

Ways of Perceiving ADAD4019

BA Illustration

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My exhibition, titled Sentimental Value, is designed to make the viewers consider whether nostalgia is a positive or a negative experience. My aim for this exhibition is to get people to question where the line is that separates the positive and negative aspects of nostalgia and how blurred can the line become. In simple terms nostalgia is thinking of the past, reminiscing on past events in one's life (Jacobson, 2021) and this is the definition I will be using throughout.

Johannes Hofer first coined the term nostalgia and defined it as “the suffering evoked by the desire to return to the place of one's origin” (Wildschut, Sedikides, and Routledge, 2021). Definitions of nostalgia had changed however by the nineteenth century with it being closely tied to depression. Nostalgia in this way can be viewed as a negative emotion causing unhappiness and a negative impact on a person's mental health, however it can also have positive aspects.

Nostalgia is said to have “existential implications” (Sedikides and Wildschut, 2018), meaning it can spiral the individual into an existential crisis, questioning existence itself. For something to be existential it has to be related to the human experience and life as a whole (vocabulary.com, 2021). This implies that nostalgia is linked to the human experience in the sense that it is often triggered by an object or place, making the person relive that period of their life and reminisce on it. It is also seen as near to grief in the sense that the individual experiencing nostalgia is mourning their past and their past self in some cases. However different research implies a more positive reflection on the term, for example;

Nostalgia does have its painful side — it's a bittersweet emotion — but the net effect is to make life seem more meaningful and death less frightening. When people speak wistfully of the past, they typically become more optimistic and inspired about the future (John Tierney 2013).

To recreate the feeling of nostalgia the exhibition will take place in a medium sized circus tent, approximate measurements would be 140ft wide, approximately 43 metres. The height would be 10ft at its lowest around the edges of the tent and around 30ft in the centre where it comes to a point. These measurements were customised from the Flynn Creek Circus websites own measurements, however their tent is quite large and I wanted something a bit cosier (Tent

Specifications | Flynn Creek Circus, 2021).



Fig 1: Example of a Flynn Creek Circus Tent

Internally the pathway will be shaped like a spiral, leading inward to the centre of the tent. It is believed that,

the Spiral is a sacred symbol that represents the journey and change of life as it unfolds; taking a labyrinth-like passage that leads to Source. The spiral symbol can represent the consciousness of nature beginning from its center expanding outwardly (Spiral Meaning and Symbolism, 2021).

I feel that this is a good representation for nostalgia as it reflects the idea of spiralling down into nostalgia. I would go as far as to have vintage light bulbs with the middle made up of a spiral, with the decorating to represent this concept of the spiral (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Globe Spiral Filament Warm Glow LED Bulb

For a colour scheme, I want the artworks to be the brightest and boldest part of the exhibition, but I'd also like the whole exhibition to be extremely colourful. For these reasons the tent itself will be made up of vertical stripes of lighter more toned down shades of the three primary colours, red, yellow and blue. The stripes will be vertical not only because it fits the classic aesthetic that the older circus tents had, but also to give the illusion that it is taller than it actually is. The colour scheme will continue into the interior of the tent, the stripes will be internal too and the spiral will be made of partition screens in the same three colours as the stripes on the tent.



Fig. 3: 'Here's to all the small joys and baby hopes!'

The first artwork I have chosen to go in the exhibition is a colourful, what appears to be traditional piece, by an artist called InkiPri (Fig. 3). This piece is quite existential, the text within the piece reads "can you even fathom the vastness of a lifetime? I'm learning the only way to make sense of it is to fall deeply in love with every mundane bit" (InkiPri, 2021). To me this piece is saying to be able to live a fulfilled and happy life you need to fall in love with the everyday, to make the most of the little things in life that we all sometimes take for granted. (SkillsYouNeed, 2021) The person in the piece seems to be distorted and out of proportion. This could be seen to represent how memories, especially nostalgia, are not true reflections of the past in a lot of cases. For many people nostalgia paints the past as a vastly positive experience and time in their lives, when actually it was most likely less interesting at the time than it is to look back on.

Nostalgia is a rose-tinted lens that distorts the past, a lens through which we bend and contort memories to fit our whims and desires, to have them slot neatly into narratives and weave seamlessly into wider stories we tell ourselves, about when we were younger, stronger, better. Nostalgia, in short, is a liar (Jackson, 2021).

This is a good example of how nostalgia can be deceiving, it can be both negative and positive at the same time.



Fig.4: You are allowed to be kind to yourself.

Next we have another colourful piece by GummyGunk (Fig. 4.) which has a positive message behind it; the text within states that “you are allowed to be kind to yourself” (GummyGunk, 2021). This is something we often forget, especially when comparing where we are now to where we were when we were younger. The message behind this piece is not to dwell on how good you think the past was, but to look forward to how brilliant you can make your future. Self compassion is extremely important for a person’s mental health (Hasson, 2021). The colours in this piece give an almost marbled effect and it looks childlike in its style; this links into the theme of nostalgia, like looking back on childhood drawings.



Fig.5: Redraw

The next piece is by CottonSprout (Fig. 5.) which shows two people holding polaroid cameras and taking photos together. These polaroid cameras are a modern take on the classic; they are more streamline and compact compared to the original polaroid cameras. This is a metaphor for nostalgia in my eyes. The actual old polaroid camera was clunky and a bit ugly, whereas the recreation based off of it is sleek and colourful. This shows the rose tinted glasses effect nostalgia has that I previously discussed, as many people remember the classic and immediately dismiss any modern recreations as worse than the original.



Fig. 6: Felt Clown Characters.

Following this will be a piece by CircusMotel (Fig. 6.) depicting felt fabric clown characters. I felt these fit in with my theme of nostalgia because for a lot of people clowns are scary, but for others they remind them of their childhood and visiting the circus with the family. (Tikkanen, 2021). This artist takes advantage of these factors by making the clowns appear very cute and innocent then giving them quite sinister names such as 'Bones'. Clowns are nostalgic for a lot of people, personally I always went to the circus whenever it came to my local area. I enjoyed it a lot, however at the time it was probably a lot more overwhelming for my younger self than it is in my memories. Some things are best left as memories and should not be revisited in case the memory is tarnished by a negative new experience.



Fig. 7: Sherb.

The final piece will be displayed in the centre of the spiral within the tent, and it will be an animal crossing inspired digital piece by Rynook (Fig. 7). This digital piece would be in the form of a large scale print as a grand finale. Many people have played a game from the animal crossing franchise, however even more people got into it when the newest game came out in March 2020. This game was called New Horizons and came out as lockdown was beginning therefore this year and in the future a lot of people will be reminiscing on the times when we were all stuck in our houses and were fearful of what the future held, but had this adorable new game to focus on instead of the negatives. This game provides people with control during an uncontrollable situation enforced by society due to the pandemic. This was an essential item for people to have to provide focus and motivation at a time when it may have felt independence was removed from them. This game got me through lockdown and though it has only been out for just over a year, it is already nostalgic for me of the beginning of lockdown. (MacDonald, 2020).

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