



Virtual Exhibition:
Upside/Down – an inverted exhibition

School: Fine Art & Media
Module: Ways of Perceiving ADAD 4019

Student Name: David Phillips
Student Number: P152088

Module Lead: Ryan Moule

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My exhibition aims to liberate the viewer from the thralldom and Eusabian subordination of much current curatorial practice, to emancipate them to their proper position of equality and regard in the act of artistic creation and give them the confidence to make of the art what *they* will.

Art has been created and exhibited for millenia. There are many 'marks' left by early humans, but the oldest 'art', that which satisfies the sense of "purposeful...creation" (Tacon. P. 2021), is currently considered to have been created at least 45,000 years ago (Fig 1.) Whilst it is impossible to know the motivation for its creation, it is difficult to argue that such parietal drawings are not 'art' and were not placed where they were with the intention of being seen, even if only in the chiaroscuroic gloom of a flickering flame-lit cave.



Figure 1: Pig cave painting Sulawesi, Indonesia

Art has been 'on show' for centuries, principally for the religious education of illiterate populations, by means of stained glass, church decoration and architecture, and for political events and trade advertising.

The first 'Art Exhibitions', as we would understand them, began around the late 16th century, with the public display of work by students from the various painting schools, and with religious images being temporarily removed to public spaces (such as the cloisters or porticos) during religious festivals. (Fig 2).



Figure 2. Feast Day of Santa Rocco. Canaletto

Indeed, it is from the cloisters, the covered walkways of religious houses; adapted into the 'long galleries' of 16th century mansions as weatherproof exercise space, and where your 'picture gallery' provided a convenient place

to show off your art, that we obtain both our current descriptor of exhibition spaces and the way we look at art; on foot and on the move.

The exhibition of art by private collections and institutions in *public* galleries proved popular and, to use modern parlance, became ‘destinations’¹. The growth of collections in size and depth, partly in response to the need to provide change for the returning visitor, led to the birth of the curator and the development of an ‘exhibition practice’.

‘Curator’, deriving from the Latin for ‘to cure’, as ‘someone who cares for’, was originally only applied to those with stewardship of collections, or to one who led an institution, which holds such collections.

So, the carer became a creator; that latter role sporogenetically metamorphosing into the curatorial peripatetical celebrity auteur we know today. A being that not only dictates what is good, but also how it relates to other art, how it is hung and what is it hung next to, and through the didactic panels and labels they write, how the spectator should respond. The purpose of the exhibition no longer being the audience, but the exhibition: the exhibition, no longer being about the art, but about the ‘curator’.

Donato argues that this is predicated on a false premise, that the “the set of objects the Museum displays is sustained only by the fiction that they somehow constitute a coherent representational universe” (1998).

¹ The earliest recorded public *selling* exhibition that I have been able to find, was in Edinburgh in 1697.

In this conformation, the 'Exhibition' becomes a separate entity: an event, more important than the art it contains. Where the 'aura' of the individual works in the exhibition is swallowed up in the smog of the exhibition's 'concept. Where the art is obliged to serve an end not its own; where the viewers become spectators in a crowd, moving through the exhibition only along a guided route, craning their necks, trying, where they can, to see what is on the wall. And sometimes, in the most fashionable exhibitions, being urged not to dawdle.²

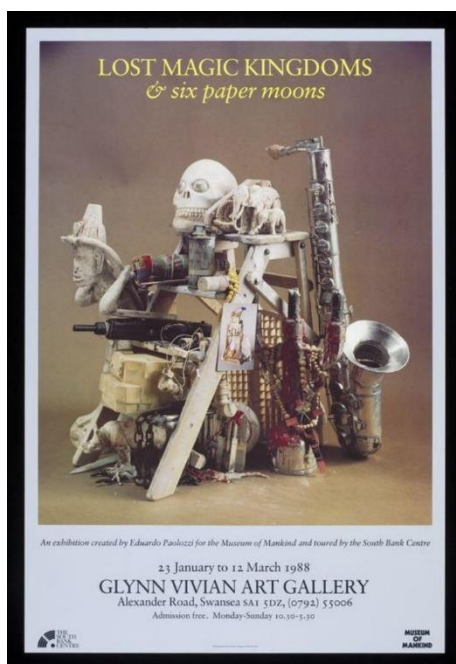


Figure 3 Glynn Vivian Paolozzi poster

But where curation (an abominable neologism) operates as bricolage, the final 'work' (the exhibition), can achieve something greater than the sum of its parts. I particularly remember Greenaway's *wunderkammern* exhibition *Some Organising Principles* originated by the Glynn Vivian in 1993, as well as Paolozzi's *Lost Magic Kingdoms*, which toured there in 1998 (Fig 3).

Maybe I should have begun by defining what I mean by 'art exhibition'.

² I admit to being deliberately provocative. To be clear, I differentiate this super-selector from the super-heroes that manage many public institutions and deliver important access to their permanent collections and touring exhibitions, with the space for the art to meet its audience.

Art. At its most basic, art is a consciously created visualisation of human thought, emotion, imagining and documentation, one that is intended to be seen.³

Exhibition. The act of providing opportunities for art to be seen.

Art Exhibition. This being the synthesis of the artist, the art, the curation, and the space in which the art is presented.

However, this ignores the constant in the exhibition equation, those for whom the Exhibition is intended, its '4th wall', the viewer, the 'exhibitionee'; without whom the whole exercise is a redundant fatuity. There is no show without Punch.

Abrams observed that historically the "ordering" of the creative artistic process was seen to be orientated towards, "...the needs, ...the springs of pleasure in the audience", but that from the 19th century,

"...the stress was shifted more and more to the (artist)... (and that, as) ...a result the audience gradually receded..., giving place to the (artist)..., as the predominant cause and even the end and test of art".
(1971)."

However, this had not gone unnoticed.

Haladyn reports that Duchamp proposed a "dialogic artist-viewer relationship" which involves not only "the making of the work but also its reception" (2015). Duchamp said,

³ I intentionally take no account of the artist's creative intention in that definition.

“...the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work into contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act”. (1957) ⁴

Haladyn argues that Duchamp saw the creative process not as an artwork *only* being seen *after* its completion, but that

“...the artist is positioned as a medium that produces works of art only with the participation of the spectator and, more important(ly), ... (that of) ...posterity (multiple spectators in multiple contexts)” (2015).

In other words, the artist is conscious throughout the creative process of the presence of the viewer.

Barthes also reconsidered the inferior position of the viewer, “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author” (1978). He was not questioning the role of the author (read artist) in the creation of the work, but that s/he had become more important than their work. Hughes also advocated the duality of the creative process; for him the artwork is a “physical object, ...a thing in the world”, that is validated by being “contemplated, ...returned to, (and) examined”, which can only be provided by the viewer’s required “long look” (1990).

⁴ Heidegger reports Nietzsche holding a similar view, “Enjoyment of the work consists in participation in the creative state of the artist” (Heidegger M.1979).

It seems to me that in the development of an exhibition, consideration of the importance of the viewer demonstrated in this line of thinking, is often absent, with the result that scant notice is given to its consequence; viewers spend very little time actually looking at a piece of art.

So why do people go to exhibitions? Perhaps to see a particular artist, or a theme, or because it is 'the thing to do'. Perhaps they are 'exhibition spotters' ticking off the entries in their *At the Exhibition* 'I-Spy' book; perhaps, simply to get out of the rain. I believe the fundamental factor is that human beings are inquisitive creatures, their curiosity sparked by stimulation or intrigue. But whatever their reason for coming, they come.

Why are viewers not given more respect and encouraged to take the "long look"? Is it because they are seen as outside the 'exhibition', passive spectators of it, rather than, as Rancière has it, "active participants in a collective performance" (2004), the exhibition's vital motivating heart?

Changing this perspective, allowing this emancipation, would require what Rancière, echoing Duchamps and Abrams, asserts begins with, "the realisation that viewing actively transforms and...translates the image offered...into an "alien entity that the artist and spectator verify together" (Spencer J. 2010).

That equality of authorship and innate understanding is anathema to the cultural gatekeepers. The illiterate speak, they understand the words and their meanings, even if they cannot read or write them.

We all make creative comparative choices, choosing the colours to decorate our houses, what clothes we wear, the statements we make, “I don’t like art!”. We are all curators now!



Figure 4. Baselitz exhibition

Artists know that when a piece is stuck and does not seem to be working, they should turn it upside down to get a fresh perspective. This is the model that Greenaway adopted in his *wunderkammern* exhibitions, with “a system of inversions (including displaying paintings in reverse) to de-familiarise and reignite a kind of marvel that has otherwise been lost through over familiarity” (1993). I have adopted the inversionary approach (Fig.4).

Greenaway’s apothegm that “The viewer is not passive” (1993), also follows the philosophical propositions referred to above. Using a space that was originally intended as a place of refuge, contemplation, and communion with God; I will challenge curationist(!) doctrine, literally turn it on its head. The unusual means of presentation, the absence of narrative or didactic direction, and the provision to truly look, combine in a deliberate attempt to reconsider the very act of viewing.

My exhibition is all about asserting the right of the viewer to see, to have the space and time to engage and communicate with the work, to allow the 'long look'. To stay their feet and hold their eyes and mind; to encourage them to talk and discuss what they are looking at. To show what they most certainly will know but have never truly seen.

All the works in the exhibition are, or will be **Upside/Down**.

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Images.

- Figure 1** Cave Painting. Untitled . A Pig.
[Tacon - Time magazine](#)
- Figure 2** Canaletto. *The Feast Day Of Santa Rocco*
[Canaletto - Feast Of Santa Rocco](#)
- Figure 3** Paolozzi . Lost Magic Kingdoms
[Paolozzi - Lost Magic Kingdoms](#)
- Figure 4** Baselitz exhibition
[baselitz 4](#)

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Mission Gallery Hanging Plan - with stools for the long look

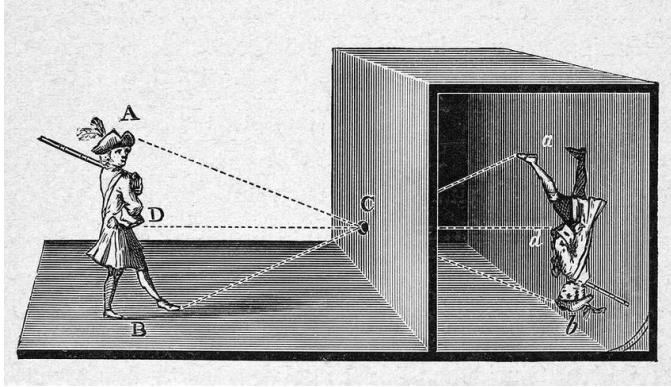


Appendix.

Selection Choices & Exhibition Content.

In thinking the works to be shown I considered upside down/images that exist

By Nature of production:



Camera Obscura

By intention:

Georg Baselitz. His process was I believe intended to make people look



baselitz 4



upside down house



[La Trobe](#)



[De Haen/de Witt bros](#)

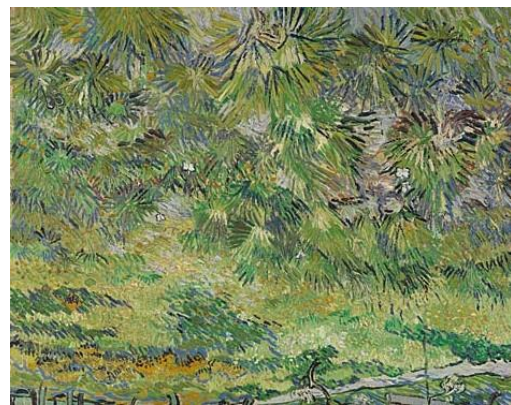
By accident or ignorance:



[Matisse U/d](#)



[Miro](#)



[Van Gogh](#) – Long Grass with butterflies

Conclusion:

Works to be exhibited.

Rationale. All the works will be exhibited upside down (in Baselitz's case this ought to be 'the right way up'! However, I believe that it was a deliberate choice to hang upside down, to encourage looking - see Fig 4). Two other works are also 'upside down', Wallinger and Kapoor.

I have deliberately chosen some very famous works of art. There will be no didactic panels. For those who need to identify the work, labels will be placed outside the main gallery in alphabetical order.

The four smaller works will be paired for purposes of comparison, each pair having a similar subject. (Baselitz/Da Vinci (female portrait) and Turner/Van Gogh (night-time landscapes.)

The Wallinger will be in the chancel, providing a significant challenge directly to our view of our place in the world. This is echoed by the Kapoor in the garden outside which provides the viewer with a different view of the world they are actually in. Picasso stands alone.

In the centre of the gallery's main space and running its length, will be two back-to-back, fairground funhouse upside-down mirrors facing the artworks, so the viewer can not only see themselves upside down, but also (should they choose) the works behind them in their correct orientation.

Stools will be provided to encourage viewers to take the 'long look'. Talking and discussion will be mandatory.

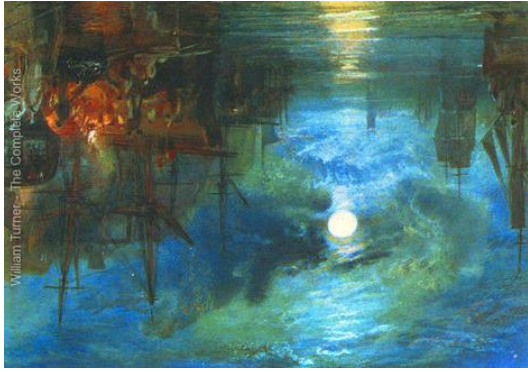


[Portrait of Elke](#)
Georg Baselitz



[Mona Lisa](#)

West Wall



[Turner](#) - (no title found)



[Van Gogh](#) Starry Night

East Wall



[Guernica](#) - Pablo Picasso

North Wall

Chancel

Garden



[Wallinger](#) - Turning the World Upside Down



[Kapoor](#) - World Turned upside down