

Ways of Perceiving, Curation Essay

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Inspired by recent events, including the Black Lives Matter protest and Sarah Everard's vigil, this exhibition addresses The Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998. Entitled *Wake Up*, the exhibition features five pieces of art in collaboration with five different artists.

The exhibition is in Kilby Correctional Facility, a maximum-security prison for males, situated outside of Montgomery, Alabama, as according to Obrist in *Ways of Curating*, 'exhibitions can be immaterial, and be held outside museums and exhibition spaces' (p. 50). The exhibition is situated within three different rooms in the prison, displaying the five pieces, using doors and walls to direct the public through the gallery. The setting of a prison for the exhibition holds great significance, signifying where people should end up when they commit a HRA violation.

In exception to the lobby, the exhibition will be held in darkness. This is inspired by d'Harnocourt's *Timeless Aspects of Modern Art* (1948-1949), where the pieces were 'spotlit in darkened galleries, emphasizing their individual character' (Obrist, date, p. 73). Darkness is used to 'convey negativity: evil, death or the unknown' (Kampf, 2017), and this is the atmosphere that is created throughout the exhibition.

The title, *Wake Up*, is an active verb, asking the visitor to 'act, not only observe' (Obrist, 2014, p. 21). All pieces in this exhibition are created by those who have experienced Human Rights violations first-hand, or in collaboration with those who have. As Anna Cline states in *The Evolving Role of the Exhibition and its Impact of Art and Culture* (2012), 'it is impossible to get closer to human experience than art created by real people who have been through real tragedy and real experiences...'. The exhibition asks for those in a position of power and privilege to rise and call for change.



Fig One

Upon entering the prison, the first piece the audience will encounter is Kara Walker's *Fons Americanus*, standing at 13-metres tall (Bakare, 2019), it 'confronts the way we look at history of slavery (Tate, 2019)'. It is an 'allegory of the Black Atlantic and really all global waters which disastrously connect Africa to America, Europe and economic prosperity' (Walker, 2019). As the piece is an allegory, the significance of having it in a room by itself with white walls is important as I want to audience to truly understand the implications of this piece, without any other distractions. The piece will be the only piece that will be framed by white walls, otherwise known as the white cube (Obrist, 2014, p. 29). '[The white cube] offers an invisible canvas on which art can be presented without distraction... leaving the viewer totally detached from the outside world as there are no point of reference' (Snaith, 2013). The audience has no choice but to look past the allegory, and to find the hidden interpretation.

The piece addresses Article 4 of the HRA, stating that the act 'protects your right not to be held in slavery or servitude, or made to do forced labour' (Equality and Human Rights Commission).



Fig Two

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) was the 'first human rights treaty adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December 1948' (United Nations), following the atrocities of the Second World War. Though it was set up to ensure that history did not repeat itself, Mamdani explained that genocide would happen again as 'it became possible not only to set a group apart as an enemy, but also to exterminate it with an easy conscience' (2001). Though genocide is rarely in the news today, there are currently eighteen countries that are classed as a 'genocide emergency', (Genocide Watch, n.d). This piece is included in the exhibition to raise awareness of genocide and that it is still an on modern day problem.

The Eyes of Gutete Emerita by Alfredo Jaar (1996) is a haunting piece that shows the 'gaze of a survivor' (Chow, 2012). Emerita witnessed the killing of her husband and sons (Zimmermann) during the genocide against the Tutsi minority during 1994. Displayed in its own dark room, in the prison warden's room, the piece features 1 million slides of Gutete Emerita's eyes to symbolise the number of killings that the genocide saw, slumped into a pile on top of a lit table, like a mass grave (Chow, 2012).

My intention for this piece is to make the audience feel uncomfortable, and to do so I will apply Edward T. Hall's Proxemic Theory (1966), which 'considers human uses of space within the context of culture' (Brown, 2001). When strangers or people who you do not know very well are in your personal space, there is a feeling of uneasiness (Worrall, 2018) and as the piece is 6 x 6 metres, the room will be no bigger than 7 x 7 metres, to ensure that the audience is in each other's personal distance, which ranges from 1 to 4 feet (Haddad. et al, 2019). The intention of wanting the audience to feel uncomfortable is important as the artwork is a harrowing piece of art, and I want the audience to feel that as well.



Fig Three

Since the protests began in 2011, an ‘estimated 13,000 people have been hanged’ at Sadnaya high-security prison (Amnesty International UK, 2016). The prison is run by the Syrian Government, and those who are taken as prisoners are subjected to torture and ‘total sensory deprivation and forced to live in darkness’ (Tate, 2019), thus developing a grave sensitivity to sound (Chisenhale Gallery, 2018). The prison violates Article 3 of the HRA, which states that ‘no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment’ (Equality and Human Rights Commission).

Lawrence Abu Hamdan’s *Earwitness Inventory* (2018) is based on the earwitness descriptions of those who have survived Sadnaya. It is the first piece that the audience will encounter when exiting the vault, lit up to the right in a dark room. Comprising of ‘95 custom design and sourced objects’ (Chisenhale Gallery, 2018), each element tune into the earwitnesses descriptions. Though the piece does not directly address the atrocities at Sadnaya, this piece captures the audience’s attention to the problem that it represents.

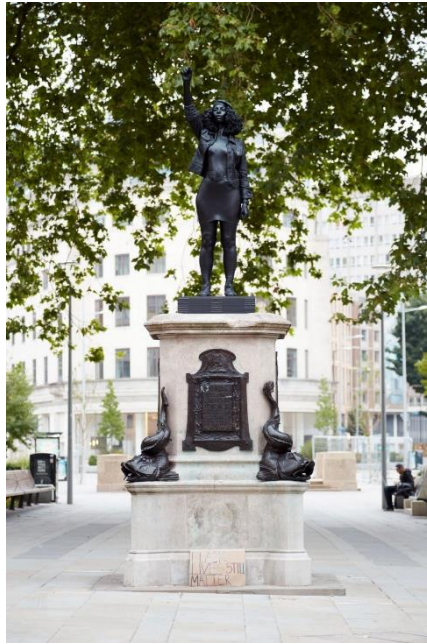


Fig Four

Despite black men constituting 6 percent of the US adult population, they are approximately 35 percent of the prison population and are also six times more likely to be incarcerated than white males (Carson, Sabol, 2012). George Floyd was 46-year-old father (Mee, 2020), who was killed by police officer Derek Chauvin in the streets on Minneapolis. In response to his unlawful death, protests took to the streets all over the country (Aratani, 2020) to protest for Black Lives Matter (BLM).

The Black Lives Matter protest in Bristol, England, saw the removal of the statue of Edward Colston (Farrer, 2020), a Bristol Politician who's 'fame and wealth were built on the slave trade' (Parkes, 2020), and now stands as an unofficial replacement is the statue of Jen Reid. Marc Quinn's recreation of Jen Reid's black power salute, *A Surge of Power* (2020) is lit up in the centre of the dark room. This piece addresses Article 2 of the Human Rights Act, the right to life (Equality and Human Rights Commission). It further states that 'public authorities should also consider your right to life when making decisions that might put you in danger or that affect your life expectancy.' As Jen Reid is quoted saying, 'I wanted to give George Floyd power, I wanted to give power to Black people like me who have suffered injustices and inequality. A surge of power out to them all' (2020). It shows that those who are white do have privilege, and therefore need to speak up and be a part of change.



Fig Five

Sarah Everard was a 33-year old white woman who went missing on the 3rd March 2021 in South London. Shortly following her disappearance, a serving Metropolitan Policeman was arrested, later found guilty of her murder (BBC News, 2021), a man in position of protecting people.

During the disappearance of Sarah Everard, it was announced that 86% of women from age 18-24 have been sexually harassed (YouGov, 2021). When commenting on this shocking statistic, Clair Barnett, executive director of UN Women UK, said 'this is a human rights crisis. It's just not enough for us to keep saying 'this is too difficult a problem for us to solve' – it needs addressing now' (2021). The surprising factor of this statistic was that no female was surprised at all.

Kiki Smith's *Tate* (1992) is in this exhibition to highlight the inequalities that women face every day, addressing Article 14 of the HRA: protection from discrimination, and the Equality Act 2010, Section 26 (harassment). The piece will be lit up to the left of the room. *Tate* is an example of abject art, a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1980. The term is largely associated with feminist art, as female bodily functions are 'abjected by a patriarchal social order' (Tate, 2017). The sculpture actively subverts the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975), as the woman is not positioned as an 'erotic object' (Mulvey, 1975), but rather an actual woman.

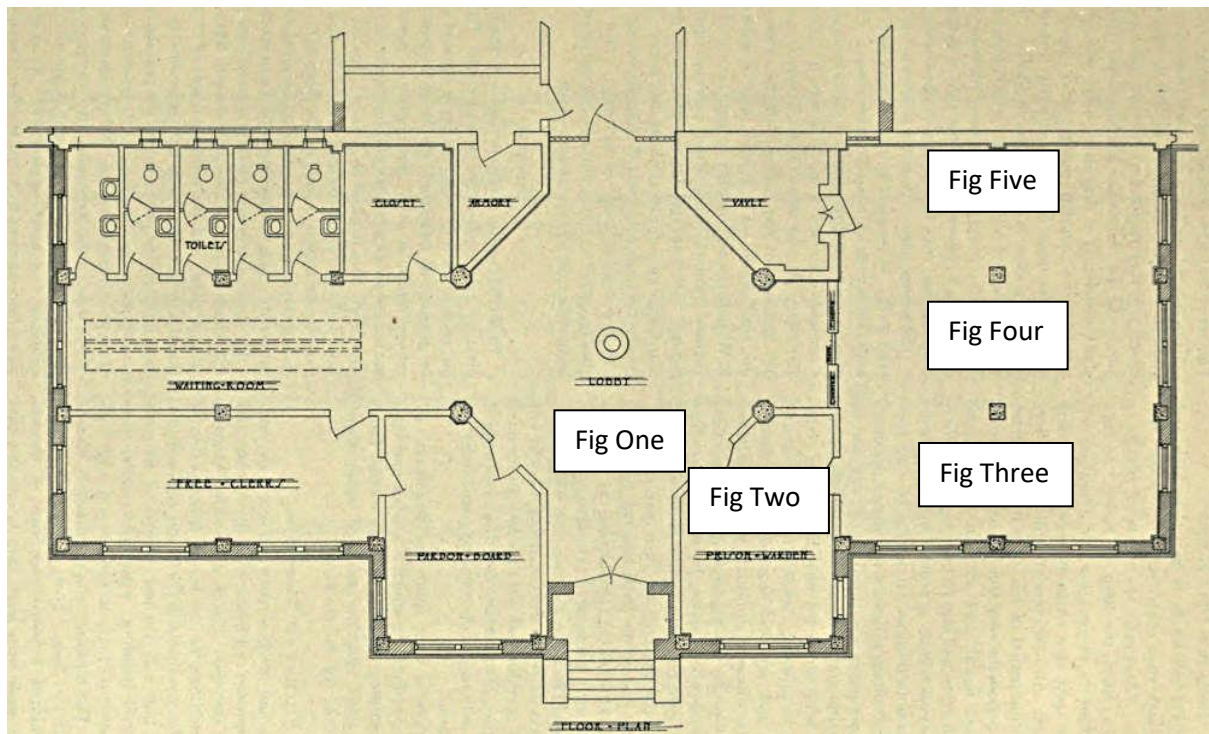


Fig Six

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (PCSC) 2021 was announced early this year. The bill's aim is to 'introduce new police powers and review the rules around crime and justice across England and Wales' (The Big Issue, 2021). A part of the bill is to 'police powers to tackle non violent protests' (Home Office, 2021), and as a result of this announcement, Kill the Bill protests took place around the country. 'Protests are inherently disruptive... that's what they're supposed to be' said Dominique for BBC News. Without disruptive, loud protests, women would not have had the vote in 1918 (UK Parliament), and George Floyd may have never had justice. It is our duty to stand up for our democracy, and those who are less privileged than us.

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Figures

Fig One: Tate (2019). *Kara Walker's Fons Americanus – Look Closer* [online] Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/kara-walker-2674/kara-walkers-fons-americanus> [Accessed 18 Mar. 2021].

Fig Two: Daros (2021). *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*. [online] Available at: <https://www.daros-latinamerica.net/artwork/eyes-gutete-emerita> [Accessed 13 Mar. 2021].

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Fig Four: Reid, J. (2020). *A joint statement from Marc Quinn and Jen Reid*. [online] Available at: <http://marcquinn.com/studio/news/a-joint-statement-from-marc-quinn-and-jen-reid> [Accessed 13 Mar. 2021].

Fig Five: Drawing Lover (2010). *Teddy talks on Kiki Smith's "Tale."* [online] Available at: http://contemporaryart2010.blogspot.com/2010/01/march-17_10.html [Accessed 13 Mar. 2021].

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