The New Light: A Site Specific Light Mapping Intervention

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ABSTRACT

This article describes The New Light, a site-specific light mapping intervention in the altar of the Museu Paroquial in Óbidos, Portugal – a church converted into a sacred art museum. The work suggests a reflection on our religious heritage and raises the question on churches as the true satisfying place to our spiritual needs. What are we missing? Is spirituality not important anymore? Can we be fulfilled as human beings if we are not conscious of a spiritual dimension? The New Light talks about the light in its spiritual dimension and this paper introduces the context of the work, discusses its motivation, describes the creative process from conceptualization to materialization and details the technical process for its construction. The article ends with a conclusion on both the creative process and the audience experience with written materials from the artist statement.

Keywords: Digital Art, Light Installation, Religious, Sacred Art, Site-Specific, Spiritual, Video Mapping

1. INTRODUCTION

This work emerged in the context of the 1st DMAD - Digital Media Art Doctoral Retreat1 - in Óbidos, Portugal, during July 2013 and was presented in a public group exhibition. I was given a village tour to acknowledge the different locations and possible interventions places to develop an artwork and I got inspired by the altar of the Museu Paroquial - a church transformed into a sacred art museum2 located in the entrance of the village - as the place for my intervention.

I felt engaged by this location as I saw an opportunity to problematize with
the theme of the religious, in particular regarding the question if our religious heritage fulfills our spiritual needs. Is it functional nowadays? Or has spirituality become less important issue? Where is the place of spirituality in our contemporary society? And why it’s not so often discussed in the public sphere, like the economics or politics?

2. CREATIVE PROCESS: FROM FEELINGS TO FACTS

Freud argued that a cogent thought process, to say nothing of conscious intellectual work, could not exist amidst the unruliness of visual experience. Over the last half century in a sequence of landmark books, Rudolf Arnheim has not only shown us how wrong that is, he has parsed the grammar of form with uncanny acuity and taught us how to read it. (Jonathan Fineberg, author of Art Since 1940)

One of the structural differences between Art and Design resides on its intention: the aesthetics of Design is functionally motivated and good design solves a problem, Art doesn’t exist to be functional and instead of giving an answer, good Art opens the possibility for multiple interpretations. This thought was critical to report on the intention of this artwork. It was led by an inspirational moment and the nature and process of feeling inspired is something hard to clarify due to its subjectivity. In the case of this work was a feeling of engagement with the altar of that church, in particular, with the sacred art figures presence and composition that seemed somehow unnatural in that environment (See Figure 1).

I can describe the meaning of this particular ‘inspiration’ as an emotional desire sustained by a creative visualization as a process of imagination that conducted to an artistic vision. It’s a visual thought that is willing to speak by its own means to express a certain dimension- I define it as the nature of my personal visual thinking (Arnheim, 1969). Accepting or rejecting such ‘inspiration’ depends on the quality and value one attributes to the artistic vision. This relates to the initial evaluation at the beginning of the creative process. To evaluate such decision, one needs to organize and formalize the initial concept in a simple way and to imagine how it can be produced and constructed (See Figure 2). The pictures shown in Figures 1-3 resume the stages of the creative design process (Marcos et al., 2009).

To evaluate if my artistic vision (as a form of an abstract visual idea) could be translated to the physical world as the form of a light mapping installation, I used the mechanism of drawing simple sketches and produce a digital Concept Art\(^3\) that could simulate the artistic vision (See Figure 2). This was the preliminary stage of the work that I define as the ‘gestational moment’ - when one is introduced to the creative act. In this ‘gestational moment’ it is not possible to know if the work will resolve as a successful piece, this is, a piece that is conceptually strong and formalized in a way that it speaks clearly about its concept – independently of the feelings it might evoke.
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