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Three Key Words: Emotions, Expression, Subjectivity.

In this proposal for my dissertation, I will be researching three keywords that reflect my interests in art as a therapy and how emotions are expressed through fine art and how it can help us grow mentally and emotionally and make us feel certain emotions or feelings while looking at a piece of artwork or a specific painting. Three key images will be used to support my three chosen keywords in a synthesis with up to 3 or more visual artists/thinkers. The keywords that are chosen for this dissertation proposal will then lead to a question that I will further develop and research for my dissertation. I will be researching the keywords, Emotions, Expression, Subjectivity.

For my first chosen keyword 'Emotions' I will research how art elicits emotional response. "Emotions are the cement that keeps audiences connected to the artworks",(Carroll,1997) suggesting that the emotions that are felt when audiences are looking at a particular artwork are what connects them to the piece of art and the emotions that are generally felt her are the "garden-variety ones" (Carroll, 1997) which are "fear, anger, horror, reverence, suspense, pity, admiration, indignation, awe, repugnance, grief, compassion, infatuation, comic amusement and the like", (Carroll, 1997), all these emotions are what are felt when responding to an artwork depending on the emotions of the viewer.

> "In one broad, but legitimate, sense of the term, an emotion is a state that is characteristically felt, a state that characteristically has a phenomenology (unlike, say, a belief, which has none)." (Gaut,2007).

While researching more into depth of the keyword emotions and its connection with art I discovered the philosopher and author Berys Nigel Gaut and the book *Art,*

Emotion and Ethics in which he states ‘that our response to art centrally involves emotions is a commonplace, albeit a true and very important one’ (Gaut, 2007), suggesting that the way that we respond to a piece of artwork involves the emotions that we are feeling when looking at the art piece which is an important aspect to responding to art.

In *Art, Emotions and Ethics* Gaut describes art as a sort of perspective which then allows the viewers to react to what they are looking at using the emotions they are feeling towards the piece of art “Art deploys a cognitive–affective perspective on its represented events, a perspective that invites the audience to react emotionally to the scenes and characters it describes.” (Gaut,2007). I think that the way Gaut describes the artwork as a perspective to the viewers is interesting as each viewer sees the piece, they are looking at with a unique perspective of what it is or means.

> “There is a long tradition dating back to Plato and Aristotle that emphasises that for better or worse the experience of art is often an emotional one.” (Robinson,2005).

Jennifer Robinson touches upon emotions within art and states that whether the feeling someone is feeling is good or bad towards art it is always emotional one way or the other. Although it is also mentioned in her book *Deeper than reason emotion and its role in Literature, Music, and Art* Robinson stated that “R. G. Collingwood defended a romantic theory of art as the expression of emotion” (Robinson, 2005). Art is also created with emotion; the artist must feel a type of emotion when creating their artwork.

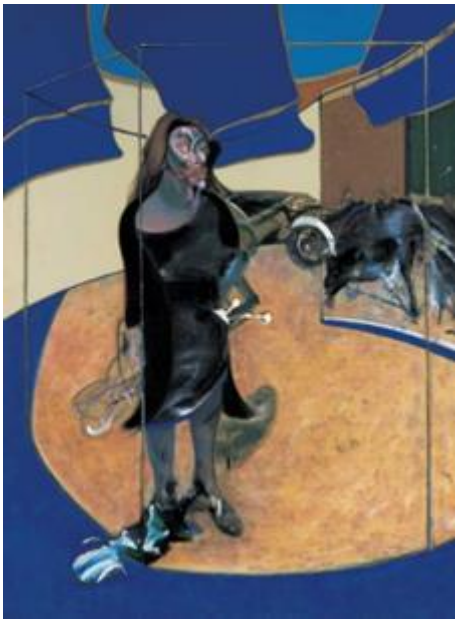

Figure 1, Bacon, F, (1967), *Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne Standing in a Street in Soho*.

An example of an artist who shows emotions through his paintings is Francis Bacon. In the book *Bacon by* Luigi Ficacci (2010) it is stated that Francis Bacon's paintings “push the effort to comprehend human nature” and also pushes “its concrete form and functioning, and its feelings to the extreme” (Ficacci, 2010). These state that when Bacon created his paintings, he was trying to push towards trying to understand “human nature” (Ficacci, 2010). When Ficacci mentioned that Bacon tried to “comprehend human nature” he is stating that Bacon was trying to understand and distinguish the feelings, characteristics and the way people think while creating his paintings. Therefore, this means that Bacon was trying to show his understanding of human emotions and feelings within his artwork.

Figure 2, Bacon, F, (1944), *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of Crucifixion*.

After researching the artist Francis Bacon and how his abstract distinguishes the feelings and emotions of the viewers, the question of how a painting creates emotions for the viewer? was thought of. When researching this question, I read a statement “Abstract Paintings can evoke emotions in viewers” (Kang, D., Shim, H. and Yoon, K. (2017). This was interesting as the style Bacon uses to create his paintings are quite “abstract” and his work tries to comprehend human characteristics, feeling and emotions so can his work also evoke emotions in the people who view his paintings.

While deconstructing and researching deeper into the word emotions I have gathered other keywords such as, characteristics, feelings, human nature, perspective, and character, which can be further researched regarding my dissertation question.

“Art offers a way of communicating and expressing oneself when words are not accessible nor capable of doing what art can do” (McNiff, 2019). This is a statement from the book *‘Reflections on What “Art” Does in Art Therapy Practice and Research,’* by the author Shaun McNiff who touches upon the topic of art as a

therapy which led me to the keyword of ‘Expression.’ As he states art allows a way for “communicating” and “expressing oneself” (McNiff,2019), therefore when we are unable to speak about our feelings or communicate with words art is an effective way of expressing these feelings and emotions instead of holding them in. It has been stated that “Art has long been an outlet for self-expression, and painting is just one art form that individuals use to articulate their ideas and emotions” , therefore painting is an important art form for people to be able to express themselves by showing their emotions and expressing the emotions that they are feeling when creating the painting, the expressions could be a way of communicating without using any words but just paint.

> “A ‘theory’ of art as expression, therefore, can say no more than that art works have properties designated by the same words which designate feelings, emotions, attitudes, moods, and personal characteristics of human beings,” (Sircello, 2015).

As Sircello states in this quote, there are various words that can be used to describe the way that one would express themselves.

Figure 3, Munch, E, (1893) *The Scream*.

“The psychological state of an individual affects the way in which they express themselves,” (Azeem,2015). Edvard Munch is a key artist who uses expressionism within his paintings, through using lines, colours, and shapes to show what emotions that he is feeling whether it be sad, angry, or happy, he will express these in his paintings, for example his famous painting ‘*The Scream.’*

As shown in the photograph above the colours used within this expressive painting are not happy therefore, I can see that this image shows fear, sadness, or frustration. Hina Azeem is an author of the book “The art of Edvard Munch: a window onto a mind” who touches upon the early works of Edvard Munch and how Munch can express all his emotions such as depression and anxiety through the colours

and characteristics that he puts into creating his work and how we are able to distinguish his feelings through these colours used.

“Expressions are portrayed, and colours are assigned present clues about Edvard’s suffering,” (Azeem, 2015), this statement from an article I read that discusses the expressions that are shown within Edvard Munch’s paintings suggests that the colours that Munch expressed within his work gave clues to the viewers regarding his emotions and feelings and the suffering that he was experiencing. “Many of Munch’s early works embrace pessimistic themes. Death, anxiety, and depression are all vividly exposed through his use of colours and character” (Azeem, 2016), by researching into the expression that Munch shows within his work using colour, I would like to research further into the use of colour to express one’s emotions and feelings. Can the way someone is feeling be expressed through the colour that they choose to use within their artwork? the colours in paintings can in fact depict a person's feelings with the artwork, as Edvard Munch used a series of colour within his paintings to express the way he was feeling at that point in his life, “Many of Munch’s early works embrace pessimistic themes. Death, anxiety, and depression are all vividly exposed through his use of colours,” (Azeem, 2015), this has been proven by other artists as well as Edvard Munch, for example Van Gough also chose the colours that he used within his paintings to express his feelings and emotions.

Figure 4, Gogh, V, (1889), *The Starry Night*.

After researching into depth upon the topic of expression within art I have come to realise that painting and art is an especially important way of being able to do this as it allows us to express ourselves freely without having to speak or use any words but to just simply use any art from such as paint and to also be able to express these emotions through the colours that are used as Edvard Munch and many other artists have in their expressionism work.

To bring my proposal together I have decided to finish on the keyword Subjectivity which complements my two first chosen keywords which are ‘Emotions’ and ‘Expressions.’ Subjectivity looks at the ideas around what we as individuals bring to the act of interacting with a work of art etc what we carry with us, mentally when we had a terrible day or night's sleep or even an argument with someone before seeing the piece of art that will affect the way that we view it. When researching into the

subjectivity of art I came across the article ‘Art as subjective solution: a Lacanian theory of art therapy’ by Shirley Sharon, who wrote that,

> “All modalities of art have a symbolic dimension, which depends not only on their medium (words, colours, images, sounds, movement), but on the function this medium has in a patient’s psychic life and on the use s/he makes of this medium.,” (Sharon-Zisser, 2018).

Stating that the medium used within a piece of art is not the only aspect that is dependant when a piece of art is created by and artist or viewed by a patient but the modalities of this depend on the impact that the medium has within the artist/viewers life and what they think of this medium in that point in their psychic life, meaning the feelings that are felt at that point of creating an art piece or viewing an art piece will make a difference in how the artwork or these mediums are viewed. Within this article the concepts of Freud are spoken of in which it states that “Freud’s thinking makes it possible to conceptualise art as a symptom (of its creator),” (Sahron-Zisser, 2018). Suggesting that Freud views art as a ‘symptom’ of its creator, meaning that he sees art as a form of how the artist shows what they are feeling, the feeling is described as a symptom of its creator as a way of saying the emotions that the artist is feeling when creating the art piece. In another article that I have researched, *Changing subjectivities in art education: from Sigmund to Lucian Freud,* it is stated that “Sigmund Freud saw art as a manifestation of inner drives and desires,” (Emery, 2002), again stating that art is a way to show one's expressions, emotions, and feelings, the way that Sigmund describes art as a form of manifesting someone's

inner drives and desires is interesting to me as it is describes art as a form of expression very well.

‘The White Pube’ takes on art reviews in a very rounded way, embracing the chaotic nature we may view art and what we bring to the moment as viewers. They speak on their views on pieces of art that they have viewed and speak on the way that the artist has created the piece of artwork based on a feeling or emotion that they are feeling, creating a blog of all these reviews that they make after viewing them. “We tried to write in a way like we were falling through our feelings and simply writing about art along the way,” (Muhammad, 2015). The way that ‘The White Pube’ speaks on art and the way that they view it is remarkably interesting as it gives the opportunity to read what people feel about these art pieces and allows us to understand other people's views when interacting with the artworks. “We decided to start writing ourselves and actually state how art made us feel (happy, bored, angry, in love),” (Muhammad, 2015).

To conclude my dissertation proposal, I have spoken on the emotions that shown through a piece of artwork by the artist and how art elicits and emotional response, how expressions are shown through a piece of artwork and howe art allows one to express themselves freely, and the subjectivity in art and how the emotions that we feel when viewing a piece of art depends on what sort of day someone is having. Researching my 3 keywords in depth has allowed me to have a better understanding of the meanings behind them in relation to art, which has enabled me to comprise a series of questions and sub-questions in relation to my dissertation question. All 3 of

my keywords have a strong connection in relation to the meanings they have within art.

Regarding my research question, I have taken all my keywords into consideration and produce sub-questions, such as, ‘How much is a viewer's subjectivity to art based on past experiences and emotions?’ ‘Is expressing emotions through art negative or positive?’ ‘Can emotions be expressed through colour?’ ‘Can expressing emotions through art help us grow mentally?’ ‘Does expressing emotions through art help with creativity?’ These sub-questions have allowed me to comprise a research question. The question ‘How does the creation of art transform expression into meaning for both the artist and viewer?’, is the working question which will be researched further as a point of my dissertation. The sub-questions which have been generated along my working question can also be recognised and explored into depth within my writing.

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