

Artistic Mind Control: Intention and Immersion in Abstract Expressionism and New Media Art

Emma Jonas

Immersive art, by my definition, is a movement-spanning artistic niche that incorporates the complete activation of one or more senses to alter the viewer's mental state—in short, artistic means of mind control. Abstract Expressionism of the mid-twentieth century adopted a large-scale, screen-like format through which works overtook viewers visually and somatically. Light-based New Media Art, while not necessarily limited to a single two-dimensional surface, is “screen-based” in its involvement of large-scale presentations meant to captivate viewers spatially over time. Successful Abstract Expressionism and New Media Art dissociate viewers from their physical environment. My LARC project will examine the relationship between the immersive aspects of these movements.

Professor Susik and I will attend the Elektra International Digital Arts Festival in Montréal in early May 2013. There, I will interview New Media artists about their experiences with traditional and New Media art, how those experiences interact, and their concepts of immersive art. I will also discuss these pieces with other attendees in order to gauge the general reaction to immersive techniques in New Media. After the festival, I will research the politics and intentions of the Abstract Expressionists Barnett Newman, Louise Nevelson, and Paul Jenkins, whom I consider to be creators of three distinct types of immersive art.

Through this research I will garner an understanding of the intentions of both Abstract Expressionists and New Media Artists in creating immersive works, and how the effects they hope to achieve alter the meaning of their works. Ultimately, I will place immersive art in a cultural studies and Modernist art historical context by exploring the effects of traditionally based multimedia developments that allow artists to communicate more intricately with present-day viewers.

On completing my research, I will create an immersive piece of art that incorporates techniques and materials from New Media Art and Abstract Expressionism. This piece will be a visual representation of the relationship between traditional and modern immersive art. I will also write a 15- to 25-page research paper on my findings. These will comprise my presentations for LARC, SSRD, regional conferences, and other academic forums.

I have completed two courses in modern art history, both taught by Dr. Susik, as part of my art history major: “Intro to Modern and Contemporary Art” and “Dada & Surrealism.” In these courses I have studied the relationship between art and viewers. I have also taken several years of extracurricular art classes and have experience with various artistic media. The skills I acquired in these courses will contribute to my ability to successfully compile research into a work of art and an academic article. Participation in LARC will provide me with invaluable experience in art historic field study and artistic production. The publishable academic article will set a precedent for

the type of work I aim to generate in my next two years at Willamette and as a graduate student. I also hope to determine the evolution from traditional to New Media immersive art, and how immersive techniques therein have affected the art community.