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2025-02-18

Instructor: Sabine Rosenberg

CART 236

Reflection 01

Chosen Artists: Elena Manferdini

Elena Manferdini is an artist whose work spans multiple disciplines, including but not exclusive to sculpture, graphic design, digital illustration and CGI. However, her main focus is architecture. After studying Architectural Engineering in Italy, Manferdini decided she wanted to pursue a more extensive education in this field. After obtaining a scholarship which allowed her to study at the UCLA in Los Angeles, her vision of architecture expanded. She explains in her interview with Archivo de Ideas Recibidas that travelling to America allowed her to see an architectural landscape that was ‘in motion’ rather than long-standing as it is in Italy. Her work has a heavy focus on incorporating organic shapes and natural imagery, creating structures that blend with the surroundings while also standing out. She aims to engage the viewer in what she calls ‘a deeper activity of seeing space’ (Manferdini). Furthermore, computational methods and the digital world plays an incredibly important role in her work in many ways. Firstly, with new programs and ways to visualize possible projects, this expands the architect’s mind to new possibilities. She uses textures as an example, explaining that with 3D renderers, ‘impossible’ materials can be visualized, such as the generic ‘phong’ material. With this, the original dream becomes far more complex due to the possibilities presented by the computer. The computer puts its own imprint on the project, working with far more complex geometries that weren’t possible

before. There is also the social media aspect of modern technology, which Manferdini says ‘democratizes’ architecture as it exposes it to a far larger volume of people. These structures also become something akin to canvases, since regular people can pass by and use them as the backdrop of their own photography. Buildings are no longer ‘just buildings’ but rather present the potential to be part of anyone’s photo or post. This, in turn, had inspired a surge of color and more eye-catching designs amongst architects like Manferdini, and this can be clearly seen in her work

One such work is ‘Purple Haze’, which manifests itself as a series of murals along the walls of the garage building in the RaDD district in San Diego. These murals all feature pixelated depictions of the Jacaranda trees that are common in, but not native to, San Diego. They sprawl across the walls in various hues of purple and blue, covering also the ceiling. One of the murals is flanked by glass windows, opening up to a courtyard field with real plants. Overall, the piece creates a union between the sharp, artificial walls of the building and the surrounding vegetation. This is of course not accidental, as Manferdini makes a point to blend the natural with the artificial, and to blur the lines between the two. She explains in her website video on the piece that she surprisingly did not, and in fact never starts, with images of actual plants, but makes a point to create a depiction of a natural object from synthetic means. The image was originally constructed in a 3D space, sculpted and then processed in order to eventually render it a two-dimensional image. The piece is meant to both blend in the structure with its surrounding landscape while also making it stand out with its bright colors for the whole city to see. However, there is even more to see within the image as one approaches it. Not only was the image created with synthetic means, but the essence of this synthetic nature is kept in the form of a sort of pixilation across the entire image. Moreover, there is a series of vertical lines and dots

of many different colors that are reminiscent of the 1s and 0s of binary code on a computer screen. The piece as a whole is an excellent summary of Manfredini's work, as it combines the admiration for the natural world, her fascination with technology, her affinity for colors and her multi-disciplinary knowledge all in one work.

Bibliography

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