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By 2030, London's consumption growth is projected be the largest of any City in the World¹. As the driving force of the economy, consumerism is not only necessary but encouraged enthusiastically by our governments. However, the Western World's insatiable hunger for material possession has grown to overconsumption, resulting in "a culture of overwork, haste and instantaneous gratification; under-scores a bland cultural homogenization of life; and fragments communities and social relationships." (Humphery, 2010, p. 5). Many consumers are unaware they even contribute to this culture, thus why I have choreographed my interactive art exhibition titled 'Avarice' (extreme greed for wealth or material gain) to inform the shoppers of London of their passive involvement in consumer culture.

Exhibition Aesthetic researcher Dorothea von Hantelmann proposes that 'The artwork needs to become an object of reflection, just as the visitors have to become the object of the conversation that they witness; it is as if the work of art were holding up a mirror to the observer.' (Hantelmann, 2014). Featuring 5 different art collections from 3 different artists, my exhibit will present itself as a standard British retail store in an attempt to submerge the audience into their very own exhibition of consumerism through using Hantelmann's theory on gallery space.

From the moment a person steps into a store "They are told what they might buy, and where it is kept, and why they might buy it. They're told what the merchandise can do for them and when and how it can do it." (Underhill, 2009, p. 63) Using findings from 'Why We Buy – The Science of Shopping' My exhibition will feature a specially designed faux retail space that uses customer behaviour theory to manipulate the audience into curating unnecessary material goods; Ultimately proving to them they are an active reflection of consumer theory.

¹ 2016. *Urban World: The Global Consumers To Watch*. 1st ed. [ebook] McKinsey & Company, p.16. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/urbanization/urban-world-the-global-consumers-to-watch/~/_media/57c6ad7f7f1b44a6bd2e24f0777b4cd6.ashx> [Accessed 8 May 2021].



Fig One

Upon entering the exhibition, Barbara Kruger's 1987 Untitled (I shop therefore I am) will be the first art installation to welcome the audience – Fig One. Adorned to the wall, the striking visual contrasts and vivid red frame should capture the audience's eye as though it were a promotional store sign. Measuring at 111 x 113 inches this photographic vinyl demands your attention, paired well with a large red Futura Bold phrase reading 'I shop therefore I am'. Taking inspiration from French philosopher Rene Descartes' well known phrase 'I think therefore I am', Kruger implies that rather than conscious thought defining a meaningful existence, that material possession now has hierarchy in importance in recent years. This clear commentary on mass media consumption will make the audience begin to question if their sense of identity comes from a place too materialistic in nature.



Fig Two

Within a break in the shelves, this piece will be surrounded by another element in this collection – Fig 2; an industry standard paper bag with Kruger’s untitled (I shop therefore I am) printed upon it. Copies of this are to be manufactured and displayed on shelving within the store that participants can purchase themselves, creating a sense of irony that anti-consumerism artwork can be mass produced and sold.

I designated this as the first exhibit as consumer theory suggests, “In this zone people will be walking fast, so a message has to be short and punchy-arresting.” (Underhill, 2009) and Kruger’s bold yet simplistic work I believe fits these criteria effortlessly. Paired with the rows of merchandise, these works will introduce the audience to the sense of familiarity of a generic store but undermine that feeling with the contrast of the message at hand.



Fig Three



Fig Four

These acrylic and spray paint on canvas pieces are the work of Ben Frost, an Australian visual artist who challenges Western culture and society by putting his own dark spin on popular iconography. From his 'The Package Paintings Collection', I have chosen Gotta Take Em' All Acrylic & Spray Paint on Canvas - 44 x 40 inches and OxyCookie - Acrylic & Spray Paint on Canvas - 44 x 44 inches as their strong vivid imagery is immediately recognisable across many cultures.

Seeing overproduced icons of mass media that often hold strong childhood emotion, contrasted with the mature and morbid prescription medication packaging at first will be a shocking and uncomfortable experience for the audience. However as the audience overcomes this initial reaction, the exhibit invites the spectator to think about how corporations exploit consumers by invoking these feelings of familiarity and trust all for the purpose of getting you to make a purchase since ultimately, "Nostalgic memories have been found to generate high levels of emotions and positive consumption intentions." (Exploring the elements of consumer nostalgia in retailing: Evidence from a content analysis of retailer collages, 2017)

To exaggerate this sense, significantly smaller 3D cardboard packaging of the medication is to be displayed in 3 merchandise pyramids that are no taller than 4 ft around the store as "This scaling-down appeals psychologically to both children and adults;... while adults are reminded of trips back to childhood haunts; everything is much smaller than one remembers." (Kowinski, 1985).



Fig Five



Fig Six

My final exhibition piece will be these hyper-realistic depictions of average shoppers sculpted by Duane Hanson. These figures could be mistaken for audience members themselves as Hanson spares no detail within his work and strives to accurately portray the American consumer. Fig Five, 'Supermarket Shopper' will be placed alongside the till, her overflowing trolley speaking volumes on society's addiction to overconsumption and Fig Six 'Young Shopper' will be placed in front of a merchandise stand, despite her hands overflowing with bags it presents her desire for more material possession as she peers at the goods on offer. Mini figurines of the statues are to be placed along the shelves adjacent and available for purchase. As these sculptures mirror the target audience, I intend to make my audience's personal reflection unavoidable, as "The artists we find in museums often challenge our conceptions of ourselves and unsettle our sense of society. The artists who exhibit their skills in the museums we call malls, tend to reinforce our sense of ourselves, producing a commercial art that makes malls more popular than museums in American culture." (Farrell, 2014). Ultimately blurring the line between art exhibitions and retail store and successfully putting Hantelmann's theory into notion.

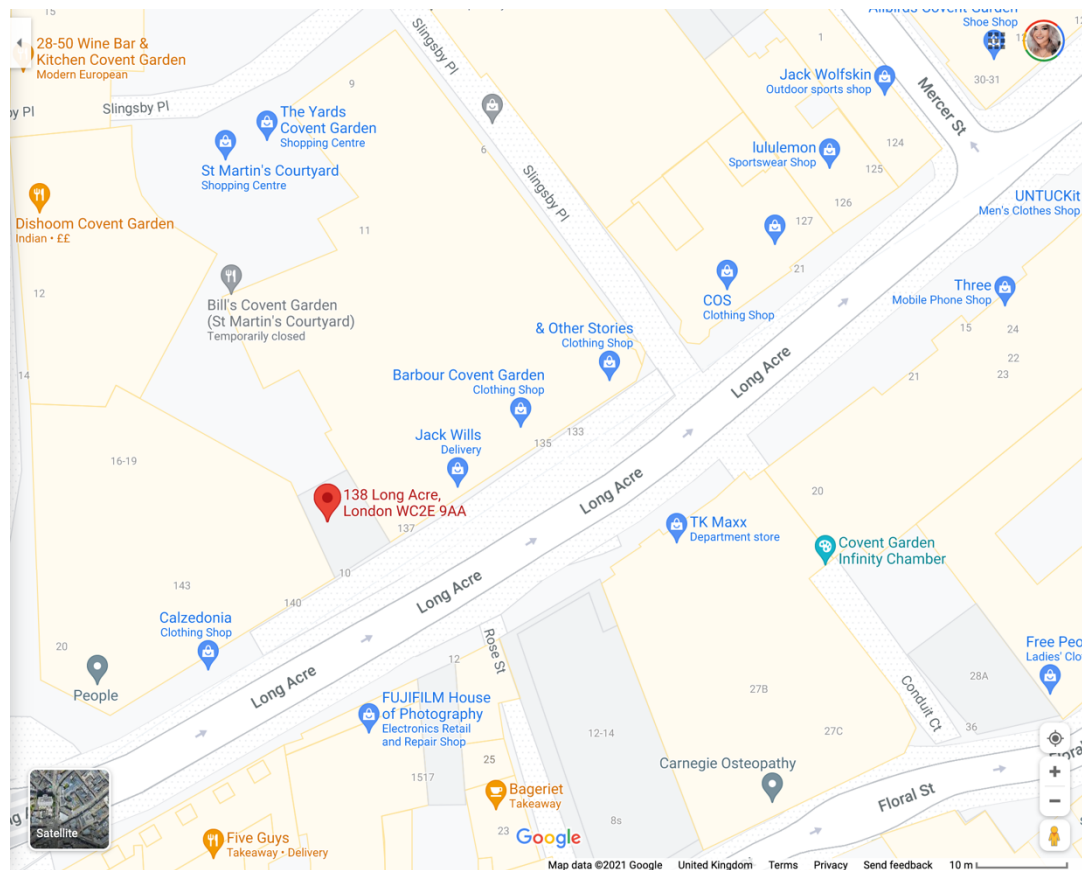


Fig Seven

As seen in Fig Seven, 138 Long Acre is situated in Covent Garden, a major global retail and hospitality destination in central London. Welcoming over 44 million patrons a year, Covent Garden features a wide array of luxury retail stores and restaurants. My chosen lot 138 Long Acre, also known as the Glass Front Store for its large panel glass entrance, is next door to two major fashion retail brands, Jack Wills and Calzedonia and neighboured by many more. Avarice's unsuspecting appearance will help it effortlessly blend within the Highstreet and potential audience members will already be in the consumer mindset, all importantly keeping the experience authentic as "the creation and shaping of experiences have increasingly become an integral part of the artwork's conception." (Hantelmann, 2014)

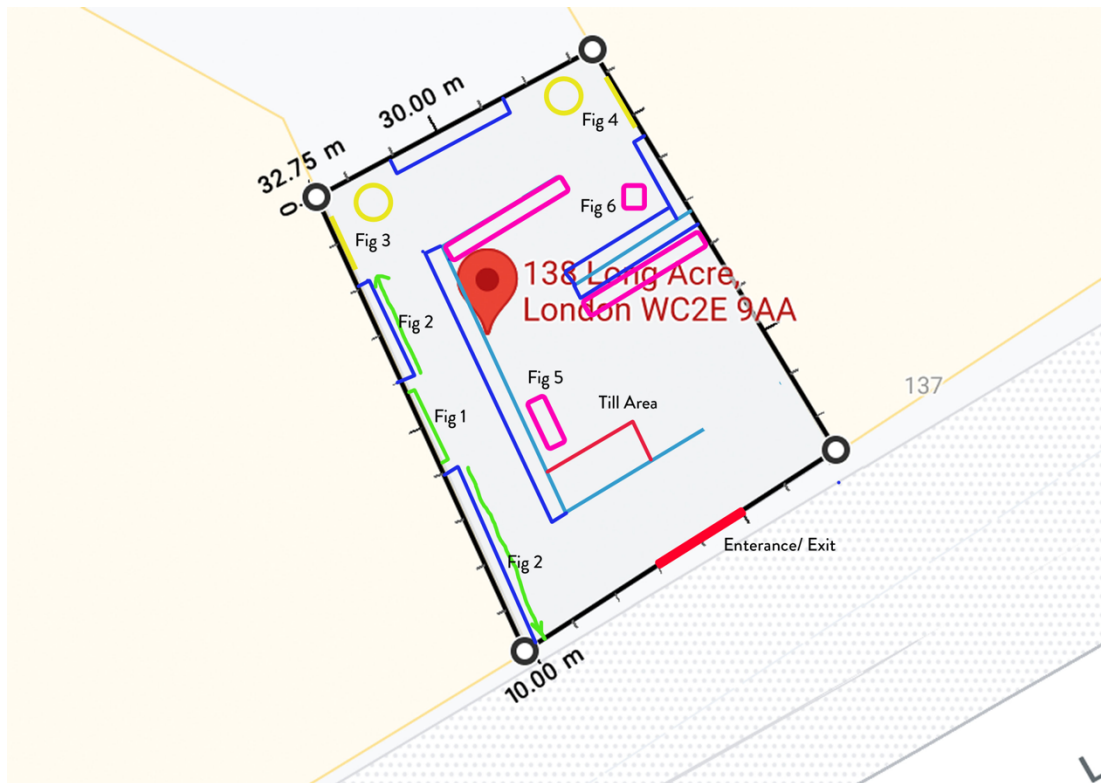


Fig Eight

As depicted in Fig Eight, my exhibition is a one-way system that flows to allow the audience time to appreciate and contemplate the artwork on display. Using consumer behaviour theory, each aspect is specifically placed to where the customer is most inclined to purchase the product. It is as though the museum and it's gift shop have become one. Consumers have been exposed to a plethora of behavioural cues and sensory experiences during every retail interaction they have had, this sense of familiarity will further immerse the spectator into the experience and it is then "The spectator is invited into a space where the act of approach is turned back on itself." (O'Doherty, 1986).

Ultimately my goal for this exhibition is it will allow the public to take a break from fuelling the industries that profit from consumer culture, to be educated on just how deeply ingrained this behaviour is and hopefully perpetuate a positive change of mindset. Whether the audience gauges this from the various anti-consumerist exhibits, the ironic merchandise or the interactive self reflective experience I believe this space of curation will shift the perspective of a city.

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