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Psychologically Effective Art

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Kristan Shuford

Psychologically Effective Art

The goal of my summer research was to create art that would affect the psyche, producing an emotional response in those who experienced it. After researching the psychological effects of color, pattern, texture, and shape, I designed an installation piece that attempts to use these formal elements to produce a targeted response. Much of what I read indicated that the impact of visual information on the psyche is very passive. We are not aware of the impact that art and other visual media have on us. I thus decided that one of the main goals of my installation would be to make this passive experience an active one.

My work consists of three separate rooms, each designed to immerse the viewer in an atmosphere of emotion. The rooms, titled *Anxiety*, *Tranquility*, and *Felicity* are each tailored to create a specific response through the use of color, lighting, special layout, pattern, texture, and movement. In *Anxiety* I chose to use create a narrow, claustrophobic space in order to make it more overwhelming. Sharp angles have typically been recognized as aggressive, and striped patterns can often create a dizzying effect on the viewer, especially when certain colors are layered on top of each other. I therefore chose to cover the interior walls of *Anxiety* with repeating sharp angular patterns. I also employed the use of red lighting, as it was found in studies to be anxiety inducing.

In *Tranquility* I employed cool blue tones, throughout the room, as almost every book I read indicated the blue was very calming. I also found that curved lines are perceived as less active than angular ones. Therefore I used gentle curves, and

soft, flowing textiles to create a peaceful effect. The room itself is much more open, with soft blue lighting in order to make it more relaxed and tranquil.

Felicity is filled with bright warm colors, as studies have shown these colors to be exciting, active, and energizing. It also employs a combination of straight lines, curves and dots to produce an effervescent, energetic climate. The room is also very open compared to *Anxiety*, with one wall completely transparent, and is full of natural sunlight coming in through a large window. This gives it a happy, cheerful, and energetic feeling.

I designed the rooms so that one can walk from one to the other, experiencing each in turn. Throughout the process, many people came though and gave me feedback on the rooms. Many people wanted to take naps in *Tranquility*, staying in that room longer than any other. I noticed that people tended not to stay very long in *Anxiety*, and felt overwhelmed when they did. Many people found themselves, jumping around *Felicity* excitedly, myself included. The juxtaposition of these rooms with each other hopefully makes the effect of these formal elements on the psyche more obvious to the viewer, thus transforming a typically passive response into a more active one. Hopefully experiencing this installation has made viewers more aware of the psychological effects of art.