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Programme of Study: Bachelor of Arts (Part-time): Fine Art - Studio Site & Context

Module: ADAD4018

Ways of Thinking Lecturer's Name: Alex Duncan

Tasks in the order I received them:

Task 1: Manifesto Writing = 504 words

Task 2: Observational Writing = 531 words

Task 3: Practice-based Writing = 519 words

Task 1: Manifesto Writing

1. I will try to find beauty in everything, even mundane objects. Beauty should be seen as an “open for interpretation” concept, rather than as a fixed definition.
2. I should constantly practice and improve my drawing and painting skills. Without practice no ideas can be brought into the world. The hardest thing for myself is to make art my primary response to all life’s challenges.
3. My aspiration is to communicate through my art not only to others but also to myself. Art is an important means to explore things that are ambiguous, elusive, complex or unthinkable.
4. Painting/drawing from life is an essential way of connecting to and exploring the world and myself.
5. My own judgement of my work should be respected as much as that of others. If it is difficult to assess the quality of a work, I should leave it aside for some time and come back in few weeks or months for a new judgment. Try not get too emotionally attached to a piece, as it distorts its perception.
6. Embracing one’s vulnerability is as important, as being aware of one’s strength. Ability to be open about an artist’s vulnerability brings art to a deeper level of communicating with an audience.
7. It is essential to be kind to myself both as a human and an artist. Do not let the inner critic win.
8. I will take account of political and social context but from an independent and not partisan perspective.

One of the most important traits an artist can have is the ability to think independently. As individuals we experience societal pressure every day and it affects our opinion and identity. An artist would inevitably be affected by the current economic, political and ecological situation but should persevere to keep thinking independently as much as possible. It is tempting to react to current political issues, as it can make art easily noticeable, but as artists we should

dive in the deep end, not splash about in the shallows. Or, as Grayson Perry states in his Red Alan Manifesto (2014): *“Artists are NOT philosophers, comedians, politicians, priests etc. They will be JUDGED on their ART. “*

And it is hard enough to withstand the pressure of others’ critical judgement of one’s art. An art work may be a result of many days or weeks of hard work, it can have intensive research or many previous unsuccessful attempts behind it, but a judgment of it is made by the public within a few seconds. That kind of pressure is inevitable, so the only way to keep creating is to stick to an artist’s own judgement.

The area of our best expertise lies in our personal experience, our feelings and issues, motives and vulnerabilities. When a piece of art is an honest attempt to reconcile both the uniqueness and universality of a personal experience it often manages to communicate with an audience on a deeper level.

Mona Hatoum is one of the artists who, in my opinion, manages to find a balance between the personal and political without compromising the quality of her artwork.

Her works, including Marrow, 1996 and Remains, 2019 are often made from elements of the domestic environment, which inevitably brings associations with a family life’s past and present. But the way of Hatoum’s manipulating the material makes references to political events, war disturbances and conflicts.

As the artist said herself:

I’m never trying to make a direct political statement. I’m thinking about form most of all. I am focusing on the materials, on the aesthetic. The tension is between the work’s reduced form and the intensity of the possible associations.



Fig.1 Mona Hatoum, *Marrow*, 1996

Mona Hatoum's works are important examples of how psychological and political connotations can make art based on a very personal experience even stronger. The choice of form clearly has intimate, domestic connotations but the material is related to the social context and together they create unique, fascinating installations, which always touching a nerve. It is also inspirational as a woman and an artist myself to see such uncompromising art from a female artist. Mona Hatoum is dealing with the difficult, unpleasant sides of a domestic existence, showing the almost transcendental horror and sorrow of it. It is enormously inspirational for me to see that such issues are possible to raise within an artwork just through its aesthetic qualities, without the direct involvement of the artist in the political movements or printed manifestos. After all, the best manifesto of an artist is their works.



Fig.2 Mona Hatoum, *Remains, (play space)*, 2019

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Figure 1. Hatoum, *Mona Marrow*, 1996 Accessed from <https://www.artimage.org.uk/32014/mona-hatoum/marrow--1996>

Figure 2. Hatoum, *Mona Remains, (play space)*, 2019 Accessed from https://whitecube.com/exhibitions/exhibition/mona_hatoum_bermondsey_2019

Task 2: Observational Writing

GREEN BRITAIN NEEDS YOU!



If you want a green outcome from your energy bill, building new sources of green energy is the only level of activity that makes a difference.
Join Ecotricity to invest your bill money in to building new sources of renewable energy.

ecotricity

Switch to Ecotricity and we'll send you a £50 Natural Collection voucher*
Visit ecotricity.co.uk/natcol or call 0808 123 0123 (quote NTC1)

*£25 per fuel



Fig.1 Ecotricity Advertising Campaign, Natural Collection Catalog, 2020

In a contemporary environment, where social media influence almost overcame that of newspapers and tv, the importance of understanding the semiotics of visual language is crucial for both creators and consumers of content. Semiotics is the study of the relation between signs and the things to which they refer; in this case between the images and their meaning. One of the principles of semiotics, defined by Ferdinand de Saussure (2011, p.37), is that 'the connection between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary'. In advertising the signifier often refers to historical or emotional connotations, which would engage with the target audience. Many millions of images are produced and uploaded every day and influence our society. The cultural context and therefore the reading of the images changes much quicker than it used to be in the pre-social media era.

"The press photograph is a message. Considered overall this message is formed by a source of emission, a channel of transmission, and a point of reception." Barthes, R. (1977, p. 11). I will analyze the image advertising the Ecotricity electricity supply producer, considering the three elements mentioned by Barthes.

The denoted elements of the image are the original photo "Flag raising on Iwo Jima" 1945 by Joe Rosenthal and the Union Jack flag on the background.

The green colour of the flag colour signifies the 'organic' green nature of the energy. The raising flag of the original photo is substituted by a wind turbine and the four soldiers holding it substituted by respectively an NHS worker, a firefighter, a sportswoman, and someone, who can potentially represent either an electrician or a regular person joining a street protest. The presence of emergency response workers in the picture signifies simultaneously its importance, the urgency of the appeal, and also the 'heroic' nature of the event, in this case switching the energy supplier to the right one.

The image was placed in a clothes magazine-catalogue distributed by post. So, the point of reception would be a common person with mainstream views. The commodity that is being sold is also an ordinary one. But the visual message evokes the fighting revolutionary spirit of historical paintings, such as Delacroix 'Liberty leading the People' and war photos of fighting soldiers. The Union Jack used as a metaphor of the unity of the British people and together with the anchorage text 'Green Britain needs you' refer to war posters and represents an appeal to the patriots' spirit.

So, by joining the electricity supplier, which proudly advertises itself as 'the only vegan' one, consumers are encouraged to feel that they contribute to the climate change battle. The obvious virtue of the decision is stressed by the participation of the state workers and the common people raising the wind turbine.

Whereas previously advertising campaigns tried to influence consumers' choices by promising to add glamour to their lives, today we are being sold products that are meant to make us more virtuous. As John Berger (2008, p. 38) rightly said: "All publicity works upon anxiety." To overcome the anxiety of the challenges of modern life, we try to be more virtuous, the urge which is eagerly exploited by the companies selling their services.

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Figure 1. *Ecotricity Advertising Campaign*, Natural Collection Catalog, 2020. Obtained from the student owned hard copy of the catalog.

Task 3: Practice-based Writing



Fig.1 Anselm Kiefer: Superstrings, Runes, The Norns, Gordian Knot (2019). White Cube, Bermondsey

I visited Anselm Kiefer's exhibition, *Superstrings, Runes, The Norns, Gordian Knot* (2019) in the White Cube Bermondsey a year ago. It comprised of three rooms with new series of monumental paintings and a single installation filling the gallery's corridor. The installation consisted of thirty vitrines, which acted as a foundation for and lent its title to the exhibition. Each vitrine, about 4 meters high, was filled with stained and rusted panels, and entwined masses of cables, tubing, in entangled, knot-like arrangements. Hand-written equations and phrases were written on the vitrines' glass surfaces, relating to string theory and the names of the three Norns from Norse mythology.

In the exhibition Kiefer connected his traditional motifs of history and mythology with a scientific concept. The concept, known as String theory, is a mathematical model that attempts to articulate the known fundamental interactions of the universe and forms of matter. The artist attempts to visualize that, 'Everything is connected: the missing letters, string theory, the Norns, the Gordian knot.'

The most lasting impression was left on me by the installation in the corridor. It was perceived as mere introduction to the paintings initially but in a contrast to them, it managed to engage with me emotionally on a much deeper level, than the paintings. I think that the effect was mostly achieved by difference in the space and the lighting of the exhibition areas. The colossal paintings communicated typical for Kiefer incurable melancholy of apocalyptic landscapes. Pristine and empty white interior of the gallery's rooms with their cold light intensified the monochromatic wasteness of the immense canvases but failed to increase emotional response. Spacious gallery's rooms provided opportunity for both seeing the works from a distance and enjoying their magnitude but absence of audience in the rooms (there were no more than 4 people in a room simultaneously) made whole experience less pleasant, rather lifeless, clinical.



Fig.2 Anselm Kiefer: Superstrings, Runes, The Norns, Gordian Knot (2019). White Cube, Bermondsey

An introduction text provided by curator went for a great length, explaining the artist concept but I found the interpretation rather imposed. As a viewer I value the direct emotional impact from art the most. Intellectual concepts should be part of the general interaction on the emotional level, otherwise they fail to engage.

In the exhibition the installation with its much narrower space and dim light created much stronger connection with the pieces. It was a place where one wanted to stay longer. I spent quite a time just admiring the reflection of light on a floor and the vitrines glass. The dark paneled vitrines with entangled cables and wires had a vaguely organic feeling. The scientific formulae written on the glass reminded rather graffiti than a classroom. The writings gave the installation a human touch, making it much less intimidating, comparing to other pieces.

The whole experience of being in the corridor was similar to feelings of a child in a natural history museum. The quietness was comfortable and just amplified the sense of wonder, when in childhood one sees new interesting things in a museum without yet fully understanding what they are but nevertheless enjoying the discovery and looking forward to new marvelous impressions.

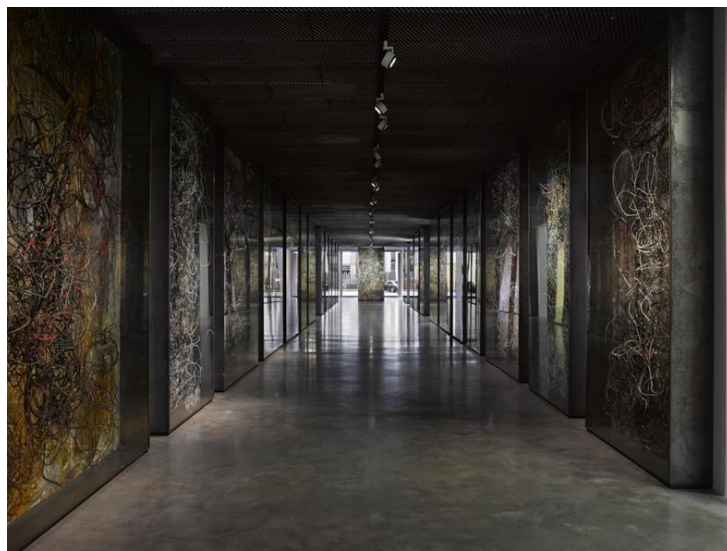


Fig.3 Anselm Kiefer: Superstrings, Runes, The Norns, Gordian Knot (2019), The installation in the corridor. White Cube, Bermondsey



Fig.4 Anselm Kiefer: Superstrings, Runes, The Norns, Gordian Knot (2019). The installation in the corridor. White Cube, Bermondsey

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Figure 3. Anselm Kiefer: Superstrings, Runes, The Norns, Gordian Knot (2019), The installation in the corridor. White Cube, Bermondsey

Figure 4. Anselm Kiefer: Superstrings, Runes, The Norns, Gordian Knot (2019). The installation in the corridor. White Cube, Bermondsey