

A Creative Inquiry: How Context Affects Design

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
School of Art + Art History + Design

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Abstract

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The following thesis explores how creating work in a non-traditional art space can change the perceptions of that environment and the work itself. This essay is intended for exhibition designers, installation artists, design educators and museum/gallery directors. Using various methods of design, I create work with the intention of bringing joy, humor, nostalgia, and reflection while simultaneously studying how context affects audience perception and response to this work. I create installations that act as interruptions, disruptions, and interventions to the spaces that go unnoticed and are considered mundane. I find inspiration in the opportunity that these informal, everyday spaces provide for a spontaneous response. The implications of this research will offer new and novel approaches for designers, artists, and employees of museums and galleries to rethink how their exhibitions are affected by the space that surrounds them. This thesis will also inspire future designers and artists to see how their work can change and adapt to its surroundings. The context of the work questions where design and art merge and I argue that in the future of exhibition design, these two disciplines are interchangeable. This change in cultural context asks how the same imagery showcased around the world in different environments and global contexts changes its narrative based on its location and audience. I created a series of pieces in the public realm—some small scale, some large—to explore how much I could change the perception of an environment and provoke audience reaction. The work culminated in a collective project where I asked creatives all over the world to create contemporary outdoor galleries. This allowed me to play with context on a global scale.

a creative inquiry: how context affects design

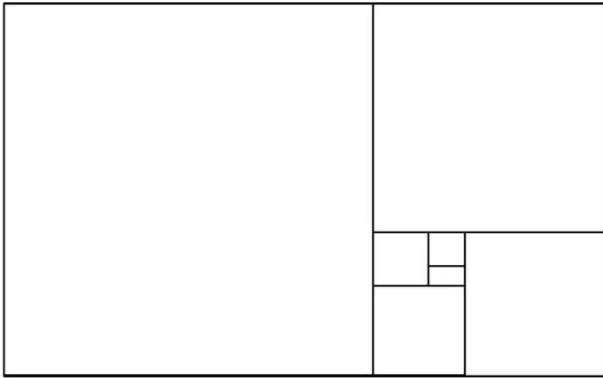
Samer Fouad 2020

Abstract

The following thesis explores how creating work in a non-traditional art space can change the perceptions of that environment and the work itself. This essay is intended for exhibition designers, installation artists, design educators and museum/gallery directors. Using various methods of design, I create work with the intention of bringing joy, humor, nostalgia, and reflection while simultaneously studying how context affects audience perception and response to this work. I create installations that act as interruptions, disruptions, and interventions to the spaces that go unnoticed and are considered mundane. I find inspiration in the opportunity that these informal, everyday spaces provide for a spontaneous response. The implications of this research will offer new and novel approaches for designers, artists, and employees of museums and galleries to rethink how their exhibitions are affected by the space that surrounds them. This thesis will also inspire future designers and artists to see how their work can change and adapt to its surroundings. The context of the work questions where design and art merge and I argue that in the future of exhibition design, these two disciplines are interchangeable. This change in cultural context asks how the same imagery showcased around the world in different environments and global contexts changes its narrative based on its location and audience. I created a series of pieces in the public realm—some small scale, some large—to explore how much I could change the perception of an environment and provoke audience reaction. The work culminated in a collective project where I asked creatives all over the world to create contemporary outdoor galleries. This allowed me to play with context on a global scale.

Introduction

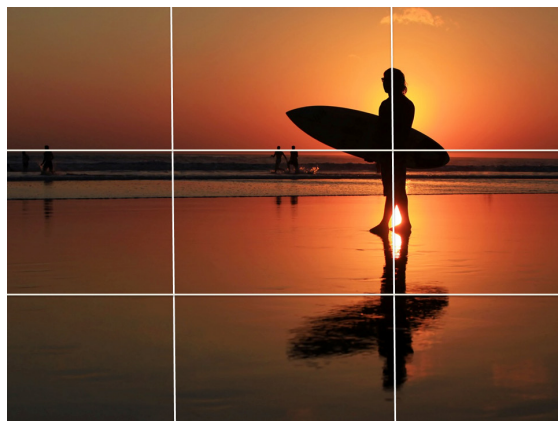
In the first week of every introductory design class the professor will introduce the class to a few concepts like the golden ratio (fig 1) and the rule of thirds (fig 2), but they will also state that design and art are very different. They will explain that design is problem solving, visual narrating a message to a larger audience, that it must be accessible, and there must be some sort of interactive experience between the artifact and the viewer. This first week ingrains the idea that these two very similar visual worlds are two extremely different concentrations and should not be compared. This thesis argues that there is very little difference between art and design, but rather “context is king.” In my work I make no distinction between the two fields, but rather am interested in how to use any space — whether that’s a gallery or a sidewalk — to provoke reaction.



The Golden Ratio

fig 1

This thesis document will describe my graduate school research that spanned the course of two years. Through the process of research through making, I created a number of installations that transformed spaces using a personal process that reflects various design methodologies to create installations, disruptions, and interventions. These opportunities were spontaneous and were often created in tandem with interacting with the space that would hold these artifacts.



Rule of Thirds

fig 2

In this thesis my goals are to provide an analysis of artifacts, installations, interventions, disruptions and exhibitions that will explain my process of creating these various environments. My studies not only embrace the space and context in which they are in, but also interact with the audience in unique ways that become participatory.

Background

I have worked in the gallery world since 2008. I have been an exhibiting artist, an exhibition designer, a curator, an art installer/handler, and a gallery manager/registrar. I have now worked in various museums and galleries around the world and have served clients and museums such as Christie's, Sotheby's, New York Public Library, MoMA + MoMA PS1, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Guggenheim, The Museum of the City of New York, The Jewish Museum, The American Museum of Natural History, The Brooklyn Museum, The Harlem Studio Museum, The Queens Museum, El Museo del Barrio, The Whitney (the old one), The New Museum, +81 Gallery, The 9/11 Museum, International Center of Photography Museum + Collection, Magnum Pictures, The New York Historical Society, The Brooklyn Historical Society, David Zwirner, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, Alexander Gray Associates, Shirin Gallery NY, Gagolian, Pace Gallery, Petzel Gallery, Nouvelle Vague Marbella, Sperone Westwater, Mykita, Cartier (fig. 3), Mana Contemporary, Project for Empty Space, Solo(s) Project House, Index Art Gallery, Gallery Aferro, Aljira, The Paul Robeson Gallery, 303 Gallery, Metro Pictures, The Jane Lombard Gallery, MILK, School of Visual Arts, Richard Meier, Sante D'orazio, Zoe Buckman, Citi Bank, The Hole, The David Bowie Foundation, Derrick Adams, Mary Kate + Ashley Olsen, The Row, Jay Z + Beyonce, Kanye West (Yeezy Season 1), Andy Warhol Foundation, The Calder Foundation, Ai Weiwei (fig.4), and The Mugrabi Family.

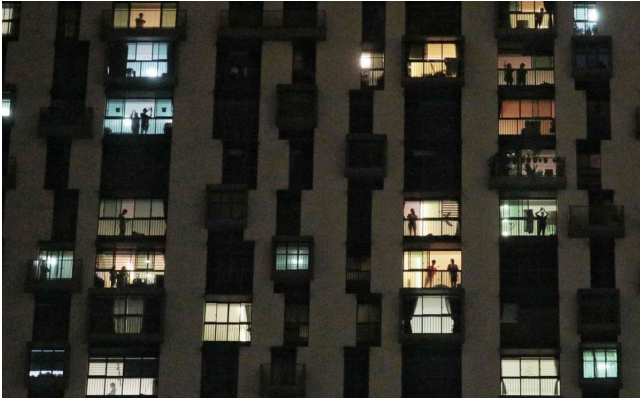
Having an undergraduate bachelors degree in both graphic design and art history, I would still define myself as an artist before a designer. I have always loved graphic design because of its cohesion of type and image but I have noticed I cared more about the overall "art of the design" than the message it is delivering.



Samer Fouad installing art in the Cartier Mansion New York *fig. 3*



Samer Fouad packing Ai Weiwei Pottery *fig. 4*



People clapping from their windows.

fig 5

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-52058013>



Italians playing instruments from their balcony.

fig 6

<https://www.vox.com/culture/2020/3/13/21179293/coronavirus-italy-covid19-music-balconies-sing>



Sign in Spain

fig 7

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2020/mar/19/balconies-sites-hope-coronavirus-in-pictures>

I have used much of my classic graphic design training to assist me not only in my personal work but also in the installation of other artist's works. My personal work has always been a little more guerrilla than the traditional artist/designer and I have developed a style of installation art that begs for forgiveness rather than ask for permission.

I began this thesis with the intention of changing spaces to change the mindsets of those who viewed or interacted with them. Over time this thesis changed from a physical process to a digital one due to the Covid-19 pandemic. With the new constraints of the pandemic, I am not only reacting to what is currently happening in the world but I am also responding to spaces that are found outside the contemporary gallery — questioning what happens to my creative work when it crosses the threshold of the gallery door and enters public space.

This doorway represented a change in thought processing, but what happened when the doorway was no longer being walked through due to a stay at home order? What is our new point of view? Our new “doorway”?

As the pandemic continued, I saw the people of New York City sticking their heads out their windows to clap for essential workers. I saw families in Italy playing musical instruments from their balconies. I saw people in Spain having socially distant meals with their neighbors. Day after day I saw these incredible images across the world, in various cultural contexts, all using the same thing to communicate with the outside world... their windows. Their windows and balconies were the new doorway to challenge the perceptions of work made during this pandemic. It all didn't have to be viewed digitally, an outdoor gallery space was still possible.

Statement of Purpose

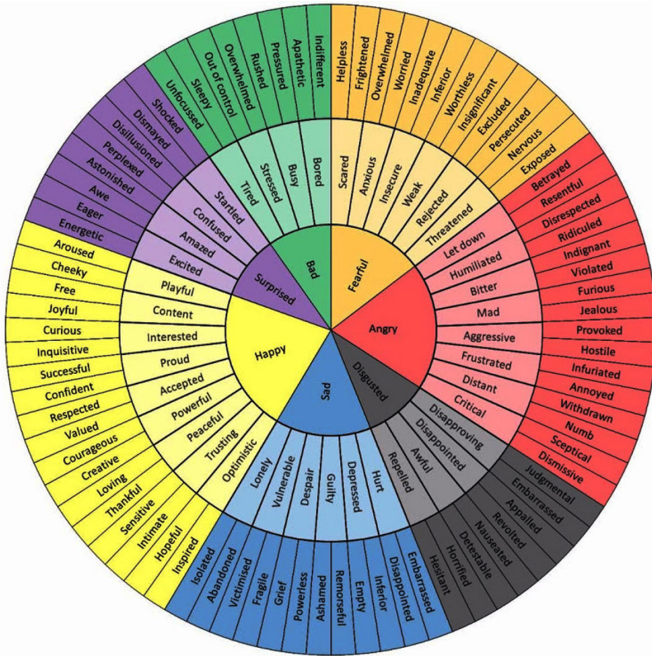
My purpose is to evoke an emotional change to viewers of my work through disruptions to their daily environments. The interruptions are sudden changes to these spaces that hold no importance until they have been activated by an installation. I create work with the intention of bringing joy, humor, nostalgia, and reflection while studying how the perceptions of these installations change when found outside the traditional gallery space. The evidence of these changes were seen in not only the initial reaction of viewers of the works made, but also the interactions of the viewers with pieces that could be manipulated and/or destroyed.

A secondary purpose is to inspire future designers and artists to see their work be able to change and adapt to its surroundings. Adding this contemporary framework of context to exhibition design and installation art is a vital part of this thesis.

The emotional responses I look for can be found in this chart (fig. 8) created by Robert Plutchik in 1980. I have highlighted the specific emotions I captured in figure 9.

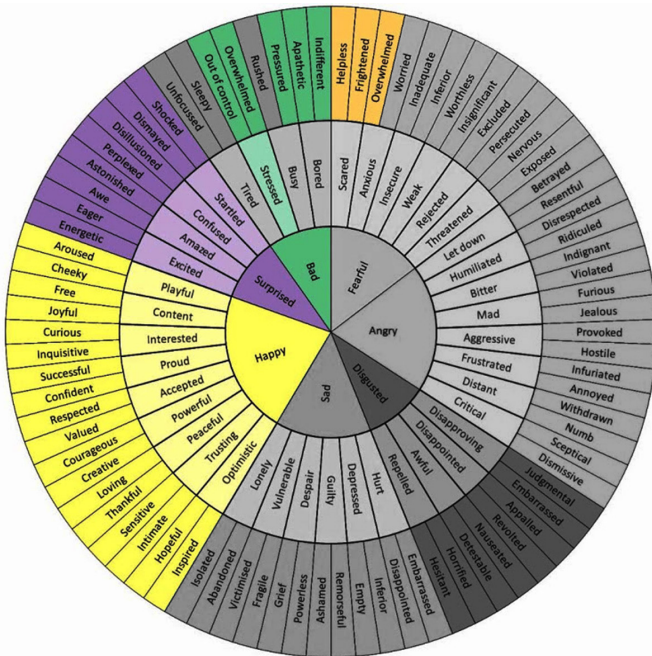
Problem Statement

Why does crossing the threshold of the gallery change how objects and works are viewed and understood? Does this change of space also change our mindset? With the intention of bringing joy, humor, nostalgia, and reflection, I have been creating installations that act as interruptions, disruptions, and interventions to the spaces that go unnoticed or are considered mundane. I work in these spaces because the work made in them is more spontaneous and a direct reaction to the space and atmosphere itself. I dismiss asking for permission to activate these spaces leaving, no room left for critique. What if the exhibition was a serendipitous experience outside the gallery? One that you stumbled upon and found yourself interacting with accidentally and with curiosity. What if that same installation you see outside



Robert Plutchik's Emotional Wellness Chart 1980

fig. 8



Robert Plutchik's Emotional Wellness Chart 1980
Highlighted to show the emotions this thesis evokes.

fig. 9

the space was the same artifact you saw inside the space? Would your perceptions and how you interact and view that work change? Would you look at the work the same way?

The focus of these lines of inquiry were researched in both the public and a gallery setting. I wanted to know how the same work changes in various settings. This gave more insight to architectural spaces that inspire and evoke conversation vs. the street or the commute of the public.

In the world of art and design, there are various traditional and unconventional spaces that house diverse works within them. Below are my personal urban dictionary style definitions of these spaces based on my last 12 years of working in this field.

Types of Spaces

I can break down spaces into three categories: Traditional, Conventionally Non-Traditional, and Mundane. In each, the perception of the work changes with the context: The owner, the funding source, the social status, and of course the physical location all mean that the work is perceived differently.

Traditional

The White Box Gallery - A four sided white wall gallery that mostly shows paintings or photographs shot on film or an overly priced DSLR camera (fig 10). You will always find track lighting in these spaces and the openings will generally be on Thursdays. Group shows are most common here.

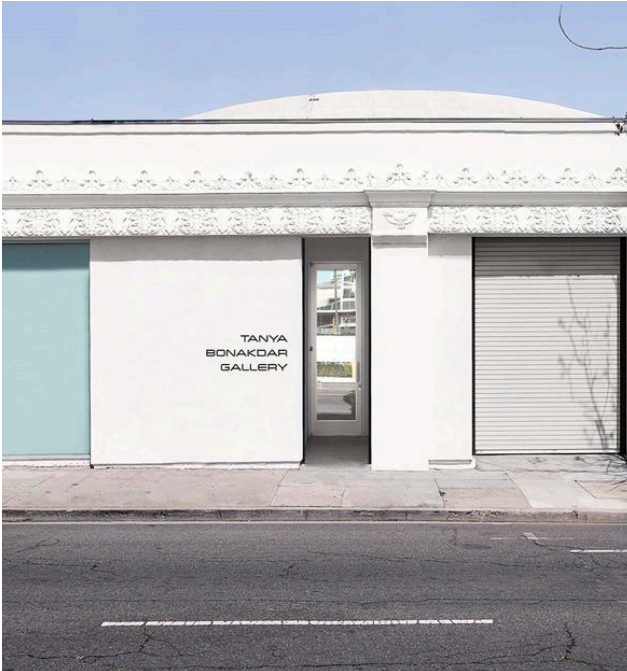
The For-Profit Gallery - A gallery where its sole intention is to make money. They rarely care about the artist making the work, just care about their bottom



The White Box Gallery

http://whiteboxnyc.org/white-box-main-gallery_1-11-2013_1_final/

fig 10



Tanya Bonakdar Gallery
<http://www.tanyabonakdargallery.com/gallery>

fig 11

line and selling the most amount of work per opening. These types of spaces are usually run by capitalists and solo shows are most shown here. The lighting is usually dim and yellow and the work is usually framed. Their sales are usually focused on abstract paintings and sculptures.

The Non-Profit Gallery - This is by far the truest form of the gallery. This type of gallery is usually artist run and is focused on beautifying its community with various forms of outreach and group shows that really promote up-and-coming artists. This type of space holds various fundraisers and depending on its size is either, very close to having no money, or has too much money that it questions the “non-profit.” The non-profit gallery, no matter the size, usually serves boxed wine and holds an opening every 6 weeks.

The “Owners Name Here” Gallery - I like to call this the ego space, it is usually run and founded by someone with too much money and they learned that selling art helps their taxes in other ways (fig 11). The founder is rarely involved in the day to day but will be at every opening taking pictures with the very famous artist they are showing (fig 12). These types of spaces host mostly solo exhibitions and are also big profiteering spaces.

The Contemporary Museum - This museum is usually funded by the private donors who love seeing their name engraved upon entering the museum space. It’s rooms hold numerous types of contemporary works and feel like the massive room in which you reside is about to engulf you.

The Museum of Modern Art - This museum is also usually funded by private donors but its architecture focuses on guiding the patron through a timeline of various art genres. This type of space ebbs and flows



Tanya Bonakdar with artist Olafur Eliasson
<https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2019/june/20/olafur-eliasson-knows-his-place-at-elmgreen-and-dragset-show/>

fig 12

with the patron's perception of the labyrinth in which they walk and sometimes you forget if you've been in this room before.

The History Museum - Usually funded by either the federal or local government. Depending on its size, this museum focuses on guiding its patrons through the relevant history the museum is portraying. With various pedestals protected by acrylic, antique objects and various oil paintings wayfind the patron from one end of the museum to the other. These types of museums often create a perfect loop, where the exit was also the entrance.

The Museum of Culture - This type of museum preserves the local culture and natives that once resided in the community this museum was built upon (fig 13). In my personal opinion, I prefer museums who hire the tribe of people who got pushed out of this community, but we do not live in a perfect world and we mostly find old white retirees working these spaces as docents. These spaces are usually housed in architectural spaces that were never intended to be a museum. Old train station buildings, senate halls, etc are usually older builders refurbished to hold museums of culture.

Conventionally Non-Traditional

The Alternative Space - These spaces are usually artist run and have to sustain themselves with various events and shows. They hold poetry reading nights, live music shows, group art shows, and other various community events. Like a non-profit gallery, these spaces are usually nested in the community they love and support and try to better their communities through this engagement. The only difference is they don't have 501c3 status.

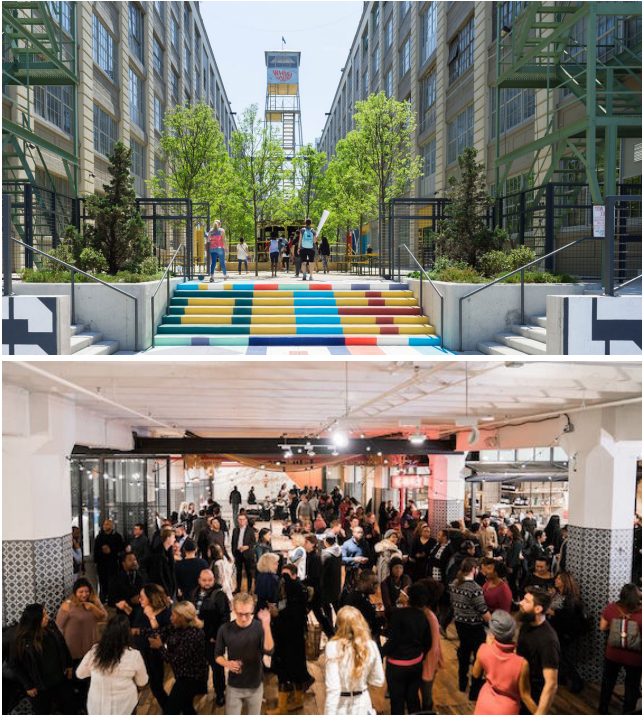
A Cafe- Your local neighborhood cafe is usually where an up-and-coming artist will have their work on the walls for an insane amount of money, but somehow



The National Nordic Museum - Seattle WA

<http://www.seattlemag.com/arts-and-culture/inside-new-nordic-museum-behind-scenes-one-seattles-most-anticipated-cultural>

fig 13



Industry City - New York
<https://industrycity.com/>

fig 14

always at least sells one piece. The cafe is a great gallery space because people are usually there for long periods of time.

An Apartment - This non-traditional space is usually someone's home that wants to show artwork so badly that they clear out an entire room of furniture and stow it in their bedroom just to have friends over to see the type of work you wouldn't always find in a gallery.

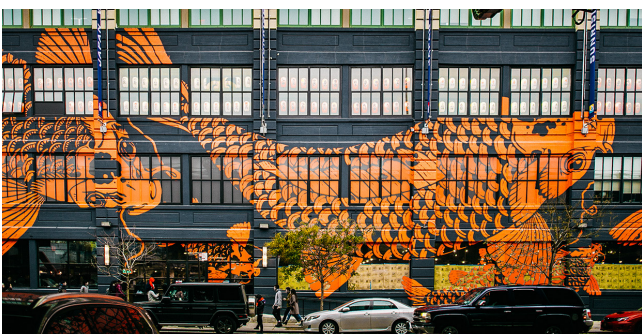
A Performance Venue - Usually dimly lit and is focused on spoken word and music. This space is usually a large room with alcoholic bars on either side of the space. I appreciate the scale in which these spaces make large groups still feel small. This nontraditional space was placed in this paper because I think it is a missed opportunity for large scale works. New York City's Armory space comes to mind for inspiration.

The Third Space - This type of space is usually founded by an institution trying to connect to its local community. The third space has both community businesses and an annex space of the parent company. Third Spaces are probably going to be the spaces of the future in my opinion. Spaces like Mana Contemporary, Industry City (fig. 14), and Express Newark come to mind.

The Mundane Spaces

The Mundane Spaces is where my thesis lives, it lives in the public and acknowledges that the space surrounding it affects the work itself. Like the artist Olafur Eliasson, I believe the designer/artist needs the surrounding space to influence their work but also the patron to view it.

A Wall - Murals and street art as gallery space. I really appreciate the designer and artist's ability to change a blank wall to a canvas. The wall, be it legal or illegal has always been a large canvas to deliver visual narration where the medium is the message (fig 15).



Japanese Wing - Mural at Industry City - New York
<https://industrycity.com/>

fig 15



The Artist Retna's Billboards - Los Angeles

<https://vscoc.com/justsomebody/media/5375c8e873670894258b47c8>

fig 16



New York Artist Sam Keller with Parents in his Closet Art Gallery
courtesy of the artist

fig 17

The Sidewalk - Sidewalk sellers in cities are always very different from your local sidewalk garage sale. The people who hustle on sidewalks make a full time career out of this sidewalk gallery. They showcase their current, past, and even their in progress work. They sell sometimes close to hundreds of dollars worth of art a day while still showing their work to probably the most massive moving population. In my honest opinion, the sidewalk gallery is the perfect gallery. Most eyes for the lowest cost with the highest reward in both a financial sense and through viewership.

Billboards - In the last few years we have seen a large increase of professional artists buying/renting billboard space just to put up a singular piece. We have seen this mostly from the “I was a graffiti artist and then some fashion company noticed me and now I make millions a year” type of artists. Two artists who have successfully done this are Retna and KAWS. The Billboard as gallery is similar to the viewership of the sidewalk gallery but there is no financial benefit, just bragging rights (fig 16). These artists specifically target these “galleries” because in the past they would climb up illegally to paint them and there is a level of ownership when you can now “pay to play.”

Nooks & Crannies - My personal favorite space for making is in areas you would never consider seeing design or artwork. Nooks and crannies is an idiomatic word pairing that is defined as a place or part of a place, especially small or remote. I personally think these nooks and crannies are making a huge leap in the gallery world and spaces like Meow Wolf in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA completely embrace the “small gallery.” I have also seen full galleries and art shows in people’s walk in closets and refrigerators.

Stairwells - I never thought of the stairwell as a gallery until I created the piece “The Great Divide” where I realized the connection and repetitive human ergonomic movement can be used to interact with various sides of an art piece as one ascends up or



Marina Abramović & Ulay's *A Living Door of the Museum* fig 18
<https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/marina-abramovic%C4%87-ulay-living-door-museum>

descends down the staircase. I would love it if stairwell galleries became a popular interactive experience in the future.

Doorways - As much of this thesis discusses, the passing through doorways is a change in mindset. I feel as if the doorway can be perceived as a small gallery if done correctly. A great representation of this would be Marina Abramović & Ulay's *A Living Door of the Museum* (fig. 18). They are quoted saying "If there were no artists, there would be no museums, so we are living doors." Both artists are standing naked in the main entrance of a museum, facing each other while the audience passes sideways through the small space.

Signage - UK Artist/Designer Killy Kilford has used signage as a window to social signage through graphic design (fig. 19). Their signage is installed in various cities and usually has a political or social message. The idea of using signage to create an installation in the public is another mundane space.



Killy Kilford's *Happy Signs* - Newark, NJ fig 19
<https://www.facebook.com/KillyKilford>

Again to reiterate, these are my personal definitions based on my knowledge of this specific gallery world. It is imperative that these definitions and spaces are in this thesis due to their importance in my growth as a designer. I have worked, shown, or curated shows within these spaces and they have shaped my thought process as I created work for the past two years in the Pacific Northwest.

Project Description

It is imperative to discuss how this thesis has changed due to the global pandemic of Covid-19 in 2020.

Before Covid-19

The final deliverable of this thesis was planned for the Henry Art Gallery. The final work would have been two identical installations that hovered

both inside and outside the gallery. The interactive installations were intended to raise the awareness of migration, movement and borders while showcasing various theories on participatory design. While also using installation art to study how perceptions of artifacts change when crossing the threshold of an art gallery.

The entirety of my thesis intended to be anti-digital and I relished the idea of only having analog elements throughout my thesis. During my second year at UW, I actually deleted all my social media and really focused on the analog. I created work that would be difficult to document and photograph and could only be experienced in person. I would have used the final installations as the final part of my research to observe that the perception of artifacts do change dramatically from the interior and exterior of the gallery space. The ability to create work that would only be experienced in person was a quintessential part of this thesis. I wanted the work to be undocumentable and not be able to be shared on any social media.

After Covid-19

The global pandemic happened and making work that could only be experienced in person became impossible so I went from analog back to digital. I began to sketch solutions on what this new normal meant for the gallery and design world and how we could be apart, together.

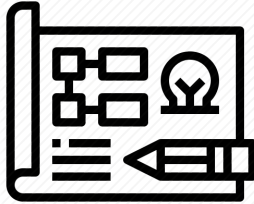
Using the quarantine as a constraint I used window frames as my new doorway from my previous idea and created a global gallery that could be accessible to not only everyone digitally, but a large audience physically. The final part of my thesis is a global collaborative project with the intention of creating an outdoor gallery space that moves in real time with a select group of artists, designers, curators, and creatives.

This project was executed in three phases.



phase 1

Phase 1 - Artist, Curators, Designers, Creatives, project their own work onto select physical surfaces directly out their windows.



phase 2

Phase 2 - Participants receive other participants' work and either subtract or add to the work and then project the new collaborative work.

Phase 3 - Participants receive all the work made globally and choose how to project all the new collaborative work as one large gallery.

This creates a new thesis question, how does the same image change around the world in different environments and global contexts? Now instead of the same artifacts being 30 feet apart from indoor to outdoor of the gallery, we have the same artifacts thousands of miles apart in different societies and cultural contexts. This perception change through cultural context can be measured through the new reactions of these varied audiences which may see the projections.



phase 3

Results of Work Made

The following works were created as research for this thesis. The works vary from size, material used, location, and reactions anticipated. These results explain the work made, reactions observed, and research discovered.



No Pie

No Pie

Location: Global

Duration: Ongoing

Materials Used: Sharpie Marker

No Pie was a quick modification to the No Smoking signs. It was a serendipitous attempt at humor and adjusting local signage to create a new narrative. About 40 of these were manipulated over the course of the last two years. Most reactions to this work were a chuckle or a light laugh, but were often just quick nods to noticing the change in language of the signage and then the viewer carried on their day.

Papier-Mâché

Location: Jersey City, New Jersey, USA

Duration: 30 days

Materials Used: Tissue Paper and Neon Lights

Papier-Mâché was an attempt at recycling and reusing a large quantity of paper products. The piece itself was a sculpture that tried to draw viewers into a secluded room using only light and sound. Although this piece wasn't made specifically for my thesis, it is placed in this paper because of its correspondence with my process and restraints. It also was an important research point in how the viewers of the work manipulated the work presented. Most people walking by this installation were confused of where the light source was coming from and how all this paper appeared in the shared studio space overnight. Most reactions were puzzled and confused but they still walked around the installation.

Nervous to step on the already crumbled paper (which I took from a dumpster). Once one person stepped on the installation, many more people joined and walked towards the light and took a peek inside the fabricated hole.



Papier-Mâché



UNESCO Conference discussing *To Seek Refuge*



To Seek Refuge

To Seek Refuge

Location: New York, New York, USA

Duration: 14 days

Materials Used: Cinder Blocks, Sheetrock, Aluminum Beams, A Television

To Seek Refuge was a commissioned work for an exhibition curated by The United Nations and UNESCO. Although this work was commissioned, I took it upon myself to make my installation relate to my thesis. This work was exhibited in an alternative Manhattan nightclub that was converted into a contemporary New York City gallery. The space in which my piece was installed was actually in the basement and was originally a shower that professional dancers would dance in as the water poured on them from a shower head. The shower head was not allowed to be removed from the space so I had to find a way to incorporate it into the work.

The piece itself represented the broken and destroyed homes of Aleppo Syria. *To Seek Refuge* shines a light on recent events concerning immigration and conflict in the Middle East. By using found objects and creating an immersive environment, the artist invites the viewer to familiarize themselves with feelings that are not so familiar, using the aesthetics that resemble Syrian architecture prior to the civil war and combines them with the aesthetics of the destruction that followed. The GIF of the faceless woman speaks also of the loss of identity when a displaced civilian seeks refuge.

The words immigrant were written in Arabic and could only be viewed from the exterior of the piece, while the word refugee was written inside in Arabic. The word refugee could only be seen by the person standing in the work. This showed that this invisible border (the glass) created this terminology and the words did not represent the people.

Many people walked towards this piece and were confused if they were allowed to enter it. There was a docent for the work that told people how to enter the



Students looking at flowers in The Red Phone Booth

glass box. As people entered the box they always put their hands up and touched the sides of the glass. They peered up as viewers of the work peered in. Most of the reactions were quiet and reserved. The piece was sensitive and I think the viewers of the work understood that.

The Red Phone Booth

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Duration: ongoing

Materials Used: Paint and Fake Flowers

The Red Phone Booth was a more guerrilla piece dedicated to the beautifying of a decrepit old phone booth. The blue phone booth was repainted bright red and I had bought a large amount of fake flowers to place as if they were exploding out of the phone booth. At the time, a student had passed away a few weeks prior and passers by asked if I was doing this as an homage to that student. I regretfully declined and told them I just wanted to make an old looking photo booth look nicer. Many of the reactions were positive, but just as many were confused. Many people photographed the phone booth and they also just would touch the flowers to see if they were fake or not.

Most of the interactions were acts of thefts, throughout the quarter almost every flower was stolen. What excited me most is that people would take them and place them in other places around the art building. I was also just excited to see people taking the flowers because they wanted to.

During the most recent 2019 TA Conference, there was a scavenger hunt where one of the objects you had to photograph was “a red phone booth, hint* there’s only one on campus.”

This installation is still present.



The Red Phone Booth



The glow behind the blinds at The Sandbox (Zen Garden)

The Sandbox (Zen Garden)

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Duration: Ongoing

Materials Used: White Paint, Canvas, Window Blinds, Black Sand, White Caribbean Rocks

Zen Garden was another beautifying of an ugly space. The space in question was a perfect enclosed rectangle that was covered in stains, dust and a chipped floor. Another guerrilla piece done in the middle of the night, I began cleaning and painting the enclosed space.

A fellow colleague saw what I was doing and I began to explain how I wanted to create a simple seating area for students to leave the adjacent classroom and have a moment to chill out. My colleague Coreen Callister had then suggested why not a Zen Garden? I began to laugh because there is nothing more ridiculous than dropping pounds of sands in a space randomly.

We installed 500 pounds of black sand and 40 pounds of Caribbean white stone to create the final installation. The interactions were really exciting because the installation had almost changed weekly since Feb 2019. There is someone constantly creating new patterns in the sand, and rearranging the pattern of the rocks. There have also been moments of someone stacking rocks. A majority of the reactions were shocked.

This installation is still present.



The Sandbox (Zen Garden)



Surplus (Permanent Signage)

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Duration: Ongoing

Materials Used: Various Miscellaneous Items

I was invited by my colleague Jeremy Viny to make an installation for an exhibition titled Surplussed.

I was told that all the work would be returned to the artist after the exhibition, and I have consciously been trying to not become a hoarder of my work the way I did in my past. So in reaction, I asked the manager of Surplus, “if I made signage for surplus out of objects found in Surplus, would you guys keep it?” They agreed and I began to sketch out my design. I decided to stick with the Egyptian Slab Serif typeface that is an ode to the University of Washington’s visual vocabulary and to create a typographic site specific signage that would correlate with every aisle of Surplus.

A majority of the viewers of this installation walked right up to the work and examined all the objects that made the letterforms. About half of viewers walked behind the installation to see how the pieces were installed. Some viewers took photographs of specific objects at a macro scale and took multiple photos as they stepped back to then show the letterform, and the word as a whole. I would say most reactions were positive and the installation overall made a lot of people smile. No one touched the work because of how it was presented, but many people photographed it.

This installation is still present.



Surplus Signage

Hopscotch

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Duration: One Hour

Materials Used: Carpet Square Samples and Black Spray Paint



Students using the Hopscotch Carpet Squares

Hopscotch was my first attempt in seeing how simple shapes can not only alter shapes but human interactions within those spaces. Using some old carpet square samples I placed seven tiles on the ground of the quad at the University of Washington and watched. Many people stepped over the carpet squares to avoid them, so with that new information I grabbed a can of spray paint and drew some numbers. I then watched as many students would walk past the squares, realize they were hopscotch, and then play the game.

The main reaction I noticed was pure joy, it seemed anyone who played would be momentarily transported to their childhood and once they completed the squares they would laugh and just carry on their day. One student asked her friends to hold her backpack so she could go back again and try it with one foot.

The Line of Great Divide

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Duration: Ongoing

Materials Used: 200 Denier Red Nylon



The Line of Great Divide

This site specific installation was made of 26 yards of 200 Denier Red Nylon descending three levels of stairway. I have noticed the stairwell since I first wandered around the art building and wanted to activate it in some way. I thought one long strand of fabric connecting all three floors would be some sort of connecting “thread.” Using my process above, I was problem solving while installing this installation. There was a lot of room for error but I was incredibly happy with the final result.

What was most exciting about this installation is that it was copied in a similar stairwell in the building a few



The Line of Great Divide

months later. There were two undergraduate students installing a large banner of mirrored mylar and when I asked them what they were doing, they immediately asked me if I had seen the large red banner in the other stairwell, they then went on to tell me that they were inspired by it and wanted to make something similar. This “homage” kickstarted my thesis in ways I had not planned for. I began to see how manipulation of space could inspire others to not only riff off work, but add to a process.

This installation is still present.

Digitized

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Duration: Three Months

Materials Used: Books, Screws, Hot Glue, Keyboards, Computer Mice

This installation used its surrounding space and resources to create an interruption out of what was available. This was done at a research library on the University of Washington’s campus. I was wandering around the loading dock looking for material for a separate project and I found this enormous dumpster of books. I then used a “nook and cranny” within the library to stack this pyramid of books about six feet high. Using computer parts from the 1980’s that were also in that dumpster, I began to create the installation that looked at these books and their now digitized forms while “mice” crawl up the information stacks to “digitize and spread their knowledge.” After one day, the installation was pushed over with books and mice stolen from it, I went in the following day to restack it where it remained standing for three more months.

Digitized is a critical survey that explores recycled books that are now either out of print, digitized, or older editions of now newer books. Reconstructing the narrative that blurs lines between the screen and the page, I explored the disconnect we have with the printed page and its digital counterparts.



Digitized

The Looking Glass

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Duration: Two Hours

Materials Used: Computer Chairs and a Reflective Sheet of Cardstock



The Looking Glass

I originally wanted to title my thesis *The Looking Glass* in early September because I was heavily inspired by Cooley's 1902 theory titled *The Looking Glass Self*. Cooley states I am not who I think I am, I am who you think I am, I am what I think you think I am... and there was something about that that I couldn't let go of. Why do we act the way we think people want us to act? Why can't we ever just try to be ourselves and remain genuine to the reflection we see in the mirror?

This thought inspired the piece *The Looking Glass*, this piece consisted of two chairs, myself wearing a reflective surface, and a conversation. I built out this reflective "mask" and would sit in the quad on campus across from an empty chair. Not being able to see anything I would ask passersby if they would like to have a conversation. I was curious how conversations would change if one party was anonymous and the other party could only look at themselves.

The results were very exciting to me, I found the people I spoke to seemed more genuine and truthful. That they weren't afraid to tell me personal details of their moods and/or lives. There was something about talking to someone they can't see that allowed a safe space? Maybe this is why confessional booths are all the rage in Catholicism.

You Missed a Spot

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Duration: One Month

Materials Used: Chalk

You Missed a Spot was created to disrupt the mundane hallways of the art building. Using chalk to create quick shapes, I wrote three phrases on the floor, *Bad Luck Spot*, *Good Luck Square*, and *Skip This Step*.

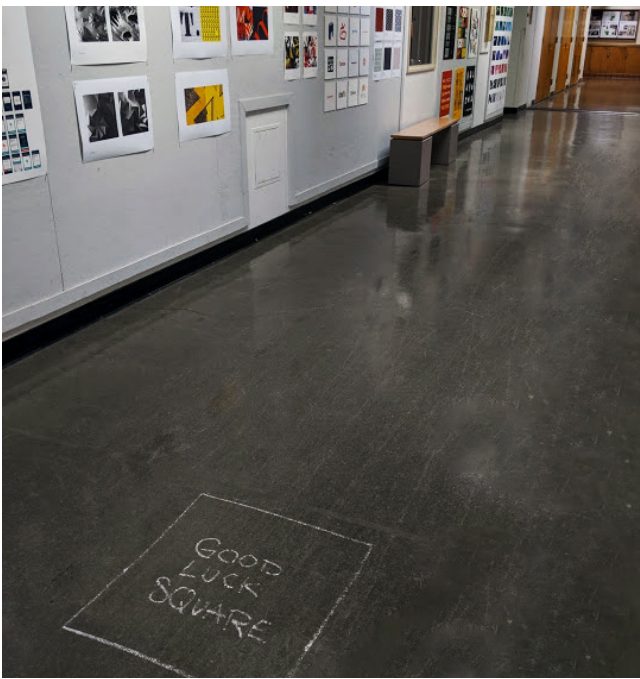
Bad Luck Spot attempted to get viewers to avoid large a space on the ground due to superstitions. This circle was placed in the stairwell near a bulletin board to maximize traffic.

Good Luck Square allowed viewers to stand in a square the size of their shoes to gain some good luck before their classes. This circle was placed in the middle of a hallway to disrupt the ebb and flow of motion in between classes.

Skip this Step was an unconscious attempt at creating paranoia within the viewer walking up or down the stairs. It was placed on the third step going up the stairs to disrupt the mindless stair climbing.

I would continue to make subtle changes to the art building and see how my peers would interact with them. I figured that if this brought them the same joy it brought me, then maybe everyone wouldn't be so sad all the time. So to spread some luck around, I drew a large circle and wrote "Bad Luck Spot" inside it, then I walked to a different part of the building and drew a smaller square with the words "Good Luck Square."

From my observations, I thoroughly enjoyed everyone avoiding the Bad Luck Spot and standing inside the Good Luck Square. I also appreciated that no one took out their phones to take photos of either pieces but instead I noticed one student just step into the Good Luck Square, close her eyes, took a deep sigh, and just kept on trucking down the hallway. That moment of pause is what I hope to achieve with this thesis.



Good Luck Square



Bad Luck Spot



Skip This Step



Runway Run Away

Runway Run Away

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Duration: One Hour

Materials Used: Various Rolls of Fabric

My last installation of that quarter was a disruption to that same quad. I took 50 yards of various colored fabric and lined the quad with it to see how people would interact with it. This disruption was a large failure in my eyes. Most people just walked around the fabric, which sure, that is disrupting their pace to their next location... but I was hoping for more. I would consider this disruption a failure.

The Fine Line (at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery)

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Duration: One Week

Materials Used: Black Matte Paper, Bulldog Clips, Poster

Our cohort's final presentation was a group exhibition at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery in the Art Building on the University of Washington's campus.

I created an installation of 12 imaginary images that were black type on black paper. These pieces were purposefully printed in this manner to make the viewer of the images physically need to be present because the pieces could not be documented by a camera without the use of an assisted flash or higher exposure.

Using black vinyl, I taped a line from floor to ceiling to divide a fine line between my poster, thus, cutting it in half to further my message.

Finally, I had a pedestal with 4x6 matte photographs of all the installations, interruptions, and disruptions I had made during my graduate studies at the University of Washington.

The poster that accompanied this work was created to articulate the problem statement, primary research, and background of my thesis. I manipulated a photograph



The Fine Line (at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery)



Not a single cell phone in sight - The Fine Line (at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery)

of myself, collaged it with some architecture representing the space in which I am working in (the Pacific Northwest), and finally added the definitions of both art and design juxtaposed with things I have read and made over the course of the 2019 Autumn Quarter. This poster's final dimensions were 30x40 inches.

Final Deliverable

Location: Global

Duration: Ongoing

Materials Used: Projector

Using the quarantine as a constraint I used window frames as my new doorway from my previous idea and created a global gallery that could be accessible to not only everyone digitally, but a large audience physically.

Working with curators, creators, designers, and artists from Buenos Aires Argentina, Brooklyn New York, Paris France, Seattle Washington, and Mamer Luxembourg, I created a global gallery of collaborative images based on the three phases above.

The incredible discovery from this research was that many people, although in quarantine, watched the projections being illuminated across the globe. The beauty of it all is that all the participants were able to build and design their personal projected gallery in their own ways.

The results were exciting because it was an incredible feeling of connection watching these images come in at real-time via Instagram, E-mail, and Whatsapp. Knowing that right now, in this exact moment, there is someone in Paris France seeing the Eiffel Tower and one of my exquisite corpses in an animation.

This final product reminded me of the New York Times piece on Skype Family Portraits (*fig 20*), these Futuristic Family Portraits were a beautiful way of connecting people around the world through projections.



Still of Rotating Gamine Glasses - Paris, France - Designer Sergei Zubkouski



Projector Set Up - Paris, France - Designer Sergei Zubkouski



Still of the sky is not falling we are simply learning to fly - Brooklyn, New York
Artist Penn Eastburn

The contextual cultural changes of this process truly came to life in phase 3, where the same image changed the perception of the work within its new environment. The context influenced this perception due to environmental changes in architecture, the texture of the surface projected on, the audience that both saw the work digitally and in person, and finally the style in which the creative decided to project their new “gallery”.



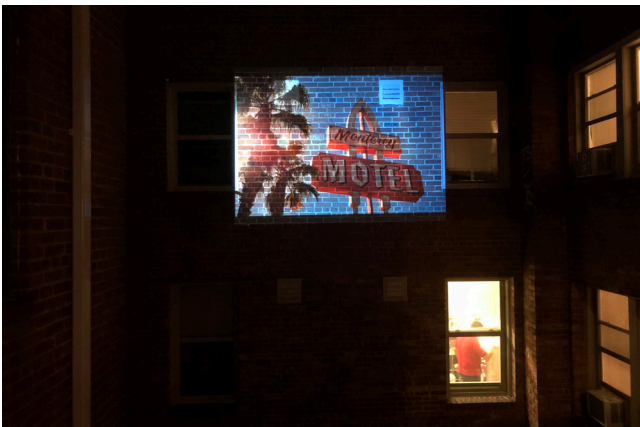
Skype Portraits - New York Times - fig 20



Still of Walkaway Photograph - Mamer, Luxembourg - Curator Sana Lux



Reaction of Rooftop Projected Work from Street Level - Brooklyn New York
Artist Penn Eastburn



Photograph of Motel- Washington D.C, USA - Creative Luke Walter

My Process

My contribution to exhibition design focuses mainly on my process as a designer. Although most would define me as an artist first, my process comes from a heavy history in design. My process uses the following key components; framing, constraints, analytical creativity, development and design, and gauging success.

FRAMING

Finding and framing the environment for interventions

As I walk and skateboard around I am constantly thinking of creative solutions to deliver a visual narrative to the local community. Believing the medium is the message, I look for spaces that are often overlooked and yet would be noticed if they were changed (fig 21).

Framing the problem

The problem is usually found within the space itself and uses the space around it to begin to articulate a solution. The problem is also not only the location but can be influenced by the current socio-economic climate, or just the climate. If the space is covered in snow, I will use the surrounding climate to frame the problem and begin to search for varied solutions.

Framing varied solutions for the space

The solutions, like the problem, begin to come out of the surrounding space and location. I begin to sketch various solutions with the knowledge of previous works created and the ability to reuse objects and material. A majority of the work created in these spaces are made with recycled material from various resources.



Framing a mundane space

fig 21

Reframing after the first object to space contact

This reframing is an initial critique when the objects are in the physical space for the first time. This reframing comes before anything is installed and is part research through design and design while making.

CONSTRAINTS

The following constraints were created for this specific thesis and reflected work I personally wanted to make between 2018-2020.

The work must evoke joy, humor, nostalgia, or reflection. Emotion is a large part of the installations created, and each piece needed to evoke some sort of emotional response to be considered successful towards my research (fig 22).

The work must have some participatory or interactive element. All the work could be touched or manipulated in some way to be considered an adequate installation towards my research. I could only gauge success of the work by physically observing and documenting responses to the installations.

The work must feel contemporary. The installations must be created by materials that were considered contemporary and could be no older than 50 years. This was extremely important because I wanted all objects used to be understood by a larger focus group/audience.

The work must activate a space that goes otherwise unnoticed. The installations must all be placed in a space that is considered mundane and/or alternative. This assisted my research in numerous ways, one being that design and art both have the power to change the mindset of how a location can be used.

COVID-19. This constraint was forced upon me and made me consider alternative approaches to my thesis now that a majority of the world's population is quarantined to their homes.



Evoking emotion

fig 22

ANALYTICAL CREATIVITY

Begin analyzing how the objects fit in the desired location through previous constraints. This research through design begins with designing while making and this feedback loop is infinite until a successful style of making prevails.

Using found objects and recycled material (fig 23); creatively create an interruption, disruptions, or intervention that allows the viewer to rethink the space. Trying to use material that also mirrors the space assists as well.



Using found recycled material

fig 23

DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN

The design of the desired installation is created from the set of constraints and experimentations in the chosen space. The development of the design is working in conjunction of creating. This development is the actual installation of the work and is also responding to the audience's reaction while I am installing. It is not uncommon that people will walk by and have a question or a critique while you are installing the work. Sometimes their questions and critiques will change how you yourself think about the work and can change the development and design of your process. This collaboration is essential for work being made in the public realm.

Essentially the research and design is being created and critiqued during the making process. This continues until the piece is completed and begins to change with interactions that are no longer in the artist/designer's power. Once I leave the space the piece is no longer mine and now belongs to the space in which it resides. The piece is free to be altered, manipulated, and/or destroyed (fig 24). This development is a part of the design process for all work created for this thesis. The hope is that patrons will touch and interact with the work and make it their own.



Next day ; Installation was pushed over and destroyed

fig 24

GAUGING SUCCESS

Success is based on interactions and emotions evoked to the artifacts audience.

Type of Successful Interactions

- A viewer documents the piece through a photograph
- A viewer interacts and touches the work
- A viewer interacts and manipulates the work
- A viewer interacts and destroys the work

Types of Successful Emotions Evoked

- A viewer laughs at the work
- A viewer is disgusted by the work
- A viewer is angry with the work and destroys it
- A viewer smiles at the work
- A viewer takes a moment to reflect with the work



A viewer photographing the work

Reflection

My biggest reflection out of the past two years is that I can make work that doesn't entirely rely on one large conceptual message but can be a formal joy to its surrounding space and audience. A large part of this thesis was made with the assistance of my committee, thesis chair, and incredible faculty at the University of Washington. The past two years of making has assisted me in defining my own design research and I am extremely grateful for all the new methodologies I have gained an understanding in.

Over the course of my masters degree I created various work that I am comfortable with. I made various publications, screen printed material, and focused my work around my background in graphic design. What I enjoyed the most about this degree has been my ability to work in UW's extensive other design concentrations. From Industrial Design, Interactive Design, and Human Centered Design, I used these other concentrations to influence the work I not only made during my time at the University of Washington, but will influence work to come.



Students laughing after using the Hopscotch

Conclusion

Imposing creative solutions to otherwise mundane/ non-traditional spaces not only inspires and evokes various emotions by its viewers and patrons, but also allows the audience to produce creative responses to the installations themselves.

Context is the driving force of this thesis and it is what defined the work I made. Contextual changes occur in our daily lives and regardless of the medium, the message is always defined by context.

The Covid-19 pandemic changed my context but my creative peers around the world helped me complete this thesis. In collaboration, we created work that used a change in physical and cultural context to provoke reactions around the world. The creatives who participated in this thesis used my process and directions while building upon it with their own methods. This form of participatory design was essential in the success of my thesis and I have been thrilled with the results.

Seeing this man in Washington D.C react to work made in Paris — asking to stay to watch the entire slideshow — is one key way that I gauged success. Reaching a population not only physically but also digitally allowed this thesis to move past the contemporary gallery/ museum doors and illuminate buildings in four major continents.



Passerby in Washington DC watching final phase of final deliverable

This thesis has taught me that context defines the design process. Contextual constraints assisted me in finding solutions when I thought there were none. The pandemic changed my entire thesis for what I thought was the worst, but in conclusion I realize that the pandemic actually created a constraint that defined what context meant to this creative inquiry into artifact and environment.

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