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Course: BA Illustration

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Module: M4X01560

Tasks in Order I Received Them:

Task One: Jonathan Pugh- Reflective Writing. = 507 words.

Task Two: Ryan Moule- Observational Writing: A semiotic analysis of a chosen image. = 500 words.

Task Three: Julia Lockheart- Manifesto Writing: "What do I believe in?" = 542 words.

Task One: Reflective Writing.

Theorist David Kolb first introduced the 'Kolb Experimental Learning Cycle' in his 1984 book, *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development (Vol. 1)*. The learning cycle conveys that by having an experience, reflecting, and learning from said experience, we open ourselves up to new ways of thinking- "*Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience*" (Kolb, 1984).



- Van Gogh, V, (1889) Sunflowers, [website]
<<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0031V1962>>

Vincent Van Gogh is thought to be one of the best impressionist/ post-impressionist painters ever to live. Collin Wiggins, the special projects curator for the national gallery in London, describes Van Gogh as someone who can "*communicate to people who aren't interested in art*" (*Vincent Van Gogh: The Colour and Vitality of His Work*, 2016). I think this is largely down to his bright display of colour, especially the usage of yellow.

His use of colour definitely is an inspiration into my own personal practice.

'Sunflowers', painted in January 1889, is one of Van Gogh's most famous- the large oil painting lives in his own museum in Amsterdam. This painting transitions his earlier, greyer,

works, such as 'the potato eaters', to his more recognizable works, his colourful style and thick brush strokes.

Van Gogh always viewed his multiple sunflower paintings with happiness. In a letter he writes "*sunflowers are mine*" (Walther and Metzger, 2015). He wrote to his brother Theo "*I am going to cover the white walls of the room... with nothing but large yellow sunflowers*" (Walther and Metzger, 2015). The series of Sunflower paintings produced were created as decorations, created with excitement for fellow artist Gauguin was coming to live in Arles with Van Gogh.

I think it's apparent that although Van Gogh had such a tortured mind, the sunflowers brought him joy, the idea that they represented him, and his own work filled him with pride.

My initial impression on the painting hasn't changed, more so added to after researching and reflecting on the piece. Upon reflection I realise the flowers are wilting, a link towards the mortality of a natural form and how life is short- however what is left behind are heads full of seeds. The painting is joyous- there is an impression of hope. Hundreds of seeds left behind, full of energy and ready to burst into life next summer.

At Van Gogh's funeral, friend Emile Bernard wrote how "*on the coffin were masses of flowers. Sunflowers, yellow flowers which he loved so much. A symbol of that light in which he dreamt in heart as well as painting*" (Vincent Van Gogh: The Colour and Vitality of His Work, 2016).

I find it's such a fitting symbol for Vincent. I'm glad that it is the sunflowers he painted that are his legacy since I believe they are his purest works. Many paintings he completed after this were of gardens at the mental hospital that he admitted himself too, so much of his portfolio of work had a secret pain behind it- but the sunflowers were born out of pure happiness.

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Task Two: Semiotic Analysis of a chosen image.

Semiotics is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as “the study of signs and symbols and of their meaning and use” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, 2019). Defined by one of the terms founders Ferdinand De Saussure as “the life and signs in society” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019), semiology became a functional method for analysis in the late 19th and 20th century.

Using this method, I’ll provide a semiotic analysis of Frida Kahlo’s 1946 painting titled ‘Tree of Hope, Keep Firm’ breaking down the overall message of what Kahlo is trying to convey to her audience.



- Kahlo, F (1946) Tree of Hope, Keep Firm, [website] <<https://www.fridakahlo.org/tree-of-hope.jsp>>

Kahlo's painting is a self-portrait. What is denoted in the piece is two versions of herself- one lies on a gurney behind, the other seated on a table in front. There are two moods of background, a sun and moon, daylight and night-time split down the centre. The Frida lying on the gurney has bloody gashes down her back, her face not visible and her upper torso shielded by a sheet, whereas the Frida sat on the table is facing us, colourfully dressed. She is wielding a pale pink back brace in one hand, and a flag with Spanish on it in the other. The Spanish on the flag is words from a song "Cielito Lindo" - "Tree of Hope, keep firm." By the time Kahlo painted this she was already "forced to wear eight corsets" (Fuentes, 2006), her body- like the version of herself hidden on the gurney- had been put through hell. It completely juxtaposes 'colourful Frida'.

I think it conveys the front that Kahlo gives to the audience. The colourful gown (part of her native Mexican dress), jewellery, and floral headpiece, acting as an armour- "...hiding her tortured body, her shrivelled leg, her broken foot, her orthopaedic corsets under spectacular finery..." (Fuentes, 2006).

Kahlo was involved in a bus crash in 1925, where she "broke her spinal column, her collarbone, her ribs, her pelvis. Her already withered leg suffered eleven fractures... A handrail crashed into her back and came out through her vagina..." (Fuentes, 2006)

The context explains the connoted back brace that 'colourful Frida' holds, and the medical imagery that involve the 'bloodied Frida'. Given also that this was painted in 1946 and her accident happened in 1925 it could explain why the 'bloodied Frida' is depicted lying behind the 'colourful Frida'. Her past self is behind her, or possibly the idea that 'colourful Frida' is merely a persona, a mask of who she really is. One could infer that the split sun and moon ties into the idea of by day you are one person and by night someone else.

This isn't necessarily a bad thing, for example this is a common trope seen in superheroes such as 'Batman' or 'Superman'- perhaps Kahlo regards 'colourful Frida' as her own superhero?

I think Carlos Fuentes accurately describes her "a broken Cleopatra" (Fuentes, 2006). A beautiful, admired woman, with a life of trauma experienced in her short life.

Bibliography

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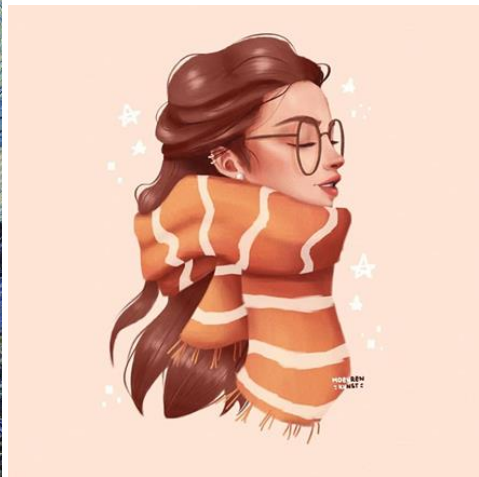
Task Three: Manifesto Writing.

What do I believe in?

1. Colour. Colour. Colour.
2. Not everything needs a hidden meaning
3. Fashion first
4. Things take time
5. Art Museums need to be more accessible, inviting, and less pretentious
6. Experience and learning go hand in hand
7. Not being 'Edgy' is just fine
8. Pay attention to nature

Keywords and Images

1. Colour. Colour. Colour



- Van Gogh, V, (1889) Starry Night, [website] <https://www.vangoghgallery.com/painting/starry-night.html>
- 'Anna', (2019), [website] <<https://www.instagram.com/moehrenkunst/?hl=en>>

Colour is possibly the most important influence on my own practice, and myself just in general.

Thanks to French chemist named Michel-Eugene Chevreul, he "altered understanding and

use of colour...Chevreul realised that colours appear brighter or duller depending on the colours they are placed next to". (Headforart.com) Paintings and works became much more vibrant from the impressionist period onwards due to this. Chevreul's discover explains why I find myself interested in art largely from the impressionist period onwards, standouts for me are painters such as: Vincent Van Gogh, Claude Monet, Frida Kahlo, and Georgia O'Keefe.

I enjoy their vivid use of a range of tones and shades from a plethora of colours, they're often always linked to nature too which I think is full of beautiful blends of colour. The blues of the sky and ocean, the mixture of tones in flower petals- bright beautiful hues that dare to be explored in art.

In relation to my illustration tastes, I enjoy the use of pastels, or a limited colour palette (like the example above made by Instagram handle @moehrenkunst), and watercolour or gouache-based illustrations. The works are more inviting to me and less serious, perhaps silly at times, which I think is needed in our modern world.

2. Fashion first



- Sebastian, P, (2018) Once Upon a Dream SS Couture [website] <http://paolosebastian.com/collections/2018-ss-couture/#/image/13>
- Gaultier, J P, (2007) Jean Paul Gaultier SS Collection [website] <<https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2007-couture/jean-paul-gaultier/slideshow/details#46>>

As well as looking at colour, fashion has always been a huge inspiration. Collections or photoshoots that are themed in relation to a storybook, or aesthetic make my mind wonder how I could create something fun using that as reference.

As an example, one of the two above images is from the 2007 Jean Paul Gaultier Spring Couture range was heavily influenced by religion- “Their faces were painted like plaster statues, their garb inspired by the vernacular devotional art found in local churches throughout the Catholic world” (Mower, 2007). Each piece illustrating a story, a narrative to be explored.

Playing with the idea, or story, associated with Catholicism (or just religion in general) hasn’t left the fashion world- 11 years after Gaultiers collection the MET Gala’s 2018 theme was ‘heavenly bodies’, where celebrities and models donned religious garb in the name of fashion.

The second example is the 2018 Once Upon a Dream collection from designer Paolo Sebastian, this time under the influence of Disney and all things Disney Princess. The collection was pastel, floral and embroidered- a complete dream to look at. When thinking of reference for certain projects or pieces, I often think of the imagery this collection provided.

3. Not being ‘Edgy’ is just fine



- Clements, S, (2019) [website] <<https://www.instagram.com/sillyyellowlines/>>

Although I realise this term was told to me in an effort to push myself within my work, the term has always stuck with me and kept a foul taste in my mouth- 'Edgy'.

It's a term I probably have an unusual opinion on, but I detest it. Many times I have been told to try and be more 'Edgy' through my higher education, and as I become increasingly aware of my artist style I wonder what is so wrong with not wanting to be 'Edgy'? Often, I'm not creating work to convey some hidden message or broader point- it's me enjoying colour, portraiture, and nature. I would rather stand out as an illustrator doing the opposite of what people want me to do- it's not being comfortable; it's enjoying what I'm creating.

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