

Covid Connections by Kai Samuel

My show will be about mental health and how, who you spend your time with can affect yourself in different ways. I think that this is important in relation to now because of the recent events in society such as the covid 19 pandemic. The pandemic affected everyone in their own ways such as not being able to socialise and spend time with the ones they would like. I believe that covid was the worst thing to happen to society, and the mental health of people decreased catastrophically. The artist that I will be looking at is Dougie Wallace as he took photos of people with their friends in the moment with no warning, so everything was natural. the theme that I will outline will be mental health and the socialisation of people and how they come together. The main theorist that I would like to focus on will be Jean Baudrillard and his post modernism theory on the difference between online and real life.

Mental health is a massive issue in today's society, when looking into studies that have taken place, I can see that 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England and 1 in 6 people report experiencing a common mental health problem (like anxiety and depression) in any given week in England.¹ the main factor that I wanted to investigate and show in my exhibition was about COVID-19 and how it has impacted mental health. The pandemic itself has had a profound impact on the way that people go about their day to day lives, from keeping their distance from people, being more wary of people's feelings to even losing connections and loved ones. The pandemic caused people to be dealing with stress, anxiety and depression due to isolation, uncertainty around money and a fear of the virus itself. There have been many long term affects from COVID-19 too, with the waits in health care services in some places tripling, with people being prevented from getting the help that they need. These issues have caused peoples mental health to rapidly decline. I want to show this in my exhibit by taking photos of a gathering of people where I can see their emotions and genuine feelings that they have with each other without them knowing that they have a camera on them. I would also like to focus on the same people but with other people to see how they would react around a different group, as they might be more comfortable around some more than others. This to me is a bit of a social experiment to see the mental health of my friends but also how people react and enjoy themselves when there is no pressure for them to react and/or act the way that they think they are supposed to.

¹ Mind UK (2020). *How Common Are Mental Health problems?* [online] Mind.org.uk. Available at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/>.

For my exhibit I knew that I wanted to look into an artist that really inspired me. Whilst looking for an artist I came across a photograph that Dougie Wallace had taken. Dougie Wallace will inspire me based on his project called "STAGS HENS & BUNNIES," especially one that showed 6 women on a hen party. I liked the idea of taking pictures of people with a background story. Wallace is internationally recognised for his long-term social documentary projects and a distinct direct style of expressive street photography. They do not appear to be acting for the camera and appear to be having a good time, which is what I want to strive to capture in my work. With this strategy, I feel like I have a lot of freedom and I think I can capture moments that resemble the ones I looked up. I want to spend the day with my friends and try to take pictures without them knowing so I can get ones that are similar to Dougie Wallace's and are not seeking to be noticed by the camera to capture genuine reactions and emotions. Because I feel that way people can socialise more together, I think I want to take it in a closed area so I can try to capture as many scenes as possible without having to go so far. For theorists I took inspiration massively from Jean Baudrillard and his post modernism theory on the difference between online and real life. The theory is that our current society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs, and that human experience is a simulation of reality. "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning." this to me shows how artwork now is more about how it appeals to the audience rather than the meaning that is behind the piece itself.

One of the pieces that I have found that inspired my work was a project called 'STAGS, HENS AND BUNNIES, A BLACKPOOL STORY.' This project was created by Dougie Wallace. Dougie Wallace is a Scottish photographer that specialises in street photography. He is known for his humorous shots of people in public spaces. His work is categorised by his bold colours, strong contrasts and the way he captures the energy and chaos of urban life. Wallace's photographs often feature people going about their daily routine, but he has a particular talent for finding the unexpected and absurd in everyday situations. His work has been exhibited in galleries around the world and has won numerous awards. Wallace's work is often described as 'in your face' and 'uncompromising.' he has a knack for capturing the raw energy of urban life, and his photographs often feature people in candid, unguarded moments. Wallace's work is also notable for its use of colour, which is often bold and saturated. He has published several books of his photography projects, including 'Shoreditch wildlife,' 'Harrodsburg,' and 'Stags, Hens and Bunnies,' which is the main projects that inspired my work. In addition to his street photography, Wallace has also worked on commercial projects for clients such as Adidas, Rolls Royce and HSBC. These images were compiled between September 2011 and November 2013 but then publishes in July 2014. I

decided that this project would be the best to take inspiration from as it looked fun and unique, which is what I wanted to show in my own work.

One of the specific pieces I especially took inspiration from was the one with seven women dressed as Greek goddesses, riding bikes. I especially liked this image and took inspiration from it for my exhibition due to how caught off guard they all look. In the image itself, there are only two of the women looking at the camera whilst the others have no idea what is happening. The girls in the image can be seen as being really carefree and genuinely enjoying themselves as they do not even know that someone is actually taking a photo of them. At that moment you can see that they are not thinking about what others may think of them or what society wants from them, they are just being themselves with no cares. I wanted to use this piece of work in order to create my own for the exhibit, I will do this by taking images of a group of my friends when they do not know that I am taking photos so that I can get genuine and carefree images of them. For the photoshoot to take place I am going to ask a group of friends to go out for a drink and then capture photos of them whilst having a chat and a drink. However, I am going to make a few changes to my piece as I am going to try and have a narrative to my project so that it is meaningful. This may be quite difficult to do as I have no control over the images as they are candid and out of my control. With my project I will be surrounded by the same group of people the entire day instead of with numerous groups like Dougie Wallace was, this allows me to have the narrative idea that I want to portray.

References

- DOUGIE WALLACE. (n.d.). *STAGS HENS & BUNNIES, A BLACKPOOL STORY*. [online] Available at: <http://www.dougiewallace.com/blackpool> [Accessed 1 May 2023].
- Michels, S. (2018). *Re-framing Photography – Some Thoughts*. [online] JSTOR. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1wxt5s.4?searchText=photography&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dphotography&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3Ac4281e9ec3f6e79fb871db6898fedc4e [Accessed 1 May 2023].
- Costello, D. and Iversen, M. (2012). Introduction: Photography between Art History and Philosophy. *Critical Inquiry*, 38(4), pp.679–693. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1086/667419>.

- Mind UK (2020). *How Common Are Mental Health problems?* [online] Mind.org.uk. Available at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/>.
-
- Andrews, P. and Langford, M. (2014). *Langford's Starting Photography*. Taylor & Francis.
-
- Burian, P.K. (2006). *Mastering Digital Photography and Imaging*. John Wiley & Sons.
-
- Peres, M.R. (2013). *Focal encyclopedia of photography : digital imaging, theory and applications, history, and science*. Focal Press.

