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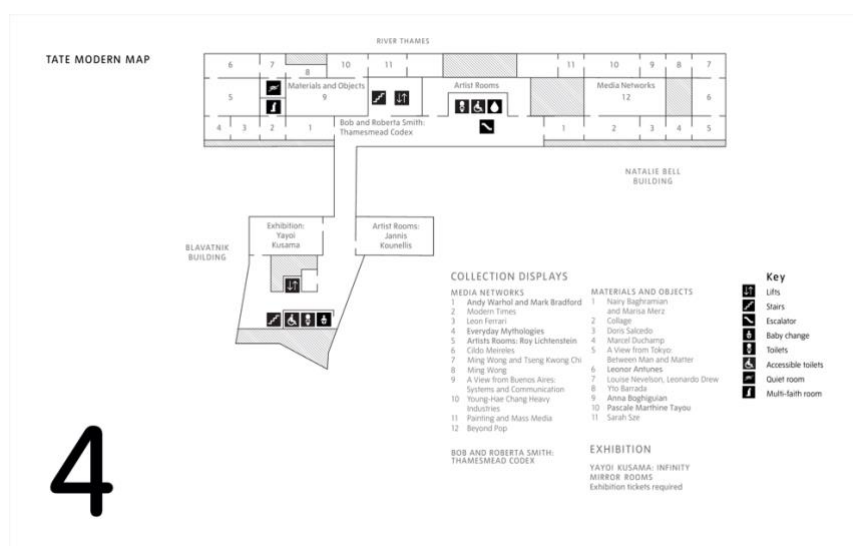
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FACING FEARS

Fear is an inevitable part of the human experience, a dark shadow that follows us everywhere. This topic of art has always deeply interested and attracted me. The ability of artists to convey through their work the deepest human fears and look into the darkest corners of the psyche leaves me in awe.

That is why I decided to organise the exhibition “Facing Fear” at Tate Modern in London, one of the largest and most technologically equipped museums of modern art in the world (Tate Modern, Wikipedia). The spacious exhibition halls and developed infrastructure of Tate Modern will allow us to fully reveal the potential of each work, maximising the impression of immersion in the whirlpool of human fears and phobias.



Tate Modern Map, 4th floor, London

The exhibition "Facing Fear" invites viewers to explore the most hidden corners of the psyche through the prism of art. Here the works appear not just as visual objects, but as living, breathing beings that haunt and fascinate us with their expression of fundamental human fears. As Sigmund Freud warned in his concept of the “unconditionally terrible,” sometimes the most disturbing things lie in what seems familiar and ordinary to us (Freud, 1919). The exhibition's artists skilfully expose such hidden fears, forcing viewers to turn their gaze inside their own “I”.

My main goal as a curator was to create an exhibition space that would become a kind of cathartic environment for visitors to confront their deepest fears and anxieties but in the safe territory of art. Only by realizing and experiencing these phobias through works of painting and sculpture can we gain power over them and learn to accept them as an integral part of human existence.

Since ancient times, humanity has been dominated by various fears - of the unknown, hostile forces of nature, disease, and inevitable death. The desire to comprehend and subjugate these horrors served as one of the first incentives for the creation of works of art. The cave paintings in the Lascaux caves, dating back to around 15,000 BC, are considered some of the oldest artistic evidence of people struggling with their fears. Expressive depictions of wild animals such as bison, horses and deer were an attempt by primitive people to master their fear of powerful predators and the harsh, hostile natural environment on which their survival depended (Cave of Lascaux, UNESCO).

During the Middle Ages, fear of sinfulness and divine retribution in the afterlife became prevalent in the Western world. This pervasive fear gave rise to a whole tradition of grim religious images of martyrs and sinners writhing in the flames of hell. Such frightening images, designed to instill awe of the church, reflected the deep-rooted fear in society of the time of God's wrath and eternal torment for breaking his laws. Art then served as a kind of visual sermon, frightening parishioners with images of terrifying punishments for sins (Literary Hub).

With the development of society, technology and social changes, primitive fears were replaced by new anxieties and concerns. However, the basic human need to express and overcome these fears through art remained unchanged. During the era of the Industrial Revolution and the rapid urbanization of the 19th century, Romantic artists captured the apocalyptic fears of the people of the time in their ominous cityscapes filled with clouds of acrid smoke and frightening scenes of biblical disasters. John Martin's monumental Old Testament paintings reflected new anxieties about the effects of rapid industrialization and the threat of climate change (The Public Domain Review).

At the beginning of the 20th century, avant-garde art movements such as expressionism, cubism, futurism and abstract art opened up unprecedented possibilities for the expression of deeply personal fears, anxieties and internal conflicts of the human psyche. The distorted, seemingly screaming figures in the

paintings of Edvard Munch, the founder of expressionism, embodied the existential fears of modern man - his sense of loneliness, alienation and madness in a rapidly changing world. As Sue Prideaux notes, Munch's work serves as a crucial source and necessity for all creative inspiration due to the "panic-chaos" inherent in his artistic process (Prideaux, 2005, p. 17).

In the modern world, the sources of people's fears and anxieties are multiplying and changing at an unprecedented speed - loneliness and isolation in the era of social networks, mental disorders due to the stress of everyday life, consumerism and the loss of moral and ethical principles, the growing threat of environmental disasters due to change climate and environmental pollution, fears about the development of artificial intelligence and much more. And yet, works of art still provide people with the opportunity to explore their deepest, often unconscious fears in the safe, controlled environment of exhibition halls and galleries.

Exhibits

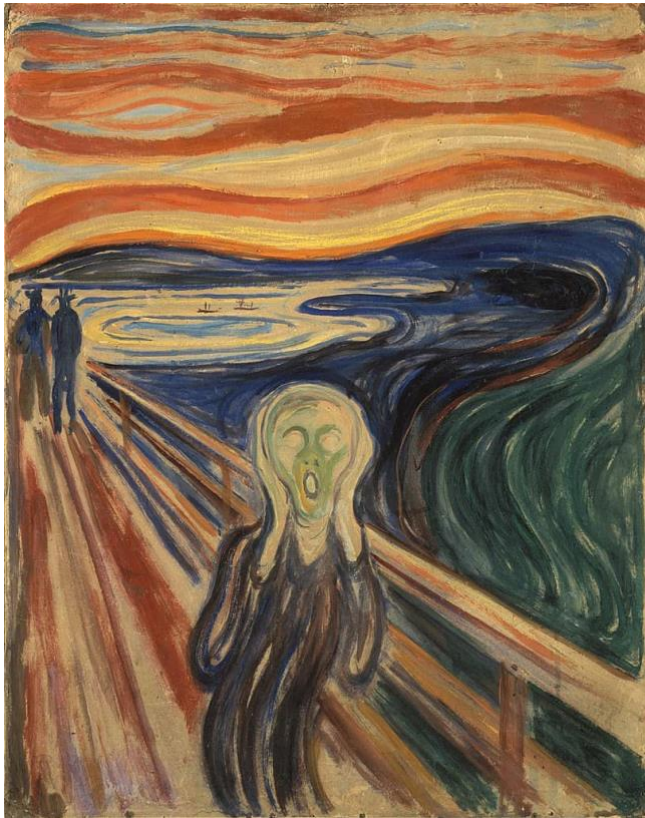


Figure 1: The Scream, 1893 by Edvard Munch

The undisputed star of the exhibition, its main attraction is the famous “The Scream” by Edvard Munch. Created in 1893, this work seems to have absorbed all the existential horror and sense of human alienation in the rapidly changing modern world of the late 19th century. The painting shows a blurry human figure, his face stretched out in a deafening scream, his mouth open in a silent scream. The figure floats against the backdrop of a writhing, trembling landscape in alarming tones of red and yellow, as if the whole world around has plunged into madness and chaos.

Munch himself said that the idea for “The Scream” came to him after experiencing an attack of musty, oppressive fear, when it seemed to the artist that nature itself was

emitting an “a scream of fear” (quoted in: Prideaux, 2005, p. 17). Swirling, twitching lines, melting, fluid forms - everything in this picture conveys a complete loss of support and control, a state of absolute hopelessness and despair. “The Scream” literally vibrates with unbearable anxiety, the spirit of our troubled times.



Figure 2: Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X, Francis Bacon, 1953, Oil on canvas, 153 cm x118 cm, Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines

Moving on to the work of Francis Bacon, his macabre series Exploring Pope Innocent X defiantly challenges the viewer to uncover our deepest fears about the brutality of power and the reign of ugliness. In his paintings, Bacon presented the head of the Catholic Church as an almost brutal, vampiric creature, debunking all his supposedly divine authority. Rough, aggressive strokes of red and purple paint blend into a frightening mass of deformed flesh, creating a terrifying sensation as if the body itself is being torn apart from the inside by unseen forces (Smith, 2008).

These chilling images of ruthless cruelty at the helm of power awaken in the viewer deep-seated fears of the loss of humanity, the collapse of social foundations and the onset of chaos itself. Bacon brings us face to face with the terrible consequences of the perversion and abuse of power in the most bizarre, grotesque forms.



Figure 3: Maman, Louise Bourgeois, 1999, Sculpture, Stainless steel, bronze, marble, at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Frightening and at the same time hypnotizing, Louise Bourgeois's monumental steel sculpture "Mama" embodies the contradictory nature of motherhood. This huge 9-meter structure in the shape of a steel spider amazes visitors with its grandeur. As Bourgeois herself explained, the spider is a metaphor for the dual nature of a mother - both a protector of her offspring and a predator capable of killing for them (cited in Barker, 2023). On the one hand, the spider deftly weaves a web, protecting its young with its strong threads, but on the other hand, it fiercely hunts and kills to feed them.

In the same way, the figure of a mother evokes in us both a feeling of security and fear, because before her boundless, sometimes blind love, all barriers fade away.

With its ominous monumentality, “Mama” touches on our most conflicted memories of the maternal figure, inevitably associated with anxiety and self-doubt.

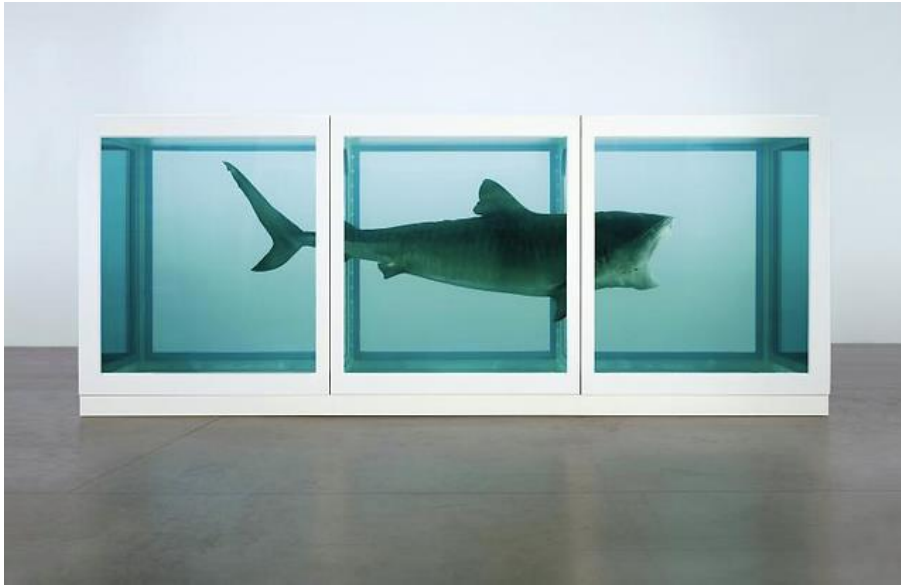


Figure 4 : The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, Damien Hirst's (1991) Image: Photographed by Prudence Cumming Associates

Damien Hirst's disturbing installation, Baby Tiger Shark Swimming in Formaldehyde, brings us face to face with our greatest human fear: the fear of death. Inside a large glass box floats the immobilized body of a small tiger shark, its tiny dead body soaked in formaldehyde for preservation. This stunning spectacle makes us aware of the fundamental fragility of life and the inevitability of death even for the most formidable marine predators.

As critic Carla de Castro has written, Hirst's work "provides an illusion of life, the work explores one's greatest fears, and the difficulty involved in adequately managing to express them " (de Castro, 2016). This unusual installation evokes in us a whole storm of existential questions and worries about the meaning of life in an

ever-changing, ruthless world.



Figure 5: Yayoi Kusama, "Aftermath of Obliteration of Eternity," 2009. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo/Singapore; Victoria Miro, London; David Zwirner, New York.

And finally, one of the most fantastic and bewitching works of the exhibition is “Endless Mirror Room” by Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama. Plunging into this stunning installation, the visitor finds himself in endless corridors of reflections, terribly deforming his figure and space. The room is literally buried in flickering LED lights, reflected in hundreds of mirror surfaces. The viewer is completely captivated by this crazy kaleidoscopic space, creating a feeling of loss of orientation and control.

According to Kusama herself, “The Infinity Room” embodies her many years of experience struggling with mental illness and “repetitive hallucinatory images of

light and space” (from Kusama’s autobiography, 2012). Once inside the installation, it is impossible not to experience disorientation and an unsettling feeling of madness, blurring the boundaries between reality and illusion. The viewer gets the opportunity to look into the very depths of the human subconscious and its creations and, perhaps, even experience catharsis.

Conclusion

Facing Fear provides viewers with the ideal opportunity to peer into the darkest corners of their psyche and come face to face with their nightmares. Whether it's Bacon's grotesque imagery revealing the perversity of power, Munch's otherworldly visions, or Kusama's haunting nightmare The Infinity Room, these works take us directly to our deepest fears in a controlled environment.

Fear is a person’s eternal companion, constantly pursuing him on his heels. But it is he, as Aristotle said, who “makes people think” about the very essence of existence (Aristotle, Rhetoric, book 2, chapter 5). “Facing Fear” clearly demonstrates that art provides the perfect space for us to safely explore our fears, gain control over them, catharsis and ultimately deep self-discovery. By daring to confront our worst nightmares through the language of painting and sculpture, we become stronger and freer.

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Figure 1: The Scream, 1893 by Edvard Munch "The Scream". Edvard Munch, 1893. Available at: <https://www.edvardmunch.org/the-scream.jsp> [Accessed 28 Apr. 2024].

Figure 2: Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X, Francis Bacon, 1953 "Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X". Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Study_after_Vel%C3%A1zquez%27s_Portrait_of_Pope_Innocent_X [Accessed 28 Apr. 2024].

Figure 3: Maman, Louise Bourgeois, 1999 "Maman (sculpture)". Wikipedia. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maman_\(sculpture\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maman_(sculpture)) [Accessed 28 Apr. 2024].

Figure 4: The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, Damien Hirst, 1991 de Castro, C.F. (2016). "Albert Camus and Damien Hirst: Always looking on the absurd side of life". Available at: https://www.academia.edu/44999931/Albert_Camus_and_Damien_Hirst_always_looking_on_the_absurd_side_of_life [Accessed 28 Apr. 2024].

Figure 5: Yayoi Kusama, "Aftermath of Obliteration of Eternity," 2009

"A Look Inside Yayoi Kusama's Five Infinity Rooms at the Seattle Art Museum".

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Tate Modern Map, 4th floor, London

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