

Empathy for Culture

A collaboration between Pratt Institute and Herman Miller

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Not simply another decade, the year 2010 represents the cusp of what promises to be a new era of globalization: As advanced communication and transportation technologies collapse spatial and temporal barriers, people across cultures are coming even closer together. Cultural ideas and modes of expression cross-pollinate.

Pratt Institute and Herman Miller, two respected leaders within the world of design, come together to examine this concept to its furthest extent. In an exhibit entitled Empathy for Culture, they will explore design as a medium for sharing and integrating the unique ideas of a particular culture within the physicality of design.



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The process is cultural understanding through cultural investigation and ultimately, empathy. The end result? Seating, textiles, ceramics, and other furnishings whose form and function represent culturally-aware design that conveys cultural empathy—true insight into how the people of another culture think, feel, and respond to the world around them.

To achieve this level of understanding, students will be working closely with professors at Pratt and design leaders at Herman Miller who will challenge them to immerse themselves in a culture foreign to their own or to engage in deep exploration of their own unique cultural heritage. The culture a student chooses to explore may be a mainstream culture or a slightly altered or marginalized portion of that culture—a subculture.

The intent is to go deeper than merely a superficial incorporation of design ideas from a particular culture. Students must get to know people, exchange ideas, and most importantly, consider the impact their work may someday have on the world.



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As one of the most internationally recognized design schools, Pratt is uniquely poised to meet this challenge. A sort of microcosm of world cultures, Pratt consists of students from around the world, serving as both a cultural and conceptual melting pot.

Advising Pratt in this endeavor will be Herman Miller, a company globally respected for its expertise in ergonomics, environment, and cultural understanding. Herman Miller will provide input and guidance to Pratt's students as each navigates a unique cultural path, helping them to discover true authenticity within this theme.

The end result will be design with cultural integrity—born of truly engaging with people, and then sharing a distinct point of view about how objects integrate into the human experience.

