition design attempts to break the phenomenon of horizontal viewing that often occurs in media exhibition installations. In the context of the exhibition, the body of the audience and the artist is drawn into the whole display environment. As visitors move through the exhibition, the audiovisual works transform from the static space of a television screen into vivid projections of moving images interacting with other objects, bodies and expanding surfaces. The exhibition includes visual acoustics and optics, providing visitors with an immersive multi-sensory experience.

Thus, the museum space itself participates in a media world characterized by the disappearance of the distance between the physical and the digital. The exhibition constructs a convincing trajectory that includes audiences in its screening operations. This is definitely a return to the human experience, the connection between the viewer and the material, and the bodily sensation of experiencing the work together. This experiential exhibition strategy will be applied to my next design. Experience and interactivity in my opinion are indispensable experiences in the exhibition space, which will be the place of immersion.

Photo Credit: “Pipilotti Rist: Pixel Forest”, New Museum

Distilling lessons From Engaging Exhibitions

- Material use (historical/culture context)
- Neutral color choice for woman sculptures
- Angle of setting the sculptures (dialogue with art piece)
- One on one experience
- Quite and beautiful atmosphere

- Flow of circulation in exhibition
- Overall experience
- Use related setting for the rice
- Sensory experience
- Might be influence imagination of cooking rice

- Special setting space for rest (curtain, bed...)
- Special angle of viewing art (lying down)
- Quiet and comfortable atmosphere

- Related setting (immersive work space)
- Sensory experience (touch to models)
- Increase interaction of comparing models & photo
- Increase communication opportunity

- Special setting/display (historical/culture context)
- Original artwork presented in full-scale reproductions of historical exhibitions.
- Overall experience
- Material and color choice (related to culture)

- Special setting/display (historical/culture context)
- Original artwork presented in full-scale reproductions of historical exhibitions.
- Overall experience
- Material and color choice (related to culture)

Simone Leigh and Basquiat, Guggenheim Museum
Kome. The Art of Rice, 21 Design Sight Museum
Pipilotti Rist: Pixel Forest, New Museum
Met’s “Manus x Machina”, The Metropolitan Museum
World Architecture, Snøhetta
Gillian Wearing: Wearing Masks, Guggenheim Museum
Post Zang Tumb Tuum. Art Life Politics: Italia 1918-1943
Countryside, The Future, Guggenheim Museum
World Architecture, Snøhetta
Gillian Wearing: Wearing Masks, Guggenheim Museum
Post Zang Tumb Tuum. Art Life Politics: Italia 1918-1943
Countryside, The Future, Guggenheim Museum
Brazil: Body & Soul, Guggenheim Museum

- Special setting (historical/culture context)
- One on one experience (dialogue with ppl)
- Material and color choice (related to culture)
- Strong visual experience

For Mario, Tina Kim Gallery

- Special setting (fabric as narrative elements in life)
- One on one experience (dialogue with ppl)
- Immersive experience (Mario's apt)

Camille Henrot: The Pale Fox, König Galerie

- Special setting (futuristic ikea showroom)
- Chaos circulations
- Overall experience
- Special color choice creating blue atmosphere

Photo Credit:


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As described above, it’s time to redefine the museum. The mission of a multisensory exhibition is to express the visible and the invisible to the audience, giving them their own experience about their dialogue with art. Multisensory experiential museums are an excellent way to break down the invisible wall between art and audience. Transform museum visits from a primarily social experience to one where people can connect not only with others, but with their own senses at the same time.

When the museum ceases to be a hall of reverence and quiet contemplation, leaning solely on the inside, endowed with authority and transparency, becomes another landscape, another place, then our experience of the work becomes an active exploration, finding paths instead of following them, listening to relationships instead of silencing them to refine the art.

Site Analysis

The Institute of Contemporary Art is the first museum to be built in Boston in 100 years. The building includes temporary and permanent galleries, a 330-seat multipurpose theater, restaurant, bookstore, educational/workshop facilities and administrative offices. It encompasses the dynamic civic architecture of a public project and an intimate, contemplative environment for viewing art. It presents contemporary art in all media, including visual arts, performance, film, video, literature and so on. It also develops educational programs that encourage appreciation of contemporary culture.

The design interweaves interior and exterior spaces, generating ever-changing views of the waterfront throughout the museum’s galleries and public spaces. However, the exhibition experience here has lost this connection, but has always maintained the “White cube” exhibition method, separating the audience through walls and wonderful art pieces. So I think rethinking an exhibition with more immersive multisensory experiences would be a good proposal for the CIA.

First Floor

Second Floor

Third Floor

Fourth Floor

Photo Credit: Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Boston

1936
The ICA relocates to 14 Newbury Street in Boston.

1937
The ICA relocates to 138 Newbury Street.

1938
The ICA relocates to 270 Dartmouth Street.

1940
The ICA relocates to 200 Newbury Street.

1943
James S. Plaut becomes the institution's first director, defining its identity as an "experimental laboratory" for contemporary art.

1946
The ICA relocates to 138 Newbury Street.

1947
The ICA relocates to 14 Newbury Street.

1956
Setting off heated debate in the art world, the museum changes its name from the Boston Museum of Modern Art to the Institute of Contemporary Art.

2005
A comprehensive traveling exhibition of Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius surveys his formative role in the emergence of modernist architecture and design.

Newly designed by architect and ICA founder Nathaniel Saltonstall, the Metropolitan Boston Arts Center, at 1175 Soldiers Field Road, becomes the museum's home for two years.

"MODERN ART" and the AMERICAN PUBLIC
A statement by THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Art is accompanied by sound
use headphones
Art is accompanied by watch
On websites
Video
Multisensory components
Physical interactions / experiences
At an early moment in the history of electronic media and video art, *Art Turned On* brings together some of its leading pioneers, including Dan Flavin, Robert Whitman... Marcel Duchamp attends the exhibition and takes a special interest in Jones's Music Plant.

Parkman House at 33 Beacon Street becomes the ICA’s new temporary home. With the exhibition *Monumental Sculpture for Public Spaces*, the ICA brings art into the public area.

The ICA launches the Open City Youth Program.

The ICA organizes the second museum exhibition dedicated to Andy Warhol—staging a performance of the landmark intermedia work *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* by Warhol and the Velvet Underground.

The ICA moves to 137 Newbury Street.

1965

1970

1972

1976

2006

2010

2016

2018

2023

The ICA announces the acquisition of Yayoi Kusama’s *LOVE IS CALLING*, the largest of her popular Infinity Mirror Rooms to date.

Jenny Holzer presents a new text projection on the exterior of the ICA as part of her collaboration with Bessie Award–winning choreographer Miguel Gutierrez.

The ICA announces the acquisition of Yayoi Kusama’s *LOVE IS CALLING*, the largest of her popular Infinity Mirror Rooms to date.

1965

1970

1972

1976

2006

2010

2016

2018

2023

MEEM 4 Boston: A Story Ballet about the Internet, a citywide Art + Tech collaboration with more than a dozen cultural institutions, and the ICA’s first-ever virtual reality commission.
The exhibition, “To Begin Again: Artists and Childhood,” brings to light the multifaceted theme of childhood through an eclectic mix of mediums, including drawing, installation, painting, photography, sculpture, and video. Showcasing the work of forty intergenerational artists from around the world, the exhibition provides diverse perspectives and experiences of childhood. Many of these artists, also parents themselves, have incorporated children as collaborators, replicated their distinctive modes of drawing and storytelling, and explored childhood-associated themes such as innocence, spontaneity, and dependency.

Divided into six thematic sections, each focusing on different aspects of childhood, the exhibition does face certain limitations. Despite the presence of interactive spaces for drawing and reading that aim to foster engagement, these areas are currently constrained in size and segregated from the main exhibition, which hampers an immersive experience. Moreover, although questions are presented on the artwork labels to provoke thought and foster deeper interaction with the exhibits, the details about the artwork provided are relatively limited, potentially curbing a comprehensive understanding of the pieces.

Furthermore, while the exhibition successfully generates viewer responses through these interactive experiences, there’s a missed opportunity in not adequately showcasing these shared insights, which could have further encouraged a sense of community and shared learning.

This thesis proposes an enhancement to the existing design of the exhibition, “To Begin Again: Artists and Childhood.” The primary aim is to create a more immersive, interactive environment, enabling a deeper connection between the audience and the artworks. The proposed improvements include enlarging the interactive spaces, enriching the information about the artworks, and giving visitor contributions a more visible platform.

By addressing these limitations, the redesigned exhibition will significantly enhance the visitor experience, offering a more engaging and participatory environment that vividly illuminates the influence of children and childhood on artists’ work. The ultimate goal is to foster a more enriching exploration of the exhibition’s core themes, augmenting visitor engagement and interaction.

“Children are the ways the world begins again and again.”
—June Jordan

Photo Credit: Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Boston

This new exhibition mode will explore a new contemporary way to express appreciation and thinking about the exhibition, close to works of art rather than art worship. Thereby narrowing the distance between the audience and art, increasing multi-sensory experience, interacting with the exhibition space, and better understanding of art.
Building on the previous discussion about the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) and its recent exhibition ‘To Begin Again: Artists and Childhood’, the existing minimalist design presents some challenges. One of these is the feeling of overcrowdedness, primarily due to the exhibition’s spatial limitation as it attempts to convey multifaceted aspects of childhood within a confined area on the 4th floor. This constraint can impact visitors’ experiences, limiting their interactions and overall engagement with the art.

In response to these challenges, this thesis proposes an innovative redesign of the exhibition by extending into an adjacent gallery space. This expansion would not only mitigate the issue of overcrowdedness but also provide an opportunity to incorporate additional context and narratives that enrich the visitor’s understanding of the artworks. The proposed redesign aims to transform the exhibition experience at the ICA into one that is more immersive and interactive, promoting a deeper connection between the contemporary art on display and its audience.

Existing Plan:

![Existing Plan](image)

Proposed Plan:

![Proposed Plan](image)
The first section of the exhibition, “Among Children,” explores artists’ various emotions and experiences through the lens of childhood, as conveyed through six distinct sculptures. These pieces, while visually compelling, are currently displayed in an open area that does not sufficiently highlight the unique narratives behind each sculpture.

In light of this, the central argument of this section is to reimagine the presentation of these sculptures in a manner that underscores their individual stories. The proposed redesign advocates for a more curated, immersive space that encourages visitors to engage deeply with each piece, allowing them to connect more intimately with the artists’ narratives. Concurrently, the redesign aims to uphold the collective impact of the sculptures, thereby creating an exhibition experience that is both individually enriching and collectively cohesive. This innovative approach is geared towards transforming the visitor’s engagement with the art and fostering a more profound understanding of the intertwined narratives of art and childhood.
The second section of the exhibition, "Draw Like a Child," highlights the innate authenticity and innocence in children’s artistic expressions. It displays childlike drawings by various artists who have drawn inspiration from the unfiltered creativity of children. However, the current setup of this section seems to miss an opportunity for visitor interaction. While notebooks are provided for visitors to express their own creativity, this aspect of participation is not fully integrated with the exhibited artworks and is somewhat hidden from the collective exhibition experience.

The thesis proposes an enhancement of the "Draw Like a Child" section through a more integrated, immersive design: incorporating an interactive drawing area directly within the exhibition space. This modification will empower visitors to actively engage with the creative process, connecting their creations to the displayed artworks. By bolstering this interaction, the thesis aims to enrich the exhibition experience and deepen the understanding of the theme "Draw Like a Child."
The thesis proposes a reimagined design for the “The Page Is a World” section that highlights the influence of children’s literature on artists. Currently, the connected reading room that houses a selection of children’s books and information is distinctly separated from the art space. This setup restricts a fluid interaction between visitors’ reading experience and their engagement with the artwork.

To enhance this, the proposed design seeks to seamlessly integrate the reading function within the exhibition space itself. In this envisioned environment, visitors can simultaneously appreciate the artworks while indulging in relevant literature, thereby creating a more immersive and cohesive experience.
This thesis proposes an innovative redesign for the “Born into Being” section that probes into power dynamics and childhood experiences. Presently, the artworks are divided into two groups in semi-open spaces, each depicting contrasting themes of societal oppression or violence, and protection or unity within minority families. However, this layout lacks a clear emotional journey for the visitors.

To address this, the redesign suggests a spatial layout that enhances the emotional connection of visitors with the artwork. A curved wall structure is envisioned, symbolizing the dichotomy of experiences presented in this section. As visitors navigate around the exterior of the curved wall, they will encounter artworks reflecting societal oppression, cultivating a sense of discomfort. Conversely, as they step inside the curve, they will be welcomed by artworks exuding themes of protection and unity, offering an inclusive and comforting atmosphere. By spatially embodying the dichotomous themes presented in the artworks, the proposed design aims to deliver a more immersive and emotionally resonant exhibition experience.
This thesis suggests a significant redesign for the “Gestures of Care” section, which concentrates on depictions of care and support, challenging societal stereotypes and representing diverse networks of caregiving.

At present, the artworks in this section are displayed in a conventional layout that doesn’t fully echo the transformative journey from societal stereotypes to more diverse and inclusive notions of caregiving. To enhance this, the redesign proposes a novel spatial circulation that allows visitors to physically experience this journey.

Visitors will initially enter through a narrow pathway, symbolizing the constraining societal stereotypes of caregiving. As they continue to move through the exhibit, the path gradually widens, leading them towards the center of a circular layout that represents diverse and inclusive networks of caregiving. This spatial transformation reflects the exhibition’s thematic progression, providing a more immersive and engaging experience that amplifies the narrative of societal transformation in terms of caregiving.

Photo Credit: Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Boston
This thesis proposes an innovative redesign for the "After School" section, which celebrates the combined power of artists and children engaging in collective play, self-education, and creative expression, emphasizing diverse global perspectives of childhood experiences.

Currently, the layout of this section follows a traditional approach, with artworks displayed in a regular format that may not sufficiently encourage visitor interaction and exploration. To enhance the visitor experience and to resonate more effectively with the theme of community and collaboration, the redesign will introduce a non-linear, free-flowing layout. Instead of a guided path, visitors will be encouraged to explore the space freely, fostering a sense of community and collaboration. This new spatial design not only promotes active participation but also mirrors the diverse and dynamic nature of childhood experiences, thereby enriching the visitor’s engagement with the exhibition’s thematic content.
In this thesis, the following strategies are proposed to deepen visitor engagement and enhance their connection with the artworks:

1. **Dynamic Circulation:** A well-planned flow of the visitor's path will be designed to promote efficient engagement with the art pieces.
2. **Sensory Experiences:** Incorporating sensory elements such as touch, lighting, and sound will augment the visitor’s experience and create a more immersive environment.
3. **Contextualization:** By providing historical, cultural, and background context on display, the appreciation and understanding of the artworks will be enriched.
4. **Increased Interaction:** Interactive elements and hands-on activities will be included to promote active engagement with the exhibition.
5. **Creative Spatial Design:** By employing spatial design principles effectively, visitors’ attention can be guided, their movements influenced, and specific emotional responses evoked.

In conclusion, the implementation of these strategies will transform the viewing of art into a more profound and immersive experience. By encouraging visitors to engage actively with the artworks, exhibitions will cease to be just displays of artistic creations but spaces where art is truly experienced and appreciated.
I would like to extend my profound appreciation to my esteemed thesis advisor, Heinrich Hermann. Your vast knowledge, honed through years of diverse architectural and design experiences, has been an invaluable resource throughout my research journey. Your contributions to the Int|AR Journal and the wider field are inspiring, and your insights have enlightened and guided me at every step of this endeavor. Thank you for providing me with a unique blend of practical wisdom and visionary thinking.

To my special adviser, Youngjin Song, I am deeply grateful for your support and guidance. Your interdisciplinary approach and your in-depth understanding of community engagement, placemaking, and public discourse in relation to art and design have greatly influenced my thinking. Your dedication to investigating the complexities of our time through your work has left a profound impact on my thesis. Your guidance has allowed me to navigate through the multidisciplinary dimensions of my research.

To my desk critic, Ivan Grahek, I am incredibly grateful for your insights and your unique perspective, bringing a psychology-driven lens to my work. Your extensive knowledge in cognitive sciences and your dedication to understanding the intricate intersections of motivation and cognition have added an enriching layer to my research. Thank you for introducing me to a new perspective, helping me to delve deeper into the cognitive aspects of visitor interaction within exhibition spaces.

I am incredibly thankful for the collective wisdom, support, and mentorship of each of you. Your invaluable guidance and expertise have shaped my academic journey and have been instrumental in the completion of this thesis.
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**Site Analysis**


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