

Consider the work of one or two practitioners (e.g. artists, designers, film-makers, etc) who highlight the significance of materials and / or the senses in their work. Discuss their work and explain how their engagement with the senses contributes to the overall impact of their work.

Visual Culture

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Consider the work of one or two practitioners (e.g. artists, designers, film-makers, etc) who highlight the significance of materials and / or the senses in their work. Discuss their work and explain how their engagement with the senses contributes to the overall impact of their work. (You are advised not to select a practitioner who has already been discussed in class).

Brianna Marshall Crowe

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“Sensory perception is the silken web that binds our separate nervous systems into the encompassing ecosystem.” David Abram, 2010

Many artists today engage with the senses in order to create something stimulating and to send a message to an audience. When creating something physical and visual, there is great significance in the material used to communicate that message. Artists choose specific material to work with as different materials communicate different messages and can be interpreted in different ways. Our relationship with materials can be highlighted through conceptual work as artists outline how reliant we are on materials in everyday life and their impact on the environment. As well as exploring sustainability, artists outline our psychological relationship with materials and our attachment to the way we use them. As a lot of the material we see around us is not biodegradable and will likely last for centuries, designers can present a more sustainable alternative to what we use today.

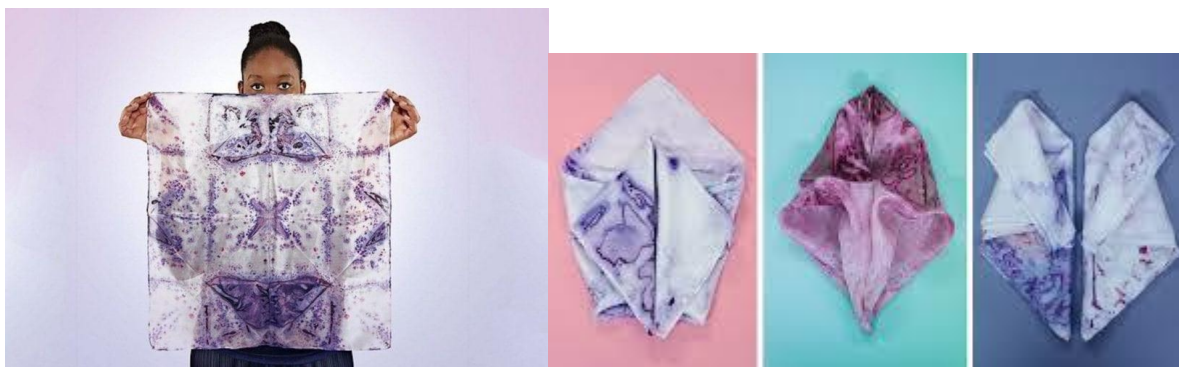
Natsai Audrey Chieza is a trans - disciplinary design researcher who works in the field of biotechnology. She says “I approach science from design, so my interaction with biology is through the design lens”. With a background in architecture, she is the founder and CEO of Faber Futures, an agency at the forefront in manufacturing organic alternatives to unsustainable materials and fossil fuels we use in everyday society. Faber Futures has a slogan reading “Learning from nature, making with life.” . Chieza has presented a TED talk on pollution in fashion and how her work is a sustainable alternative. She is passionate about cultivating an ideal world where algae is a sustainable construction material and textiles are dyed with pigment producing bacteria instead of toxic chemicals.

Chieza has a residency in University College London’s department of biochemical engineering, where she has been developing a pigment-producing bacteria found commonly in the roots of trees called streptomycetes. She has a fascination with the possibilities of bacterial cells that seep pigment from their walls. An organism she focuses on is celicolor,

which produces an antibiotic called actinorhodin. This antibiotic ranges from pink, to blue and purple, depending on the environment and pH levels. Textiles and live streptomyces are placed in petri dishes and are left for an incubation period. Each natural dye will be different, Chieza has experiments further with creating folds in the material before letting the bacteria grow.

Chieza highlights the copious amounts of water used in the fashion industry and the pollution that results from dyeing. CNN writes “Fashion has a water problem. A [2017 report](#) found that the industry consumed almost 79 billion cubic meters of water in 2015, enough to fill 32 million Olympic-sized swimming pools. ” A Drop4Drop blog article writes “Dyeing and treatment of garments makes up roughly 17-20% of all industrial water pollution according to the World Bank, with water primarily being used in the dyeing process to remove excess dye. These chemicals often escape treatment and work their way back into freshwater sources.” Chieza’s method uses 500 times less water than traditional dyeing and no toxic chemicals are needed.

“Biotechnology is going to touch every part of our lived experience. It is living; it is digital; it is designed, and it can be crafted. This is a material future that we must be bold enough to shape.” Natsai Audrey Chieza



Images by Natsai Audrey Chieza

“It’s a generational thing. I think Andy Goldsworthy and I, and Richard Long, and most of the British artists’ collectives associated with Land art would have been landscape painters a hundred years ago. But we don’t want to make portraits of the landscape. A landscape picture is a portrait. We don’t want that. We want to be in the land.” David Nash.

David Nash is a Welsh sculptor who works mainly with wood, trees and the natural environment. He is a skilled and accomplished artist in land art and manipulation of wood. Land art is made directly in the landscape and is usually made with media from the natural world. Nash explores our relationship with the natural environment through charcoal drawings, blackened or carved wood sculptures and living sculptures.

One of his most famous conceptual works is still living and growing. It consists of a ring of 22 Ash trees Nash planted in 1977 and his interference manipulated their growth to form a canopy shape. ‘Ash Dome’ as a response to the short term policies in Britain during the late 1970’s, is long term and ongoing, growing through the 21st century. Nash used British hedge-making practices to train the trees to form a vortex-shaped dome. He says “It is called fletching. The very small trees, I simply pushed over and put a stake to hold them, while for the larger ones I cut out a series of V-shapes, bent them over, and then wrapped them so the cambium layer could heal over.”

Another famous work produced by David Nash is titled ‘Wooden Boulder’. This work was created in 1978 and consists of a sphere weighing half a ton carved from a 200-year-old Oak tree. Nash rolled it into a stream and let it be taken by the water. It remained in a stream for years, being moved only by storms, then traveling up and down the River Dwyrhyd. The whereabouts of the ‘Wooden Boulder’ is now unknown. Some believe it has traveled out to sea and some believe it will turn up in a river bed someday. Part of this piece

of land art is the mapping of where the boulder was carried, Nash left its movements entirely up to Nature. 'Wooden Boulder' is another conceptual example of Nash's art in response to the dark political circumstances during the 1970's. He Says 'People were saying that humans would destroy themselves before we got to the 21st century. So I thought: I'll make a sculpture that's aimed at the 21st century.'



David Nash at Ash Dome. Photo by Rob Fraser.



Wooden Boulder. Photographs © David Nash, courtesy the artist

Both Natsai Audrey Chieza and David Nash have a high appreciation for the natural world and are passionate about its preservation, yet they explore our relationship with the environment in very different ways. Chieza's response to fashion-produced pollution is to grow our own sustainable material from bacteria instead of using fossil fuels. Her beautiful, naturally dyed garments are a revelation to the fashion industry using significantly less

water and no toxic chemicals. It is inspiring to see an artist put her idealisms and abilities to work and to change how we relate to the world, visually and thoughtfully.

Like Chieza, Nash uses organic living matter as media, but he is communicating something different. Both examples of Nash's work are ongoing and living sculptures and are interferences with nature, in nature. His ongoing sculptures 'Ash Dome' and 'Wooden Boulder' explore the dimensions, as a large part of the art is the passing of time and these two pieces of work are continually evolving. What is inspiring about David Nash and these two examples of land art is how he allows the forces of nature to play such a large role in his living sculptures, leaving his art up to nature to take it further while he documents it.

Both artists explore activism in response to society. Chieza is producing highly useful and sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels and the harmful textile industry. Her response to this large part of society not only provides a solution to the problem, it gently outlines the carelessness of the fashion industry. Nash gave a response to the British policies during the late 1970's with his sculptures 'Ash Dome' and 'Wooden Boulder'. With everything seemingly being short term, he created something that would last and contradict the actions of society at the time.

Chieza and Nash have a lot in common with their work, but they also contrast each other in the way they engage with the senses. Chieza is coming from a design perspective, tying in science methodology to her practice. Her work is mainly visually stimulating and appealing, opening our eyes to the possibilities of patterns created by living organisms. She is also approaching her audience with the solving of a problem as she introduces her ideas for alternatives to a harmful and destructive industry. Nash is coming from a more expressive approach with conceptual thinking and elements of performance added to his work. As well as being visually appealing, his sculptures carry a high level of tactile skill and are produced with his hands engaging with the wood and the earth.

Chieza and Nash are both highly creative and accomplished individuals in their practices. Their work is solely about the material they use and focusing on its significance. They both merely interfere with the organic matter and let it grow, ultimately allowing nature to be the artist.

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