

Practical Application and Benefits of Immersive Curation: The Uniqueness of Van Gogh Exhibition

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ABSTRACT

The development of immersive exhibitions has created more technical applications and utility of the immersive experiences. With a close look at the Van Gogh exhibition, this study discusses what kind of technology used in immersive curation is ideal or positive in the sense of art and social evaluation. With three specific exhibitions taken as examples, it is argued that though the art representation and technological collaboration works in different formulas and mechanisms, it is promising that immersive curation is exploring the future for art museums.

Keywords: *immersive exhibition, Flow theory, Immersive experience*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the progress of the social economy and technology, people are eager to see different forms of exhibition and exhibition. Therefore, traditional exhibitions alone can no longer meet the needs of the audience, and the form of exhibitions needs to be innovated [1]. After that, some people merged the two concepts of flow theory and immersive experience in psychology to create the current popular immersive exhibition.

The 'Flow theory' was first proposed by Csikszentmihalyi in 1975. He explained why people were fully engaged in certain daily activities, focusing on situations, filtering out all irrelevant perceptions, and entering a state of immersion [2]. The concept of 'Immersive experience' was proposed later than the 'Flow theory'. It was proposed by Zwaan in 2003, and then some scholars conducted cross-research on this concept and design field, namely, 'Immersive exhibition' [3]. Immersion exhibitions bring 'Flow theory' and 'Immersion experience' into art exhibitions and present a novel form of expression by integrating elements such as new media technology, sensory experience, and interactive technology, to bring an unusual audience experience to the audience. Intuitively speaking, the 'Immersion' art exhibition interacts with the audience through the re-creation of works of art and artistic space

with unique and novel technological means and senses. In this process, the audience is not only the appreciation of art, they are also the participants and creators of works of art, which greatly changes the relationship between traditional exhibition works of art and the audience.

In recent years, immersion art exhibitions are popular, so why immersion art exhibitions are so popular now, I analyzed several reasons. First of all, immersion exhibition is different from traditional exhibitions. It has rich exhibition elements, strong interaction, and high entertainment properties. At the same time, immersive exhibitions use people's sensory and cognitive experiences to create an atmosphere for participants to enjoy a certain state and provide participants with a completely immersive experience. The immersive exhibition uses holographic projection, projection, backlit, etc. to give the audience a sense of presence. Some immersive exhibitions use sound, light, electricity, smell, and other elements to bring sensory shock to the audience [4]. This will give users a sense of being in the virtual world, allowing viewers to enjoy the exhibition more. Secondly immersive exhibition on the audience's artistic accomplishment is not high, and it is a form of appreciation that can be accepted by the public. If the traditional works of art require the audience to have a profound history of art, as well as rich design ideas and advanced aesthetic needs, then watching immersion exhibitions will not require the audience so much. The

curator drew the distance between the audience and the painter in the form of immersion exhibition so that the traditional works of art were no longer cold and obscure. Finally, from the perspective of curators, planning more immersive exhibitions can make more non-art lovers like to see the exhibition and cultivate their habit of seeing the exhibition. When the audience is used to watching immersive exhibitions, they will go to the exhibition again. In the long run, the artistic accomplishment of the audience will gradually increase, and then they may go to see some traditional exhibitions. Because the audience has accumulated a lot of artistic knowledge and improved aesthetics, they will pursue the needs of the next stage, such as traditional exhibitions.

2. TECHNOLOGIES OF IMMERSIVE EXHIBITION

2.1. Background and classifications of immersive exhibition

Immersive art is a form of art along with the progress of science and technology arises at the historic moment, its core is "immersion", refers to the artist in a specific space, use space, visual effects, sound effects, and even restore art scene in the form of original works of art itself to build a scenario is different from the reality for the audience, In this way, the audience can interact with the works while obtaining sensory experience and carry out the process of re-creation.

Different technologies and performance orientation of immersive curation have always been the top priority of exhibition curation. Generally, the technologies applied in immersive curation can be divided into three types: spatial picture restoration, a combination of space and vision, and a combination of space and sound.

2.2. Spatial picture restoration: Turn painting into Reality

It is difficult to point out that there are too many new technologies reflected in this kind of immersive curation, but the new feelings brought to the audience by physical immersion are often the most prominent. The exhibition hall will be rearranged to restore artworks so that people can walk into the art space and break the traditional barrier between the public and artists. The audience will be able to bring the atmosphere and even the feelings of artists at that time. The traditional painting focuses more on creating impressions and surface memories than on experience and assimilation. However, the physical scene exhibition can present a certain reality, even if it only stands on a major structure that is not completely restored, it can also allow people to have a real connection with the work of art.

The conflict between virtual, planar painting and spatial, the realistic arrangement is also a key element of

immersive curation in spatial picture reduction. The audience can do it in the form of the entity rather than a heart into works of art, interactive with the items in the work, in a whole new way to feel the experience of art, all these help the audience read more about art, in some sense the elimination of the general public and artists was the art of line exists or cultural barriers. The audience is placed in the entity, but the entity comes from the plane. The indistinguishable reality from the virtual makes the audience have new thinking about the artwork.

The immersive curation of space picture restoration can be said to be the most direct interpretation of the word "immersion". Let the audience place themselves in the restored physical space, and feel the atmosphere at that time with themselves, to achieve the effect of immersion. The original concept of letting the audience experience rather than just show the different directions that the curation presents realizes the re-creation of life scenes based on works of art. The popularity of this kind of immersive curation in today's era is more due to the feature that it can make people who do not know art experience the pleasure of art and have more interpretation of artworks.

2.3. Combination of space and vision: the art of amplification, flow, and scattering

Different from spatial picture restoration, this kind of immersive curatorial method involves more technical participation in a real sense. The use of segmented, overlapping Spaces instead of packed Spaces is a true integration of curation and art. Walls are used for shielding, partitions are used in a large space, and the space where the artwork is located and even the artwork is collaged and recreated to create another dimension of space, making the audience have a completely different feeling from the traditional curation in terms of consciousness and vision.

At the same time, the curator may intentionally draw apart the scale of humans, painting, and space in some designs. In traditional art viewing, curators mostly hang art on the wall at a height that makes it most comfortable for the public to see it level up. However, the deliberate design adopted in immersive curation will make the audience have to look up, overlook or even place themselves in the perspective of viewing and experiencing. For example, to highlight the greatness of artists or people's yearning for works of art, curators will use the perspective of looking up to show people's respect and yearning for things.

In the spatial and visual type of immersive curation, the techniques derived from teamwork are the most important. Whether the installation itself creates the entire space or the integration of various interdisciplinary technologies such as programming and interaction design through induction technology, the curatorial space is

inseparable from a great deal of calculation and analytical design. Instead of presenting the whole painting in a unified way, the curators will try to increase the background and gap reasonably through the combination of precision calculation projection equipment, to make the exhibition itself more breathable. Part of the dark wall or ceiling is used as the background, while the projector placed in a specific position is projected on different positions so that the whole work of art in addition to the unity of the whole more interspersed effect.

In this form of immersive curation, the curators themselves are among the authors. Because the curators themselves have realized the rebirth of works. The painting is not only arranged 1:1 according to the original painting. The curator needs to divide the picture into parts according to the imagined needs, with different angles, and even needs to collage the original basis for projection. Immersive curation finally presents a flowing effect rather than a static one, which turns the original video content into video. As for the production of animation, the choices made by the curators themselves also seem to be full of weight. What kind of flow effect is good? So which part of it is going to be projected where? How can we give the viewer scope for total immersion? Where do you put the projector, on the roof, on the floor, in the corner? These are all questions for the curator to consider.

2.4. Combination of space and Sound: the beauty of music serving the theme

The use of music in immersive curation completely makes the work dynamic and changing. Use different kinds of audio and even earphones for output, so that the overall music atmosphere is more rich and varied. Whether to use point-and-click sound or surround play, whether to use a player with heavy bass or a loud treble, a series of questions about player selection will be answered in the final curation effect. Controlling the direction of the sound, the source, the specific texture, are all techniques involved in this kind of immersive curatorial approach.

How curators make different music according to different themes, different production methods, different instruments, and sound playback methods, and how to combine with perfect vision are all related to whether the audience can feel the intensity of "immersion" in immersive curation. Sound should serve the theme of the work, stimulate the audience, give the audience an emotional atmosphere, can walk into the world of artworks. Therefore, in the immersive curation with sound, the composer is also very important.

Different from vision, the addition of sound allows the audience to experience not only the immediate dynamic but also the combination and movement of all senses. The difference in sound intensity and frequency makes for a completely different experience for the

audience. The resonance brought by the sound "deep into the chest" is different from the dynamic that floats on the surface visually. The combination of sound and drum rhythm played in the exhibition hall all the time enforces the dynamic in the exhibition.

The rich effect brought by the combination of sound and space is easier to surprise the audience. The subtlety of this is the subtle difference in the sound that the viewer hears at different points in the room. The viewer may experience a less penetrating sound when approaching a partition wall, or be struck by a sudden momentum sound when entering the hall from a path. The combination of real sound and space can make viewers get different and rich feelings when stepping into different types of space.

3. THE COMBINATION OF EXPERIENCES

3.1. Live Experience: "Van Gogh's Bedrooms at the Art Institute of Chicago"

The first example of such an immersive experience is the exhibition "Van Gogh's Bedroom" hosted by the Art Institute of Chicago in 2016 [5]. This exhibition is an innovative and pioneering attempt to bring Van Gogh's famous "bedroom" series back to life. Located in Chicago's s River North neighborhood, the duplicated bedroom belongs to a larger apartment and therefore features modern technological equipment, such as cable TV and Wi-Fi. It is even listed on Airbnb with Vincent being the host [5].

Between 1888 and 1889, Vincent van Gogh painted three versions of his bedroom with a similar angle, style, and color scheme. The first one was painted upon his arrival at the "Yellow House" in Arles in 1888. One year later, in 1889, he painted the second version during his stay at an asylum. This is also the version that has been admired most around the world. The third painting was intended as a gift for Van Gogh's mother and sister. The three versions of his bedroom are now housed respectively in the Art Institute of Chicago, Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, and la Musée d' Orsay in Paris [6].

The "Van Gogh's Bedroom" exhibition, therefore, is a collective effort by multiple artists to study the "making and meaning to Van Gogh in his relentless quest for home" [6]. The exhibited room not only accurately restored the setting and furniture but also follows Vincent van Gogh's distinct post-modern impressionist style. The choice of colors and even the paintwork on the wall was carefully executed to reflect Van Gogh's style. The goal is to create a "living-in-the-painting" experience for the viewers who wish to get closer to the world's greatest artist.

But the bedroom was not the only artwork on display. Along with the bedroom were 36 other artifacts, including paintings, drawings, and letters, which

collectively captured Van Gogh's professional path and his inner world. There were also digitally enhanced exhibits that help viewers explore the mental state of Van Gogh. At the center of these exhibits was “the motif of home-like haven, creative chamber, and physical real-like” [6]. In Van Gogh's paintings, such a motif is represented in various ways as cottages, birds’ nests, and of course the bedroom. Following Van Gogh's journey in the 19th century, the viewers were able to experience first-handly using all sensory Van Gogh's desperate longing for a tranquil piece of land and mind. More importantly, the spatial and material arrangement of the exhibition reconstructs another reality for the viewers, one that has been perceived and recorded by Van Gogh himself.

3.2. Visual Experience: “Immersive Van Gogh exhibit thrives in Chicago”

The second example is the “Immersive Van Gogh” exhibit that has enjoyed wide popularity in 20 cities in the United States [7]. Unlike the traditional art exhibition where viewers stand in front of and admire a piece of static artwork, the “Immersive Van Gogh” exhibit brings us into a world of flowing colors, shapes, lights, and shades. All of these are made possible by over 500,000 cubic feet of projections animating Van Gogh's work. When stepping into the exhibit room, you will find yourself being surrounded by giant LED screens that form the walls, floor, and ceiling. You are immediately engulfed by an overwhelming influx of the famous scenes—the starry night, the coffee house, the sunflowers, as well as Van Gogh's iconic use of bright colors and bold brush strokes. As the writer, Steve Johnson from Chicago Tribune brilliantly describes: “Here, the entirety of the pulse of the room with imagery, a light-and-video artist’s rendering of Van Gogh’s thick paint daubs, his fuzzy distant stars, and exuberant, hopeful sunflowers, as a kind of living wallpaper” [8].

The whole exhibition bears more resemblance to a short film than a museum experience in its traditional sense. Standing in the middle of the exhibit room, the viewer absorbs the sound and light that is intended to generate a certain emotional connection with the genius yet lunatic artist Van Gogh. However, the images are by no means randomly assembled. Instead, they are carefully arranged and broken down into visual chapters that encapsulate the different phases of Van Gogh's career and life. In a sense, the changing images surrounding the viewers are symbolic of the loss of time, memory, and even sanity. The “Immersive Van Gogh” art exhibit challenges the traditional experience of visiting an art exhibition. The boundaries between “seeing”, “viewing” and “feeling” are becoming extremely blurred and fuzzy. What the viewers are seeing or experiencing is no longer the canvas from one and a half-century ago, but an iconic representation of human

accomplishment that rises far beyond the limits of picture frames. At the same time, the innovative form of exhibit lowers the threshold of admiring and understanding fine arts, thus ultimately making fine arts less intimidating. Here, you do not have to be expertise or knowledge in art schools to be impressed by the sensation of Van Gogh's masterpieces. The fact that the Immersive Van Gogh exhibit has been established in 20 cities means that people now have easier access to the artistic world.

This exhibit is a modern illustration of Van Gogh's quote: “I dream my painting and I paint my dreams”. Indeed, the exhibit offers a completely new experience that is described by Steve Johnson as “trippy” [5]. What we can be certain of is that the Immersive Van Gogh exhibit is but a beginning of an exciting journey to explore more ways of approaching art. In an interview, Corey Ross, the founder of Starvox Entertainment that sponsored the immersive exhibit, envisioned that the next project could be an “experiential room where the narrative is being told in 360 degrees around you and you're moving through physically” [9]. It is the reason you're removing that future art exhibits will rely on the orchestration of a rich repertoire of multimodal resources.

3.3. Auditory Experience: “Van Gogh Starry Night” Immersive Art Exhibition”

Titled “Starry Night”, the Van Gogh Immersive Art Exhibition was held in Paris between February 2019 and January 2020 [7]. This exhibit certainly shares the common features that have been described in 2.2, but it is also distinct in the use of background music [10]. One example of such a contemporary soundtrack is the “Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood” by Nina Simone, an American singer, songwriter, and musician. The song depicts an infatuated woman who desires to be understood. The intensive loneliness runs through the lyrics as the singer repeatedly whispered “I'm just a soul whose intentions are good; Oh Lord, please don't let me be misunderstood” [9]. Such loneliness is also the main theme is hidden behind the vivid colors of Van Gogh's painting and his vibrant composition. As the Guardian comments “The words of the song mirror a cry for understanding in his time of darkness” [11]. The soundscape of the Starry Night Exhibition was carefully curated to provide an immersive experience of the world's purest beauty. In the “Dreamed Japan, Images of the Floating World” section, visitors are greeted with not only Van Gogh's oeuvres, but also other Japanese symbols — geishas, samurai warriors, and ukiyo-e. Accompanying this dreamy scene is Debussy's second chapter of *La Mer* (The sea)—*Jeux de vague*. The symphonic orchestra was composed by Debussy between 1903 and 1905 to convey his profound love for the ocean. However, Debussy was not inspired by the natural beauty of oceans, but the seascape available in painting and literature, presumably by the dancing waves portrayed in

ukiyo-e. Similarly, Japanese art and painting had always been an important source of inspiration for Vincent van Gogh [12]. Japanese paintings, clothing, and culture are an indispensable part of Van Gogh's creation. In Van Gogh's letter to his brother in 1888, he wrote "And we wouldn't be able to study Japanese art, it seems to me, without becoming much happier and more cheerful, and it makes us return to nature despite our education and our work in a world of conventions" [13]. Over 100 years later, the two great pieces had their first reunion with the help of digital technologies. While these artworks might be composed and created under different circumstances, they have worked amazingly well to bring us a harmonious sensation that is deeply rooted in our desire to be close to the most primitive beauty of nature.

4. CONCLUSION

By analyzing the three examples of Van Gogh tour exhibitions, it is argued that with the progress of social economy and technology, it is inspiring to take traditional exhibitions into the current popular immersive exhibition, on the matter whether it is the sake of art or the experiences of audiences in at stake. The application of modern technology brings more sensory channels and enrichment of those hidden significances of historic or art's nuances. Its success in America proves that reality can regain its popularization through visual technology while the Flow Theory proves that visual experiences will define the new boundary of reality in the age of perception immersion.

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