

GDN 2016 Call for Statement: The Big Question – what is the emerging role of design(ers)?

Full Title: Design to touch our souls – from slow living to soul searching

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When observing our densely populated urban environment with high pace, people searching for “slow living” is an emerging phenomenon. As being stated in BMW Guggenheim lab that “slowing down” is one of the urban trends and it is indicated that “While modernist urban-planning philosophies typically focus on moving people and vehicles as quickly as possible, “slowing down” refers to an alternative way of thinking: that some places and parts of a city should be dedicated to a slower and more enjoyable, experiential way of moving through and being in the city”. Slow living can gain time for relaxation but relaxation is not only talking about doing nothing or resting physically. When people slow down, apart from satisfying physical need, addressing spiritual need is vital too.

Design to encourage the searching of our souls can be blended in to the “slow living” concept in order to live an enjoyable life with a purpose. Moreover, meditation as a medium in soul searching can release stress in busy urban lifestyle. One can discover that more and more designs are addressing the issue of slowing down and actually touching our souls in the slowing down process which is significant for the spiritual need of human being. Design in different disciplines, no matter directly or indirectly have generated spaces or artifacts / products for meditation or reflection to touch our souls.

Design touching our souls or design for spirituality is not necessarily referring to religious oriented projects. When we look at design by famous Japanese architect, Tadao Ando, even museums or

shopping mall spaces are designed with high level of spiritual quality which is touching our souls.

Hospitality design is another arena which customers can experience the momentum of slow living and indirectly facilitating the soul searching idea. People relaxing in coffee shop, reading books or simply thinking in a relaxing coffee shop ambience is a phenomenon which can push forward the idea of touching the soul. The mood of spa and massage centers is also meditative. Products such as candles and holders for burning incense or essential oils are popular too and they are associated with meditation and soothing our souls.

On the other hand, more and more religious organizations, such as Christian churches, are focusing on the impact of design. They employed interior designers to create spiritual spaces and some churches, such as Island ECC, even have full time in-house graphic designer and video production manager to generate high quality design output. Majority of the designs of these churches are presented with a contemporary approach and the sacred quality is always an oasis in an urban setting to touch our souls. Spiritual spaces nowadays are not just for religious activities which is due to the trend that church are focusing more on community orientation, more churches are being built to integrate social services to reach a wider scope of people. Therefore, this kind of community oriented church design becomes a soul searching space in an indirect manner too.

With this perspective, one of the roles of design is addressing a higher level of human need by creating a more enjoyable and inspirational world for our contemporary lifestyle to slow down and search our souls.

(The contents contain a total of 530 words)