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CONTEXTUAL PRACTICE

WAYS OF PERCEIVING

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A QUIET NOISE

ARTISTS THAT SILENTLY INVITE DIALOGUE

Two Rooms

BY EMILY BERRY

I went into one room and then I went into another.
I was in a room inside a room.
There I felt safe.

SANCTUARY

CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY

'Protection or a safe place, especially for someone being chased or hunted'

It is often impossible to find a language in order to respond to our life experiences and those of others. Experiences can hunt us down, chase us, remain unresolved and unexplained - thereby affecting our life choices - and how we regard those choices made by others. Art can provide a sanctuary.

'for those who assert that our lives cannot be accounted for within a paradigm which states that we exist within a life-world produced wholly from cultural signs and systems, the sublime defines the moment when thought comes to an end and we encounter that which is 'other'.

Whitechapel gallery.2010.*The Sublime*.london.Thames and Hudson. P.18

This exhibition shows the work of artists and sculptors who urge us to pause and engage with their own viewpoint, and also the experiences or histories of others they have encountered and been affected by. We are encouraged to try and find new ways of thinking and to understand what these stories truly mean why they exist. We can consider how to navigate moving forward, and perhaps how to radically change our perceptions. Some images may be uplifting – providing temporary sanctuary – in this 'age of anxiety' this is crucial too.

'Art can mitigate randomness and chance, though, for it provides tools for generating helpful experiences on a reliable basis, so that we can have continuous access to them whenever we are able to look up from our sadness'

De Botton.A and Armstrong.J.2020.*Art as Therapy*.London. Phaidon Press Limited..P.27

In this digital era of heightened consumerism there is a lot of NOISE made. A cacophony of voices urging us to 'be this' 'do that' 'believe this' 'buy that' etcetera. We are bombarded with information and graphic details of news events across the globe. We are constantly fed 'facts' that are not always reliable, and there is so much confusion in our lives.

We can 'live' millions of lives daily without leaving our homes and we can invent digital identities for ourselves. Our inability to fully engage with all that

is fleetingly put in front of us is in danger of numbing those qualities (such as empathy) that make us human. We are simply overwhelmed and disaffected.

The Pandemic has further pushed us behind screens and into a virtual world where reality is almost like one long running movie or drama series which we can simply switch off if we chose.

‘This a kind of social distancing that emerged before the two metres suggested between people came into play during our lives after the global outbreak of covid-19. Have you ever had a friend, colleague, or other interlocutor ask that you email, text, whatsapp or facebook them rather than have a face-to-face conversation? Social distancing measures have already been put into place because our machines have conditioned us to do so.’

Kholeif.O.*Art In The Age Of Anxiety*.Sharjah Art Foundation.MIT Press US.Cambridge.MA.P.90

For millions of people current periods of isolation and inactivity have not induced calm peaceful reflection and an opportunity to enjoy any benefits, they have led to unprecedented mental health problems.

Much of the advertising, media, news and social media would have us believe that there are endless happy smiley families – cheerfully sharing with those close to them - cheerfully ordering washing machines and suchlike on line, happily dreaming about vaccines and holidays, deciding which pet food to spoil their dog with and devotedly home educating their children. Banks and so on remind us of all that is good about life, familiar pop songs and communities being steered lovingly by these institutions - they just can’t wait to talk us through how they can help us all (get into more debt!) and how we can pass through this united and cheerfully clapping and waving together. The reality for the vast majority must actually be hell – and their isolation has served to push them further into the shadows.

The majority of those who have REALLY steered us through this and those who have lost loved ones friends and colleagues, will need help processing everything. All those who have the opportunity to do so should think of ways of bringing back some of the ‘peace that passeth all understanding’. Those who have suffered need channels to alleviate their suffering. Art should

address all and be shared by all and it should be shown and shared in a variety of locations.

I have chosen works where creative artists and sculptors have portrayed huge stories, sometimes in ways that touch us with their familiarity. We are offered accounts of histories, the descriptions of which fall outside the realms of spoken language. Some of these stories leave us clinging to an abyss, they lie somewhere beyond anything we can comprehend. We can also find sanctuary in the essence of some of these works, as they may allow us to recall welcome memories of our own.

Themes of home (rooms) and sanctuary are intertwined, the desire or yearning for a home, the lack or loss of a home, the real meaning of home. In the current climate the home – for those lucky enough to have one – may have become a prison, cutting us off from the realities of life outside. For others their home is the place where they truly feel safe – their sanctuary.

We need - more than ever - to slow down and listen. This is ironic considering that (due to the pandemic) we have been forced to slow down in an unprecedented way.

Doris Salcedo

Unland: the orphan's tunic, 1997

Wooden tables, silk, human hair and thread

31 1/2 × 96 1/2 × 38 1/2 in

80 × 245.1 × 97.8 cm



Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM)

📍 Miami

The 'found' or disturbing nature (or appearance) of this table is created by it being formed out of two tables roughly joined together creating a 'scar', and thereby altering our perception of it as a table. The original tables have no important history to us at all, they show significant signs of wear, perhaps they might have come from a kitchen. However they would have been of huge value - in practical and monetary terms - to their original owners. The manner of their new form conveys that the truths they are attempting to tell are about ordinary people who were attempting to lead ordinary lives. Truths about those who – due to extreme trauma - are struggling to carry on with a

life of any sort, as their lives bear a scar from a terrible disruption at their core. [1]

'If somebody that is close to you or if somebody that you love has been killed then your life is distorted. It hasn't ended... and you have to go on with the distortion.'

*'.....The idea of silence, the idea of displacement, the idea of absence, and of course violence, war, but all these ideas are shown in the quietest way possible'.....
..... 'without actually much happening on the surface'.*

'UNLAND: THE ORPHANS TUNIC HAS A PIECE OF FABRIC COVERING ONE END OF THE TABLE, THEN A NARROW BAND OF THICKLY SEWN HAIR RUNNING ACROSS ITS WIDTH. THE SCULPTURE RELATES TO THE TESTIMONY OF A SIX YEAR OLD GIRL WHO HAD WITNESSED HER MOTHER'S DEATH AND WHO WOULD NOT REMOVE A DRESS THAT HER MOTHER HAD MADE FOR HER'.

Tanya Barson, 'Unland: The Place of Testimony', in *Tate Papers*, no.1, Spring 2004,
<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/01/unland-the-place-of-testimony>,
accessed 30 March 2021.

[1]

Testimonies from children, and other victims of the civil war in Columbia, are what Salcedo uses to inform this work – though the thinking and awareness is universal. This war is intermittent and began in 1948 – there are countless people unaccounted for – the 'disappeared'. In the case of 'Unland: the orphan's tunic' (1997), she visited Northern Columbia and listened to orphaned children – some in orphanages and some living on their own.

This work is respectful – it creates a narrative by means other than quoting directly and naming sources – or photographing individuals. Salcedo informs us

by still and sculptural manipulation of objects and materials and weaves truths and agonies in a way that is unavoidably moving and in many respects figurative. These tables are not metaphorical on her eyes, they become something else at her hands, a vehicle for her to allow countless voices to be heard. They represent the desire of the victims not to be forgotten, and are a monument to those who are lost.

Salcedo uses a deliberately lengthy process of weaving (through numerous tiny holes) raw silk thread and human hair. The weaving ultimately resulting in a web like effect, as the density is varied. Salcedo's intention was to generate feelings, not to tell specific stories.



GWEN JOHN
 35 **A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris
 (with Open Window)** 1907-9
 Oil on canvas on board 31.2 x 24.8 cm
 Langdale 17
 National Museums & Galleries of Wales

 36 **A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris**
 1907-9
 Oil on canvas 31.7 x 26.7 cm
 Langdale 16
 Sheffield Galleries & Museums Trust

Fraser Jenkins, D. and Stephens, C. 2004. *Gwen John And Augustus John*. London. Tate Publishing

When Gwen John painted these she was living in Paris, they are two oil paintings of her much loved room – this room in rue Cherche-Midi (which she lived in between 1907 and 1909) was a subject she returned to many times, she found great solace and joy in her simple intimate surroundings.

Gwen John was never more enchanted by a room than she was by the one in Cherche-Midi. 'It is the prettiest ever', she declared.

Chitty.S.1986.*Gwen John 1896-2939*.London.HodderAndStoughton

These were painted during the period when she was deeply in love with Auguste Rodin, her life revolved around him for many years, this room was her sanctuary. This relationship with Rodin was all consuming on her part, the attachment as far as Rodin was concerned was much less intense and this caused her great pain.

There is an element of the self portrait about these paintings , and also they became a visual diary, recording and illustrating her frame of mind on the day. She showed them to Rodin, everything she did she did was either at his instruction or with him in mind – her overwhelming love and admiration for Rodin and his work was an obsession. [2]

[2]

These paintings have a delicacy which renders them not just as a view, but gives them an air of reminiscence, and also a narrative that explores the

human condition. They are intertwined between the 'moment', and memory, and they allow the viewer to explore and consider both John's and their own memories and other senses in a quiet and profound way. The gentle tentative light portrayed, and the repetitive portrayal of the chair and table allow us to share in her obvious pleasure in the familiarity and simplicity of this simple space.

The props in view suggest presence and absence, as indeed does the empty chair. The open window in one, with the blue sky visible may suggest a hopeful mood, the closed window with the outside merely suggested, a less hopeful frame of mind.

Even with no knowledge of the painter – or the context in terms of her life - it is possible to experience the safety and sanctuary that can offered by a private intimate space. Encountering these works, encourages us to reflect on the significance of sanctuary in terms of its presence and absence in our lives and those of others.

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Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (billboard of an empty bed) 1991, printed billboard, dimensions variable © The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation

"Above all else, it is about leaving a mark that I existed: I was here. I was hungry. I was defeated. I was happy. I was sad. I was in love. I was afraid. I was hopeful. I had an idea and I had a good purpose and that's why I made works of art." ~ Felix Gonzalez-Torres

https://www.azquotes.com/author/45793-Felix_Gonzalez_Torres

The delicate and sensitive nature of this monumental public work belies its true identity and purpose. The quiet power and scale of the image and its simplicity, is what gives it its weight. It is not designed to shock in order to command attention but rather to offer - by its significant and understated presence - a chance for us to pause and question.

It is only when the context – in terms of the artists intention – is revealed, that the pathos and the messages emerge. [3]

[3]

This work speaks of unspeakable grief and loss, it exists as a personal tribute to the memory of Torres's partner Ross Alcock who died of Aids. The indentations of two heads left behind on the pillows are poignant and speak of absence in a unique way.

Twenty four of these billboards were placed around New York in 1991, the twenty fourth being the date Ross died in 1988. Torres was clear that his purpose in making this work was entirely to mark and respect his memory, and that this was the sole purpose of its existence.

There is an added layer of reflection when we consider that, in 1996, Torres too died of Aids. This work therefore invites us to consider Aids and the devastation it wreaked and its continuing affects on society today.

There is a possibility that, when this work is encountered without any knowledge of its concept or purpose, feelings of comfort joy and security might be felt by those who come upon it. A bed is an intensely personal space with rich and complex layers of meaning and significance. This work allows endless interpretations.

Torres sought to create a permanent record of the love that existed between him and his partner Ross, love between two people should simply be that – love with no requirement for explanation or justification. It is only when we know the context of this work that we fully understand the layers of life experience and the context in terms of world affairs that informed it. We are then 'invited' to explore the other matters to which it alludes. However, at its core it is a loving monument made for by one human being for another.

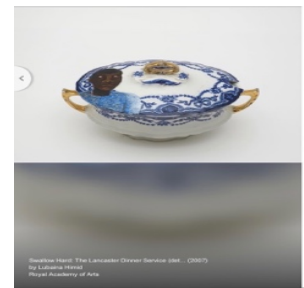
slave trade.



Swallow Hard – Judges' Lodgings



▲ Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service, 2007. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian



<https://lubainahimid.uk/portfolioio/swallow-hard/>

Himid places the histories of two cultures in plain sight, showing how they collided in such a cruel way. The nature of this exhibition is very 'approachable' it requires no language to explain it, and exists in a familiar (to some) setting and uses familiar (to some) vessels.

“An artist must be free to choose what he does, certainly, but he must also never be afraid to do what he might choose”.

Langston Hughes

<https://www.biography.com/writer/langston-hughes>

The overlaying of the very vessels that were used by the wealthy slave traders (in luxurious surroundings) with images of the slaves that were oppressed, and also images of the society that oppressed them, is very powerful. [4]

([4])

Eating and drinking together is a familiar and necessary requirement for mankind and has been so for thousands of years. There are examples throughout history of people striving to make this more than simply a function, eating together can unite people and have a comforting uniting reassuring and sometimes celebratory and joyful feel.

‘Swallow Hard’ shows the very different life experiences of two sets of people that existed alongside each other in this country. One set of people has a well documented history and the other has been largely hidden.

Art can provide a great service in terms of promoting understanding and awareness. Encountering art that moves us can alter thinking and broaden perspectives – art encourages dialogue.

This work is a respectful legacy and a lasting memorial to mark and respect the suffering and sacrifice of a large group of people - without whom we would not have so many benefits we enjoy today.

Martha Rosler

⊕ Follow

Photo Op, 2004
Photomontage
20 × 24 in
50.8 × 61 cm



Seattle Art Museum

📍 Seattle, Seattle

Martha Rosler - in this image - sums up the complexities that exist in our daily lives as a result of the media.

The consumerism present in our society is evident in the comfortable, chic environment in which we see the trappings of wealth. Our desire for a public display of all this is shown by the almost visceral selfies being taken in the foreground. These girls are oblivious to the war going on directly outside their glass window and the bodies lying on the chairs.

Martha Rosler made this photo montage in 2004 – given all that has happened since – it is clear that she was a visionary. It is a shocking reminder of how we live our lives, every kind of human deprivation can exist in our living room. [5]

[5]

The abundance of information about world affairs and the nature of its delivery has numbed people to the realities of life outside their 'bubble'.

The sheer scale of the numbers suffering and dying are beyond our true comprehension and the tendency is – with the help of social media – for us to hide away inside a virtual world. We can escape and refuse to face up to anything at all outside our own lifestyles.

All wars, all deaths, all examples of human suffering are now rendered as ‘stories’ – available through mobile phones, televisions and other means – available to anybody old enough to access them. In this frenzy of information the overriding feeling is ‘there is nothing we can do’ – ‘nothing we can change’ The result is that despite the mass sharing of stories and information, this has not increased awareness, but rather has blunted it.

The problems, both in terms of absorbing world affairs, and our understanding of the humanity that resides in the ‘stories’ from across the globe, are growing in intensity.

We need to find a way to slow down – regain balance – create a cohesive society, and find out how to limit the detached nature of communications to only the things that have to be done virtually.

People must feel they have the ability and opportunity to reach out and make personal contact with others thus helping society in small ways – communities must be helped to form, and these ‘real time’ communities can then try and affect change by uniting together and combining their voices and embracing each other.

Post Covid there will be a lack of confidence, a fear of closeness, and so many people will need help in order to navigate beyond.

Creative practices can do this – and should be doing this.

*‘A work of art has value only if tremors from the future run through it’
Andre Breton 1934*

Lack.J.2020.*Global Art*.London.Thames And Hudson Ltd



After the Bath (2006), Rose Hilton. Photo: courtesy Messum's

The arguments over centuries relating to 'beauty' in art continue to this day, and 'beauty' is possibly a term that is more controversial than ever in this current period of history. It can be divisive and destructive when applied to the human form.

I still look for reasons to uphold the role of beauty in art, and I would hope that there are things that can unite people, beyond our understanding - things that can transcend divisions in opinion or culture and humanity can simply share a feeling or sense of beauty that is indescribable.

'Art, in its diversity, is impossible to define. But something within has to arrest and work upon us in order to transform. My argument isn't about art that provides unremitting and therefore benign viewing pleasure. No. As someone living in an age when so much political manoeuvring and messaging is embedded within the visual, when images vie for attention with a fixed agenda, I need art to inhabit beauty as a temporary stratagem, a Trojan horse, in order to go beyond the borders of the norm or the benign.'

Isobel Harris

<https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-36-spring-2016/does-beauty-still-matter-art>

This painting 'After The Bath' by Rose Hilton – talks about warmth safety sanctuary and love, along with other sensations, and offers up memories that form in conscious and subconscious layers.. [6]

[6]

I see shadows and shapes in the background, and narratives that are hard to pin down. The year in which it was painted (1996) was a year in which all the comforting experiences and emotions present in this painting were jeopardised, for myself and my children, by my life choices.

I am sure others will take other things from this painting, and that is the point of making a painting and placing it in the public domain.

Despite the complexities of my own response, the overall pleasure I get in the colours, the light, the warmth (despite a lot of blue) in this painting and the complex associations that arise from it, I think it is beautiful and it fills me with hope.

IN A SEPARATE AREA

There will be a large area/wall of paper and people will be encouraged (using small pieces of charcoal that can be taken away) to make marks – this could be drawing or text or even simply names of loved ones. This drawing will be a lasting legacy from the exhibition – both as a physical document and as a Digital reference.

ALONGSIDE THE EXHIBITION



▲ Artists, refugees and locals take part in Shamiyaana: Food for Thought – Thought for Change in Athens, ahead of Documenta 14. Photograph: Louisa Gouliamaki/AFP via Getty Images

RASHID AREAAN

THIS RESTAURANT WOULD BE REPLICATED

The everyday of Shamiyaana is an event itself, created by the people themselves. Although Shamiyaana is for the community in which it is located, artists, writers, critics, art teachers, are all expected to come to Shamiyaana to meet each other but also meet and converse with people from the community. However, we also have a plan for a special gathering once a week, called Arts Party, when people from the art world can come together.



Shamiyaana

Opening Hours: Mon, Tue: Closed; Wed, Th, Fr, Sat: 5:30-10:30pm; Sun: 12-3:30pm

8 Cazenove Road

Stoke Newington N16 6BD shamiyaana.com

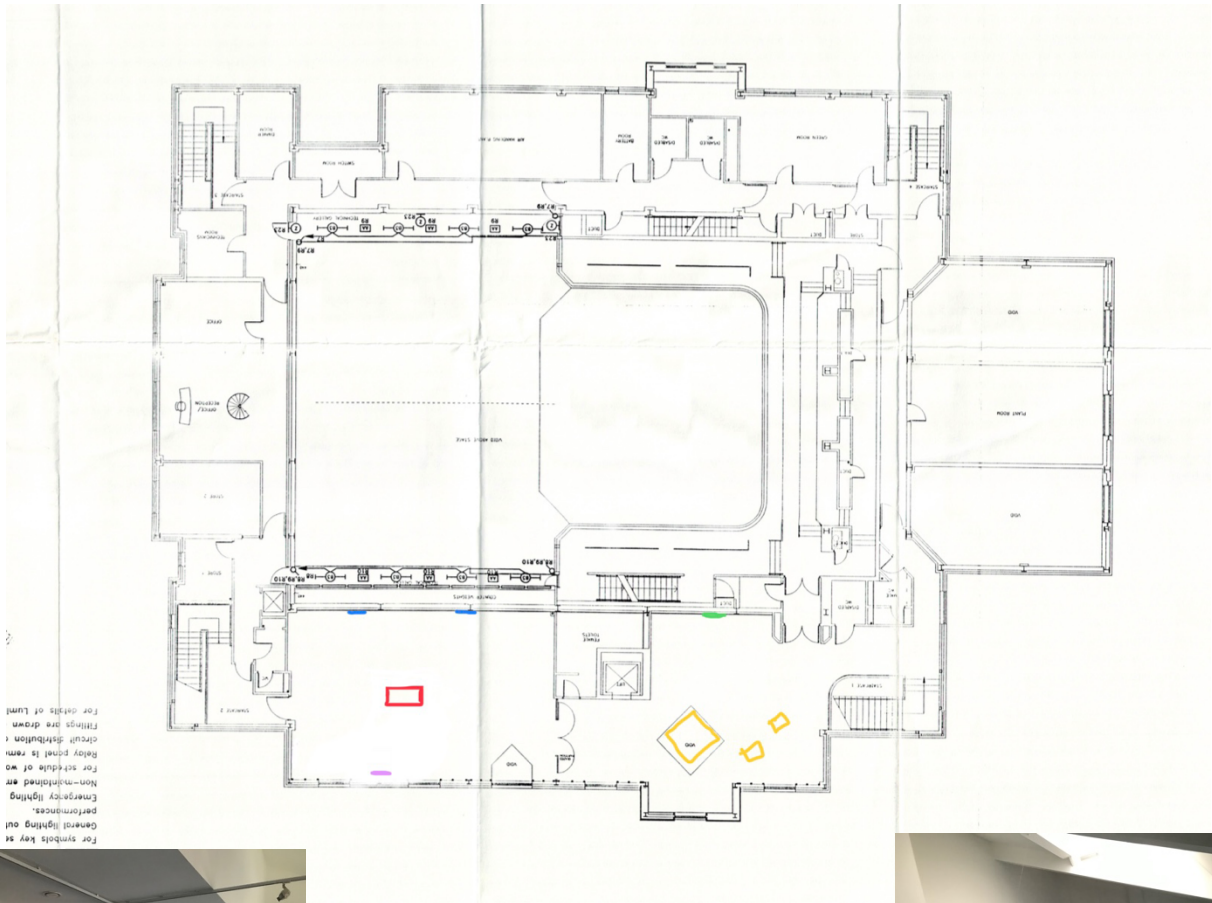
<http://www.hackneymagazine.com/stokenewingtonnewrestaurant>

THEATR BRYCHEINOG

This is a contemporary centre for the arts sitting alongside the canal in a wonderful location in Brecon.

The venue is also a centre for community based projects and the space is fully used for various projects and occasions.

There are all the available settings and provisions necessary for 'A QUIET NOISE' here – this exhibition was curated with a fully inclusive feel and needed to take place in a spacious accessible welcoming public place.



ABOVE :view of gallery area above left (scale)

ABOVE :glass display stand

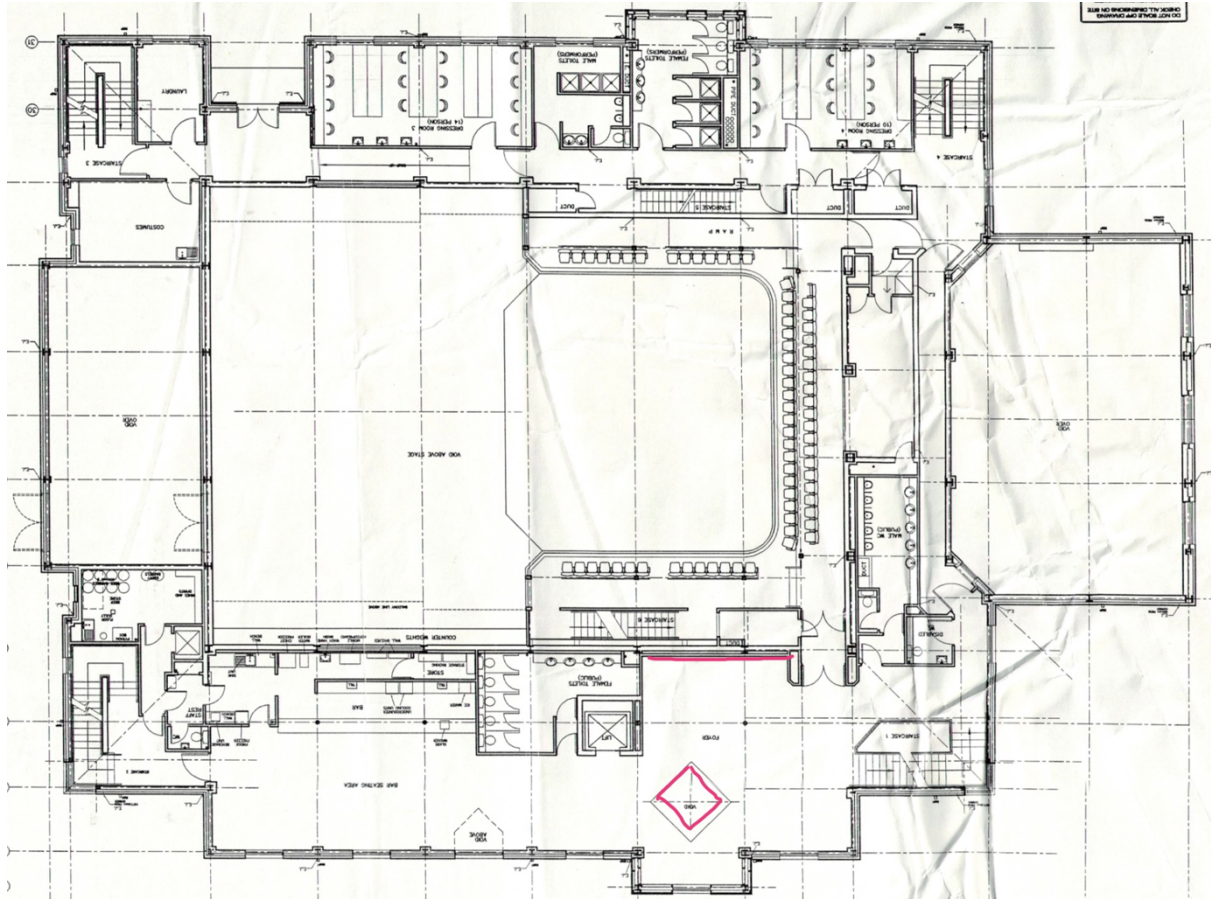
RED – SALCEDO - (The Orphan's Tunic' table)

MAUVE – ROSLER (Photomontage)

YELLOW – HIMID (Swallow Hard) displayed on glass structure (in above photo)
and two free standing closed in vertical glass cabinets

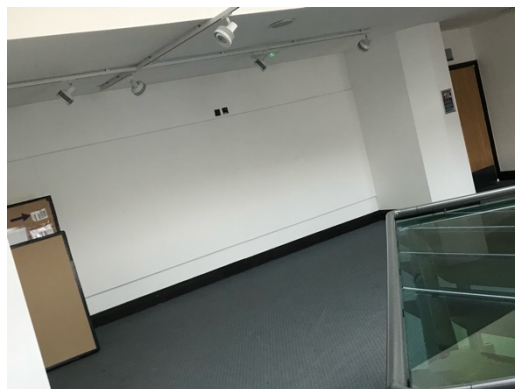
BLUE – JOHN (two paintings 'Corner Of The Artist's Room In Paris)

GREEN - HILTON ('After The Bath')

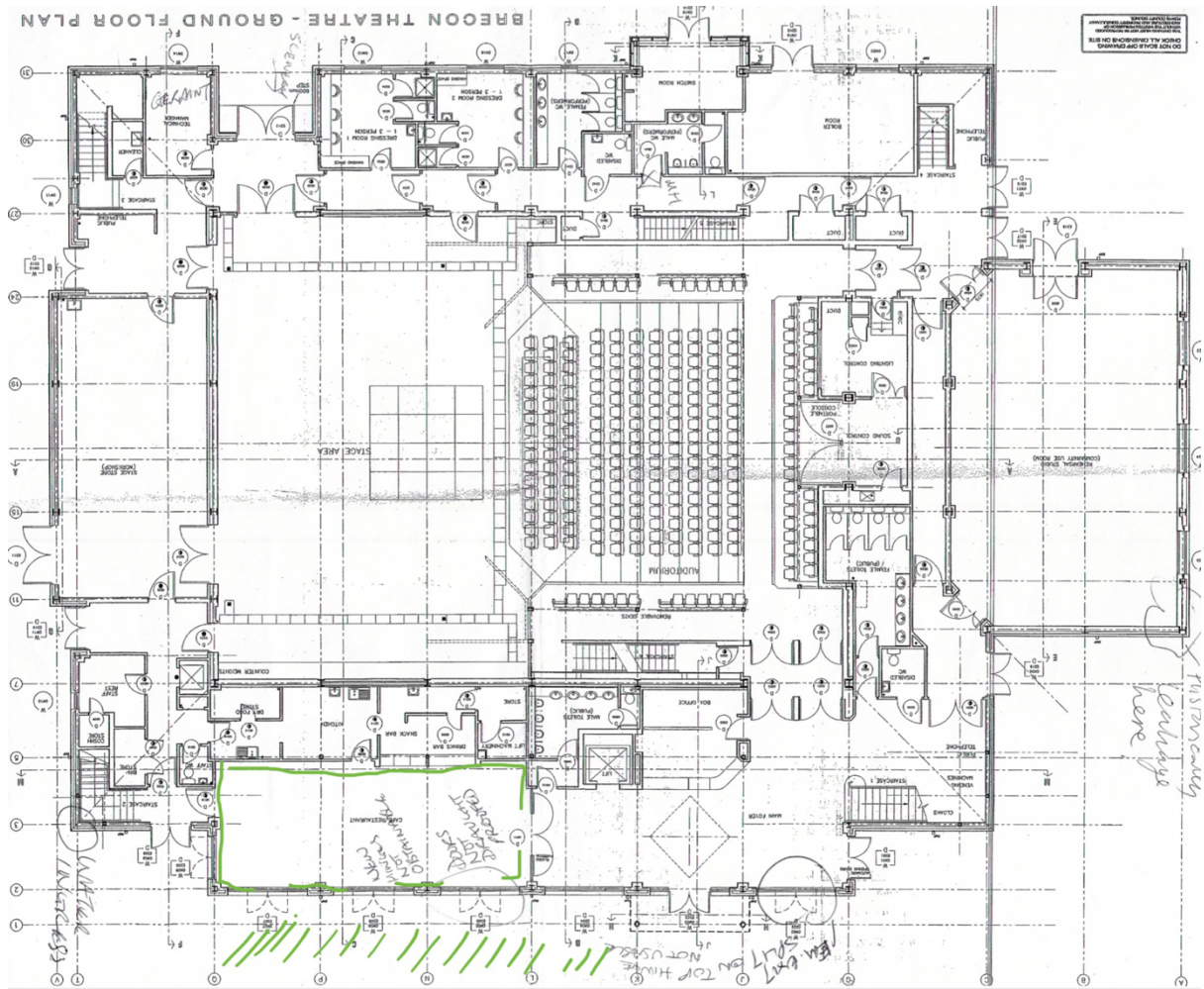


THE RED WALL IS THE 'PAPER' WALL

THE RED SQUARE IS THE GLASS STRUCTURE (as in photo below) WHERE THE CHARCOAL WOULD BE LEFT – as previously described



PEOPLE WOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO 'CONTRIBUTE' TO THE EXHIBITION



GREEN – SHAMIYAANA RESTAURANT – doors opening to outside seating as well. The Canal runs along directly in front of this

THE TORRES BILLBOARD WOULD BE FIXED TO THE FRONT ELEVATION OF THE BUILDING

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<http://www.Sussex.ac.uk/information/punctuation/essaysandletters/footnote>

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And more investigations before I settled on a theme.

