Student Name: Sarah Grossey

P Number: 1902340

Programme: Fine Art

Module: ADA5003

Research in Context Lecturer's Name: Gwenllian Beynon

Word Count = 2507

From the series of FINE ART MAKING research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

Ethics and sustainability in Art is a large aspect of my practice. I find it paramount to learn as much as possible about the world around us and how this can benefit us all. There is a greater need for compassion and education in a world of materialism and lack of understanding and knowledge, as well as, the dilemma facing artists, exhibits and galleries. They are tackling the backlash for a fight on ethics.

In this day and age, it's hard to imagine any misuse or misconduct, especially in the world of art. Where, classically its remains for the elite in society and often thought of as traditional or where money lies. However, in modern day where the lines and boundaries are tested/blurred… exploration takes on an entire new form.

In recent years, the use of animals in art has increased with surprising popularity. Likewise, museums and exhibits have had certain artefacts gain attention over its origins and the inhumane nature into how it came across the seas. Advocates for both animals and communities have been tested by these occurrences and the increase in abstract and contemporary art continues to question these morals and ethics of those we seemingly admire (Utm.edu, 2021).

Where nature and natural materials are used in art is usually and often applauded, in a time of pollution and green thinking, do some take this to the extreme?

Art of today often scopes from a dialogue of the individual to political, cultural and ethnographical observations (master-iesa, 2017). Ethics is often a large part of society, and albeit subconsciously reflected in how people behave and act day to day. Evidently, these are what we stand by and become our morals(Lumenlearning.com, 2013). In spite of that, I believe this highlights particular hypocrisies in areas, for example; one may love animals but still eat meat. Even so, should the ethics of a particular artists be taken into account when viewing/critiquing the work of another? Should the gallery/exhibit take accountability on their behalf/part?

Figure 1. Tate (2013) *The Chapman Family Collection, 2002*

> To make a collection is to find, acquire, organize and store items, whether in a room, a house, a library, a museum or a warehouse. It is also, inevitably, a way of thinking about the world – the connections and principles that produce a collection contain assumptions, juxtapositions, findings, experimental possibilities and associations. Collection-making, you could say, is a method of producing knowledge.
> (Obrist pg39)

The use of colonial artefacts, especially in current gallery and museums spaces, highlights greater historical issues. It is the work of the Chapman Family Collection, that spurred my

thoughts on tradition and history. Faux- ethnographic work, created by the brothers, highlights not only the excess of greed and materialism and the greater power hungry capitalists. It, furthermore, reminded me of the colonisers that took important artefacts to display in cabinets. At first glance the pieces appear of primitive nature and sculpture. They are seemingly lavish and look like 'untouched treasures' (White cube, 2021). It's almost a mockery, rather than just a dig at large corporations. Is it the moral accountability of the curators and creators to atone the actions of our predecessors? Should we still be exhibiting collections/ objects that once were taken or once living things? How do current artists tackle the moral dilemma of curiosity over sustainability?

The statement, 'looking back in time can be an invaluable tool' (Obrist, pp40), contextualises a lot of my thought process when discussing the nature of ethics. If we look at this from the larger and wider contextual framework of history and art, it would be wrong to completely discount historical art and artefacts as 'robbery' or point blank morally wrong. I have the privilege of hindsight and, much like most institutions, pear back on history and realise and learn from mistakes. More often than not, museums and galleries tell historical accounts. They were intended for education and general interest. So, what are the excuses of those who still chose to partake in this way of curating?

For example, Pitt Rivers, a highly proclaimed institution of history and education, located in Oxford, with links to the accomplished university of Oxford, has corrected many of these mistakes by removing (even beloved and popular) exhibits (Ox.ac.uk, 2020). This included cabinets that contained objects like the shrunken heads and human remains. The origins of such an institution, started with a collector, Pitt Rivers (Ox.ac.uk, 2021). Unfortunately, thus meaning that many items on display were detained with force. However, those who now run

the museum, have projects in place with the intentions of ‘decolonising’ (Ox.ac.uk, 2020). A process consisting of both returning these items to their origins as well as acknowledging the ways in which they were taken. This means, that certain exhibits can remain on show, but must exclaim the roots and whole history of how they came to be in this cabinet (Ox.ac.uk, 2020), a large part of this is through a partnering project, ‘Labelling Matters’ (Ox.ac.uk, 2021). Nevertheless, this is a complicated process in itself. It takes a complex analysis of each individual item to understand how to proceed. This makes sense when predecessors (collectors) where often acquired on the grounds that some items were gifted or given to them, essentially meaning they still belong to the museum. The places of origins often see the tourist appeal to these artefacts, however, and often try to claim as their own. So, aforementioned, should the ethics of a particular artists be taken into account when viewing/critiquing the work of another? Is it ethical to still visit places and support Pitt Rivers, and institutions alike? In the simplest of answers, yes. In present day, you are not supporting the colonizers, but the graduates and scholars whom will be working on decolonising schemes and proposals that will proceed over the next few decades.

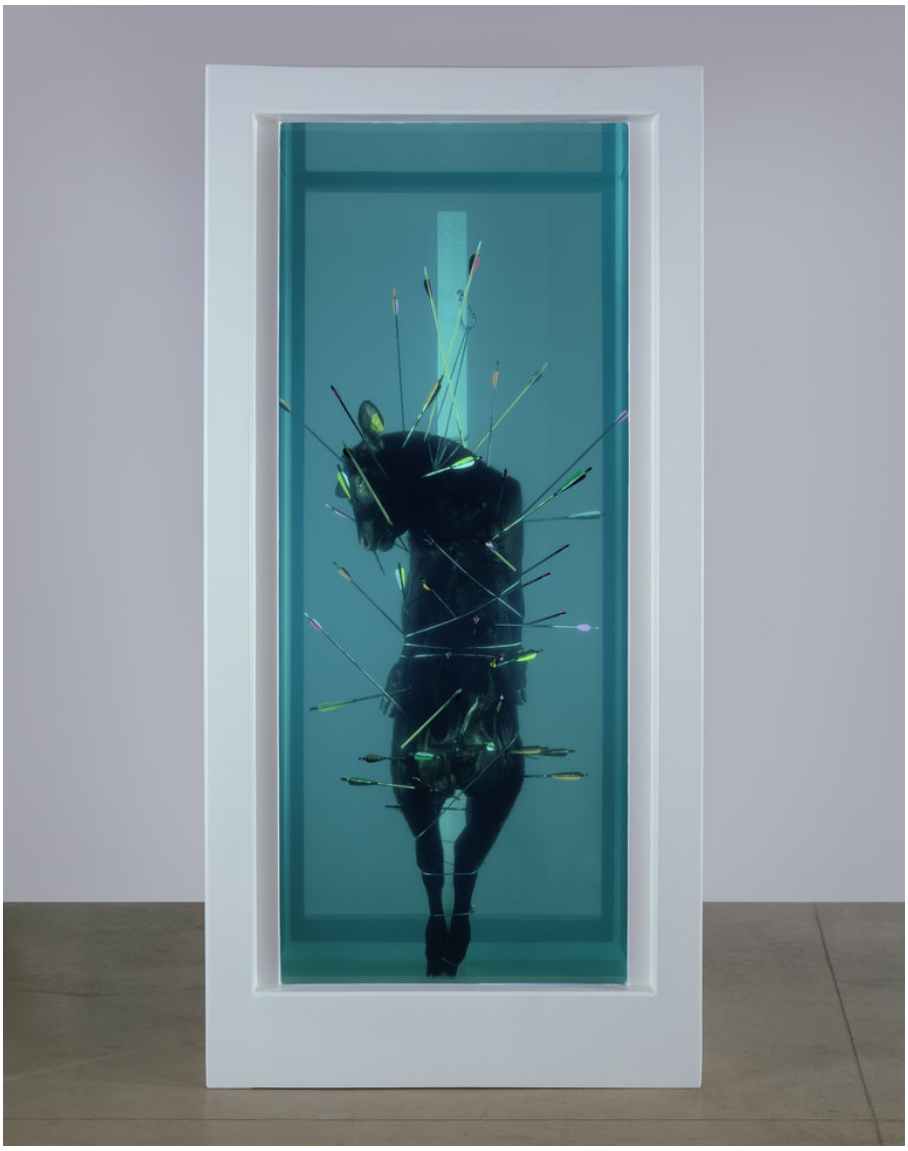

Figure 1 (Science Ltd, 2012) *Saint Sebastian,2007*

Contemporary Art, often defined as the 'art of today' (Wikipedia Contributors, 2021), is a boundary challenging and freeing scope of the art world. It is expressionistic and is distinguished by the very absence of order or structure. It is up to the ideology of the individual, rather than the collective. This allows for art to be subjective and can unfold and enlighten us to these new ideas and beliefs. Influencing practitioners can make vast impacts as idols or as people in the limelight, in both positive and negative ways (artswithanna, 2018).

Despite the efforts of some, many continue to challenge how far they can push the boundaries of the freedom of exhibiting any artworks. When natural materials are used on display ethically,

in art specifically, it can add a greater and more powerful dimension to the piece, that allows the audience to feel an almost spiritual connection to nature. Though when done with a lack or imbalance of morals, the artwork becomes a product of exploitation and disrespect. This completely eradicates and undermines the original intentions of the creator.

Damien Hirst, a large figure in the modern/contemporary art movement over the past few decades, very popular during the 1990s, has made millions with his elaborate sculptures, paintings and installations. He is the United Kingdom's richest living artist, with his worth exceeding 200 million pounds (Artnet, 2017). His success comes from his collection of work. It is built on interpretations and explorations of relationships he can display through art with religion, science, life and death.

Damien Hirst lies in this grey area of ethics in art. Hirst`s attitude toward natural materials are unappreciative. Hirst proclaimed himself, 'It's beautiful. The only problem is that's it's dead', (Science Ltd, 2012) relaying how Hirst is arguably treating the living creature as a mere object while presenting dead creatures for his own artistic purposes, regardless of whether they died for the art or not (Malik, 2021). Whether for profit or artistic expression, Hirst's objectifying use of animals and insects in his work is unjustifiable. Hirst practices his right to explore notions of religion and human desire (Science Ltd, 2012), making us question the permanency of life and belonging, but whilst ding so he interrupts an equilibrium. He focuses and engages with such powerful and important subjects, that question humanity and emotions, life and death (Science Ltd, 2012), yet completely delays the most natural of occurrences in the process. Hirst has an autonomist approach to art, rather than a moralist one.

SO, how many Animals have lost their lives for the means of Damien Hirst's Art?

It is estimated that roughly one million animals have been sourced, whether they were already dead or met ends in the hands of Hirst, for a multitude of his shows, or alternatively their artistic resting places. (Express, 2017). This includes any being that was disembowelled, any mammals, sea creature, skeletons, organs, insects and bugs used in his methodology.

Despite, the intense, interesting, in-depth and intrinsic meaning to Hirst's work, their processes and creation is far from the classification of ethical, let alone sustainable.

Hirst has been cast as controversial by majority of the art, not only through the lack of care for living creatures, but a large sum of his work is not made by him (Willett-Wei, 2013). Making most of his millions, 'arguably illegitimate'.

> His $78 million diamond-encrusted skull was made by royal jewellers Bentley & Skinner. The artist's stuffed shark was produced by MDM Props of London, a theatrical company. And his famous spot paintings were, of course, painted by his assistants. (Willett-Wei, 2013)

It seems to be that more often than not, Hirst either hires others to create something, disregarding any credits, or simply gets his apprentices to recreate his work, signing it off as his own. According to the business insider, out of the 1,400 'spot paintings', Hirst only painted approximately 25 of them. Is this ethical in it's own right. How can one person claim the profits that belong to many? Perhaps, Hirst takes on the advice of somewhat obselete artists, 'An Artists is not paid for his labour, but for his vision.' – James McNeill Whistler (Darcy. No pagination). Feasibly, this is taken to a new extremity. This, however, should not advance to the exploitation of others.

A common theme in Hirst's work tends to encapsulate his career, almost entirely. Each show/series of work widely demonstrates his absurd belief that one must, "kill things in order to look at them". (Morgan, 1996) Despite my personal disgust, Hirst's work has had and will continue to have a profound contribution to modern art and art history, as well as the artistic interpretations of social sculpture.

Figure 2 Tate (2012) *A Line By Walking, 1965*

The use of natural materials in Art work is particularly impactful in land art. Richard Long, for example, is similar to Hirst in the sense that he merges the art with nature, allowing the nature to speak for itself. In that regards they do have a similar quality, that albeit appearing quite different are equally as effective. Longs minimalist Sculpture, *A Line Made By Walking, 1965* (Tate, 2012), reflects not only an ephemeral conversation with nature, but also an 'Anti-Materialist mode of practice' (Tate, 2012). This, I believe is where the lines become clear, and the two artists differ. One becomes clearly conscious of the impact they have on nature, and marks they leave behind. The other, not so clear, a need for ambition possibly and testing the

boundaries, believing there are no repercussions. Perhaps Hirst is blind sighted by profit and intrigue.

Long is a prime example of sustainability in art, in terms of his awareness of the environment he is interacting with. Long allows for the natural cycle to proceed, the only remaining evidence of his interaction and sculpture of landscape is the photograph (Draper, 2019). Unlike Hirst, Long has allowed life and natural sequences to progress. Should artists be allowed to holt or delay the decay of living creatures?

His work carry impermanence and, in this case, present a remnant of movement, an action of another. His work carries the outside in, creating 'moments of beauty and poetry inside and outside of gallery spaces' (Arnolfini, 2019). He creates a surrounding and space for the audience to appreciate the greater world, without purposefully bringing that environment where it does not belong. In essence, the gallery space.

> You could say that my work is… a balance between the patterns of nature and the formalism of human, abstract ideas like lines and circles. It is where my human characteristics meet the natural forces and patterns of the world, and that is really the kind of subject of my work. – Richard Long (The Art Story, 2014)

In light of this, it is artists such as the likes of Richard Long that can have an appreciation for the greater picture. It is not only the consideration of one's creative process and the importance of the piece's significance, but quite obviously the materials we use and how we use them. There should be no boundary that is crossed, that proceeds the intention or meaning that morality of a living thing is undermined.

It is key to understand that artists old and new, will always approach subjects in a diversity of ways, in which many may suggest are 'inappropriate' or 'offensive', rather, it is a

continuation of art as a practice that allows artists to be experimental and have no limitations. In spite of that, with this in mind, it is important not only for those who are apart of this 'art world', but the greater world that surrounds us all. There is limited space for hypocrisy, especially in a time where all parts of nature are increasingly becoming more precious (LifeGate, 2015). It is in every person's interest to work alongside others to create a better standard for everyone to work by. The definition by which is limiting any form of destruction to our surroundings. It is the gravity of the issue at hand, that everyone on a daily, needs reminding. Nature has no value, because it is priceless. Once it is removed, we cannot gain it back.

There are two major lines of exploration that would allow for artists to engage creatively whilst also allowing for or rather acknowledging criticism and working towards creating a more ethical practice. There is an urge for more nuanced knowledge, that requires in depth research to an applied ethics approach to both the creative and ethical context of a creative process. The elements of that environment are disclosed by this fine-grained research, meaning there will be a more abstract conceptual issue in adjusting those norms with in art-historical and ethical context from which one is judging the work. This allows for ethical questioning. We, as a collective can change our responses to sensitive subjects in a magnitude of ways and should firstly be understood as 'conflicts in cultural values' (artswithanna, 2018). As a result, metaethics is a parallel line of investigation. Metaephilosophy being the study of the congregation of nature, scope and 'meaning of moral judgment' (Wilson, 2016).

Bibliography

- Darcy, E. (2017). *Inspiration for artists*. Ed. Summerdale publisher. Chichester, West Sussex, no pagination

- Ubrist(2014). *Ways of Curating.* Great Britain. Penguin Books, p. 39

- Ubrist(2014). *Ways of Curating.* Great Britain. Penguin Books, p. 40

- Arnolfini. (2019). *Richard Long: TIME AND SPACE - Arnolfini*. [online] Available at: https://arnolfini.org.uk/whatson/richard-long-time-and-space/ (Accessed 5 Dec. 2021).

- Artnet, 2017. *What's Your Beef*? [Online] Available at: https://news.artnet.com/art-world/damien-whats-your-beef-916097 (Accessed 6 Dec. 2021).

- Draper, R. (2019). *End frame: A line made by walking England 1967 by Richard Long*. [online] On Landscape. Available at: https://www.onlandscape.co.uk/2019/11/a-line-made-by-walking-richard-long/ (Accessed 6 Dec. 2021).

- Express, 2017. *RSPCA* [Online] Available at: https://www.express.co.uk/celebrity-news/793168/Damien-Hirst-art-almost-one-million-creatures-died-RSPCA (Accessed 5 Dec. 2021).

- LifeGate. (2015). *Nature is precious, more than we can imagine - LifeGate*. [online] Available at: https://www.lifegate.com/the-value-of-nature-earth-index (Accessed 7 Dec. 2021).

- Lumenlearning.com. (2013). *Ethics, an Overview | Boundless Management*. [online] Available at: https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-management/chapter/ethics-an-overview/#:~:text=regarding%20personal%20conduct.-,Ethics%20are%20the%20set%20of%20moral%20principles%20that%20guide%20a,in%20terms%20of%20human%20behavior. (Accessed 4 Dec. 2021).

- Malik, K. (2021). *It's Beautiful. Only Problem Is That It's Dead: On Damien Hirst*. [online] Arts Help. Available at: https://www.artshelp.net/its-beautiful-only-problem-is-that-its-dead-on-damien-hirst/ (Accessed 5 Dec. 2021).

- Manifoldapp.org. (2012). *"11. Art and Ethics" in "Introduction to Art: Design, Context, and Meaning" on OpenALG*. [online] Available at: https://alg.manifoldapp.org/read/introduction-to-art-design-context-and-meaning/section/9e69d419-310e-40ae-8923-97242e86ae30 [Accessed 7 Dec. 2021].

- master-iesa (2017). *IESA*. [online] IESA International. Available at: https://www.iesa.edu/paris/news-events/contemporary-art-definition (Accessed 4 Dec. 2021).

- Morgan, 1996. *An Interview with Damien Hirst* [Online]Available at: http://www.damienhirst.com/texts/1996/jan--stuart-morgan (Accessed 6 Dec. 2021).

- Ox.ac.uk. (2017). *About us*. [online] Available at: https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/about-us-0 (Accessed 3 Dec. 2021).

- Ox.ac.uk. (2020). *Critical Changes*. [online] Available at: https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/critical-changes (Accessed 3 Dec. 2021).

- Ox.ac.uk. (2021). *History of the Museum*. [online] Available at: https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/history-museum (Accessed 3 Dec. 2021).

- Ox.ac.uk. (2021). *Past exhibitions*. [online] Available at: https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/past-exhibitions (Accessed 3 Dec. 2021).

- Science Ltd (2012). *An Interview with Damien Hirst - Damien Hirst*. [online] Damienhirst.com. Available at: https://www.damienhirst.com/texts/1996/jan--stuart-morgan (Accessed 5 Dec. 2021).

- Science Ltd (2012). *Read More - Damien Hirst*. [online] Damienhirst.com. Available at: https://damienhirst.com/biography/damien-hirst (Accessed 5 Dec. 2021).

- Science Ltd (2012). *Saint Sebastian, Exquisite Pain - Damien Hirst*. [online] Damienhirst.com. Available at: https://damienhirst.com/saint-sebastian-exquisite-pai (Accessed 5 Dec. 2021).

- Tate (2012). *A Line Made by Walking, Richard Long, 1967 | Tate*. [online] Tate. Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/long-a-line-made-by-walking-ar00142 (Accessed 3 Dec. 2021).

- Tate (2013). *The Chapman Family Collection, Jake Chapman, Dinos Chapman, 2002 | Tate*. [online] Tate. Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/chapman-the-chapman-family-collection-t12755 (Accessed 3 Dec. 2021).

- The Art Story. (2014). *Richard Long*. [online] Available at: https://www.theartstory.org/artist/long-richard/ (Accessed 4 Dec. 2021).

- Utm.edu. (2021). *Art, Ethical Criticism of | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [online] Available at: https://iep.utm.edu/art-eth/ (Accessed 6 Dec. 2021).

- View all posts by artswithanna (2018). *ETHICAL QUESTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY ART EXHIBITIONS*. [online] Arts With Anna. Available at: https://artswithanna.com/2018/09/28/ethics-and-arts/ (Accessed 5 Dec. 2021).

- View all posts by artswithanna (2018). *ETHICAL QUESTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY ART EXHIBITIONS*. [online] Arts With Anna. Available at: https://artswithanna.com/2018/09/28/ethics-and-arts/ [Accessed 6 Dec. 2021].

- White cube (2021). *White Cube - Gallery Exhibitions - Works from the Chapman Family Collection*. [online] Whitecube.com. Available at: https://whitecube.com/exhibitions/exhibition/jake_and_dinos_chapman_hoxton_square_2002 (Accessed 7 Dec. 2021).

- Wikipedia Contributors (2021). *Contemporary art*. [online] Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contemporary_art (Accessed 5 Dec. 2021).

- Willett-Wei, M. (2013). *Why Damien Hirst Is Controversial*. [online] Business Insider. Available at: https://www.businessinsider.com/why-damien-hirst-is-controversial-2013-6?r=US&IR=T (Accessed 6 Dec. 2021).

- Willett-Wei, M. (2013). *Why Damien Hirst Is Controversial*. [online] Business Insider. Available at: https://www.businessinsider.com/why-damien-hirst-is-controversial-2013-6?r=US&IR=T (Accessed 6 Dec. 2021).

- Willett, 2013. *Why is Damien Hirst Contraverial?* [Online]Available at: https://www.businessinsider.com/why-damien-hirst-is-controversial-2013-6?r=US&IR=T (Accessed 6 Dec. 2021).

- Wilson, C. (2016). What is Metaethics? [online] Available at: https://blogs.openbookpublishers.com/what-is-metaethics/ [Accessed 7 Dec. 2021].

Figures

Fig1 - Tate (2013). *"The Chapman Family Collection", Jake Chapman, Dinos Chapman, 2002 | Tate*. [online] Tate. Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/chapman-the-chapman-family-collection-t12755

Fig2 - Science Ltd (2012). *Saint Sebastian, Exquisite Pain - Damien Hirst*. [online] Damienhirst.com. Available at: https://www.damienhirst.com/saint-sebastian-exquisite-pai

Fig3 - Tate (2012). *"A Line Made by Walking", Richard Long, 1967 | Tate*. [online] Tate. Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/long-a-line-made-by-walking-ar00142 [Accessed 3 Dec. 2021].