

Like Life: Architecture, Color, and the Body



The Met Breuer



Met Breuer Exhibition



Met Breuer Exhibition

The confluence of two current exhibitions in New York — *Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body* at the Met Breuer Museum and *Saturated: The Allure and Science of Color* at the Cooper-Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum — provides the impetus to explore how color can be utilized in architecture not merely as some abstract surface covering, but in a more directed way to organize and choreograph the figuration of programmatic and tectonic elements of a building, as it is sited in the already saturated colors of the urban field.

The studio will explore the engaged enactment of coloration as a means to investigate the complex social and psychological life of buildings. In other words, not color as an end in and of itself, not just static colors applied to cover architectural figures and surfaces, but color dynamically enacted to articulate the interaction of those figures and surfaces through strategic distributions and intensifications and mutings.

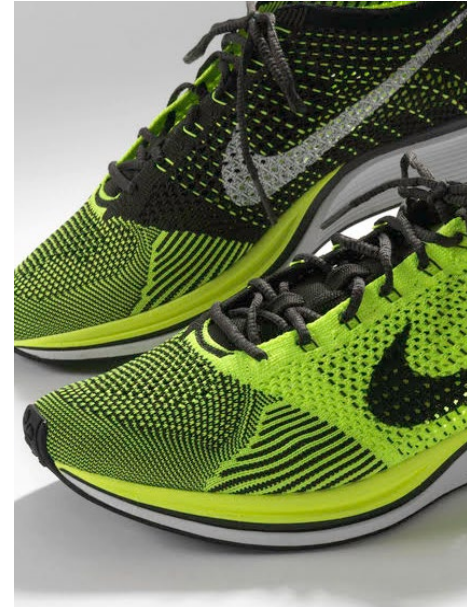
The significance for architecture of the Met Breuer exhibition is that it challenges the abstract draining of life in classical sculpture, focusing on the psychological and political uses of color in artistic practices to engage with scenes of embodied social life. The exhibition demonstrates how the portrayal of individual figures started to challenge the bleached affectlessness of classical statue, first with psychological gestures, then with the introduction of the varied colors of flesh-tones, then clothing of many cultural colors, and then with the staging of social scenes with the body now longer isolated but now in the midst of a constructed space.



Cooper Hewitt Museum



Cooper Hewitt Exhibition



Cooper Hewitt Exhibition

The exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt appears more formal in its focus but is significant in its selective engagement of color not as a static entity, but as a dynamic emergent effect through optical techniques such as after-image, florescence, iridescence, and simultaneous contrast. Both exhibitions notably show objects from across the centuries, from Antiquity to works produced last year, recognizing the trans-historical range of cultural process and production.

Experimenting with a wide range of techniques, we will investigate how dynamic forms of material and tectonic coloration can be used to intensify architecture's active staging of life — from the scale of the body to the scale of the city — through the design of a 50,000 sf / 4645 sm addition to a museum: one of the Metropolitan Museums of Art (either their main Fifth Avenue Museum, the Met Breuer, or the Cloisters), the Cooper Hewitt, the American Museum of Natural History, the Museum of the American Indian, the Museum of the City of New York, the Museum of Moving Image, the Frick Museum, the Morgan Museum — or any other museum within the five boroughs of New York City that has a dedicated permanent collection for you to engage curatorially, learning from the particular techniques of cultural color signification in whichever collection you select.

Process and Production:

Part 1 — Experimentation

In the first part of the semester you will engage in a series of visual experiments.

If you have chosen a particular museum and collection to develop your new addition, it is because there is something about the techniques of its artifacts that catches your attention. And analyzing these object techniques can reveal aspects of your own design techniques in more articulated and surprising ways. Choosing two artifacts from the color exhibitions as well as two artifacts from your selected museum collection, you will critically analyze the techniques of their figuration, how colorized form and meaning becomes manifest in objects.

Already imminent in every artifact in the collection you will select are deep informational networks that your architecture can draw forth with new spatial and temporal relations. Color, as one of those informational networks, is a cultural system, signifying meaning through its distribution across figurations and surfaces to draw attention to the social coding of culture.

Your next visual experimentation engages the interface between a gallery space and a public space in your selected museum, reimagining it in more dynamic modes. The sections from the Met Breuer *Like Life* exhibition — The Presumption of White, Likeness, Desire for Life, Proxy Figures, Layered Realities, Figuring Flesh, Between Life and Art — can provide some suggestive frameworks, as can the optical techniques from the Cooper-Hewitt Saturated exhibition.

Part 2 — Design Evolution

Your experiments will now be developing and evolving at the building and urban scale. In addition, at the scale of display architecture, the museum environment is particularly geared to evolve ways these techniques can engage interpretative information and multi-media visualization as the viewer looks through fixed and mobile screens at artifacts, paintings, sculpture, models, dioramas, or period rooms. Each of your collections pose distinct opportunities to configure and evolve more engaging uses of both technologies and tectonics — as curatorial systems within and between the diverse collections and the public spaces of the museum (cafes, circulation, gift shops, lobbies), but also as interpretative interface membranes between interior and exterior environments — all with their own varied forms of cultural coloration. Each has the capability to be more interactive, more consciously self- reflexive in and through its own form, creating innovative scenes from and for embodied life.

Your chosen collection and its informational membranes, having already expanded into the public spaces, can now expand out to engage its context in ways that can expand the very fundamental ideas — the categories, taxonomies, and typologies — of museums, your techniques having provided the agency to develop new forms and formations of culture.



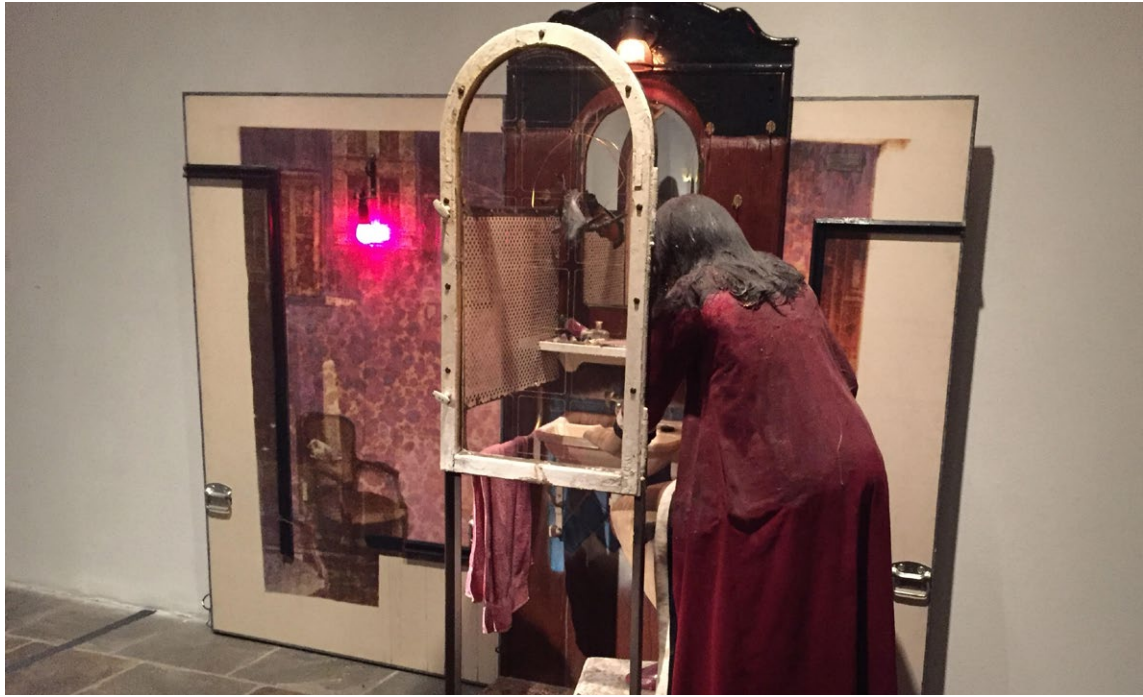
Cooper Hewitt Exhibition



Metropolitan Museum of Art

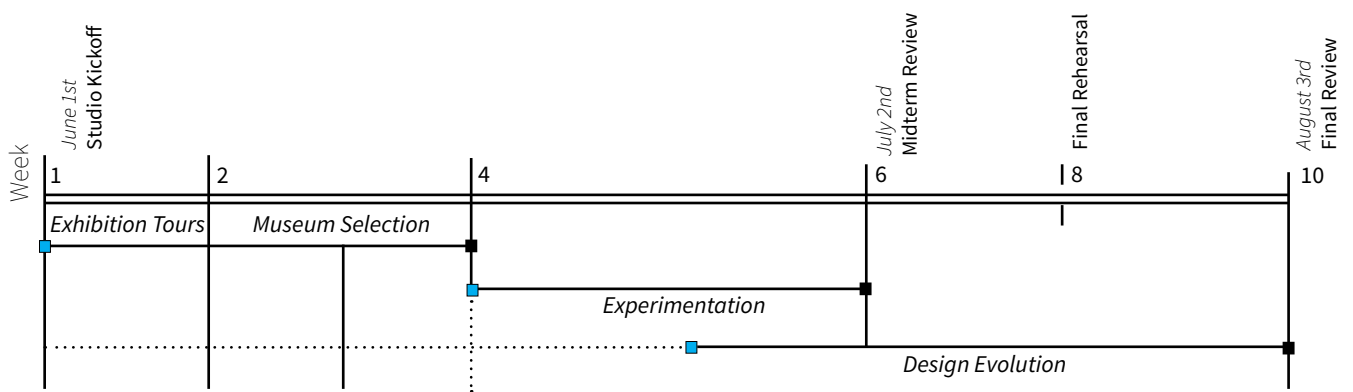


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Schedule



Met Breuer Exhibition