

The Design Futures Book

VIEWPOINT

#41

THE MASTERS OF
TACTILITY featuring
Formafantasma, Dimore
Studio & Yves Béhar

HYPER-REAL SENSUALITY
Digital materiality and
texture with Brendi LW

Creative expression and
exploration through
MESSY PLAY

D€89 — |€89 — F€89 — £75

The Tactility Issue

Touch in the digital age



Designing Tactility

As we rely more and more on the digital, the visual world will never relinquish its grip. Yet we continue to seek out tactile experiences not only through real-world experiences and activities, but also via the visual information we consume, and designers are responding to this. Studios such as Zeitguised, Wang & Söderström and Six N Five are pushing the boundaries of virtual tactility and redefining 'touchable'. The current fascination with the mysteries of ASMR and with slime, whose only function is to be touched, also offers new perspectives on tactility.

The explosion of interest in craft and making, and the renewed respect for the skill deployed in creating by hand, reflect a desire to retain contact with materials and makers alike. Designers also remain well aware of the importance of physical heft and sensation, from the classic clunk of a car door closing to the snap of a brass light switch.

A heightened awareness of the importance of texture, material, surprise sensations, delight in the tangible, is also evident. Some experiences will never give way to virtual, quick, convenient or cheap options. An invitation satisfyingly engraved on card (or a handwritten letter) will find its way into a memory box. Printed books continue to be treasured and are more beautifully designed than ever. Wool and linen, wood and stone will always hold their own.

Given all the evidence that tactility is such a fundamental human need, the designers who will continue to stand out are those who keep some form of human contact at the forefront of their design decisions, drawing on considered use of material, original combinations and forms – and even clever use of the virtual. The essential principle is that, of our five senses, sight is not the ultimate master – touch has just as valid a claim to supremacy.



“Messy Play,” *The Design Futures Book: Viewpoint #41*, Spring 2018.

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Messy Play

Kids aren't the only ones to benefit from messy play – adults also need to let go and have fun with the creative process. There is a renewed interest in crafts that involve the hands, such as dyeing and weaving, pottery and ceramics – Vogue has even described ceramics as the new yoga. And, as the rise of slime and ASMR shows, simply enjoying a tactile experience is an end in itself.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS SCHANCK

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DESIGNING TACTILITY



FROM SOUND TO SENSATION
ASMR

Autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) is perhaps the only digital trend that results in physical pleasure. It is a tingling sensation triggered by videos that feature certain sounds or sights and is also known as brain massage – or even brain orgasm. How ASMR works remains mysterious and not everyone responds to it, but videos created to elicit ASMR, featuring ‘ASMRtists’ using sounds such as whispering, tapping, scratching or paper-crinkling have gained millions of online followers. It’s been suggested that the effect is partly down to the feeling of intimacy created by the videos and also the illusion of being the focus of the ASMRtist’s attention. ASMR results in extreme relaxation – users claim it can combat anxiety, insomnia and post-traumatic stress disorder. IKEA used ASMR in a recent back-to-school campaign by emphasising the textures and sounds of its products.

DESIGNING TACTILITY



ALL GOO FUN
SLIME

Slime has become an unlikely internet sensation, as people use ingredients such as shaving cream, contact lens fluid, baby oil, detergent and glue to create their own unique blends, embellished with glitter, confetti and microbeads. What’s it for? No particular purpose other than squishing, kneading and generally playing. But that’s the point, says art therapist Nadia Jenefsky. Children today, she tells Hghanobity, spend more time on screens, with limited sensory input, so they crave the kind of sensation that used to be found from playing outdoors and making mud pies. ‘Slime has come in to take the place of those activities that we are less inclined to do because we don’t want to make a mess or can’t go out in nature as much’, London’s Institute of Making held a Slime public open day in March 2018, offering the ingredients and accessories that allowed people to make ‘the slime of their dreams’. While the event also explored the molecular chemistry of slime and the psychology of disgust, the real draw was the stuff itself. The Slime Olympics allowed makers to compete to create the stickiest, slipperiest or stringiest slime of the day.

Messy Play

EXPERIMENTAL

KING OF SHINE
CHRISTOPHER SCHANCK

A kaleidoscope of colour and a plethora of forms characterise furniture by Detroit-based Chris Schanck. The shiny finish on many of his pieces highlights every lump and bump, embracing imperfection, yet achieving glamour at the same time. Schanck’s labour-intensive, hands-on approach transforms materials not traditionally associated with luxury. His best-known works include his signature Alu-foil pieces – industrial and discarded materials are covered in aluminium foil, and then sealed with resin. ‘In every piece I try to fight a sense of good taste and push more obscure proportions,’ he tells *Architectural Digest*. ‘There are no straight lines, no perfect angles.’ → christopherschanck.com



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WILD CHILD
KATIE STOUT

Brooklyn-based Katie Stout’s works literally bear the mark of her hands – in particular, her lamps, many of them shaped like women, bear her fingerprints and thumbprints on every piece, lovingly imprinted as she creates them out of clay. ‘I imagined women evolving out of lumps of earth like goddess mudskippers,’ she tells *Pin-Up* magazine. The designer, who has been aptly described as a wild child, is as subversive, unconventional, confident and fun as her pieces. ‘I grew up in a household where creativity was celebrated. I had a whole zone to myself where I could make a mess and there was never a shortage of art supplies,’ she recalls. → katiestout.com



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VIEWPOINT #41

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT —
 MOTHER BY FREDERIK
 NYSTRUP LARSEN
 AND OLIVER SUNDQVIST,
 PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIMON
 HEGER KNUDSEN
 SHELFISH BY KATIE STOUT
 AT NINA JOHNSON
 CU TABLE BY
 CHRIS SCHANCK



DESIGNING TACTILITY



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT —
 UNHOMELY BY CHRIS SCHANCK

BLOOM BY CHRIS SCHANCK
 (COMME DES BARBONS AW 2018)

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