

“Through a Silk Screen” – An exhibition which explores real and virtual place.

Student Name: Sophie Francis

Student Number: 1900593

Programme of Study: Graphic Design

Word Count: 1556 words

Jonathan Pugh and Martin Bush

“Technology may not always be the solution” (Robles, 2001). In this text, I will be curating an exhibition entitled ‘Through a Silk Screen’, which will be held in London, “The cultural and creative capital of the world” (Khan, 2019). My exhibition will take place on level 69 and 72 of the Shard, overlooking all of London. I will be exploring “virtual” (Massumi, 2014, p.55) and “real” (Massumi, 2014, p.56) place, and how this impacts people’s feelings on the way in which designs are created. Technology plays a huge role in modern graphic design, “the evolution of design practices has transformed the entire design process in ways not deemed possible in the past” (Poon, 2015), but these past design methods (letterpress, screen-printing), allow us to feel the satisfaction of physically creating a piece on paper rather than seeing art through a screen. In my exhibition, I have curated a space that allows the audience to experience these two feelings of seeing art through a screen and seeing art physically.

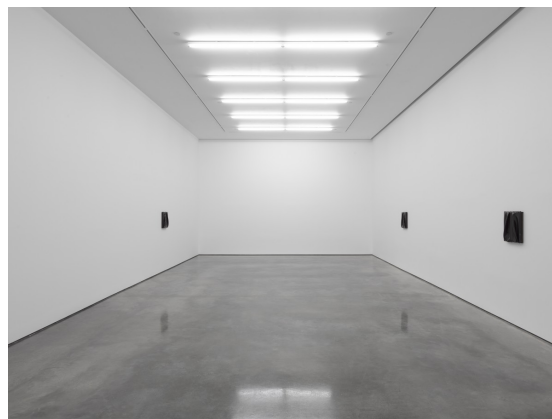


Fig 1

My exhibition is split in to two parts, beginning with the “virtual” (Massumi, 2014, p.55) space. Both spaces include the same five art pieces to show how space affects how art is viewed. The audience will exit the lift on the 69th floor of The Shard and will enter a plain, white room, which has been built into the 69th floor so that the windows cannot be seen. The white room will have nothing on the walls, reflecting that of the “white cube” (O’Doherty, 2010, p.7) aesthetic, where “the outside world must not come in” (O’Doherty, 2010, p.7) so that all focus is on the art. The audience is required to wear a virtual reality headset, which when turned on the art work appears on the walls of the room, and the audience have entered the virtual space. The headset will make the art pieces appear slightly pixelated and glitch at certain times to give the feeling of viewing the piece on a low-resolution computer. The purpose of this is to portray the idea that the virtual reality art pieces are “a dimension of reality” (Massumi, 2014, p.55), they can be seen but cannot be physically touched, the art is there but to what extent?

The second part of the exhibition is the “real” (Massumi, 2014, p.56) space. The audience will take off the headset and enter the lift where they will be taken to floor 72. This floor, unlike the previous floor, allows the outside world in so the audience can see the view from The Shard, whilst also viewing the art. This floor is full of life, with print makers creating pieces for the audience to see and hold, and physical copies of traditional printed designs displayed on stands. The overall atmosphere of the real space is brighter and more alive, with a more personal feel compared to that of the virtual space, due to the hustle and bustle of people working on machines and interacting with the audience. Trigg suggests “Place is thought of as a constructive product of human experience, such that without

human involvement, place would lose definition” (Trigg, 2012, p.3). Here Trigg is saying that without people, the place loses some of its reality. Therefore, I have curated my exhibition to include people who are an active part of the real space, in order to bring this part of my exhibition to life and give my audience the satisfaction of physically seeing the art being created. I have also ensured that only one person will take part in the virtual space at a time, so that this place feels less realistic and holds a feeling of loneliness.



Fig 2

The art pieces I have chosen to display in my exhibition include a letter pressed piece entitled 'Taxi!' by Alan Kitching, which I have positioned at the beginning of my exhibition. This piece was part of the London Poster Project, and aimed to celebrate the city of London. I have chosen to display this piece at the beginning of my exhibition, because when the audience are looking at this piece in the real space, they will also see the view of London from the windows of The Shard, thus bringing more life to the design due to its specific relation to London. By displaying a piece specifically related to the city, the audience will begin to think about the world around them, which will therefore bring the view and the whole of London to be a part of the exhibition as well. The audience will begin to look out the windows at the real world, and appreciate the space around them as well as the art, something which was not possible within the virtual space.

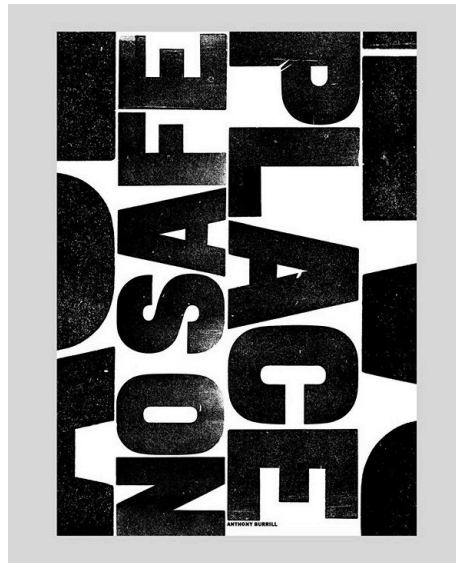


Fig 3

The next piece the audience will see is a screen-printed piece by Graphic Designer, Anthony Burrill, named 'No safe place'. The design is "created using charcoal from the Australian bush fires" (Burrill, 2020) and aims to help rebuild lives and restore habitats affected by the fires in Australia. I have chosen to display this piece in my exhibition, as being able to physically see the piece will have a much more powerful impact on the audience compared to seeing it through virtual reality, due to the textures created and the materials used. I have made the decision to display this piece within my exhibition, due to its relation to a recent issue in the world and how this will impact people's feelings.

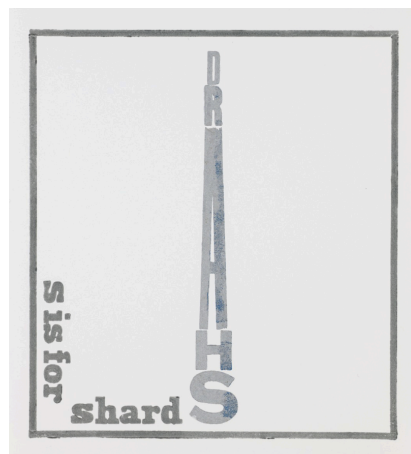


Fig 4

The audience will then see another letter pressed piece by Alan Kitching, taken from his series of prints known as 'The a-z of London'. This series "marries the individual letters of the alphabet with many historic locations, contemporary buildings, national monuments" (Birdsall, 2019) that make London what it is today. I have chosen to display the 's is for the shard' piece from the series as this will make the audience feel grounded within the space and look around where they are at the present moment. In the virtual space the audience will not be able to recognize they are in the Shard and will instead be looking at a virtual version of the art, which will result in a much less meaningful and boring feeling compared to physically seeing the piece.



Fig 5

Next to this will be a hand inked piece by Nick Loaring, entitled 'UKAEA Kult Ritual'. The 'void' seen in this piece was "created by scratching paint brushes and rubbing rags into a flat surface covered in ink, reducer and white spirit" (Loaring, 2018). I have chosen to display this piece in my exhibition, because when in the virtual space, the audience may not recognize the fine details of the paint brushes that make up the design, however when they physically see the piece and can talk to the creator, they will begin to understand the detail and beauty of the design much clearer. By putting this piece in my exhibition, I intend to show how many possibilities there are when printing by hand, and how these textures and patterns cannot be recreated digitally.



Fig 6

The final piece I will be displaying is another piece by Alan Kitching, entitled 'Mr Kitching's Travels Around London'. This letter pressed piece is an abstract-style map of London, which I will display at the end of my exhibition so that it will stay in the audience's minds. Whilst looking at this piece the audience can look out the windows and aim to identify the places on Kitching's map with the real place outside. The audience are then asked to walk around the floor of The Shard back to the lift. Whilst doing this they are also able to identify the places outside emphasizing the fact that the real space outside of The Shard has also become an active part of the exhibition.

By curating this exhibition to make the audience view the art through virtual reality first, I have forced the audience to view something they cannot touch. As humans, we often have a desire to want to touch art at a museum or exhibition. Touching is “part of a much bigger, more imaginative encounter with things – trying to somehow make contact with the past” (Giaino, 2017), and so by forcing the audience to virtually view the art, I am giving them a feeling of excitement and yearning to enter the next room, the real space, where they will be able to fulfill their desire and view the art in its physical form. This thus reveals the idea that as humans we feel much more satisfied when physically holding something and therefore poses the question should we rely on technology to create art all the time? Of course, we need technology to create certain forms of design such as motion graphics, however traditional design allows to feel a sense of satisfaction when creating and holding a piece, which is often not felt as strongly when creating a digital piece. Traditional design can also be used within a real space to connect people to the world around them, which I have shown by holding my exhibition on the top floor of The Shard. I intend for my exhibition to demonstrate these ideas about traditional and digital designs, and how this impacts how we feel about art and the space around us.

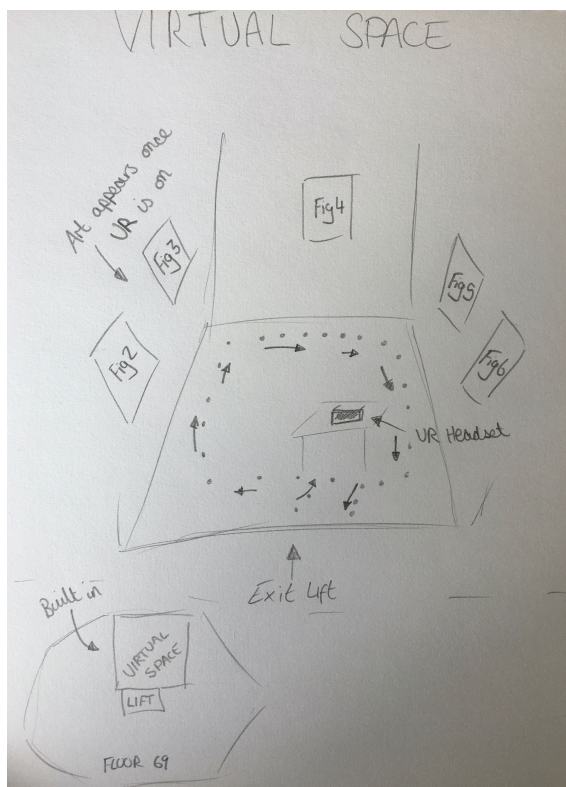


Fig 7

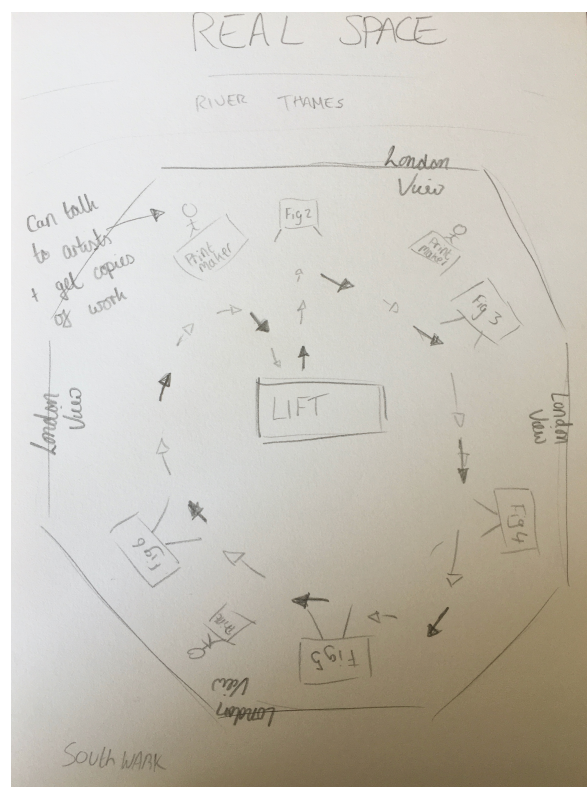


Fig 8

Bibliography

Birdsall, D. (2019), *Alan Kitching – A Life in Letterpress*. [online] Available at <http://www.thetypographyworkshop.com/life#home> [Accessed 2 May 2020]

Burrill, A. (2020), Screen print in a limited edition of thirty, created using charcoal from the Australian bush fires as a printing medium, 25 February[Instagram]. Available at https://www.instagram.com/p/B8_z9RrpqsZ/ [Accessed 20 April 2020]

Gaiimo, C. (2017), *Why Can't People Stop Touching Museum Exhibits?*. [online] Available at <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/museum-touch-exhibit-objects-multisensory> [Accessed 28 April]

Khan, S. (2019), *Multi-billion impact of London's creative industries*. [online] Available at <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/multi-billion-impact-of-creative-industries> [Accessed 28 April 2020]

Loaring, N. (2018), *UKAEA Kult Ritual*. [online] Available at <https://northernprint.org.uk/collections/nick-loaring/products/ukaea-kult-ritual?variant=17503887884378> [Accessed 2 May 2020]

Massumi, B. (2014), Envisioning the virtual, in: Grimshaw, M. (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality*. Oxford University Press, Oxford U.K. ; New York.

O'Doherty, B. (2010), *Inside the white cube*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Poon, S. (2015), "Modernisation of Graphic Design: The possibilities and challenges of digitalisation", *Journal of Graphic Engineering and Design*, Vol.6, Issue 1, pp. 5-9.

Robles, M. (2001), "Is technology taking over your office?", *Office Solutions*, vol. 18, no.4, pp. 22-26.

Trigg, D. (2012), *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*. Ohio University Press.

Figures

Fig. One: White Cube. *White Cube – Exhibitions*. [online] Available at https://whitecube.com/exhibitions/exhibition/daniel_turner_bermondsey_2012 [Accessed 27 April]

Fig. Two: Kitching, A. (2009), *Taxi!*. [online] Available at <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1260438/the-london-poster-project-poster-kitching-alan/> [Accessed 27 April]

Fig. Three: Burrill, A. (2020), Screen print in a limited edition of thirty, created using charcoal from the Australian bush fires as a printing medium, 25 February[Instagram]. Available at https://www.instagram.com/p/B8_z9RrpqsZ/ [Accessed 20 April 2020]

Fig Four: Kitching, A. (2018), *s is for Shard*. [online] Available at <https://artcollection.culture.gov.uk/artwork/18814-19/> [Accessed 2 May 2020]

Fig Five: Loaring, N. (2018), *UKAEA Kult Ritual*. [online] Available at <https://northernprint.org.uk/collections/nick-loaring/products/ukaea-kult-ritual?variant=17503887884378> [Accessed 2 May 2020]

Fig Six: Kiching, A. (2012), *Mr Kitching's Travels Around London*. [online] Available at <http://www.advancedgraphics.co.uk/kitching/zooms/mrkitchingstravelsZ.htm> [Accessed 2 May]

Fig Seven: Francis, S. (2020), Exhibition map [Hand-Drawn Sketch]

Fig Eight: Francis, S. (2020), Exhibition map [Hand-Drawn Sketch]