



Artistry in Design-Visual Connection: an Interdisciplinary Student Exhibition

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Purpose/Objectives. A collaborative exhibition was proposed between two disciplines, Fashion Design and Interior Design at Meredith College, that demonstrates the visual connection between visual works of art and the students' interpretations of art and its influence on design. The objectives of the exhibition was 1) to expose students to a collaborative work process, 2) to demonstrate how to effectively execute a cross-disciplinary exhibition supported by the Meredith College art gallery, and 3) to gain greater visibility for fashion design and interior design programs within the college and surrounding community.

Implementation. Fashion design and interior design students faced challenges due to the differences in each discipline and levels of technical expertise and in the nature of the end products. Instructors collaborated prior to the fall semester to determine the directions for the project and what the end products would be. In fall 2012, FMD 426 – Tailoring and ID 444 – Interior Design IV, senior level classes, were selected to create design pieces for the Artistry in Design – Visual Connection exhibition for spring semester 2013.

Step One: Working with the Gallery Director of Meredith College, logistics for the exhibition were determined. Fashion design and interior design faculty signed the contract agreement that covered dates, location, timeline for installation, insurance, and final graphics for exhibition.

Step Two: The problem statement was presented to the classes with an overview of art and its influence on design/style. The style of a piece of art is the manifestation of an era. The style develops as a form of art that reflects the philosophy, intellectual currents, hopes and aspirations of its time. As designers, it is important to understand what a style is and how it reflects the philosophy of its time so they can appropriately use it, modify it or add to it. Inspired by a specific art piece, students were asked to create fashion garments and birdhouses. Five well-known artists and their art pieces were selected as inspiration sources; Georgia O'Keeffe, "Red Canna" (1925); Gustav Klimt, "The Kiss" (1907-1908); Pablo Picasso, "La Lecture" (1932); Marsden Hartley, "Indian Fantasy" (1914); and, Frank Stella, "Agbatana II" (1968).

The objectives for the class project were to have students apply basic design elements and principles to three-dimensional problem solving and to have students research, synthesize and interpret historical and contemporary idioms. The garment and birdhouse design criteria were developed by each fashion and interior design instructor.

Step Three: Project implementation began as the two classes (17 interior design students, working in teams of two, and 11 fashion design students) met during three sessions for orientation, research and idea collaboration. Each student selected through a random drawing one of the five pieces selected by the instructors. The student assignment was to interpret and

find inspiration in the piece of art and through lines, textures, patterns and materials using the signature elements in their finished design. Each team or individual student researched the selected piece of art and designed, created, and constructed a birdhouse with display base as an interior design student or a garment(s) as a fashion design student. The parameters of the project were presented to the fashion design and interior design students as a group to encourage working collaboratively early in the creative process.

Step Four: Expert jurors made the final selections of the pieces that would be in the exhibition. Seven out of eleven garments and six out of nine birdhouses were selected.

Step Five: Artistry in Design – Visual Connection opened in the Rotunda of the College Administration Building. Publicity and Artist’s Statements were supported by the Gallery Director who also helped with the exhibition installation. Garments were arranged on display forms with designers’ statements posted on the adjacent wall. Birdhouses were displayed on bases or hung on the wall with designers’ concept boards. The exhibition opened on January 24, 2013 and closed on April 5, 2013.

Outcome & Implications. This project was a success and well received by students. For instructors, this project provided a platform to introduce students to other disciplines. Through interactions, students were provided with the opportunity to work with a different group of students to help their communication and interpersonal skills, to be exposed to a different group critique, and at the end, showcase their work and enhance their portfolio. For the Fashion Design and Interior Design programs, this exhibition increased the visibility within the college and greater community, provided positive feedback from guests for future events, and served as a marketing tool for recruitment.

Increasingly, educators have identified the need for creating more multidisciplinary opportunities. Instructors are hesitant to undertake multidisciplinary projects because it impedes on time necessary to cover core class material and often students want to focus on their specific field of study. However an approach, such as a collaborative exhibition, worked very well in seeing the creative process as it translates and can be complementary across disciplines.



Georgia O’Keefe, “Red Canna”1925; and example of students’ birdhouse and dress