"Big, Fun Art": The IP Of Immersive Art Experiences

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Over the last decade, “immersive” art experiences have taken the United States by storm. A record-breaking number of visitors visited the Hirshhorn Museum in 2017 to marvel at the dazzling kaleidoscopic vistas of Yayoi Kusama’s Infinity Mirror Rooms. Popular arts entertainment company Meow Wolf has opened five different large-scale, walk-through installations portraying a variety of surreal situations, such as the office of a radio station that’s been hijacked into an alternate dimension, with two more coming soon.

Multiple companies now operate wildly popular traveling exhibitions featuring projected animated interpretations of the work of artists such as Van Gogh and Monet. Wildly successful “Instagram museums” have also popped up around the country, including the Museum of Ice Cream (with its wildly viral sprinkle pool) and Candytopia (featuring candy renditions of Andy Warhol’s Marilyn Monroe prints).

Art Critic Ben Davis has taken to referring to these large, immersive installations of “tactile wonderment” as “Big Fun Art.” These description-defying multi-sensory experiences often comprise hundreds of individual pieces of art in a variety of media ranging from murals and sculptures to background music and touch-sensitive digital displays. Companies providing these experiences can be fiercely protective of their work, as can be seen in the copyright lawsuits filed by Japan-based TeamLab against California’s Museum of Dream Space. However, the protectability of experiences such as glowing musical forests, and swimming pools full of sprinkles has yet to be fully explored in a legal context.