

# THE LANGUAGE OF TEXTURE

By Mike Ayres



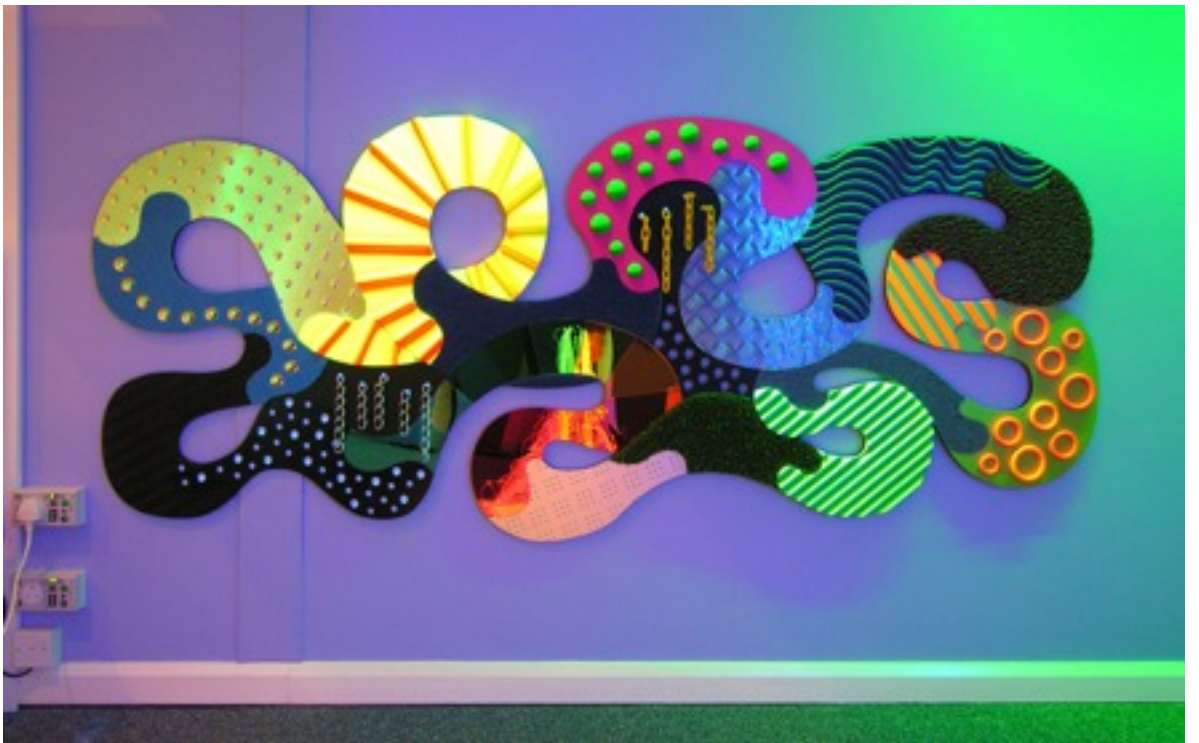
I have been creating Tactile Murals for about twenty years and like all art forms and equipment, they have evolved during that time.

Tactile experience is a fundamental part of your overall sensory experience of the environment you are in at that moment. In the early days of the creation of tactile panels, people questioned their need and stated that you could just as well go outside and touch natural materials and experience what's around you. Yes; you can and should do all of these things, but they are not always available to everyone and do not often appear in abundance in built environments. Tactile experience is particularly appropriate for people with learning difficulties and visual impairment, because they can act as very strong indicators and offer stimulation for communication and interactivity.

Also, why do we take holiday pictures, buy paintings and souvenirs? Because we want to remind ourselves of experiences and evoke emotions! This is exactly what tactile experiences can do. It acts as an exploration and enhances the understanding of the environment around you.



As you develop, you build up an internal language for textures, as you do with all your senses. You learn about safe and dangerous tactile experiences through coming into contact with the materials around you. Heat can be a safe or dangerous experience, and how do you learn about that, how do you understand what is pleasant and what will hurt?, by exploring and learning about the properties of materials within safe parameters.



This is partly what the creation of Tactile Murals are about, but they are also about giving a feeling to a building, allowing people to engage with their environment (feel the wall) and to create an art form that adds to the aesthetic value of the spaces you live, work and learn in.



Earlier I mentioned the language of texture; here are some words and comparisons that externalise that language. Rough and smooth, soft and hard, warm and cold, angular and curved, embossed and impressed, rigid and flexible, fine and coarse, linear and meandering, regular and random, absorbent and reflective. You get the idea! These are all considerations when creating a mural, as well as overall shape, size, colour, safety of materials used, flow of movement, as you explore it and the space it fits into.



Murals make a very strong statement when you walk into a space. If it is something that you can physically engage with, it will give you a much stronger personal link with it and children almost always engage with and remember the smaller things that they can physically experience.



Murals can also be very good visual and textural 'wayfinders' and signposts around buildings.

As well as continuing to create panels and individual murals and trails I am also researching and developing ideas on texture and colour for navigating around new and existing buildings, in ways that children and adults with learning difficulties can easily understand.

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