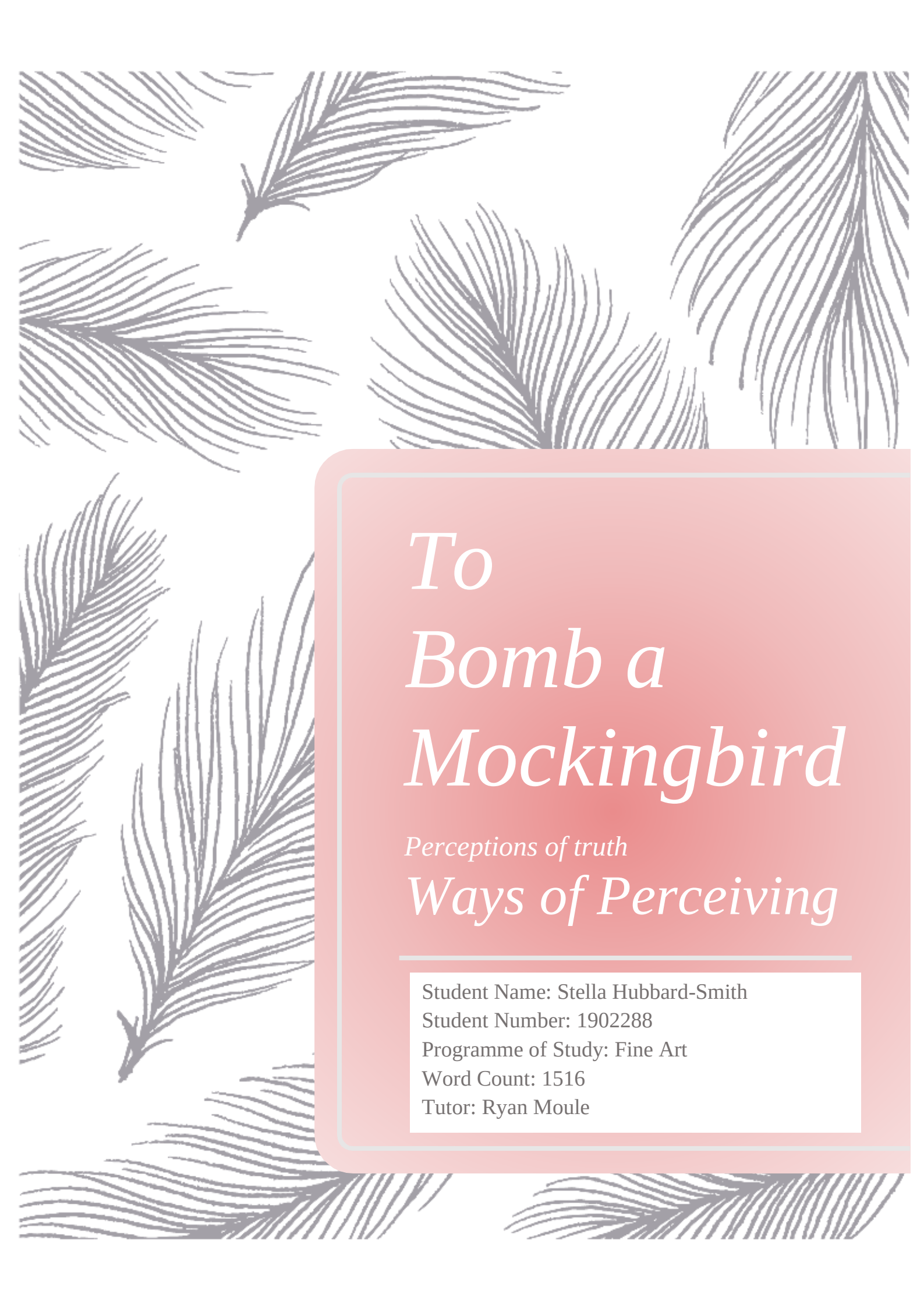




To Bomb a Mockingbird

Perceptions of truth

Ways of Perceiving

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Programme of Study: Fine Art

Word Count: 1516

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*"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it."
(Lee, 1960: 36)*

In the year 2020, information is the most lucrative currency in the world. Images within the media have become weaponised to further the agenda of a political ideology, as we have seen from the rise of fake news, the election of Donald Trump and the Brexit vote (Zafarani, 2019). These events reveal that 'truth' is actually a contested term that many artists have taken upon themselves to decipher. In reality we need to consider where this information is coming from and who is trying to manipulate it. The purpose of this exhibition is to reconnect the viewer to the 'truth' by highlighting how they are controlled by those who mould reality into whatever shape fits their narrative.

"Images were first made to conjure up the appearances of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented." (Berger, 1972: 10)

The works I have chosen to display are purposefully selected to hold these people accountable for their actions. This is in the spirit of Maura Reilly, a curational activist and arts writer. Her book titled *Curational Activism* (2018) challenges how contemporary art is represented through an expansive perspective that transcends sexuality, gender, race, or nationality. Especially today, information is interchangeable with power. Those with the tools to control that information control reality. Modern views of power are emphasised by Jenny Holzer's *Truisms* (1984). The work sits in a dark, cold, and empty room. The only thing to be seen is a "deliberately challenging (electronic sign), presenting a spectrum of often-contradictory opinion." (Tate, Gallery label, October 2000). The contradicting phrases shown on the sign emphasise the fluctuation of truth, never giving one straight answer. This exhibition will act as a journey for the viewer through realisation and confrontation of the way global media operates within their lives.

The title of this exhibition 'To Bomb a Mockingbird' is a play on Harper Lee's 'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1960). Lee's novel is part of a greater conversation on the obfuscation of truth to fuel a bigoted narrative. i.e. how information is distorted to favour the privileged. This is a factor I plan on echoing through my choice of location; an old observatory in Connecticut, USA. Built in 1914, the Van Vleck Observatory's old walls act as a capsule from another time. The contrast between the artworks I have chosen, and the location emphasises the technologization of the 21st century (Dickel, 2019). This is because a majority of the pieces were made after the year 2000, presenting new versus old ideas of 'truth-seeking.'

**Fig 1**

The exhibition will take place through a series of installations that the audience will have to navigate. Each room will have different artwork and a corresponding atmosphere. The purpose of this is so that the viewer will become fully immersed in the work and its connotations. Because this observatory was built in the USA, it is important to consider the manipulation of facts by American media and politicians in this age of 'post-truths.' (Sismondo 2017). Through this exhibition, I aim to emphasise how humanity's interest lies not in the most important facts, but in the most convincing lies.

"The rise of modern science in the Western world produced not only a number of social and technical improvements but also a view of the world as a godless mechanism." (Sigurðsson, 2016)

In the first room, Cildo Meireles' *Babel* (2001) sits at the centre. The soft murmur emitted from the radios echo around the room, as the peak of the tower stretches into the roof of the dome.

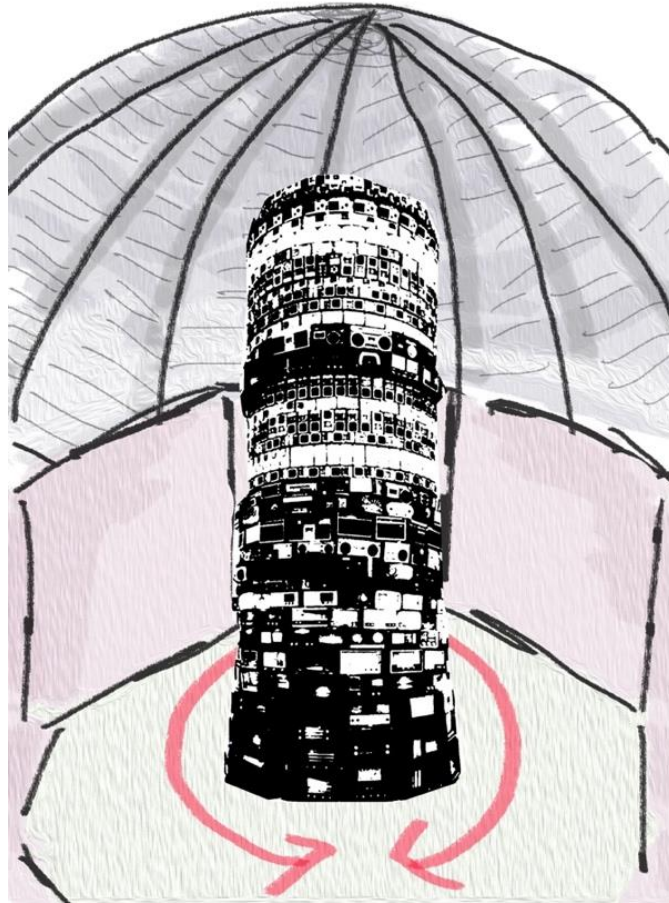


Fig 2

The tower is constructed from numerous radios; each layer evolving with a newer model. It's worth noting that each model gets smaller and smoother, i.e. easier to transport. This exemplifies the way our lives operate around technology. The artwork and its location juxtapose, the radio and the observatory representing past versus present tools of truth seeking. It serves as a testament to how we look to the media for life's purpose. We search for things to talk about and do, when in reality technology can never offer us this conclusion. We let faceless voices tell us how to behave and what to think. We are taught right from wrong, constructing a world full of binary opposites. (Levi-Strauss, 1978)

As the audience continue down the hallway, they'll see an inviting room filled with traditional Palestinian furniture. Rugs and ornate lamps adorn the walls. Arabian music can be heard quietly in the distance.



Fig 3

Seemingly innocent, the viewer continues, only to be greeted by another hallway. If they decide to continue, they are greeted by this:

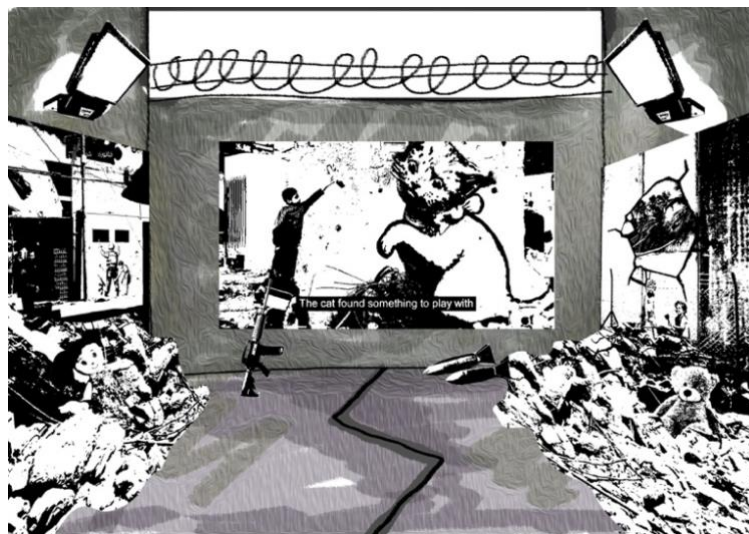
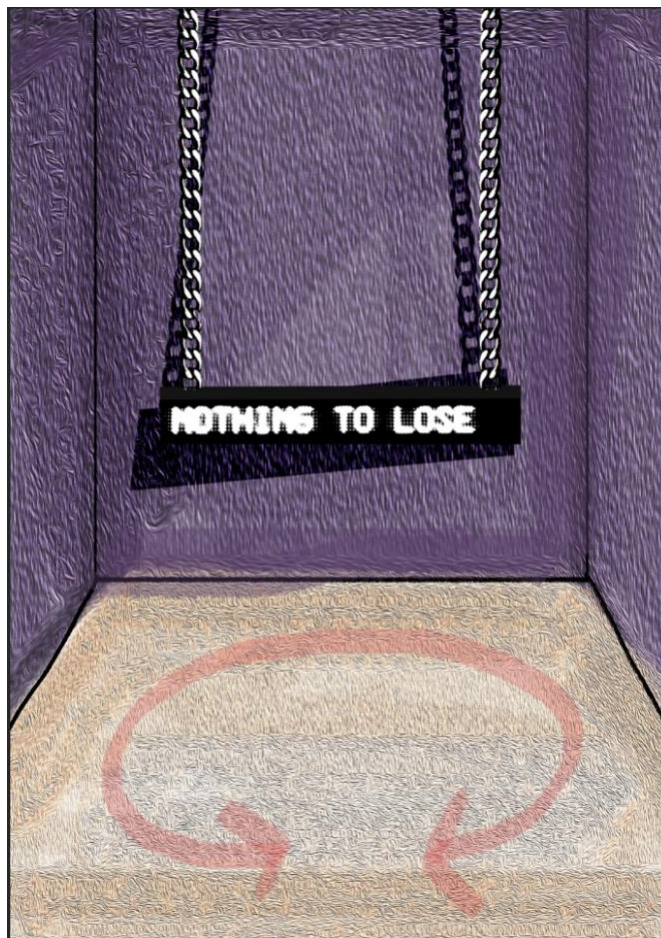


Fig 4

This is the other side of the wall. On the floor are guns, rubble, lost toys, and a crack that splits the ground in two. On the walls are Banksy's poignant *West Bank Murals* (2005-15) and a short film, ironically advertising Gaza as a holiday destination. The music becomes louder now. This is the consequence of apartheid. The purpose of this room is to portray the loss of the Palestinian people through an extreme contrast. It is to immerse the viewer into the reality of the two worlds, emphasising that one is as real as the other.

In the next space, an electronic sign hangs in the middle of a dark room. This is Jenny Holzer's *Truisms* (1984). On this sign, 3 messages appear one after another:



'GOOD AND EVIL'

'NOTHING TO LOSE'

'SIGN OF MATURITY'

Fig 5

This is referring to the contradictory nature of late-stage capitalism of the 21st century (Amadeo, 2019). It is all too easy to become passive to the endless cycle of consumption and production that is our world. It's how we live, and we tell ourselves we couldn't live without it. It offers us comfort, but with that brings an endless un-satisfactoriness. If the point of having whatever we want is to be happy, then why are so many of us unhappy? (Booth, 2020). Here, I am attempting to expose this system as the contradictory machine that it is. To escape this cycle, we have to imagine a world without the mass production of temporary happiness.

Third, is Alfredo Jaar's *Lament of the Images* (2002). In this room, 2 glowing table-like structures face one another, one hanging from the ceiling. On the walls there are three illuminated pieces of text, all referencing the governmental control of images in South Africa, the United States, and Afghanistan.

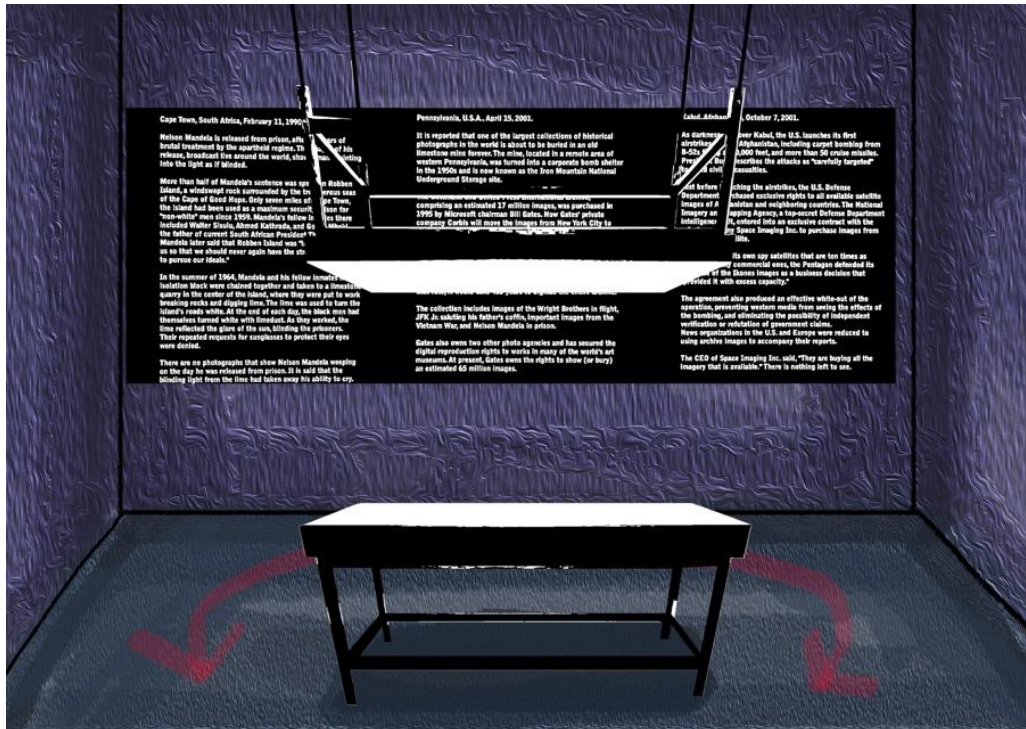
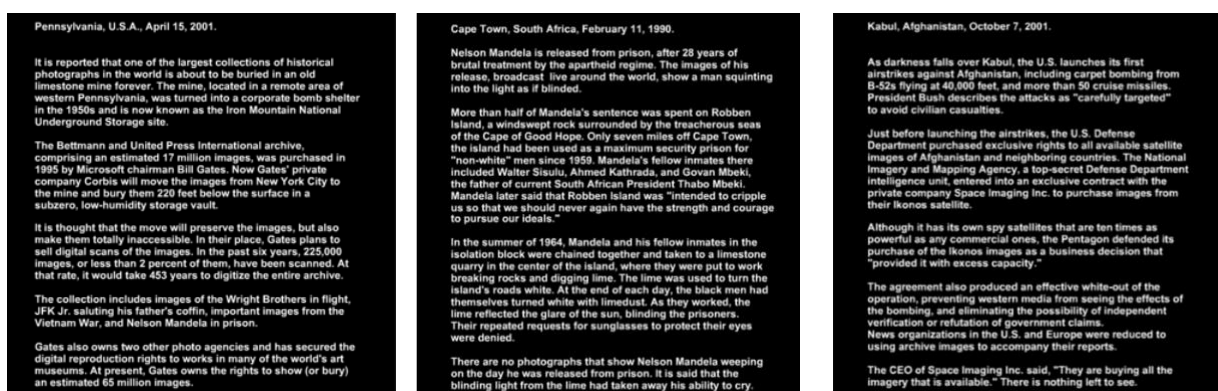


Fig 6

Over the course of one minute, the hanging table structure will lower to meet with the other, slowly diminishing the light in the room. The darkness will last for 6 minutes, and so the viewer could walk in and experience this change at any point. The controlled balance of darkness and light echo the obfuscation of images to control an audience. The text illuminated in the darkness shows that people are not giving in. It's a protest against the political control of people's opinions through perpetuated ignorance.

Fig 7



Finally, the viewer will continue through the building to another dark room. This last piece is by Hajra Waheed, titled *Everything I Hold Dear* (2019).

As the viewer walks through the darkness, the uneven floorboards creek beneath them. When they reach the end of the room, the viewer is rewarded by a web of glimmering lights hidden underneath the floorboards. These lights act as hope for those who have to make this journey through the unknown every day. It is to put yourself in the position of displaced people. Through this space, I am attempting to connect the viewer to the real world, as we can become passive to images far too easily. The oversaturation of images and the politicisation of human suffering make it difficult to connect with others on a basic emotional level (Tan, 2018). The purpose of this space is to develop an empathetic understanding of those who have lost everything they hold dear.

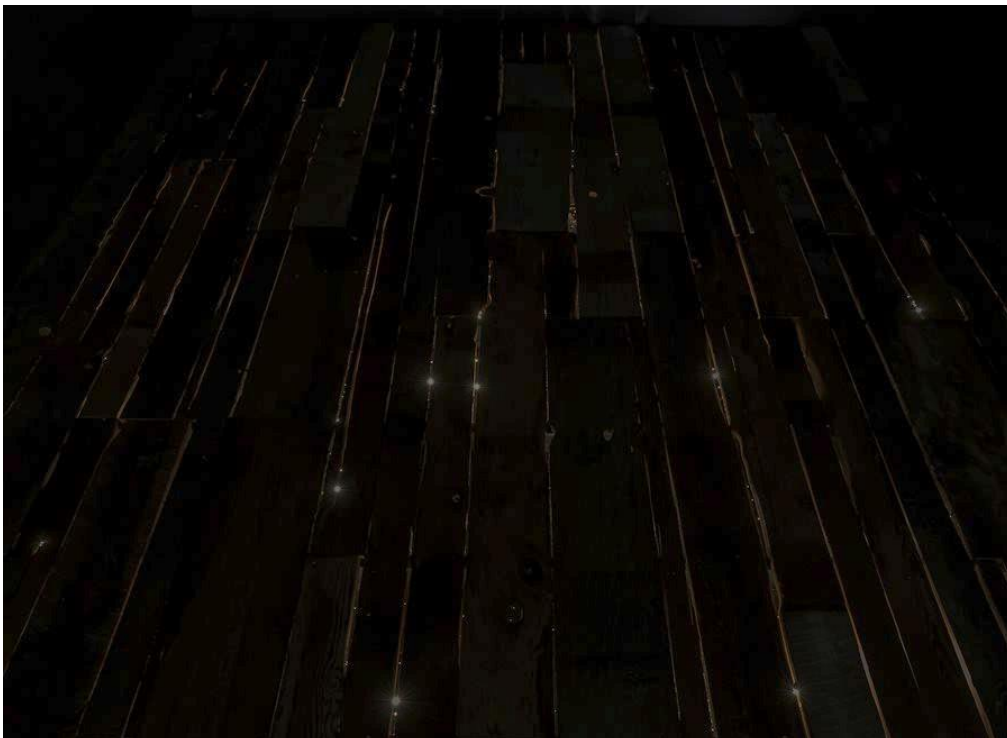


Fig 8

"If the misery of the poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin" (Darwin, 1839: 35)

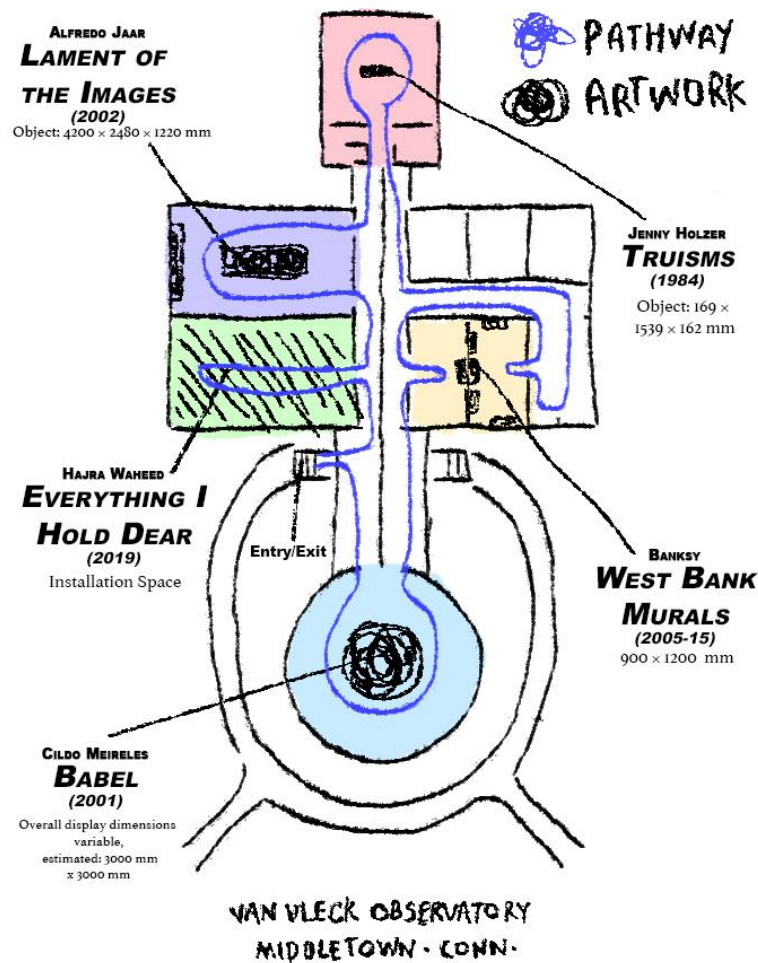


Fig 9

Here is my exhibition map showing the locations of each artwork. The blue line represents the path the audience will take through each room. The purpose of this expansive layout is to give each artist their own space to further emphasise the intention of the piece. A space designed to fit the artwork will incite a unique response. This will allow them to contemplate the pieces in greater detail with less distraction. If my exhibition has the desired effect, the audience will have an experiential response to the work, to walk away with a more questioning attitude of how information and technology are processed around them. As Bertolt Brecht wrote in his 1941 play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, a play which parodies Hitler's rise to power, "learn how to see and not to gape."

Figures

Fig. 1: AMRYS. *Van Vleck Observatory (1914)*, [Painting]

Fig. 2: S, Hubbard-Smith. *Room 1, Cildo Meireles 'Babel' (2020)* [Digitally Generated Image]

Fig. 3: S, Hubbard-Smith. *Room 2, Palestinian Front Room (2020)* [Digitally Generated Image]

Fig. 4: S, Hubbard-Smith. *Room 3, Banksy 'West Bank Murals' (2020)* [Digitally Generated Image]

Fig. 5: S, Hubbard-Smith. *Room 4, Jenny Holzer 'Truisms' (2020)* [Digitally Generated Image]

Fig. 6: S, Hubbard-Smith. *Room 5, Alfredo Jaar 'Lament of the Images' (2020)* [Digitally Generated Image]

Fig. 7: A, Jaar. *Lament of the Images (2002)* [Plexiglass text panels (texts by David Levi Strauss), light wall, and mixed media]

Fig. 8: H, Waheed *Everything I Hold Dear (2019)* [Wooden floorboards, Lights]

Fig. 9: S, Hubbard-Smith. *Floorplan (2020)* [Digitally Generated Image]

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