

Ways of Perceiving, Curation Essay

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'NOT BROKEN' is a short fashion/Art film created to raise awareness of the importance of mental health and self-discovery.

For my curation I wanted to use Film as a medium, since Film is one of the most powerful tools to portray human emotions. It is a highly persuading and influential art form, as it connects to our emotions through empathy. Empathy not just helps us to understand other's actions but to feel what they are going through. This connection has been scientifically proven by an experimental study. The subjects of the experiment watched a schizophrenic person in a movie and were seen to have temporarily developed the same brain chemistry of that of a real schizophrenic person, creating a strong empathetic connection between the viewers and the subject of the film. In my curation I wanted to create the same deep emotional relatedness, as we can forget what we have seen or heard during an experience, but we will always remember how we felt. (Francis,)



Figure 1. Filmset layout

I want to take the viewer on a journey of self-discovery, into a realm what may seems like in ruins, broken and twisted, but through art everybody can find the beauty in the scars and fragility. A surrealistic universe where imperfections and flaws are embraced, a world created by combining various art forms from five different artists. (Fig.1.)

Art and mental illness has always had a deep connection throughout history. From early as the Renaissance, where one of the first representations of modern psychology appeared on 'Melancholy' by Albert Durer (1514) and throughout other art movements where many artists have been fascinated by the insane, using them as the main subjects in their art. For others it was more than just a fascination, as many artists have been tormented by mental-health issues and had got inspired by their experiences.

This fascination to psychology is especially true to surrealism. The surrealist movement essentially was inspired by Andre Breton's the founder's psychiatric and neurological experiences. Surrealism characteristically focusses on the unconscious mind and often use symbolism to tell a story without the need to use rational thinking. (Haan, Koehler, Bogousslavsky, 2012)

"Art has led the way in seeing mental illness not as alien or contemptible but part of the human condition – even as a positive and useful experience. Modern art has even celebrated mental suffering as a creative adventure." (Jones,2015)



Figure 2. "Kintsugi Court" by Victor Solomon

The first art piece creates the 'Base' for this journey as it would act as the location for the film and a base for all the other art pieces. The filming is set in LA on the 'Kintsugi Court', an art installation by

Victor Solomon (Fig.2.). The ramshackle basketball court mended with a network of golden veins highlighting all the cracks rather than concealing them to underline the important role of sports in mental healing process, using an ancient Japanese art form kintsugi. (Hahn,2020)

The art of kintsugi is more than just an art form, it is rooted deeply in philosophy based on '*mottainai*'. Using gold to repair and transform a broken artefact is a tool to create something more. A new, unique, treasured item, something even more beautiful and special than it was before, full of stories and character.

While most of us are afraid to show vulnerabilities and treat them as weaknesses within ourselves, we should all learn from the Japanese philosophy: “imperfections are gifts to be worked with, not shames to be hidden. Things may fall apart. That’s life. But if you’re wise, you can use every scrap, patch yourself up, and keep going. That’s the essence of resourcefulness, resilience, persistence.

It’s *mottainai*.” (Mantovani, 2019)



Figure 3. “Wall Excavation” by Daniel Arsham

The second art piece is the Frame of the journey. Another art installation: 'Wall Excavation' by Daniel Arsham (Fig.3). The original inspiration behind this artwork was to examine "mankind's place in history". Daniel Arsham created a series of half destroyed faux- concrete walls where the repetitions of the carved holes in the wall getting smaller until it resembles to a human-like silhouette. (Brake,2016)

In my curation these eroded walls would be scattered around the court creating a labyrinth like structure, symbol of our unconscious mind and represent the 'feel of being lost', the journey of self-exploring to find our authentic self within. The 'Wall Excavation' would be placed in a specific way. (Fig.4.) From different perspectives they would create a completely different point of view. Same as our mind, as it often plays the trick to feel being stuck, surrounded by a wall of problems and unable to see the way out. In a Labyrinth same as in our mind just one step in a different direction can create a new path.

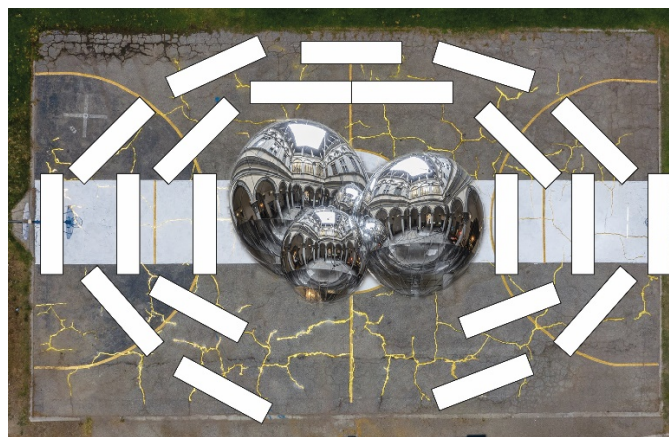


Figure 4: The 'Wall Excavation's and the 'Thermodynamic Constellation's' placement on the 'Kintsugi Court'.

Our journey of self-discovery through the maze would lead us to the centre, the location of the three main artefacts. The core to reach our authentic self.



Figure 5. "Thermodynamic Constellation" by Tomas Saraceno

The third art piece would act as the 'Mirror'. The installation by Tomas Saraceno called "Thermodynamic Constellation" part of the Aria series (Fig.5.). Inspired by air and its connection to life, as it is fundamental for every living creature to grow, also signify the unused potential of the sun. The three metallic, reflective orbs suspended above the audience, designed to create reflections of the by passers. (Ebert,2020)

Self-image is how we see ourselves, our talents, beliefs and appearance. In modern life most of the time we see others and ourselves through social media, creating a false image as a reflection of our surroundings. Our emotional state also has a high impact to create a negative self-image when we construct a mental picture of ourselves, as we cannot see reality as it is. In the concept of my short film, the suspended "Thermodynamic Constellation" orbs would act like a Distorting mirror to generate a deformed version of its settings.

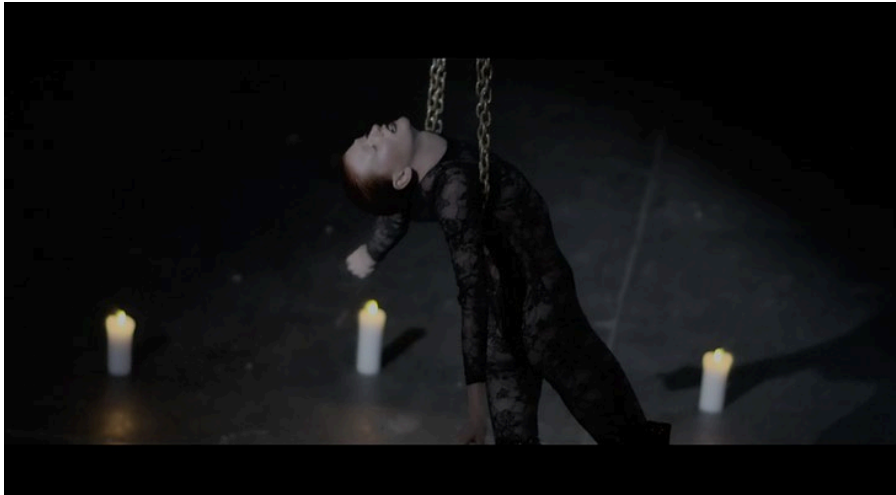


Figure 6. "Crucifix" by Janet Mayer

The fourth art piece is the 'Act'. "Crucifix" (Fig. 6.) a classical ballet pointe and aerial act by Janet Mayer, director, and dancer of J'adore La Vie. The avant-garde installation of performance art through classical ballet and dramatic aerial act on chains combined with opera music, inspired by Alexander McQueen's dark but enchanting aesthetics. (Mayer,2018)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYurrtEWq1k&t=28s>

Her act would build the link between the art pieces. Searching her way through the maze of eroding ground and walls, forging a constant change of reflections into the mirrored spheres through her surrealistic journey, finding the way to self-realisation. As same as the dancer fighting to escape from her chains, everyone has its own struggle. A fight to escape social prejudices. Many mental health problems routed in not just how others see us but how we see ourselves. We are being judged or feeling judged by us or others. Chained by expectations based on religion, class, race, gender, age, appearance, personality and many other aspects. In the journey of self-discovery, we are all trying to escape from these socially raised presuppositions to find our true identity.



Figure 7. "Razor-clam dress" by Alexander McQueen

The fifth art piece is the 'Dress'. "Razor-clam dress" designed by Alexander McQueen. (Fig. 7.) As he described it: "The shells had outlived their usefulness on the beach, so we put them to another use on a dress. Then Erin [O'Conner] came out and trashed the dress, so their usefulness was over once again." (McQueen,2000)

Each of us has our own mechanism to build resilience to be able to deal with stress and anxiety. We tend to create a safe place for ourselves, a cocoon as protection against external impulses. This cocoon can take on many forms. Some of us feel safe surrounded by family or friends, others use hobbies or other activities to create a comfort bubble for themselves. This cocoon can help to filter or limit our contact with negative factors that otherwise would cause us anxiety or stress. (Aten,2020)

In context of the film, the dress would start out as a cocoon on the dancer. The shells are symbols of the armour and protective bubble we tend to build around ourselves. While we think this armour will protect us, it is only an illusion, it is fragile just like the shells. Same as life. While we believe our cocoon of family or friends protecting us, sometimes their unintentional biases become part of the cause of our suffering. Just like the armour of shells of the 'Razor-clam dress', it can protect or cut

into the model with every step she takes. Through the journey with each step, more and more pieces of shells would break off, helping her to get closer to her true form.

The reflections under the orbs when she reaches the centre would highlight not just her fragility but also her strength as the conclusion of the film.

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