

Ways of Percieving, Curation Essay

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Entitled 'An Artist's Duty', I intend to curate an exhibition including five pieces of work in collaboration with five different artists with a focus on the issues of gender and exclusion. My aim for this exhibition is to serve as an institutional critique and a call to action for the public. With a focus on the "core question" of curator and activist Maura Riley "How can we get people in the art world to think about gender race and sexuality, to understand that these are persistent concerns that require action?" (M Riley 2018 p.7) In conjunction with a famous quote by musician Nina Simone titled 'An Artist's Duty' in which she asserts it is a creator's obligation to "reflect the times". "When everyday is a matter of survival, I don't think you can help but be involved." (Tate, 2020) Through curation I have selected relevant pieces of work which support my topic.

I intend to host this exhibition at the Mission Gallery in Swansea. The room itself will be the frame for my exhibition similarly to curator William C. Seitz, who removed the frames of a series of Monet paintings. Hans Ulrich Obrist reflects that "The gallery itself became the framing mechanism" (Obrist 2014 p.29) This will create a sense of connective tissue to all the pieces and allow the exhibition to be more visually seamless in the eyes of the spectators. I plan to take full advantage of the 650 x 720cm Exhibition Space and the gallery's additional Apse. It is my curative decision to make the walls of the Exhibition Space completely white. Equivalently to Obrist's description of The White Cube, "visual cues were reduced to a minimum, resulting in a clean, spare gallery space." (Obrist, 2014, p. 29) This notion will extend to the auditory nature of the exhibition. As political activist Susan Sontag states in her book 'Styles of Radical Will', "The notions of silence, emptiness and reduction sketch out new prescriptions for looking, hearing, etc—which will either promote a more immediate,

sensuous experience of art or confront the artwork in a more conscious, conceptual way.”
(Sontag, 1969 p. 13). I want the artworks to speak for themselves. Granting spectators with
an opportunity for quiet contemplation and self introspection of their own personal biases.

I propose to open spectators' minds and show them the artworld does not end with Picasso
and Van Gogh. Hopefully this exhibition will shift their passive outlook and cause them to
take affirmative action to “call out the institutions, critics, curators, collectors and galleries
for their sexist and racist practices.” (Riley, 2018 p. 224)



Fig. One

The centre of the Exhibition Space will show Tracey Emin's 'My Bed'. I have selected this piece to highlight the more intimate nature of feminist art and the issues women face. Much like Khalo, Emin's art is "confessional, relating—and in some way coming to terms with— intimate, often traumatic experiences" (AG Dixon, 2008). Speaking in a 2018 article for Artsy.net, art historian Laura Lake Smith posits that Emin creates an "authentic, in authentic persona" in her work. Smith continues "there was the rise of reality TV, of social platforms, of crafting personas in a very personal way," (Smith, 2018) For Emin's art was "in many ways an escape from that oppressive environment" (AG Dixon, 2008). This notion rings especially true to a generation that is severely prone to anxiety and burnout. 'My Bed' is the largest display in this exhibition. Due to its large scale this will be the first visible piece in the room. I find it

will provide my exhibition with a well balanced core in which the spectator can freely walk around and view at their own pace.



Fig. Two

Displayed to the immediate left of the entrance will be Paul Rosano Reclining by Sylvia Sleight. Sleight is renowned for her reversal of long standing stereotypes surrounding nude paintings by “presenting males as the subject for female erotic delectation” (Chilvers, 2003). This piece perfectly serves as a subversive and radical take on the female gaze and gender as a whole. Harkening back to the Gorilla Girls famous piece regarding the discrepancy of female nudes in museums compared to female artists. “Less than 5% of the artists in the modern art section are women but 85% of the nudes are female. In a recent video essay by Youtube channel The Take it heavily implies our societies shift in what we define as masculine. The Take suggests

the rise of androgenous figures such as Timothée Chalamet and Harry Styles signals a “mainstream shift into a new era. One that is less black and white about gender and expects men to be sensitive, kind and open.” (The Take, 2021).



Fig. Three

Placed to the immediate right of the entrance will be Frida Kahlo's 'Henry Ford Hospital' piece . It is the smallest piece on display, making it very distinctive to spectators. It links to the aforementioned “clean, spare gallery space.” (Obrist, 2014, p. 29) The well balanced interplay of bright and more muted tones in Kahlo's colour palette shall breathe a luminous vibrancy into the exhibition. Hopefully balancing out the more muted tones of Silvia Sleight's

work without overshadowing it. Art historian Andrew Graham Dixon explains Khalo's work: "Often transcends the personal by questioning gender roles and the power relations between individuals and nations." (AG Dixon, 2008) I chose this piece to visually highlight the importance of female voices in the art world as The piece explores her "emotional and psychological states of mind." (AG Dixon, 2008). Yashvi Ganeriwal writes in a 2018 essay for Feminism India, Khalo "used her art as an outlet and as a mechanism to share experiences, which may be common to other women but are not talked about or given adequate importance to." (Y, Ganeriwal, 2018) The imagery of Figure Three has a direct link to Tracey Emin's 'My Bed' piece. Depicting an abstract representation of a bed in conjunction with a literal bed installation. The connective imagery of beds furthers the theme of female empowerment, vulnerability and inclusivity.



Fig. Four

Displayed to the immediate right of the Gallery's Apse will be a video projection of 'Ever is Over All' by Pipilotti Rist. The "two-screen video installation juxtaposes a tranquil field of flowers with an exuberant fantasy of transgression and excess in which the artist skips down the street in a dress and heels, cheerfully smashing car windows with a flower like iron wand." (AG Dixon) This connects to my theme of gender and inclusion. Acting as a call to arms to challenge the higher authorities that suppress female voices, by taking up space and making a lot of noise. The Apse is an appropriate location to display this work as it provides a sense of multimedia immersion for viewers. The viewing experience can be enhanced greatly in the Apse as the room will be darkened and include speakers. I have decided to delegate this piece in a separate area to serve as a 'non space' in order to heighten the "imagined optimism presented in contrast to our everyday reality" (Snell, T 2017) . I have chosen this piece to elicit a sense of empowerment in my theme. "Rist transforms a destructive impulse into a hopeful, cathartic gesture."(MoMA 2019)



Fig. Five

Finally, I will conclude this exhibition with Zanele Muholi's 'Phila I, Parktown'. I view Muholi's work as the heart of this exhibition. This piece acts as an encapsulation of the exhibition's theme. It is my intention to trigger an inner dialogue within spectators in which they ask themselves the crucial questions "What are my biases?; Am I excluding large constituencies of people in my selections?; Have I favoured male artists over females, white over black— if so, why?" (Riley, 2018, p. 224) "Muholi positions each figure centrally, initiating a silent, but loaded conversation between the subject and the viewer." (Tate 2020) In many ways Muholi's work reflects the changes I and many others wish to see in the artworld. Her work acts almost as a manifesto not only carrying out Nina Simone's aforementioned "Artists Duty" but instead building upon it. Reflecting the times is not enough. "It is our responsibility as activists and artists - as activists who practice art - to challenge all 'isms', starting with racism. To combat

bias and erasure. To keep the dialogue going and create opportunities for others less fortunate or privileged. To open access to spaces historically denied to us - to black, queer, trans, female-bodied, and gender nonconforming individuals, especially. That is my main agenda going forward: to queer, to blacken, to open, and to occupy spaces.”

(K Drew 2020 p.311)

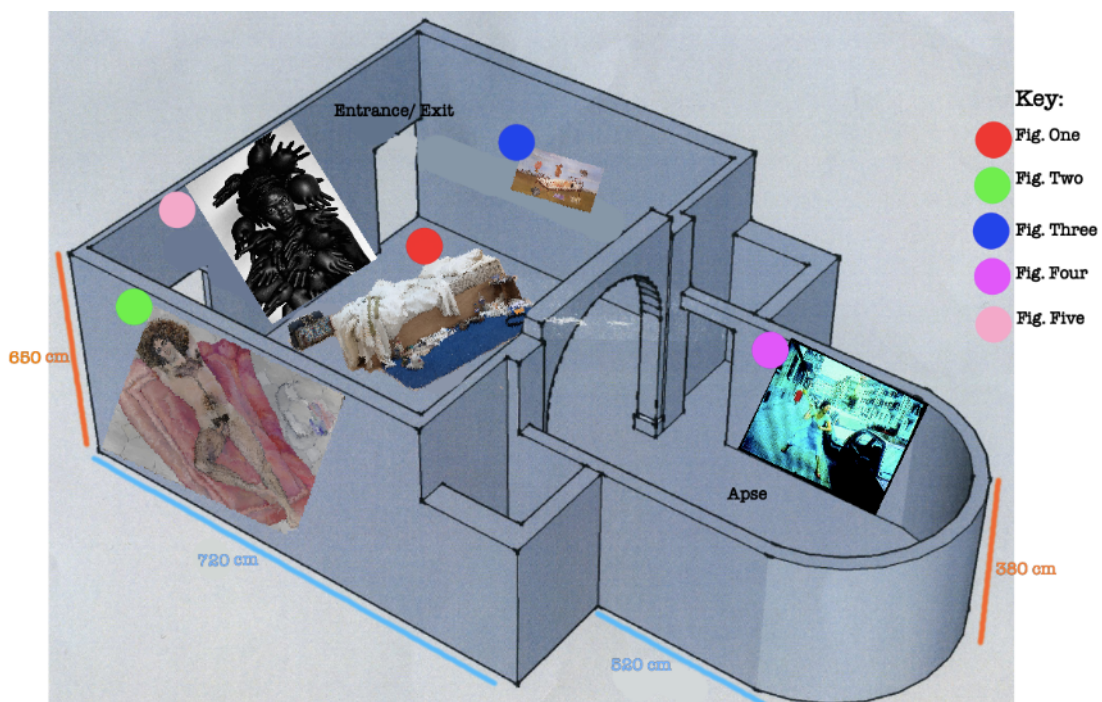


Fig. Six

My Exhibition has been curated with the intention of being open and easily accessible to spectators. Abiding by the White Cube Method of curating I believe I have taken full advantage of the wide open spaces of the Exhibition Space and created a sophisticated yet enthralling experience. It is my intention to empower spectators to take affirmative actions towards a future where everyone is granted equal opportunity and exposure regardless of gender, race or sexuality.

Figures

Fig. One: Emin, Tracey. (1998) *My Bed* [Box Frame, Mattress, Linens, Pillows and Various Objects] Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/emin-my-bed-l03662>
(Accessed May 3rd 2021)

Fig. Two: Khalo, F. (1932) *Henry Ford Hospital* [Oil on Canvas] Available at:
<https://www.fridakahlo.org/henry-ford-hospital.jsp>
(Accessed: May 3rd 2021)

Fig. Three: Sleigh, S. (1974) *Paul Rosano Reclining* [Oil Paint on Canvas] Available at:
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sleigh-paul-rosano-reclining-t14281>
(Accessed: May 3rd 2021)

Fig. Four: Rist, P. (1997) *Ever Is Over All* [Video Installation] Available at:
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81191>
(Accessed May 3rd 2021)

Fig. Five: Muholi, Z (2016) *Phila I, Parktown* [Gelatin silver print on paper] Available at
:https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-50-autumn-2020/zanele-muholi-repertoires-resistance?utm_source=emarsys&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=CRM_Feb_w1_LGBTHistoryMonth_Engaged_12pm&sc_src=email_2617467&sc_customer=2201026&sc_lid=170400175&sc_uid=LiPkcMbp3&sc_llid=40183&sc_eh=a7fd10bfc6f796c51

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Fig. Six: Copp, C (2021) *Exhibition Map* [Digitally Generated Image]

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