

Ways of Perceiving

Exhibition title: Expression

Name: Harry Clegg

Student Number: 2305785

Programme of Study: Fine Art

Word Count: 1656

INTRODUCTION

The exhibition will be about expression and symbolism. Art is a good way of expressing thoughts, feelings, emotions and important messages. Symbolism is a way of expressing these ideas in a different way. It tells a story using symbolic imagery with a deeper meaning, that is less obvious than a literal depiction of the idea the artist is trying to express. The theories touched upon in this essay will be curation theory and art expression, using semiotics to decipher meanings behind certain artistic choices (Chandler, 2007). Using semiotics to analyse art can reveal deeper insights into the piece.

CONTEXT

This exhibition will take place in a traditional white cube gallery space with one art piece on each of the four walls. One wall each means audience can focus on that one piece without distraction. The choice of white walls is to keep the area neutral and not distract from the art. Adrian George (2015) asks curators to consider colour for exhibition spaces. Brilliant white can be too straining on the eye and light will bounce from it. To counter this, galleries often choose use 'swan white' which blends white with a hint of grey to soften it.

In curating this exhibition, I need to consider the following: "the size, shape and colour of each wall to the positions of each work of art..." (George, 2015, p. 71). In my space, the doors will be in the corners of the octagonal space, meaning each wall space will be the same (fig 1).

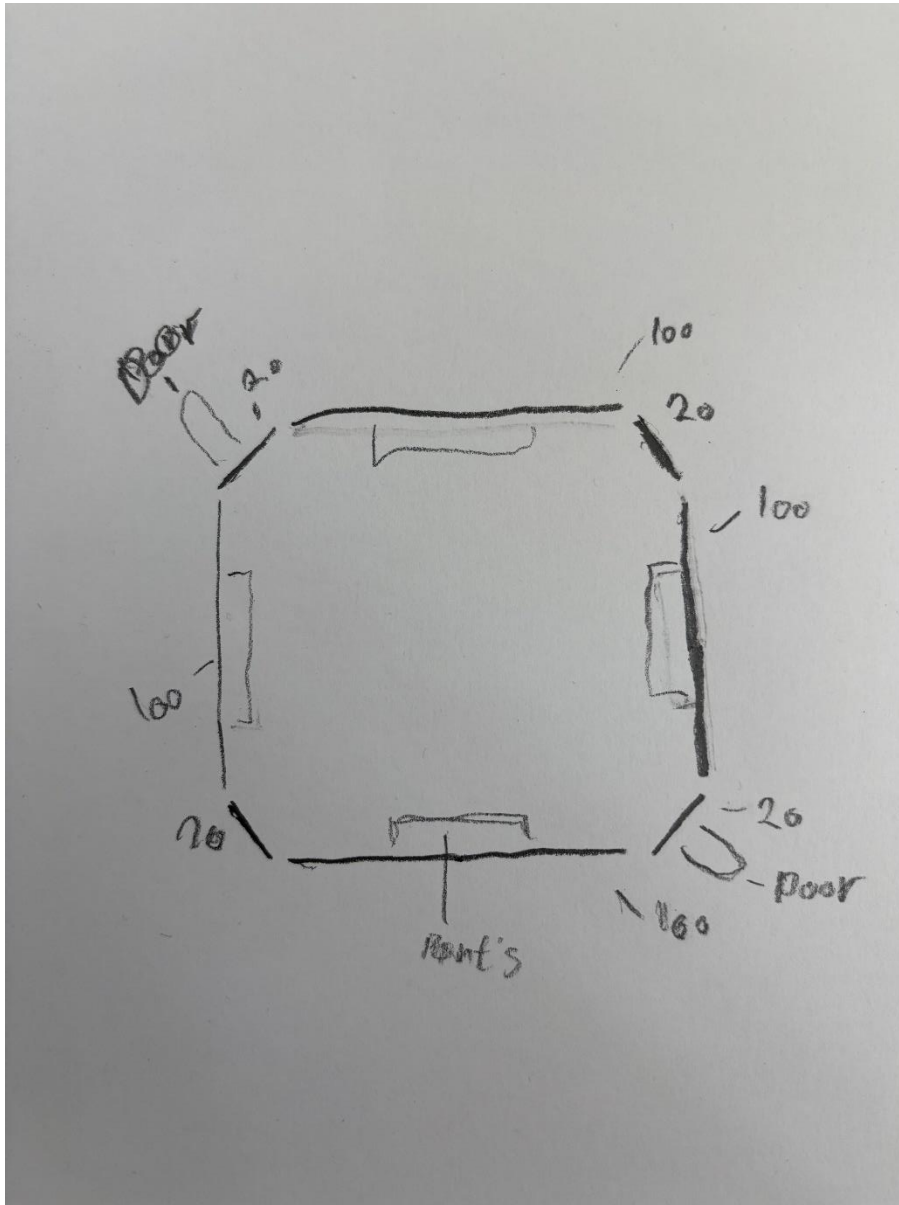


Figure 1: Own sketch of floor plan and measurements (2025)

The gallery will be in London because it is a well-known city for art with lots of galleries. George (2015) claims that “setting up a gallery in a fashionable arts area, surrounded by other galleries, comes with certain benefits” (p.70). I feel that people visit for other reasons and go to exhibitions while they are there. London gets visits from more than 20 million people each year (Road Genius , 2025). With this many people visiting London, it is a good location for an exhibition. According to many online sources, the National Gallery is the most visited gallery in London. For this reason the exhibition will be in a small room inside the National Gallery.

“In thinking about your exhibition you should consider the gallery space you are using as integral to the building it occupies, rather than distinct from it. Everything has an impact on the way potential visitors approach the space you are working in ... even how they might reach the location. Are there good public transport links?” (George, 2015, p. 70).

George (2015) suggests that high ceiling spaces give a dramatic and impactful visitor experience, whereas low ceilings make the visitor feel more enclosed. For this exhibition, I want the visitors to feel comfortable in the space and enjoy the exhibition, so I want a gallery with a high ceiling. This will also help with viewing the pieces.

Information will be presented on A4 text on the wall next to each piece and optional audio mp3s about each piece. Numbers on the wall correspond to the audio for that piece so visitors can choose when to listen. Some may like to appreciate the work before learning more about it whereas others like to know about a piece first and then take time to look at it. This option allows them to decide when to listen or read.

ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

The following artists and artworks have been chosen for their relevance to the exhibition theme.

Margaret MacDonald Mackintosh (1864 -1933)

Margaret MacDonald Mackintosh is a British artist who worked in the Glasgow style, which was a form of Art Nouveau. Art Nouveau was a new form of expressive art in the age of modernity. It represented a new style for the time, and a new means of self-expression (Ashby, 2021). She connected with artist Charles Rennie Mackintosh because of their similar art styles, both using symbolism and allegory (Howarth, 2001). He later became her husband and collaborator.

A lot of MacDonald Mackintosh's work experiments with geometric shapes and patterns, and with natural forms such as human figures and florals. As a form of expression, she worked more from her own imagination than drawing from reality. A good example of this is her work for the 'Rose Boudoir', which was a room styled in collaboration with her husband as part of the International Exhibition of Modern

Decorative Art in 1902 (Christie's, 2008). The Rose Boudoir includes a collection of gesso panels with a rose theme. The panels 'The White Rose and The Red Rose' and 'The Heart of the Rose' Margaret's own and were originally displayed together. Each of the original panels were reproduced by the artist and sold separately. A version of 'The White Rose and the Red Rose' also exists in the Mackintoshes' own Glasgow home as an elaborate overmantel.

Neat (1994) argues that her work can be seen against a theosophical or Rosicrucian world view. This means that there is a spiritual element to her work. This is supported by Senior (2002) who stated that symbolism was crucial to the art of Margaret MacDonald, and this was often presented "a great deal of Theosophy and Rosicrucianism" (Senior, 2002).

Neat (1994) also suggests that the collaboration between MacDonald and Mackintosh is a great love story. This can be seen in MacDonald's work as there are allegories of romantic love such as the red rose.

As a further aspect to the expressive nature of her work, Neat describes it as an "embodied escape into the domestic interior and the world of the self, but... also desired escape from a self that had been constituted through a redundant past history" (Neat, 1994, p. 1). Thompon (1972) had similar thoughts about the expression and symbolism of MacDonald's work, stating that "Margaret Macdonald's decorative work features a particular type of woman whose elongated body and expressive features combine with a heavily symbolic content" (p. 166).

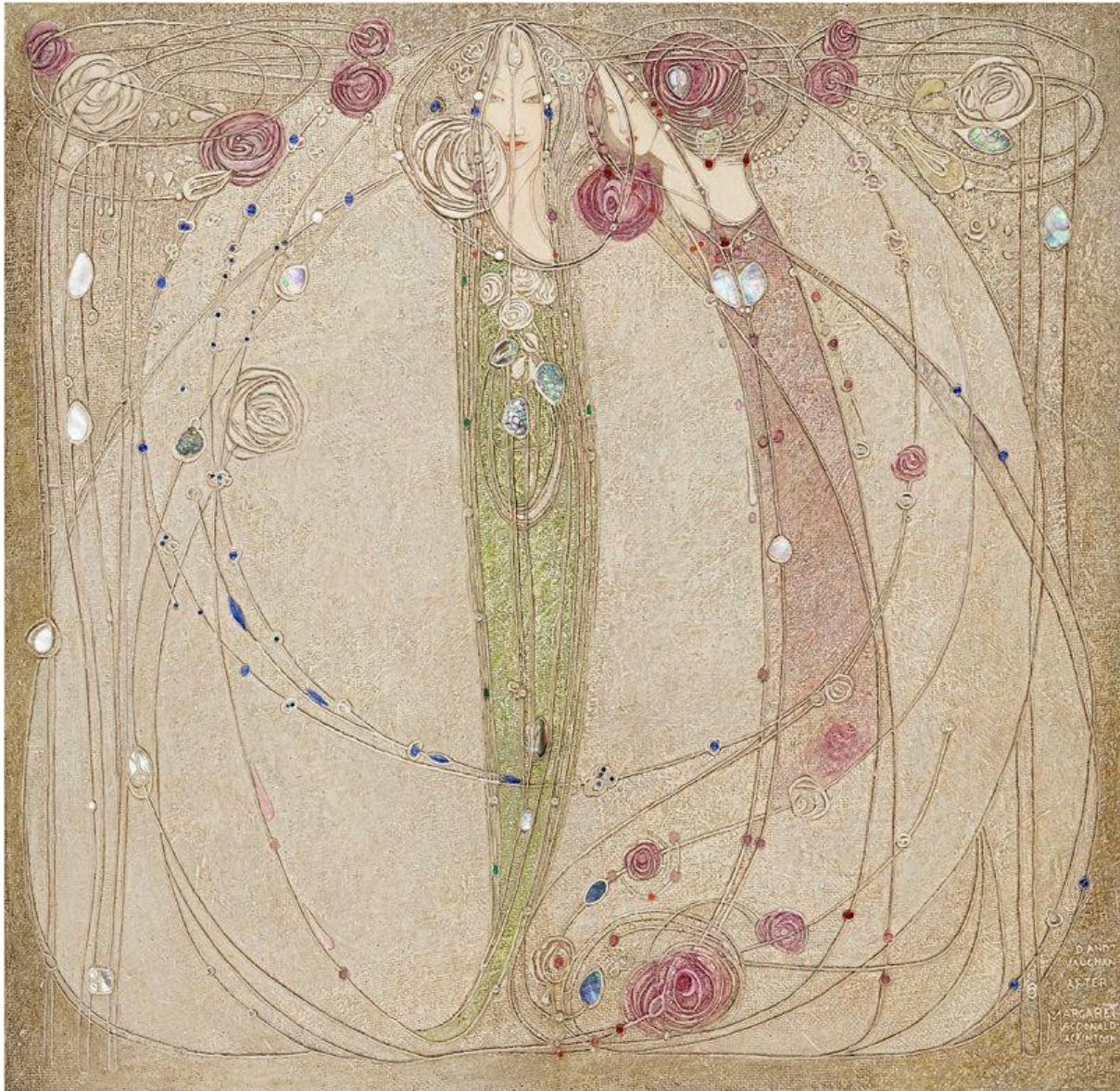


Figure 2: The White Rose & the Red Rose, by Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh (1902) Painted gesso on hessian, (possibly) set with glass beads and shell.

Marc Chagall

Marc Chagall was a Russian-French-Jewish artist who was born in what is today known as Belarus, in 1887. He was influential as a modernist artist and as part of the Jewish artist tradition and worked with many artistic mediums including paint, ceramics, tapestry, and illustration. He was influenced by his Jewish religion and Russian mysticism. A lot of his early works are symbolic of a happy childhood even though he and his family faced a hard life. “Much of his work contains the internal dichotomy between traditional Jewish art, and modernist art” (MarcChagall.net, 2020).

The painting *Over the Town* (1918) shows the artist and his wife flying above his home town of Vitebsk (fig 4.). I chose this picture because I love the simplistic style and faded tones of grey and blues and greens he chose for the sky and for town, and the darker colours in the clothes. It reminds me of surrealism and impressionism. I love the idea he made for the lovers to be floating in the air like it's telling a story of two lovers how they feel for each other. I also like it because it is an expression for love and marriage. What is noticeable is the one red house in the background and the small wooden fences around the houses. The piece is an expression of their love, as it symbolises how they felt when they were engaged, as depicted in the quote below:

“ I suddenly felt as if we were taking off. You too were poised on one leg, as if the little room could no longer contain you. You soar up to the ceiling. Your head turned down to me, and turned mine up to you... We flew over fields of flowers, shuttered houses, roofs, yards, churches.”

Figure 3: Bella Goldenberg, remembering the elation of their engagement



Figure 4: *Over the Town* by Marc Chagall (1918)

Jan Toorope (1858 – 1928)

Jan Toorop was an influential early 20th century artist from the Netherlands. His works utilise different techniques including stained glass, painting, drawing, and printmaking. He is known for both linear Symbolism and colourful pointillism.

Originally from Indonesia, Toorop studied at Amsterdam's Royal Academy of Fine Arts in 1880 until 1882, and then studied at École des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.

In 1890, Toorop started to incorporate symbolism into his work. His work is described as combining "dreamlike compositions with Art Nouveau linework, emphasising the mysticism of his figures" (Wolbrink, 2022). His work can be seen as an expression of living in tough conditions in rural communities.

The painting displayed in this exhibition is 'Fatality' (1893). He was inspired to create this as his symbolic piece after attending lectures by Rosicrucian Sar Péladan and poet Paul Verlaine. The piece represents his desire for a better world as well as his fascination for what he felt women represented. Toorop usually depicted an innocence within women, even when shown as seductive or haunting (Wolbrink, 2022).



Figure 5: Fatality by Jan Toorop (1893)

Own art

My own art deals a lot with expressing my emotions. My recent work is a response to opening up my emotions by talking, and representing these emotions in my art. As someone who used to keep my emotions inside, my recent art shows how I am moving toward opening up to people and showing what is inside.

My digital art *The Showing* (2025) depicts a version of myself showing the soul, and the dark side of my emotions as well as the lighter side. The art work is set up as a performance on a stage, where the subject wants to show everything inside and not hide anything. Bright colours were used to show my own character as a colourful person. Using semiotic theory, every colour used was chosen to represent a different emotion. The darker blues represent sadness and pain whereas the light blue to show calmness. Red signifies anger, whereas orange represents hope. I also used purples greens to represent an array of emotions ranging from happiness to jealousy. I believe that emotions make the soul, so I wanted to portray the range of emotions that represent me.

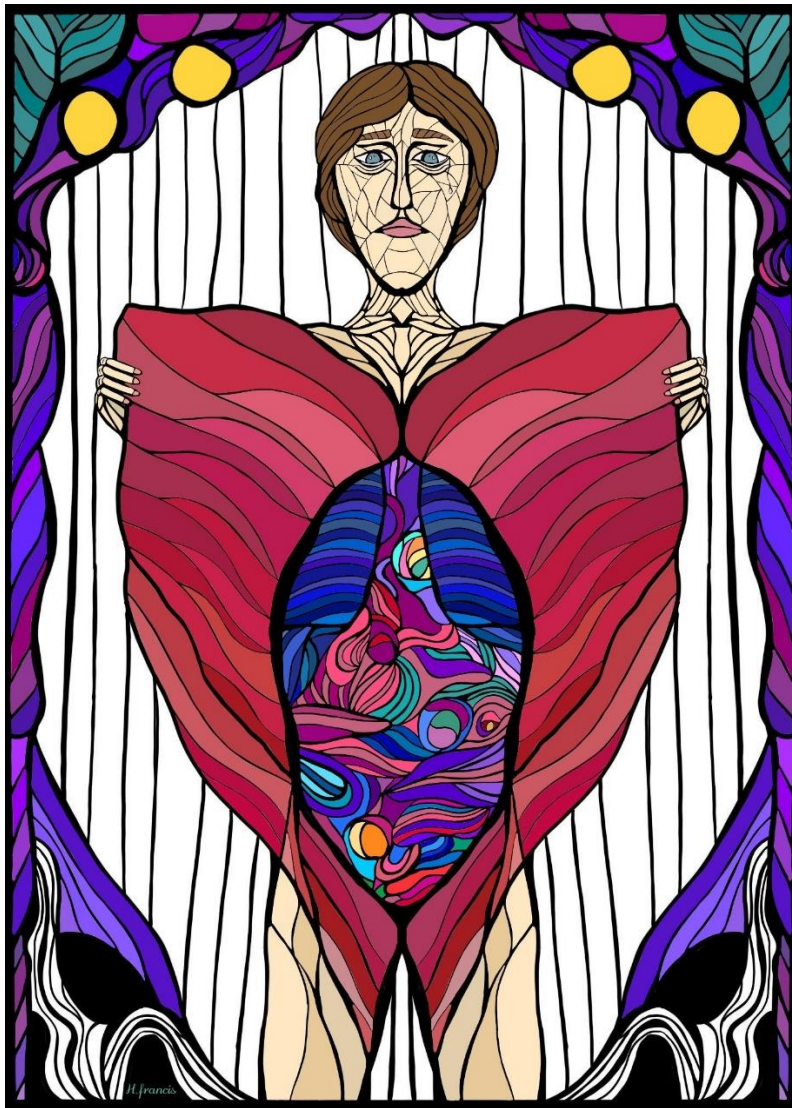


Figure 6: The Showing, by Harry Francis (2025) digital art on glossy paper