

Ways of Perceiving

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Set Design

1467 words

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The concept for my exhibition came from the consideration of how I could use my study of set design to create something visually appealing but also thought provoking by looking past just the aesthetics of a space. I began by simply considering different objects within my own living space and was drawn to the pinboard on my wall and what it represented. I had filled it with photographs and art; representations of things that make me happy. The board contained a personally chosen narrative of parts of my life and who I am, much like how when dressing a set, you consider objects and colours that represent that character. The other important thing I considered was the fact that the board is infinitely interchangeable, and by adding something new, taking something away or even just moving something from one space to another, the narrative changes. I expanded my thinking to public noticeboards; how different people contribute and offer their own work and perspectives- what if I created an exhibition that allowed everyone to contribute and what sort of narrative could be created this way?

I turned my thinking towards participatory art and came across the work of Felix Gonzales-Torres and his thought provoking exhibits. One of his most prominent series of work, named *Untitled* (1957-1996) saw him using piles of sweets to represent struggles faced by his boyfriend who had died after suffering from AIDS. Spectators were encouraged to take away the sweets and eat them, as seen in some of his artworks such as "Placebo", to represent the numerous pills that ill patients have to take during their lives, and in "Portrait of Ross in L.A" as the sweets were taken away, they represented "the AIDS virus depleting Ross' body" (Public Delivery). The concept here is simple, but the most fascinating part is the underlying and emotional message that it conveys through the help of the spectator to complete the intended narrative. The intentions behind these pieces of work are thought provoking and personal to the artist, meaning that even when you step away the ideas stick with you.



[1] *Untitled - Portrait of Ross in L.A*

With these installations, it has been noted that despite being the intention, taking the sweets away was not an entirely clear instruction to some, and the act of taking one away felt like a “crime” (Umathum, 2011). It appears Gonzalez-Torres’ intention was to encourage people to alter the pieces by using the temptation of the sweets. Obviously not everyone who visited the installation would have taken a sweet away, but this meant that the sweets were removed gradually rather than all in one go, allowing the progression of the message to be seen over time. It also emphasises the importance of the role of spectators as the removal or lack of is the reason the piece looks the way it does.

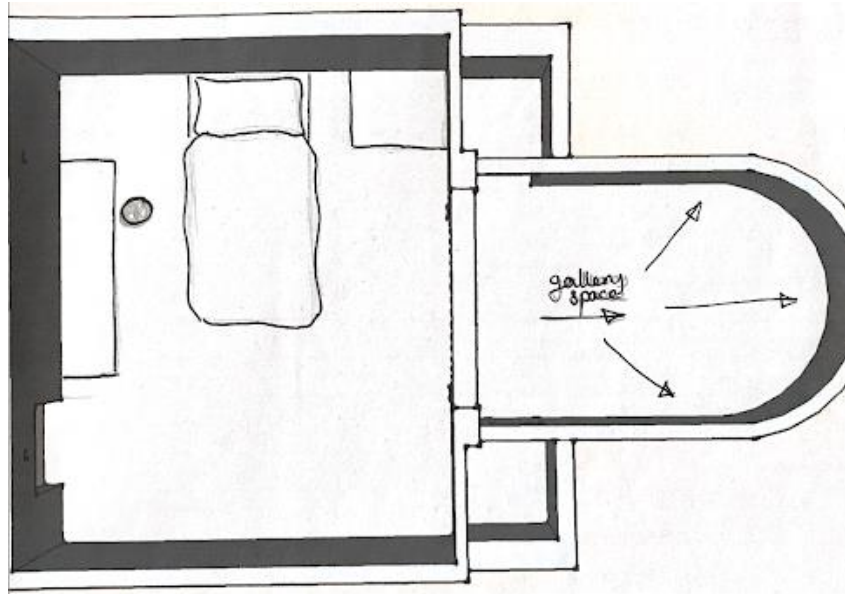


[2] *Viennoiserie*

Another artwork I looked at was *Viennoiserie* (1998) by Franz West. He used furniture to emulate a sort of waiting room within the art gallery using pieces of his own art surrounding a sofa, giving people the opportunity to sit down and think “inadvertently becoming a part of the artwork” (Manchester, 2000). Again, with this work the spectators might not have necessarily known that they were contributing to the piece, but this artwork represents how important spectators are to fulfil an artwork’s purpose. From this I can understand that even if not everybody visiting my exhibition understands it, they are still contributing by being in the space and therefore giving it some sort of purpose.

One of the main things that solidified my intentions to create a concept for a participatory installation was the work of Marcel Duchamp and the importance he stresses on the spectator; it is in his view that the spectator completes the work of art, and that “the creative act is not performed by the artist alone” (Duchamp, 1975, p.140). The idea of them having such a strong influence from both this quote and the artworks mentioned above makes me fascinated with how an artwork could present itself if the spectator is given full control.

Returning to my intrigue of the pinboard as a constantly changing narrative, I drew up my concept for an exhibition featuring white walls, a bed, bedside table, desk, and chair to create the illusion of someone’s bedroom. Initially, the information provided by the space regarding who lives there will be limited, as the aesthetic and content will be minimal. Once the spectators arrive, they will begin to make assumptions about the space, as noted by Bachelard (1969, p.14) about how we immediately “read a room” but I also want them to begin to “write a room”.



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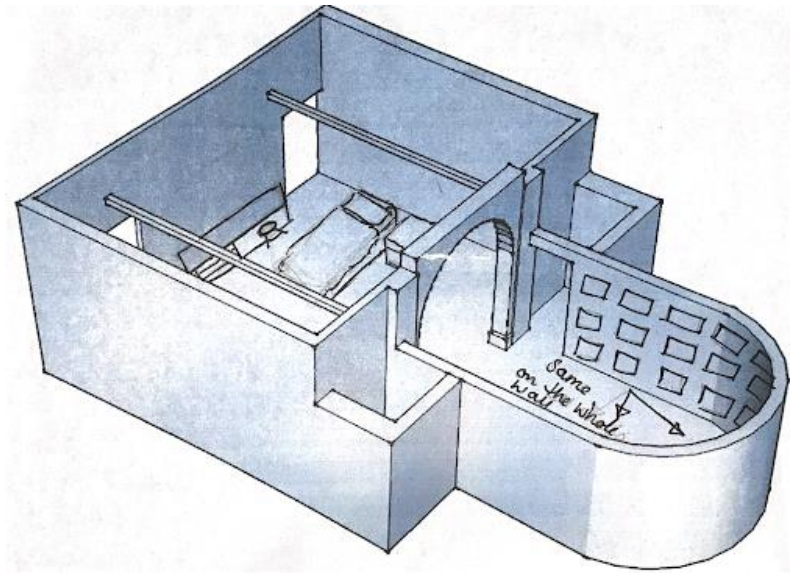
In his book, *The Poetics of Space*, Edward T Hall considers proxemics and how people use and consider space, namely intimate distance which is a more intense and sometimes uncomfortable closeness between people (1990, p116). I want the same reaction from the spectators; the room must feel authentic and lived in and distort the line between reality and fiction. They will feel like they are entering someone's actual living space. This will be achieved through encouraging those who visit to change the room and add character. This could mean moving furniture, adding furniture, decorating with different objects, photographs, or even painting the walls. I encourage the freedom to do whatever they want with the space. There is ultimate freedom, even if something within the room becomes destroyed. Through this, the narrative will constantly change, much like the elements of a pinboard, and the room will evolve, becoming more and more lived in the longer the exhibition lasts. Even if someone enters the room, sits on the bed, and leaves again, the imprint on the bed indicates movement and adds life to the room.

After looking at the *untitled* artworks, I considered the potential reaction to the space; for the piece to work there needed to be something to influence visitors to change the room; by providing paint and brushes, furniture and decorations upon entry with some sort of indication to "help yourself". It would then be up to whether they have been "tempted" to use these items within the room, much like the temptation of the

sweets. I recognise the idea that if there is too much instruction, the progression of the artwork will not feel natural, and I want this to apply to my bedroom to make it as authentic as possible.

This form of participatory design will be effective because of the perception different spectators have. The way we see things is entirely dependent on context and “what we know or what we believe” (Berger, 1988, p.8). This means that the narrative may be different depending on the person viewing it because of their own opinions and understandings of things such as colour, patterns and decorations, to name a few; An object’s function, such as a bed, would most likely be overlooked, but assumptions start to be made when looking for example at the covers or condition as “what we consume is signs (messages, images) rather than commodities” (Baudrillard, 1998, p.7). It is also important to consider how we perceive different genres; specific genres can be “immediately identifiable by costumes and settings” (Britton, 2016, p118). Of course, this is dependent again on how we identify things in the first place. For example, if there is mess and disorder within the room, someone may perhaps see the room as reflective of a stereotypical teenager’s bedroom, however another may see it as a dark genre, perceiving it to be a crime scene.

All of these variables considered such as theme, personality and genre are what could be considered when creating a set, which is my main inspiration behind the room. Therefore, the exhibition will be titled “INT. BEDROOM. DAY” because, whether knowingly or not, the spectators are entering a fabrication for an unlimited narrative and setting a number of possible scenes. The documentation of this installation will be the key revelation to how important objects, colour and space influence a scene or situation. The curved space at the back through the archway will be the only area in the exhibit with an instruction, asking visitors to provide an image with their own written understanding of who they believe lives within the space. This could be a paragraph, or a few words. It also would not be a compulsory contribution but would share a variety of different narratives from the perspectives of those most connected to and intrigued by the room. This outcome will provide evidence of the spectator’s engagement with the piece, and possibly encourage others to continue contributing and providing their own stories, fulfilling their importance in the art. This is why the installation will be so effective.



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List of Figures

[1] *Untitled- Portrait of Ross in L.A* (1991), <https://publicdelivery.org/felix-gonzalez-torres-untitled-portrait-of-ross-in-l-a-1991>, Last accessed 27th April 2020

[2] *Viennoiserie*, Franz West (1998), <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/west-viennoiserie-t07558>, Last accessed 27th April 2020

[3] *Arial Concept for exhibition in the Mission Gallery*, Rosie Cleary (2020)

[4] *Second exhibition concept for the Mission Gallery*, Rosie Cleary (2020)