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The Celebration of Nature

'The Celebration of Nature' is a site-specific curated exhibition in the heart of Gwydir Forest, Snowdonia. This beautiful location is surrounded by a canopy of majestic trees and rolling brooks flowing from the jagged landscapes. The Cambridge Dictionary defines curation as 'the selection and care of objects to be shown in a museum or to form part of a collection of art, an exhibition, etc.' (dictionary.cambridge.org, n.d.) Following on from this definition, I also feel that curation is formed from curiosity, knowledge of subject matter, fine tuning selections which create a link and creating an experience for the viewers. In order to achieve maximum experience for the viewer, it is important for the exhibition to be site specific. The overarching theme I am exploring is 'the celebration of nature' and how everyone perceives nature differently depending on their upbringing, background, and social status. In doing so I have curated a collection of thought-provoking and nature-inspired artworks.

As shown in figure one, this space is an idyllic setting to enable viewers to truly feel immersed in the exhibition, 'A celebration of nature.' The artworks would be placed along a walking path so that the viewer can contemplate each piece individually and as a whole. There will be paintings mounted on the tree trunks, a sculpture elevated on a bank and a

final installation drawing the exhibition to a close. I feel if this exhibition was sited in a typical white gallery space, the effects of the work and underlying messges would be lost and nowhere near as interesting or thought provoking. The forest setting will enable the viewers to enjoy the exhibition where all their senses would be evoked; they would be accompanied by the sound of freshly running water, the smell of the forest and chirping birds which will give the immersive experience. The importance of the exhibition being site-specific is to allow the viewers to interact with the art which is integrated with its surroundings. This in turn will give the viewer a deeper and more complex meaning of nature as they see it.

Image showing the exhibition space at Gwydir Forest.

Fig 1 (Roberts, 2019)

Fig.2: The Hay Wain, John Constable, 1821

Constable's The Hay Wain encapsulates a celebration of nature because of its idyllic countryside and homely nostalgic feel. 'Today, the Hay Wain is one of Constable's most recognised works, and was voted the second greatest painting in Britian in a public poll.' (Lloyd, 2019) Regardless of the idealistic view that this piece portrays, the Hay Wain is a juxtaposition of what that typical scene looked like at the time. 'The piece is at odds with the events that were actually happening at the time.' (Lloyd, 2019) During the time of this painting, the industrial revolution was occurring, forcing workers out of employment when manual labour was being replaced by machines. Whilst his contemporaries painted the industrialisation, Constable painted the wagon (wain) and the mill 'which had been operated by his family for nearly 100 years'. (www.nationalgallery.org.uk, n.d.) Even though

the piece looks like a snapshot, it is actually an interpretation from multiple sketches drawn over 10 years and re-constructed by Constable. The artwork is a celebration of nature, yet it ignores the political unrest of the time. Was Constable immersing himself in nature to forget about the realities of what was happening at the time?

Fig.3: Figure for landscape, Dame Barbara Hepworth, 1959-60.

The asymmetric form of Hepworth's Figure for Landscape is suggestive of a mother holding a child in one arm, (Tate, n.d.) This takes on a unique perspective of celebrating nature by looking at forms of new life. “In 1952 Hepworth recalled how her move to Cornwall had led to a new understanding of landscape’ (Tate, n.d). This extends John Berger’s philosophy in

‘Ways of Seeing,’ that ‘It's all about choice- the way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe.’ (Berger, 1972) Could this mean that everyone perceives nature differently because of their upbringing? I find this viewpoint extremely interesting as it means each viewer of the exhibition ‘A celebration of Nature’ will take on a completely unique perspective regardless of what narrative the exhibition begs to hold.

Fig.4: The Water-Lily Pond, Claude Monet, 1899.

‘For Monet, gardens offered a refuge from the modern urban and industrial world’ (The National Gallery, 2008). This painting is another example of nature being an escape from reality. Monet fashioned his own garden to enable him to create these paintings. This begs the question- is he painting nature, or is he creating nature to paint?

> ‘Conversely, some have suggested that in the aesthetic appreciation of scenery for its pictorial or compositional values, art (especially painting) is the model for an aesthetics of nature, and from the aesthetic standpoint nature is following art.’ (Crawford, 1983).

The impressionists would fully immerse themselves in nature, painting outdoors (En Plein air) rather than in a studio. The movement was considered very radical for its time, even going as far as to describe the painters as ‘lunatics.’ (The National Gallery, London, 2016.)

This relates back to John Bergers ‘Ways of Seeing’ and his perspective that ‘the way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe.’ (Berger, 1972). At the time critics may have seen this group of artists as ‘lunatics,’ however nowadays they are admired, and their paintings are revered.

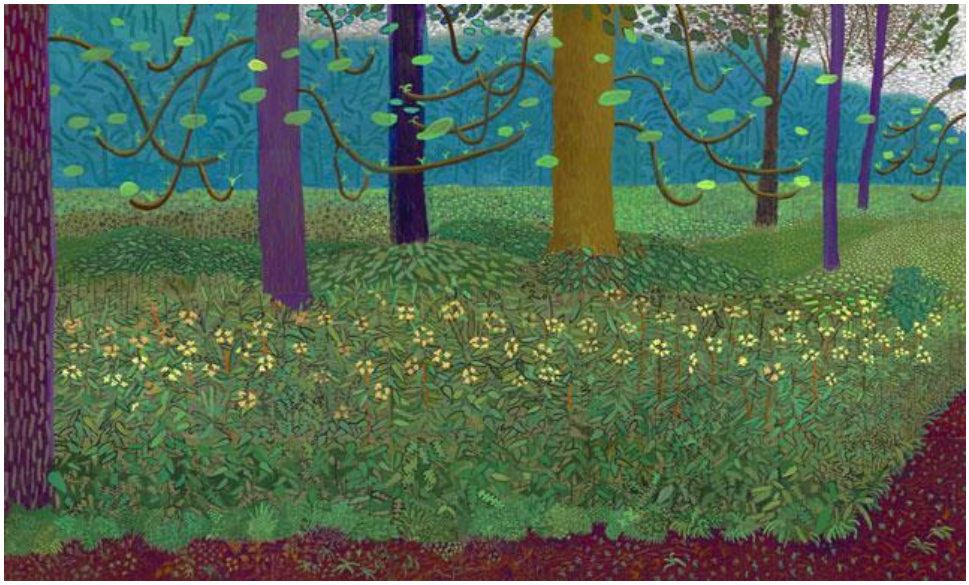

Fig.5: Under the trees, bigger, David Hockney, 2010-11.

“We can only replenish ourselves by looking at nature.” (The Art Newspaper - International art news and events, 2021) Hockney is another well-known artist inspired by nature. His work not only celebrates nature, but it encapsulates it in its natural form. Hockney was greatly influenced by Van Gogh, even though their chosen mediums could not be more opposing- with Van Gogh specialising in oil paintings and David Hockney exploring iPad paintings. Regardless of their differences, the two artists are united by their fascination with nature. (The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2021). Hockney also immerses himself in nature to gain a deeper understanding of what he is painting.

‘Hockney began this phase of his work by making drawings and watercolours, then painting oils in the open air – like 19th-century painters such as Monet and Constable – standing beside the road in all weathers’ (www.royalacademy.org.uk, n.d.)

Fig.6: Rowan Leaves and Hole, Andy Goldsworthy, 1987.

Goldsworthy celebrates nature through leaves found in the natural environment where he creates ephemeral site-specific art installations. Because he works outdoors, he has been compared to the impressionists. His outdoor installations are equally captivating when comparing to traditional plain eir paintings of landscape artists. (artincontext, 2021). Goldsworthy’s piece would enhance the Celebration of Nature exhibition as his installations boast the resources of the natural environment. His transient installations show that the

importance of nature is a strong theme throughout his work. With Goldsworthy stating that ‘if one loses their connection to nature, they essentially lose their connection to themselves.’ (artincontext, 2021) Goldsworthy’s unique approach makes use of the geometric style, that can be referenced to Modernism. One viewpoint in particular that has stood out to me is that ‘Goldsworthy’s process is viewed as a collaboration with nature.’ (artincontext, 2021). This final piece of the exhibition embodies the notion that nature creates art, and we are just collaborating with nature.

The overall effect of ‘The Celebration of Nature’ exhibition is a positive journey through the natural environment, whilst experiencing a variety of artworks. From being surrounded by nature, this increases the value of the art as it heightens the experience and enables the viewers to fully immerse themselves. The exhibition invites the viewer to explore how artists respond to nature in their own, individual styles. There is a strong theme communicated throughout the exhibition, yet questions arise, inviting the viewer to broaden their perspective and challenge their beliefs. Many of the artworks were created ‘en plein air’ which means that the viewers encounter many of the same conditions as the artists once did themselves. This is a crucial factor which contributes to the success of the exhibition. By including art through a variety of mediums, we expand the viewers perspective on how nature can be captured, and more importantly celebrated.

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