

Editorial: Environment, Art, and Museum: The Aesthetic Experience in Different Contexts

Stefano Mastandrea¹, Pablo P. L. Tinio², Jeffrey K. Smith³

¹ Department of Education, Laboratory of Experimental Psychology, Roma Tre University,
Rome, Italy

² Department of Educational Foundations, Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey
Montclair State University

³ College of Education, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

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Correspondence to: Stefano Mastandrea

Department of Education, University Roma Tre

Via del Castro Pretorio, 20

00185 Rome

Italy

Email: stefano.mastandrea@uniroma3.it

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27 The aesthetic experience may be defined as people's interactions with, and reactions to, objects,
28 places, but also to the environment. Most psychological perspectives on the aesthetic experience
29 argue that it results from the coordination of different mental processes such as perception,
30 attention, memory, imagination, thought, and emotion. Physiological and neurological responses are
31 also involved. Aesthetic experiences can take place while we observe works of art in museums and
32 galleries as well as in other contexts such as natural and built environments. Looking at a landscape,
33 walking in a park, meeting people in a square, and walking into a building that is architecturally
34 appealing are examples of natural and built environments where we can experience beauty,
35 pleasure, attraction, and interest, among other aesthetic reactions.

36 Research on aesthetic experiences has a long history, and in recent decades, the field has
37 experienced tremendous growth in the number of empirical studies conducted. One of the areas that
38 researchers have yet to fully address is the influence of the context (natural and built environments)
39 on aesthetic experiences. We refer to context according to three broad categories: *Context as*
40 *natural environments*, *context as built environments*, and *environments for aesthetic experiences*.

41 *Context as natural environments*: People show a basic tendency to associate the natural
42 environment with positive evaluations. According to an evolutionary explanation known as the
43 *biophilia hypothesis* (Kellert & Wilson, 1993), human beings, who have evolved in natural
44 environments, have developed an innate tendency to positively respond to nature as a consequence
45 of an adaptation process.

46 *Context as built environments*: Urban environments, architecture, and buildings that have been
47 systematically designed for both function and aesthetics can affect people's behaviours and social
48 relationships (Mastandrea et al., 2009).

49 *Environments for aesthetic experiences*: Museums can be considered as built environments, and
50 some museums have even been designed so that they themselves could be seen as works of art, as
51 aesthetic objects to be appreciated. These include specific elements of museums, from the halls to
52 the artworks, from the arrangement of art in an exhibition, to the paths that visitors follow and the
53 way that objects are displayed. These design elements can also influence visitors' enjoyment of the
54 art collection (Mastandrea et al., 2019; Tinio & Smith, 2014).

55 We have received interesting contributions from scholars with different backgrounds, leading to
56 a rich tapestry of offerings. We can synthesize the different topics into three broad categories:

57 *Aesthetic experience in museums and art exhibitions; Art appreciation in ecological settings and*
58 *different art context; Environment and landscapes.*

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60 *Aesthetic experience in museums and art exhibitions*

61 Regarding this topic, Myszkowski and Zenasni, in “Using Visual Aesthetic Sensitivity Measures
62 in Museum Studies,” provide a history and an overview of visual aesthetic sensitivity as well as
63 how it is measured and what it can tell us about individual differences in experiences and
64 judgements of art. Importantly, the authors makes a convincing argument of why visual aesthetic
65 sensitivity measures should be implemented in research in museums.

66 Krukar and Dalton in “How the Visitors’ Cognitive Engagement is Driven (but not Dictated) by
67 the Visibility and Co-Visibility of Art Exhibits,” asked participants to wear mobile eye-tracking
68 while visiting an art exhibition with different spatial locations of the artworks. The exhibition’s
69 visual properties influenced the experience of museum visitors. More visible locations attracted
70 more attention and the amount of attention improved the recognition and memory of pictures.

71 Annechini et al., in “Aesthetic attributes of museum environmental experience: a pilot study with
72 children as visitors,” highlighted the importance of the restorative aspect of a museum environment
73 for children. They appraised the impact of museum environment on children during museum
74 learning and experiential activities. In a case study authors tried to understand and evaluate the
75 museum impact on learning and experiential activities in children in the museum of contemporary
76 art, MART, in Rovereto, Italy. Findings show that for most children, the MART museum (and for
77 extension museums in general) provide a sense of relaxation and well-being during the museum
78 visit and the aesthetic experienced.

79 Bertamini and Blakemore, in “Seeing a work of art indirectly: When a reproduction is better than
80 an indirect view, and a mirror better than a live monitor,” used a survey and a set of hypothetical
81 questions to explore three different alternatives of museum or exhibition: seeing an optical
82 reflection (using a mirror), seeing a video screening (a closed-circuit camera) or seeing a
83 reproduction. There was an overall preference for seeing a reproduction as opposed to an optical or
84 digital image. Contrary to the idea that the original is always superior to a copy, many people felt
85 that a direct view of a copy is a preferable experience than an indirect view.

86 Pelowski et al. in “Does Gallery Lighting Really have an Impact on Appreciation of Art? An
87 ecologically-valid study of lighting changes and the assessment and emotional experience with
88 representational and abstract paintings,” presented a selection of realistic and abstract original
89 artworks under three different lighting intensity/temperature conditions. Findings show that for both

90 realistic and abstract paintings, the light changes in the gallery settings did not show significant
91 effect on the evaluation and emotional experience within the artworks.

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93 *Art appreciation in ecological settings and different art context*

94 Regarding the second topic we have three interesting articles. In “Communication and Meaning-
95 Making are Central to Understanding Aesthetic Response in Any Context,” Dolese and Kozbelt
96 advocate for the use of a framework developed by Grice in helping us understand how to
97 communicate via art, whether that communication is from artist to viewer, curator to visitor, or
98 viewer to oneself. They discuss issues of what art means to individuals, and how they go about
99 determining what that meaning is.

100 Estrada-Gonzalez, East, Garbutt and Spehar take a fascinating look at how we look at original
101 artworks versus computer reproductions of art in “Viewing Art in Different Contexts.” They
102 employ eye movement cameras to record fixations of works of art in a museum setting versus
103 computer reproductions that either used the same size image for all works, or a roughly proportional
104 representation of the works. Their findings are complex, but generally indicate that the physical
105 characteristics of the painting along with whether the image was in a gallery or on computer made a
106 difference in viewing.

107 Carbon in “Ecological Art Experience: How we can gain experimental control while preserving
108 ecologically valid settings and context,” compared art experience in different art settings while
109 participants observed paintings by Pollock and Rothko at different viewing distances. Liking of
110 painting were correlated with farther distances, but insights of the artworks were not correlated to
111 liking. Moreover, among the evaluative variables used by participants, interestingness and
112 powerfulness, were considered as predictor of how much people like paintings.

113

114 *Landscapes and Environment*

115 In this third topic, Law et al. in “Viewing natural landscapes is more stimulating than scrambled
116 images after a stressor: a cross-disciplinary approach,” show that viewing landscape paintings
117 increased psycho-physiological responses (cortisol level, pupil size, compared to viewing scrambled
118 images obtained from the correspondent landscape artworks. While viewing landscapes the average
119 pupil size was bigger compared to scrambled pictures, and it is known that increased pupil size is
120 related to augmented cognitive engagement, attention and arousal.

121 Synnevaag et al. in “Feeling at Home in the Wilderness: Environmental Conditions, Well-Being
122 and Aesthetic Experience,” conducted an original experience. Participants (47) undertook a 5-day,
123 winter, wilderness adventure training with the aim to challenge wilderness and leadership skills

124 under two different extreme weather conditions. Findings show that there was a correlation between
125 the evaluation of the sentence “I felt at home in nature” and satisfaction with life and personal
126 growth trait measures, mainly during sunny and cold weather conditions, and on the contrary not
127 significant in stormy and wet weather in a mountain forest. The finding related to feelings and
128 wellbeing are explained in term of relationship to self-awareness.

129 The researches presented addressed several and different contexts: laboratory, museum, natural
130 environment. These different approaches and settings can allow us to get more insight on the
131 aesthetic experience while observing original arts, digital reproductions, nature and landscapes.

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