



The Art of Bonding: Third Places in Museum Exhibitions

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Abstract

Third places is a space outside of the home and work, first and second place respectively (Oldenburg, 1989). Recently, museum spaces have been utilized as a place of community and learning, which many have observed can be considered a third place. While the need for third places for young adults has been noted, there is little research concerning university students specifically.

Florida State University's Museum of Fine Arts (MoFA) is a small museum extending from the College of Fine Arts. By curating an exhibit with interactive features directly addressing the audience, and catering to FSU students and faculty, a third place can be created for members of the community. *The Art of Bonding* was co-curated by MoFA staff members, including student interns, and featured artists, Hu Bei and Hu Bao, twin sisters. Their works and the show had a theme of human connection and belonging, tying into the idea of third places, especially for university students. Through analyzing survey data and documenting visitors' comments, we can observe how the MoFA space is viewed by the FSU community.

Methods

- Collaboration between MoFA employees, student interns, and the artists themselves insured multiple perspectives in the curation of the exhibit (Villeneuve & Love, 2017).
- This research utilized qualitative data, utilizing survey results and visitor comments.
 - A QR code led visitors to take a survey on Qualtrics, to express their thoughts on the contents of the show as well as the space itself. This survey was entirely voluntary. Survey takers were asked about their general thoughts about the exhibit and the exhibit space.
- They also had an opportunity to leave a comment, either on the exhibit wall itself or on the Jamboard page. The survey results and digital visitor comments are left by those who viewed the exhibit while it was on display in MoFA.
- The survey results and the visitor comments allow us to see how the audience reacted to the exhibit content and the exhibit space.
- The contents of the exhibit were focused on experiences and topics that may resonate with the target audience, university students. This included sibling relationships, COVID 19 and quarantine, identity, and being in the moment (Hein, 1998).
- Interactive elements included that art piece themselves, as well as visitor notes in the form of sticky notes, and take-home postcards featuring the *How to Do Nothing* images.
- The exhibit was located in an area of the museum typically utilized for community gatherings and events, with large windows facing the sculpture garden as well as several seats surrounding a coffee table.
 - Previous research emphasizes the importance of interior design when considering third places (Moody, 2011).
- The exhibit was advertised using social media accounts associated with FSU and the MoFA, physical posters were printed (Fig. 4), tours were granted to several groups, and there was no admission fee barring students from viewing the exhibit. An online exhibit was also created for those who wanted to learn more about the exhibit contents.

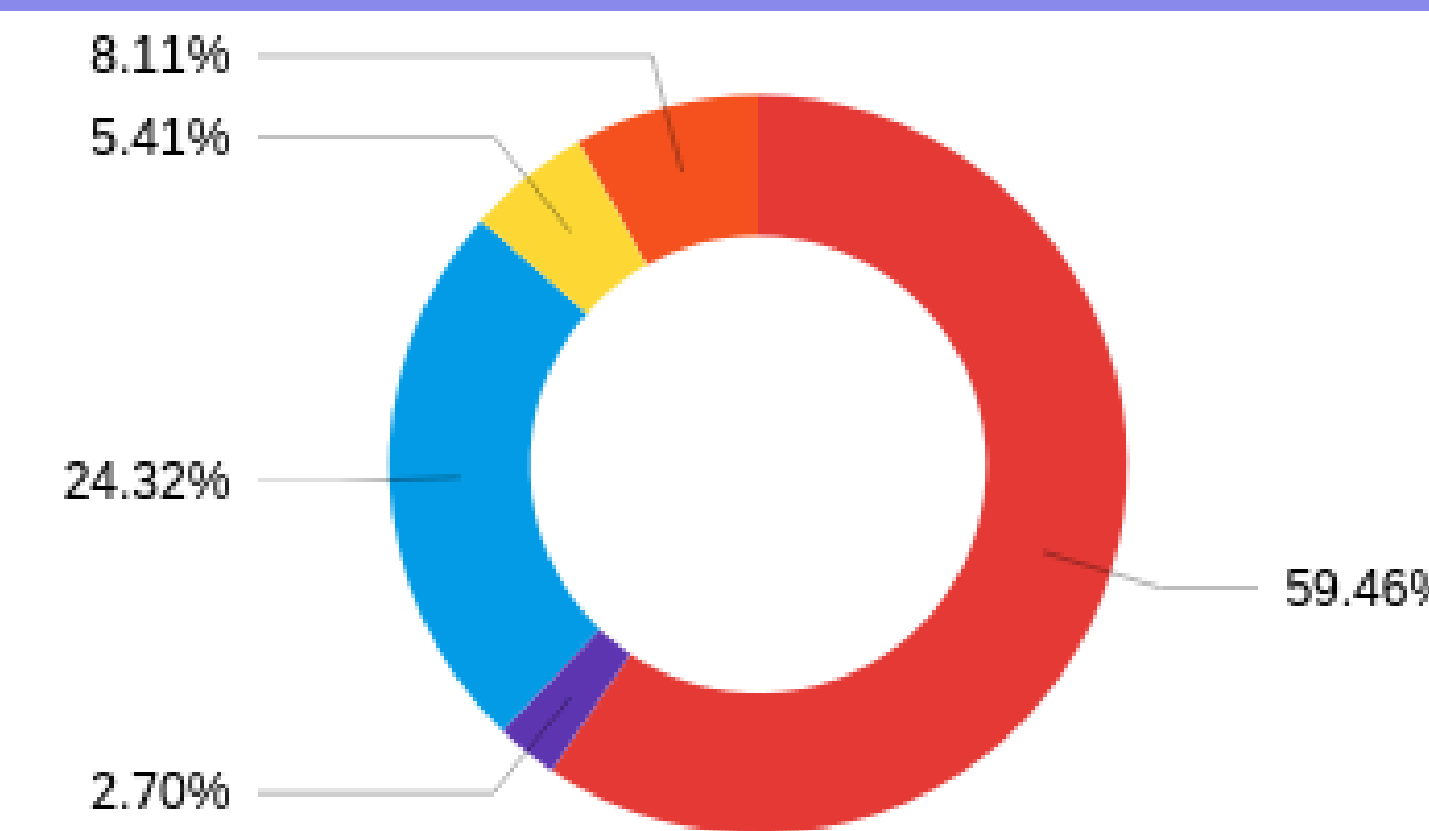


Fig. 5: Pie chart showing responses to the question: "What was the purpose of your visit?"

Results

While there is no concrete way to prove that visitors of the exhibit viewed the space as a third place, the survey and the visitor comments suggest that the environment created of what we would classify as a third place.

- The Qualtrics survey shows overwhelmingly positive feedback.
 - The survey was taken by 38 museum visitors, and 32 comments were left on the Jamboard page.
- The statements covered in the question, "To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following aspects of your experiences in this exhibition during your visit?" allowed us to indirectly ask the audience if they view the space as a third place. (Fig 2)
- The survey also revealed that the majority of visitors were visiting out of general interest and not obligation, implying that the space is already welcoming and inviting for many who took the survey. (Fig. 3)
- By compiling all the notes left by visitors, we can also gain insight on how the exhibition and its contents made them feel, and what thoughts and memories it was able to invoke. (Fig. 3)
- This research can be utilized by museum spaces that aim to curate a third place, especially those who hope to cater to university students.
- Museum spaces struggling with visitation rates can consider implementing similar techniques.

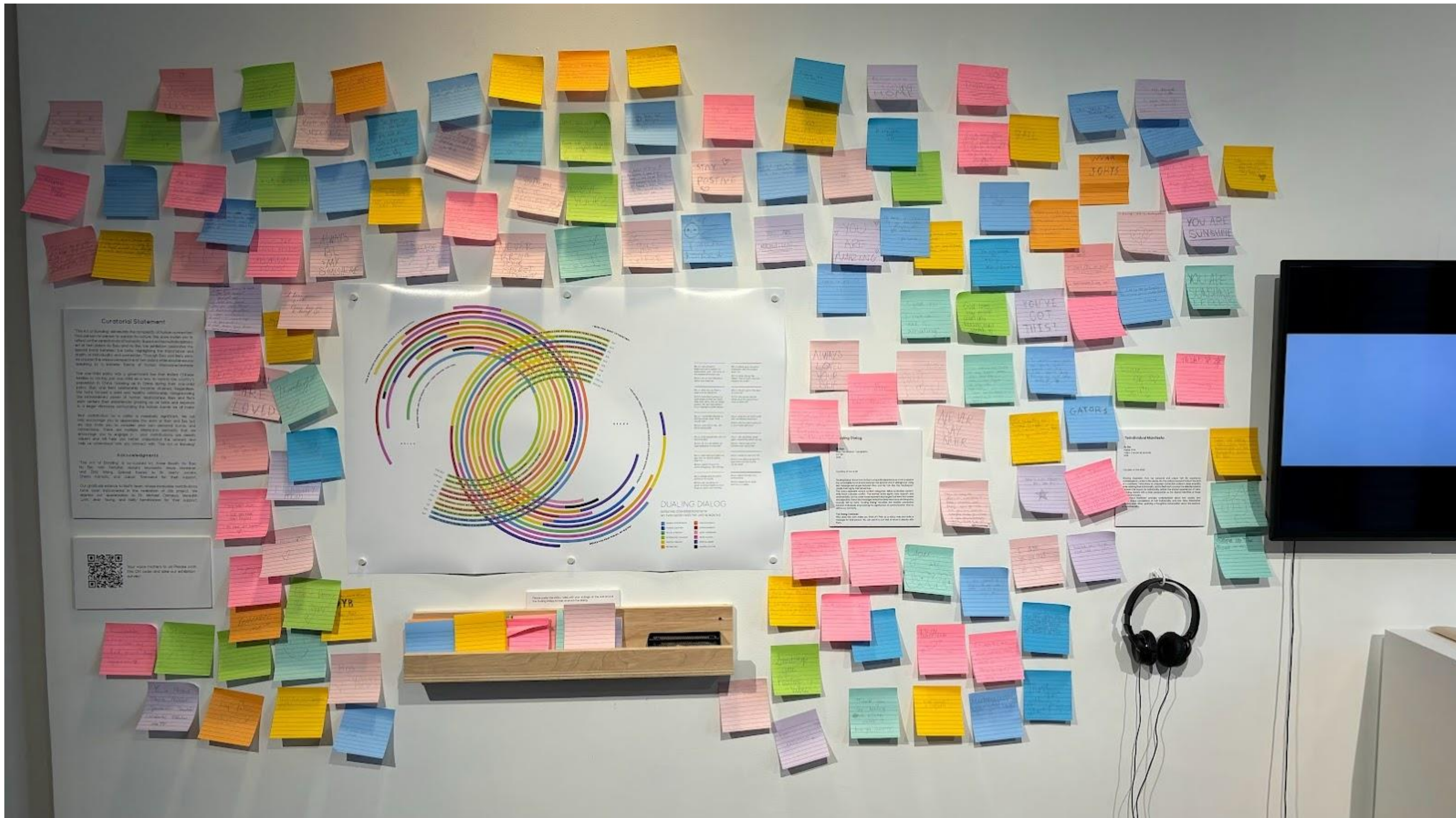


Fig 1 (top left): Exhibition wall briefly before it was deinstalled

Question	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	DNE	Total
I feel welcomed and treated equally in the exhibition	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	29
The exhibition supported my interests and identity	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	29
I find it easy to talk to others people in this exhibition	8.82%	91.18%	0.00%	34
I can easily navigate the exhibition despite physical challenges	2.94%	79.41%	17.65%	34
I feel recognized and will be attending the exhibition in the future	0.00%	96.77%	3.23%	31
I can go to this exhibition without having much knowledge with art	2.94%	94.12%	2.94%	34
I feel relaxed and entertained in this exhibition	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	34
I feel like at home in this exhibition	5.56%	91.67%	2.78%	36

Fig. 2 (top left): Data table containing responses to the question, "To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following aspects of your experiences in this exhibition during your visit?"

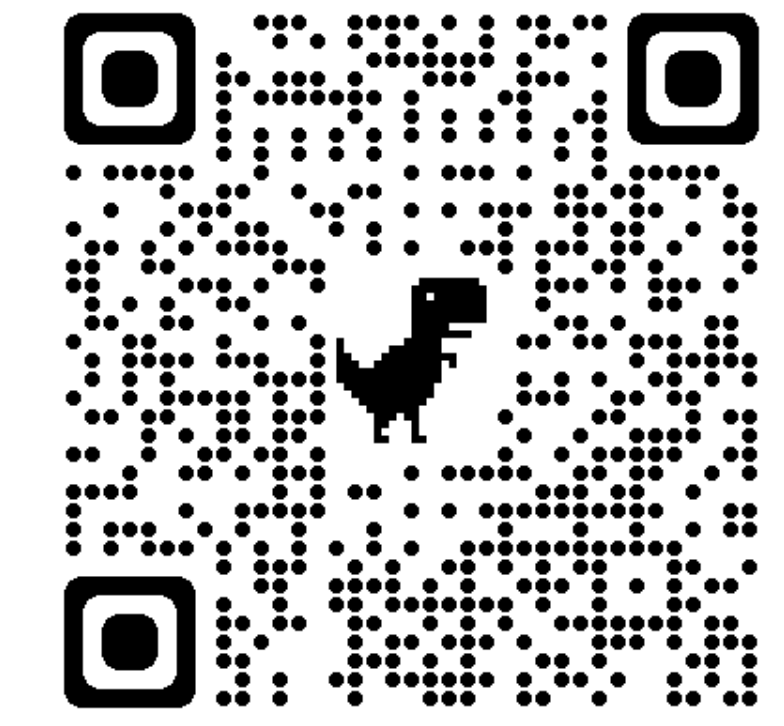


Fig 6 (left): QR code, scan to view the exhibition website. Desktop site in landscape mode is recommended.

Fig 3 (right): Word cloud created from visitor comments left on Google Jamboard

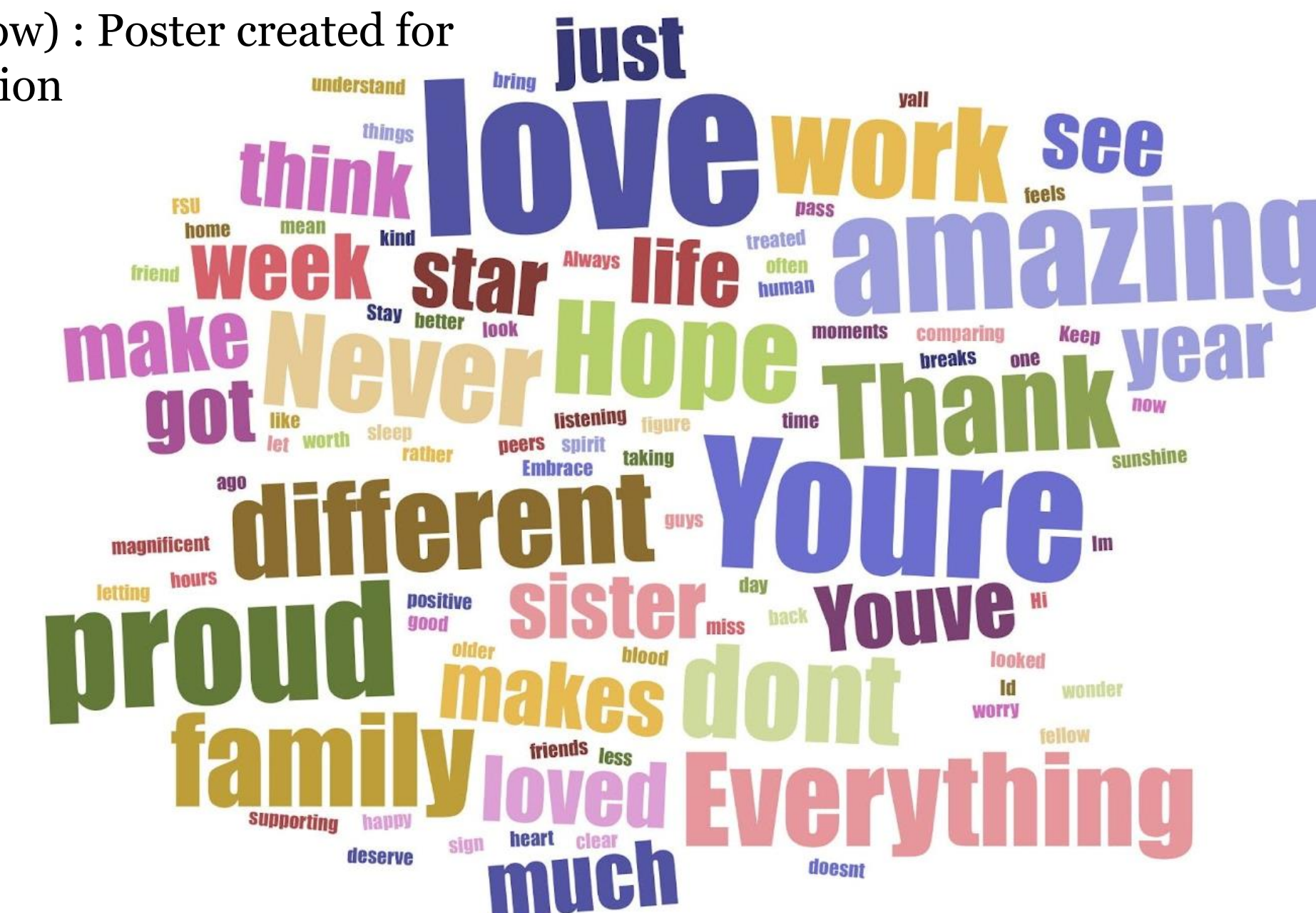
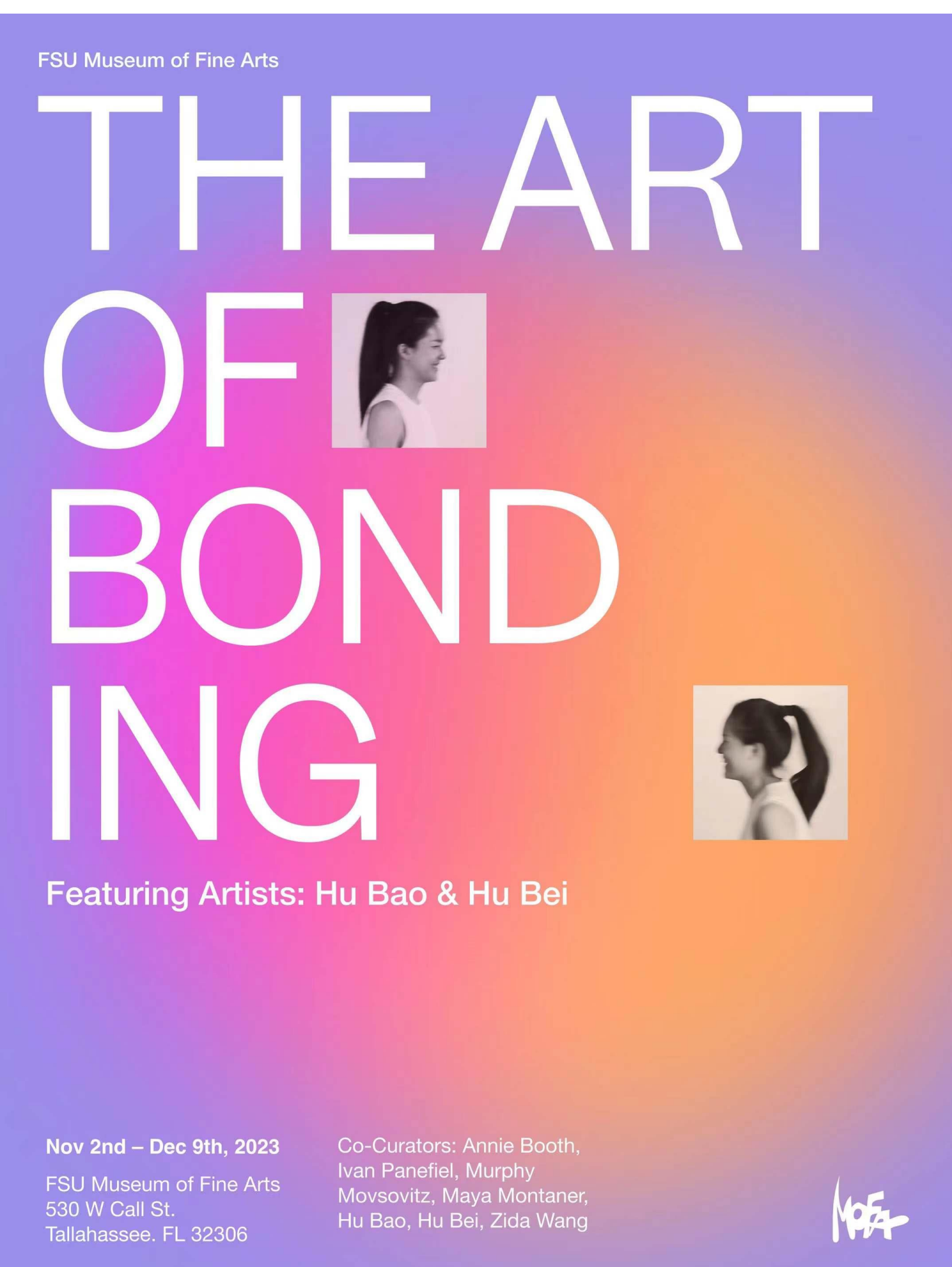


Fig. 4 (below) : Poster created for the exhibition

Background

- Third Place Theory and third place, refer to the existence of spaces outside of the home and work, for people to socialize and relax in. This theory has been applied in the field of Museum Studies, with museum spaces working to create events and spaces to help curate a third place for people in their community (Tate, 2012)
- Current research fails to acknowledge college students and the university setting specifically. This project examines Florida State University's Museum of Fine Arts, and the recent pop-up exhibit *The Art of Bonding*.
- *The Art of Bonding* featured five art pieces:
 - *How to Do Nothing*
 - A set of 3 moving images accompanied with audio, exploring the beauty of being present and calm
 - *Dueling Dialogue*
 - A visual representation of the twin's text messages, emphasizing their intertwining lives
 - *Twindividual Manifesto*
 - Explores both the unspoken connection between twins and each of their individual identities
 - *1.2 Meters*
 - A pair of wearable accessories that will light up when less than 1.2 meters apart, the distance enforced during social distancing
 - *Gathered Light*
 - A pair of cubes filled with lights, which dim when they are placed far apart from each other



Acknowledgements

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