



ANFA 2014 CONFERENCE

PRESENTER ABSTRACTS
ACADEMY OF NEUROSCIENCE FOR ARCHITECTURE

The Experience of Rhythm in Architecture, Music and Dance from Practice to Performance to Perception

CYNTHIA VRANAS, AIA, ASID
Principal, Olsen | Vranas Architecture Design and Build
Chicago, Illinois 60610

1. ABSTRACT

Architecture, Music and Dance are distinct forms of art that have influenced and complemented each other throughout the centuries. The qualities they share are numerous, but the way we experience them lies within the element of rhythm. It is thought that producing or participating in the aesthetic experience may be creative and revelatory, "a means to self-transcendence that can disclose the sacred in the familiar and ordinary." Can understanding and utilizing rhythm expand one's happiness and creativity? There is strong reason to believe that we can use rhythm in Architecture, Music and Dance to encourage innovation, creativity and a better quality of life.

Architecture, Music and Dance share many intrinsic qualities. They reflect what is happening in our culture, challenge our perceptions and inspire our creativity. But, underneath the surface there is a powerful force called rhythm that shapes the way we experience the arts. It begins with earliest stages of training with the endless repetition of barre exercises, musical scales or drawing of architectural lines, then culminates in a final "presentation" or "performance." This is where we see rhythm come to life through a patterned recurrence of specific features. Relationships develop between a dance's series of steps, lines of a musical score or forms of a building's composition giving the arts more subtle, prosaic meaning.

Through neuroscience research, we've learned that the brain also perceives rhythm. In fact, the body receives a wealth of information from the outside world then merges it with its own natural rhythms to produce creative thought, put things in order and send messages to our muscles. Studies show the brain also understands rhythm through the element of expectation.

Rhythm's intrinsic qualities of movement, repetition and pattern are primarily sensed by the eyes and ears (and sometimes touch) and evoke in us an internal pulse and organization producing a deep emotive external response. They are discriminated by the mind while tapping into our natural biological rhythms instilled in us at birth. Rhythm is at the center of our being and our evolution. Rhythm heightens our experiences, brings people together and helps us better understand life.

2. AUTHOR BIO

I have always been interested in modern and contemporary architecture and its relationship to art, music and dance. As a Ph.D Candidate at the Illinois Institute of Technology under the tutelage of Professor Harry Malgrave, I am researching the topic of Rhythm and its relationship to the arts in order to provide a new and more comprehensive understanding of how the arts address social issues, benefit humanity and inspire creative growth. I am a licensed architect and a registered interior designer in the State of Illinois, with a lifelong love for education. For over ten years, I have been co-principal of Olsen | Vranas, an architectural and design practice based in Chicago. Our firm has received commissions that have produced award-winning residential and commercial spaces throughout the U.S. Recently, a home designed and built by Olsen | Vranas in the Gold Coast won a Preservation Excellence award for New Construction from the City of Chicago and was awarded LEED Gold status by the USGBC. My focus is on a rational approach to design with an emphasis on constructability and sustainability. Previous experience includes work with the prestigious firm Murphy/Jahn. My commitment to education is equally strong. For five years, I was Associate Dean at the Harrington Institute of Interior Design. There, my opportunities included the redevelopment of the curriculum, allowing me to teach many classes and begin their foreign studies programs in Europe. I have also pursued studies in art, Modern Greek language and culture, and training in classical ballet and piano. This multi-disciplinary background has confirmed my interest in the underlying element of Rhythm as it is experienced in Architecture, Music and Dance.

