Spring 2017

A Hazy Bliss

Anna Joo

Follow this and additional works at: https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/bfa

Part of the Book and Paper Commons, Fine Arts Commons, Printmaking Commons, and the Sculpture Commons

Recommended Citation

https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/bfa/26

This Unrestricted is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Art at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bachelor of Fine Arts Senior Papers by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.
A Hazy Bliss

Anna Joo

Washington University in St. Louis

Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts

BFA in Studio Art

May 2017
There were tangerines and apples stained with strawberry pink. Some yellow pears, smooth as silk, some white grapes covered with a silver bloom and a big cluster of purple ones. These last she had bought to tone in with the new dining-room carpet.

Yes, that did sound rather far-fetched and absurd, but it was really why she had bought them. She had thought in the shop: "I must have some purple ones to bring the carpet up to the table." And it had seemed quite sense at the time.

When she had finished with them and had made two pyramids of these bright round shapes, she stood away from the table to get the effect— and it really was most curious.

For the dark table seemed to melt into the dusky light and the glass dish and the blue bowl to float in the air. This, of course, in her present mood, was so incredibly beautiful. . . . She began to laugh.

"No, no. I’m getting hysterical."

from “Bliss” by Katherine Mansfield
Chapter 1: What It Means To See – Emotion Perception Sensation

THE TRANSLATION OF FLEETING EMOTIONS INTO VISUAL, TACTILE LANGUAGE

The sensations I try to bring across in my work can best be described as emotions. Emotions not in the simple sense of happy or sad, but more complex, undefinable feelings you find you can’t quite place your finger on. This lexically elusive quality of the moments I chase can sometimes make talking about my work challenging, but it also serves as an example of how art can describe phenomena the English language simply cannot yet comprehend.

I try to create visual experiences that translate these intangible, fleeting moments of emotion and feeling to the viewer. Color, texture, and transparency are visual tools in my continuous efforts to explore perception, experience, and emotional sensation. These are key to creating a certain aura of sensation, one that can’t quite be described in words, but is communicated fully through the perceived.

THE “EMOTIONAL SENSE”

One sense that is constantly overlooked is our emotional sense. It is not a “sense” in the
typical understanding of the five senses, but more of a haptic sense, or sixth sense, if you will. I create work that is active stimuli for especially this emotional sense. Using color, texture, and transparency, the work first lures viewers in, then invites them to become present and attentive to their senses. It allows them to truly sense their sight, sense their haptic intuition, and sense their feelings and emotions, bringing these phenomena into their consciousness.

THE EMOTIONAL TRANSMISSION/TRANSCEPTION

My work can also be described as the result of trying to make the immaterial tangible. However, my true objective lies not in the physical presence of the artwork, but rather the experience of the impalpable transception which results from the repeated exchange of both physical manifestations and intangible concepts. (Here, I use the word transception to refer to the indescribable mental, psychological, and emotional phenomena that is communicated through these various materializations existing in space, conscious of its limitations within physics and in gravity.) This back-and-forth of physical material energy and nonphysical emotional energy through the viewer creates an overwhelming feeling of experience when attention is paid.
There are some emotions that are so quiet that they slip past before we've even had a chance to spot them, like that momentary sense of comfort that makes your hand reach out for a familiar brand at the supermarket.”

Page 4

The Book of Human Emotions by Tiffany Wyatt Smith
Chapter II: There Is a Cloud Around the Art

COMFORTING UNCERTAINTY

There is an appealing sense of openness that is brought to mind when I think of my own work.

There is a sense of uncertainty that is appealing, a warm, fuzzy pocket that carries nothing but potential and is surrounded by comfort. I want the viewer to feel this same warm pocket as well, and feel the desire to fill it. With what it is filled with is up to the viewer completely.

THE ELUSIVENESS OF THE PROCESS

Perhaps my work desires an impossible reality. There is never a perfect, straightforward solution in deciphering a phenomenon into a language which is different from the one in which it originates, and this creates areas of unpredictability with end results. In my case the decisions made in the materialization process are guided through intuition and by feeling the direction of the work. This method in no way guarantees a successful outcome.

However, the ceaseless pursuit of translating fleeting moments of magnetizing emotions into tactile, material objects that live and breathe in our physical world is one that is personally
gratifying. The absence of a clear end to the investigation itself is also what helps me to continue my explorations, allowing me to continue to find inspiration in my practice.

VIEWING ART, SEEING ART

Siri Hustvedt states that “seeing is creating” (Hustvedt 227). However, most people, even artists, take an extremely passive stance when viewing art. When you look at something, you only absorb it in that moment and it is gone a few moments later. When you see something, you are actually left with what you saw, noticed, felt, and digested. You take what you have seen with you, and these impressions often last longer than the memory of having seen itself. These impressions are often triggered and recalled not by memory but similar impressions and feelings. The sharp pang of familiarity overwhelms you in that moment, and you relive the feeling, but you are left unable to recall the exact memory of the moment the impression was left in you.

CHASING A FEELING

It is that same feeling of familiarity that finds you when you wonder whether you might have dreamed this exact moment before. Because you have lost the actual memory, but due to the
strange way our brain and mind works, the impression and feeling of the happening has
stayed with you. It seems so real, so compelling, but also so distant, just like a dream.

I want viewers to remember the feeling of feeling something. The subtle passing joy you feel
when you once again meet a familiar acquaintance, but instead of a person it is a feeling you
meet again. This simultaneous feeling of inexplicable emptiness and fullness is what inspires
my work.
“It’s strange. With food, for instance, people seem able to understand what’s involved: you savor the taste rather than just feed the body. But people have a hard time understanding that it should be the same way with visual experience.”

page 215 from “Seeing Is Savoring”

Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees by Lawrence Weschler
Chapter III: Not a Vacuum

I have been told by many that they can see parallels between my work and the work of Olafur Eliasson. Indeed, he is one of the many artists I am inspired by. However, while Olafur Eliasson works with the sublime and wonders of naturally occurring phenomena, my work reflects the emotions and feelings of things more seemingly insignificant and easily ignored, using materials that seem to have just as little consequence as the emotions themselves. If Eliasson’s work “demonstrates that sublime effect can indeed be captured by means of simple, pragmatic, mechanical actions or interventions,” my work captures the smallest, insignificant puffs of emotion and creates a form for them to breathe through and a stage for them to perform on. (Rondeau 37)

Artists of the Light and Space Movement also regularly surface as connections seen in my work. In particular, I admire Robert Irwin’s ideas and ruminations on seeing, perceiving, viewer, and work. Personally, I see Irwin’s physical artworks taking on extremely different forms than my own work, but I can appreciate his sensitivity to subtlety and material that also permeates my practice. (Weschler 101)
“I asked him why he thought people ordinarily had so much trouble seeing.”

page 215 from “Seeing Is Savoring”

Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees by Lawrence Weschler
Chapter IV: Object and Viewer

BOOK AS EXPERIENCE

I am drawn to the format of books because of the amount of control I have over the viewer’s encounter and experience with the object. These books are a controlled environment in which I can create a sequenced space for experience, and maximize the effect of the experience as well. The sequencing of the pages is extremely important, because it determines the interactions between the pages, both translucent and opaque, and the motion of flipping, the reveal of the next page, the collaging of pages with those in the front and back, and the mixing of colors on the pages.

The privacy a book provides is also an important element in my inclination to books. It is hard to experience a book, especially a small one, simultaneously with someone else. The solitary action of flipping through a small book creates a relationship between the book and viewer in that moment, and the moment solely belongs to the individual and the book itself. No one else, even those witnessing the moment happening from the outside, can be a part of that
private interaction and connection between viewer and book. I find that this privacy and intimacy encourages people to linger and take their time with the experience of seeing.

As soon as the viewer encounters *waxing waning sunlight glowing*, they recognize there is something to be discovered. A blank, dimly backlit surface welcoming you with the warmth of a soft, orange halo and a floating shelf that holds one real book and the ghosts of others, the piece encapsulates fully this idea of book as experience.

**VIEWER AS ACTIVATOR**

The notion of a book also connects to another idea I seek to include in my work, which is the viewer’s role as the activator of the art work. In the sense of my own kind of quantum physics, a closed book without someone to flip through it holds nothing between the covers. It requires the presence and action of the viewer, or it might as well not exist.

There was a specific moment I felt this particular thought. I had the chance to see some pieces from the storage of a notable art museum in St. Louis. Among those pieces was a beautifully designed and constructed, hand-made book by a certain artist. The curator who graciously
showed us these pieces gave us a few glimpses of this book, but then promptly closed it and put it away, stating that this book was “not for viewing purposes.” It was the most heartbreaking fate for a book I could imagine.
“But color in relationship to a tactile surface is most gratifying.”

Page 43 from “Notes on Habitability”

Notes Toward a Conditional Art by Robert Irwin
Chapter V: Objects of Surface, Texture, Color, & Light

THE TACTILE – SURFACE AND TEXTURE

Surface and texture are at both the beginning of the process and the beginning of the experience. I usually am inspired by materials that give off a certain quale, and I then use those same or similar materials to construct the artwork—a self-referential method in which my work is produced. Different textures are explored in throughout all my work, especially textures of fabric, paper, plastic, and glass. These usually serve as an entrance point to grab the viewer’s attention. Once constructed, the materials do all the work themselves.

SELF-REFERENCING PROCESS

Swing Blue and Yellow (slowly in the sun-light) was the first book I created. Using a copy machine and scanner I made a series of fast, impulsive prints, working intuitively and “in the moment.” I started with various fabrics of bright blues, warm yellows, and soft, translucent, barely-there greens. The colors and compositions I was working with all came from a few objects, but by layering and blending through the continued copying of first source material, then print after print, a whole new set of prints full of self-referencing in both material and
process was created. A hazy blue tint from the light of the scanner bed, half-faded prints from printer jams, these all became part of the process and part of the final construction. These “happy accidents” are integral in some of my works, often acting as a starting point for new processes and investigations.

COLOR AS EMOTION

I have already written about the translation of emotion into the visual language of material and presence in depth. However, in one project, I approached the question of translating visual energy into emotional energy quite differently. This project explored the literal substitution of color as emotion. Part of the project was a book titled *THE COMPLETE PORTABLE DICTIONARY OF EMOTIONS & THEIR CORRESPONDING COLORS*, which had spectrums of colors defined as specific emotions. While playing with this idea of direct substitution, I was also thinking of ways to translate the nature of emotions as being something shared. The project also included a participatory element in which viewers recreated their emotions, with those colors then projected live onto the other participants in the room. The “projection” of these colors was a metaphor for the “projection” or expression of emotions. Instead of having people read these expressions through facial and body
language, they “absorbed” the emotion colors projected onto their skin. Although this project definitely shared the visual elements and tools I use in all my other works as well, the strict defining of these emotions was something I had never done in my work. By setting these “rules” for people to either follow or disobey, the project also brought elements of personal interpretation to my practice.
We feel colors before we can name them. Colors act on us pre-reflectively. A part of me feels red before I can name red. My cognitive faculties lag behind the color’s impact. Standing in a room, I look first at the vase of red tulips because they are red and because they are alive.

Page 225,

Living, Thinking, Looking by Siri Hustvedt
In terms of success in my artwork, I believe my work is successful when it makes someone stop, and stay to feel the artwork for a little longer. It could be said that this goal is not hard to achieve, but I am already rewarded through the process of making the pieces.

Robert Irwin once said “The artist chooses from experience that which he defines out as art, possibly because it has not yet been experienced enough, or because it needs to be experienced more” (Irwin 38).

Some questions I would like to leave with viewers: What have you experienced? What have you felt? Will you remember this exact feeling? This inexplicable, fleeting moment in life and your consciousness? How long will you be able to keep it in your consciousness, in the front of your mind?

It may be as futile as trying to hold on to air with your bare hands. Inevitably you lose it. I intend to continue my investigations and attempts into creating experiences for those deprived of the ability or luxury to see, experience, and create the qualia around them.
The experience is the “thing,” experiencing is the “object.”

All art is experience, yet all experience is not art.

Page 131,

Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees by Lawrence Weschler


Images

i. Image from *Still Life at Whim*

3. Image of studio

7. Detail of *Swing Blue and Yellow (slowly in the sun-light)*

9. Image from *waxing waning sunlight glowing*

13. Detail of *waxing waning sunlight glowing*

17. Image from *The Emotion Station*

19. Image of studio