

Lust doesn't make me hot

Why is it that some works of art stay with you, and others do not?

When you go through an exhibition, an art fair or an Art book there are only very few things you remember, that stay with you, the rest dissolves into a big grey mass of nothingness.

That it is not just a matter of personal taste that decides what you remember, we all know.

Because there are loads of images and things we do not wish to remember, but we remember them anyway.

We do not choose what to remember and what not, the work with a real quality chooses to stay with us. It touches us and thus we don't forget.

But what is it then that reaches out to us?

I think that the works that touch and stay have qualities embedded within themselves that know how to reach us on different levels of perception.

As human beings we are intelligent, sensitive creatures that consist of a body and mind.

We have emotions and a soul (whatever that may be) and all those things must be taken into consideration when talking about perception.

Let's say that all that is there around us (including art), touches and aggravates us on three different levels of perception: the cognitive, the emotional and the physical level.

'I am a thinking physical being with emotions'

Art can be used to determine what it means to be touched by (visual) work.

Being hit in the cognitive level basically means that something makes you think, it may touch upon memories, recognition and understanding.

The emotional level is being touched upon when the work/image summons emotions of your own or displays emotions of the maker. Sometimes even the work itself can have an emotion of its own. The physical level covers for instance the relationships in space between you and the work or the work and its surrounding. And ofcourse: shape, size and colour.

At the same time this physical level or layer deals with the tactility and materiality of the work. It is important to realize that we only recognize material and shape as such because we physically 'understand' what it feels like when we touch it. The way our own body relates to a work is very important for our overall perception of it.

Again there is linguistic proof to be found in our manner of describing visual things: they look big/small, sharp/soft (physical level).

They look: sad/scary,aggressive/happy (emotional level)

That we often describe for instance paintwork, photography or other non-tactile imagery in this same manner proves for me that this physical layer is by far the most important and most genuine and objective way of perception. The emotional perception comes a close second and the cognitive comes third.

In the description of this flat imagery, words like soft/sharp, round/thick, grainy/smooth are often applied even though there is no tactile reason to use them in their original context.

Good work (for me) should touch on all three levels but especially on the physical!

In my search for engagement with graphic design I stumbled upon some difficulties mostly because of the lack of aggravation on this level.

Which I don't think is strange; text is a dominant factor in the realm of graphic design. And letters and words can only be perceived by our cognitive sense. They do not have a physical, three-dimensional space or an intrinsic value of their own. They are lifeless symbols we have given meaning to. But it is the meaning we read through the letter, the letter as a visual element can easily become a deceased thing. Image on the other hand has a more direct impact on our body's and brains because we don't have to translate them first from symbol to meaning. And that is why I can relate better to photography than with pure text design.

There have been attempts in trying to make a physical connection through graphic means, and giving two-dimensional characters and images a three-dimensional space.

Examples are for instance the wall in the graphic design museum in Breda made by Lust design. And a golden oldie: William Klein's experimental James bond trailer in which text is being projected on moving Bodies.

I must admit that these things are interesting, beautiful even, but not completely successful in their attempt. They still don't touch upon the magical threesome of body-mind-emotions which we consist of. However, the photo below proves that I have tried my best, but when it comes to this lust wall all can say is: "It is nice to play with, but it doesn't make me hot"

