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Ways of Perceiving, Curation Essay

The exhibition I intend to curate will be entitled *Symbiosis and Climate Change*. The venue for this imagined exhibition will be at the Scotland Events Campus (SEC) in Glasgow in the foyer of the main SSE conference centre, scheduled to coincide with the United Nations 26th Climate Change summit in November 2020 (BBC News, 10th September 2019) which will ensure maximum exposure and greatest impact, highlighting this ecological crisis. Human interaction with nature has followed a relationship in line with Descartes' philosophy – we consume whatever we want with no thought to its environmental impact. The artworks selected through my curation will highlight the impending catastrophe of following this philosophy without regard for consequences but will also be designed to encourage the audience to reconnect to nature through the installation artworks.

The Conference will be attended by approximately 30,000 delegates and so the strategic placement of the exhibit should attract significant numbers of influential delegates to review the issues caused by climate change. By evoking a sense of responsibility in the audience, this will reinforce the urgency of action and hopefully influence their decisions about our fragile planet. The objective will be to challenge them to alter their philosophy to realign with that of the German philosopher Hans Jonas – “Act so that the effects of your actions are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life on earth” (Jonas, 1979, Chapter 1/V). This philosophy requires a symbiotic approach to life, where the interaction of humans with planet earth should ensure a close association that advantages both humans and the physical world, not to its disadvantage so that we live in harmony with the natural world. In the words of John Berger (1972), “seeing comes before words it is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world”. By seeing the consequences of consumerism and persistent inaction to climate change, the exhibition should evoke a realisation that it is “real”.

It is my intention to erect an exhibition space of 10 metres by 8 metres using 2 solid freestanding sides walls, with a glass entrance (on the left) and exit wall (on the right) and a solid elongated semi-circular atrium 3 metres in depth. The structure will be without a roof but there will be 2 suspended tracks from which image projectors can be placed. The idea of a glass-fronted exhibition space is to reveal instantly the main exhibit but the remaining space will be surrounded by white walls which will become a stark framework for the other artworks which will reinforce the overall theme. The decision to use white walls partially follows the principles of the “white cube” space as proposed by Hans

Ulrich Obrist (2014, p.29) such that “other visual cues in the space were reduced to a minimum, resulting in a clean, spare gallery space...”. This removes distractions from viewing the artworks and further enhances their impact.



Fig. One

Positioned centrally, I will display two of Olafur Eliasson’s glacial ice blocks from his *Ice Watch* series in the main room – Fig. One. The ice blocks, retrieved from the oceans around Greenland, have collapsed from the ice sheet because of global warming. These blocks will be of substantial sizes, at least 2 metres high and similar depth and width, and as the ice is thought to be about 10,000 years old, they have their own sounds and exude a profoundly ethereal bygone life. The size of the glacial blocks is important: being enclosed in a small space will give them a disproportionately greater presence in the room. The audience will be encouraged to touch and listen to their creaks and crackles as pressure bubbles escape as they melt.

By seeing these natural phenomena, displaced from their original location, and hearing their evocative sounds, the audience should “connect” to the installation and to the natural world and make them much more aware of the reality of climate change. To add greater poignancy, the words of David Buckland, artist and curator, *THE GREAT WHITE SALE* and *WILL YOU LOOK YOUR GRANDCHILDREN IN THE EYES AND TELL THEM YOU DIDN’T KNOW?* will be projected onto each of the glacial blocks (Buckland, *Ice Texts*, 2005 – 2009) – Fig. Two.

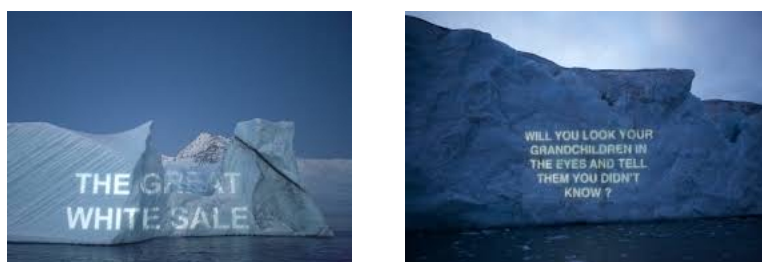


Fig. Two

To reinforce further this connection of global warming on the natural world, I intend to have as a backdrop, Olafur Eliasson's Sun from his *Weather Project* – Fig. Three. The Sun will be situated in the atrium, elevated but clearly visible from the main room, to give the impression of searing heat melting the glacial ice of the world's ice caps. The walls of the atrium will also be white to enhance the image of the Sun and emphasise the impression of extreme heat. Projected onto the floor of the main room, from the overhead tracks, will be an image of rippling water to represent the ice-melt but drains will have to be installed around the perimeter of the main room to collect the actual melt-water.



Fig. Three

To support the main theme of climate change, I intend to present a triptych of digital images by Robin Wood, which will be displayed on the left wall, immediately passed the entrance – Fig. Four. The introduction of three images in this format creates power and balance to the narrative of this curation. Wood's series, titled *Destroying Nature is Destroying Life*, serves to illustrate the fact that the consequences of climate change are far reaching – our insatiable consumerism is not only causing the polar icecaps and glaciers to melt and recede but is contributing to the loss of habitat of many animal species, pushing them to the edge of extinction. The triptych reveals the lack of symbiosis of humans with the environment. The triptych will extend 8 metres across the wall for full impact.



Fig. Four

To add a more rebellious atmosphere to the exhibition, I have selected three pieces of Street Art which are designed to challenge the establishment and political ideals of world leaders and their inclusion should create a dialogue for action - Fig. Five and Six. These will be positioned either side of the entrance into the atrium, Fig. Five, *World Going Down the Drain* by Pejac, on the left and Fig. Six (*Enough* by Redesign Revolution and *No Future* by Banksy) on the right (Bored Panda). These images will be smaller than the triptych display to avoid disrupting the view of the glacial ice blocks and the Sun from the entrance but by being smaller they will encapsulate John Berger's belief that "seeing" is fundamental to understanding and reconnection. The idea is to draw the audience in to the artworks so that they have to look harder and longer, to "see" the art – this will give their activist meaning more gravity and reinforce the message that human behaviour that follows Descartes' philosophical approach is "killing our world" and needs to change, to become more symbiotic.



Fig. Five



Fig. Six

The final piece that I intend to select will attempt to re-establish a visible connection with the natural world around us. The artwork I have chosen is that of Ana Mendieta's *Tree of Life*, Fig. Seven. In this *Tree of Life*, Mendieta connects directly with nature. Her earth-body artworks reflect her beliefs that there is "one universal energy which runs through everything: from insect to man, from man to spectre, from spectre to plant, from plant to galaxy" (Blocker, 1999, p.34). Everything is inter-connected.

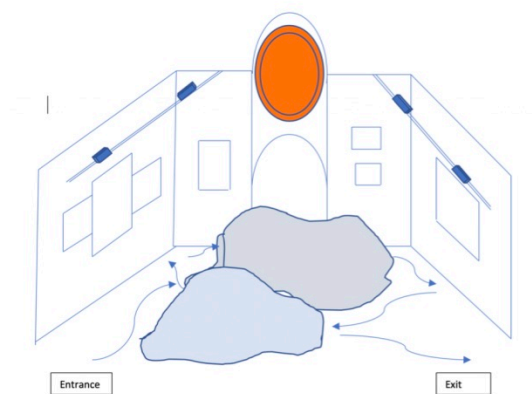
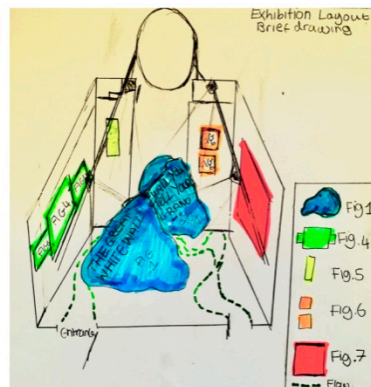
In this selection, I intend for the image to evoke an appreciation of the beauty and majesty of the world we live in, “mother earth”, and the importance of being at one with the planet, to minimise our impact in order to sustain the world for generations to come.



Fig. Seven

As depicted in my template of the layout below, the exhibition space has been designed to allow the audience easy access through and around that space, with opportunity to interact with the main exhibit, the glacial ice, giving the audience a tactile and emotional experience which should evoke a “stronger sense” of what climate change is all about. The white space surrounding the ice is flooded with the light of the “Sun” and yet it gives prominence to the other artworks, starkly highlighting our indiscriminate consumption of our natural resources and revealing in the final piece the juxtaposition with how we should be connecting to the world. The harmony with nature in this piece is emphatic.

Exhibition Layout



I intend for my exhibition to provoke a more sympathetic response to the crisis that climate change is creating, to respect our planet and live in accord with it and not against it. By including several very different artistic works into the curation, this should serve to emphasise the force of public opinion against inaction in the climate change debate. Being in the presence of these ancient ice blocks, the audience should feel a deep sense of connection and responsibility that should change the beliefs of those that dispute the evidence of climate change. “Seeing” is believing.

Figures

Fig. One: Eliasson, Olafur (2018) *Ice Watch*, Bankside, Outside Tate Modern, London

Fig. Two: Buckland, David (2005-09) *Ice Texts*, Arctic Expedition

Fig. Three: Eliasson, Olafur (2003), *The Weather Project*, Tate Modern, London

Fig. Four: Wood, Robin (2016), *Destroying Nature is Destroying Life*, Hamburg, Germany

Fig. Five: Pejac, *World Going Down the Drain*

Fig. Six: Banksy, (2010), *No Future*, Southampton, UK

Redesign revolution, *Enough*

Fig. Seven: Mendieta, Ana, (1976), *Tree of Life*, Old Man's Creek, Iowa, USA

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