

Stimulating your Sensorium through Art

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We engage with the environment and things in our surroundings each and everyday with our senses and we don't always fully acknowledge what exactly it is we are doing or receiving through them. Often this is just because it is natural to those of us that are blessed with having the ability wheatear it be to see, smell, hear, touch or taste and possibly in a way this is sometimes taken for granted. Two particular individuals that do pay exceptional attention to the fine detail of what it is we experience through the senses is two contemporary artists. These two men create work that focuses heavily around the human senses wheatear it be in the process of creating the work or when it is out in the world for an audience to experience it or possibly even a play of both.

First, I will discuss the outstanding work of Andy Goldsworthy and how he himself connects his own senses to the natural materials such as stones, leaves and sticks that he sources to construct his own unique art in the natural environment. Snow and Ice are two captivating materials that Goldsworthy has used to create fascinating sculptures, through watching Andy make an (untitled) ice sculpture I aim to understand his encounters with the material. *Midsummer Snowballs* is the second work of Andy's that I will analyse to take in to account the interaction of the public with his work.

Secondly, I will examine Ernesto Neto's process of working and how he produces work in organic forms with a variety of interesting yet distant materials to try and couple them to the senses of his audience as they observe and interact with his art works. *Egg Bed Crystal Shell* is a prime example of how one of Neto's works can aid several senses at once and this is why I will analyse it. *Humanoids* is another impressive work of Ernesto's that I will discuss in relation to people's interactions with art and their senses and how this can contribute to the impact of the art work.

I will examine and discuss the similarities and differences between the two artists through their process of working, the outcomes of the art work they make and how the engagement with the senses contribute to the overall impact of the art work they make.

“I always like to touch, you never shake someone’s hand with a glove on.” (Goldsworthy, Rivers and Tides, (2002). A quote from Andy Goldsworthy that gives us a clear insight to his view of having a connection with things, the materials the physical aspect of directly touching the material can help him get to understand it. Andy Goldsworthy is an established sculptor and photographer who produces environmental art in specific sites that relate to him. Andy grew up in West Yorkshire and studied Fine Art at Bradford School of Art he also went on to study at Preston Polytechnic in Preston, Lancashire. Goldsworthy has a unique way of working. To begin he will go to a location and then scan for materials that he can use like stones, sticks or leaves. Using the materials sourced he will construct a sculpture from them without any initial concept. “Although the physical survival of his sculptures is rarely ensured” (Artnet (2018) Goldsworthy extensively uses photography as a method of documenting his process of work and the final sculpture. The fact that his sculptures might not survive the elements does not concern Goldsworthy as his outlook is that “each work grows, stays, decays” (Ninemsn Pty Ltd, (2007). This outlook and process was developed over several years from when as a teenager Andy worked on a farm, it was here that Andy learnt about “how people who work on the land regard and relate to it.” (Friedman and Goldsworthy, 1990, p11.) To when he attended Preston it was here that he got to create work with time, it being portrayed through the tide on the seaside resort of Morecambe (1990, p12) using many stones that he found along the bay he placed them along the shore in a line and then they disappeared with time as the tide came in and the sea and sand claimed them.

“I have to work with my bare hands because my gloves stick and I don’t have the sensitivity” (Goldsworthy, Rivers and Tides, (2002) is what Goldsworthy said while he was working on a masterpiece made from ice (Fig.1) while making a film/documentary with director Thomas Riedelsheimer. Ice is just one of the many interesting materials that Andy uses in his art. Most of us know what it is like to just feel ice and want to let go off it never mind having to purposely source icicles, handle them with fingerless gloves and use your teeth to pare them in to shape for hours at a time. All which is natural for Andy when he is working on this piece that is incredibly aesthetically

pleasing. Touch is the main sense Goldsworthy is using in constructing this sculpture although to know if he has any feeling left in his fingertips from the bitter cold is another question. How Goldsworthy has come to grips with the freezing cold temperatures is a measure of how important making his sculptures is to him. "Goldsworthy is only able to create these delicate and precise sculptures by embracing the cold." (Scopic impulse, (2017)). By overcoming this and having the required tactile connection with the ice is effectively what contributes to the making of the work and the meaningfulness it has to Andy.



Fig1: Untitled, Still from Rivers and Tides (2002)

The photographs are what plays a vital role in Goldsworthy's work for us the viewers. It is the artery that pumps what he has sculpted in to our vision. For the spectators it is the work, the visual satisfaction that is received when the image is displayed in front of us, that is it. The full extent of the work cannot be translated thoroughly through a flat image as they "are not the purpose but the result of my art. As Yves Klein said.... 'They are the left-overs from the creative process, the ashes.'" (Friedman and Goldsworthy, 1990, p9.) It is Goldsworthy and only Goldsworthy who experiences the full extent of his work because he himself is the only one intertwined with the creative process, the touch.

Snow is something that many people enjoy seeing, often children especially, around Christmas but in the middle of summer? It is not something that we are used to seeing. For Goldsworthy it is something that he accomplished. He made snow appear in the middle of summer in several public locations. Goldsworthy gave instructions on how thirteen large snowballs were to be unloaded and placed on to the streets of London the work was to be titled *Midsummer Snowballs (2000)* (Fig2). This was a task undertaken on the 21st of June 2000 at midnight. It was from then until they had melted that the process was documented by photographers. They managed to not only capture the melting process but the passing public's interactions with them and their reactions to what was being uncovered. As they dissolved, they released debris ranging from wool, pebbles, cow hair, crow feathers, chalk, rusted metal and many other materials that had been captured inside the balls of snow when they were made in the Scottish Highlands in the previous winters by Goldsworthy himself. (Calder, J. 2001). The curious and fun part of this work is the interactions of the people. As established in the early part of the text Goldsworthy is often the only individual that comes into physical contact with his sculptures but not for this body of work. This was a special work that combined many passing members of the public, the snowballs had children taking bits of it, some who may never have seen snow like it, a man prodding one with an umbrella and even a dog helping itself to one of the Beech branches. What really made this work come to life was that it was located in the urban setting and it stimulated the senses of the passing public. They could see these courageous balls of white snow melting that released an alien substance on to the urban streets of London. The coldness of the snow and the textured surface of the materials were there to be felt and investigated not just to be viewed from a flat image as many works before.

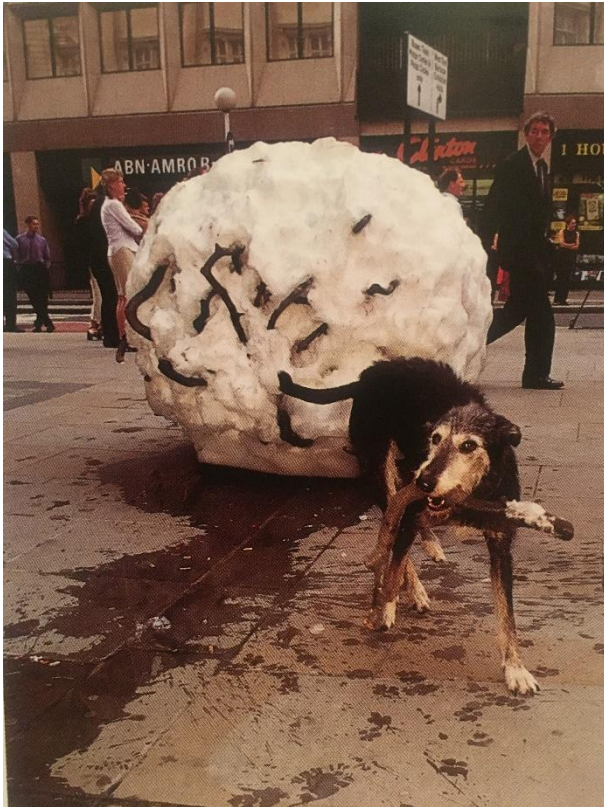


Fig2: BEECH, Early afternoon, 21 June 2000

Image source: Collins and Goldsworthy (2001)

On the other hand, we have work made by artist Ernesto Saboia de Albuquerque Neto or better known as Ernesto Neto. A native of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Neto attended the Escola de Artes Visuais Pargua Lage and has developed a long and successful career as a contemporary sculptor and visual artist creating many site-specific installations. Neto creates art that often fills an exhibition space that “appeals to all the senses” (Neto, (2000) p3). Neto constructs his sculptures in ways that lead the eyes of the audience over the organic style forms while the variety of spices emit odours filling the space to treat the nose as the works are touched and used by the occupants of the space. (2000, p3). All of which makes the work. Connecting it, the space and the viewer to their senses.

Egg, Bed, Crystal Shell (2014) (Fig3) is a prime example of one of Netos installations that breaks the boundaries of how art is often perceived, that it is to be viewed and not touched. This interactive piece is constructed out of Plywood, fabric, polyurethane foam, semiprecious stones and pulleys. Self-explanatory for the occupants, the foam bed shaped as a human figure gives them a place to rest while they lie under the fabric shell. Dangling from above are fabric sacks filled with natural spices such as turmeric and cumin that often feature in Ernesto’s work. The “use of natural

scents to create olfactory environments intended to transport the audience into a different world”. (Shiner and Kriskovets, (2007). These scents are accompanied by the multiple colours of the materials that also contribute to luring the people in, helping them to relax and be present as the artist wants them to be, “experiencing his pieces makes us notice our own body and how it responds to different spaces” (Culture trip, 2016).



Fig:3 Egg Bed Crystal Shell, 2014 (Designboom (2019)

“A humanoid (/ˈhjuːmənɔɪd/; from English human and -oid "resembling") is something that has an appearance resembling a human without actually being one.” (Wikipedia 2019). This is exactly what Ernesto Neto has constructed out of Lycra tulle and Styrofoam balls called *Humanoids* (2001) (Fig4). They have taken on the aspects of biomorphic forms just like many of Neto's sculptures. The sculptures are effectively wearables but when they are put on it is “not so much wearable sculpture as art that wears you” (Gayford, M. (2010). This can be perceived in Fig4 as we observe the sculptures as they appear to be some sort of human eating machines; although Neto has done a better job at creating Humanoids than the ones in the 1980 film *Humanoids from the Deep*.

There is more to this work than that of just people putting the Humanoids on and sitting down. When they put them on, they become part of the sculpture they become an object. For Neto it is important that the visitors to the exhibition do this and interact with the Humanoids because it is what brings the work to life. It is a performance piece in its own right, for the occupants to sit there and be part of the sculpture to feel the materials surrounding them and make them aware of their surroundings and occupancy with in the space. (Swain, L.E. (2015).



Fig:4 Ernesto Neto, 'Humanoids' (2001) (Swain, L.E. (2015).

The art works of the artists and the senses that contribute to these art works feed each other and it all begins with the process of working.

The ways in which Andy Goldsworthy and Ernesto Neto work are incredibly different. Andy is constantly out in the natural environment working with the natural materials found within the chosen location without a direct plan. He is constantly wanting to touch and get to grips with the physical aspects of the materials, "learning and understanding through touch and making is a simple but deeply important reason for doing my work" (Friedman and Goldsworthy, 1990, p1.) Ernesto on

the other hand plays it slightly safer as he works indoors with the place “full of his assistants (mainly women) sewing.” (Gayford, M. (2010). Although this is not to say that Ernesto does not get hands on with his materials it is just that Goldsworthy is more personal when constructing his sculptures getting hands on for him is the direct purpose of his work. They do share similar aims in creating their work as both artists use natural materials, Goldsworthy; stones, sticks, leaves etc. and Neto; sand, spices and shells. One of their reasons for this is that both have the same outlook that we are nature.

Andy Goldsworthy: “We often forget that we are nature. Nature is not something separate from us.” (Sacred Ecology (2017)

Ernesto Neto: “Nature is not in the third person. We are nature.” (Simek, P. (2012).

The installations and sculptures that Neto makes is generally for the audience as they are given the opportunity to engage with the sculptures in many ways. This is quite the opposite to Goldsworthy who is somewhat selfish and who wants all the interaction for himself. Andy is not selfish, he is just more focused on the “physical involvement with the earth” (Friedman and Goldsworthy, 1990, p1.) and understanding the materials he is working with himself, rather than what the final work will be and who will get to see it or experience it. While Neto has made “art that asks the viewer to slow-down” (Culture trip, 2016) and to just be present and respond to their surroundings and the art work that is often made for the specific site. Goldsworthy’s personal connection with his own senses through making and constantly needing a physical touch with the materials is exactly what contributes to the overall impact of the art works he makes and without that they may not be as exciting. Neto personally creates his works so that it can be interacted with by an audience and in doing so it can stimulate all their senses “this art work appeals to all the senses”. (Neto, (2000) p3).

To be present in a busy world where we may not appreciate everything, we can achieve through our senses it is to an extent a shame but having been looking at the work of the two artists, Goldsworthy who is a prime example of how we can be inquisitive around materials in our surroundings and to get to grips with what they feel like and what they can do or offer us. Neto

displays how all the senses can be stimulated from one or several points together through a variety of materials. The work of the two artists does get you to consider the aspects of them all a little better and how art can stimulate our sensorium.

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