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Faceless?

For the exhibition entitled “Faceless?” I intend to use four different pieces of art from different artists and eras to encapsulate my chosen themes. Using Existentialism and the theory of non-places. Comfort or discomfort in the eventuality and finality of death. One thing that is determined to happen to you and will happen.

The exhibition will be placed on the beach front of Three Cliffs Bay Swansea, in what looks like a series of disused Shipping containers conjoined together to make an exhibition space. The space made up of multiple containers will have the interiors modified to look like the offices of the 1990s complete with no natural light. This will unease the viewer due to the stark contrast of bright, wide-open space to the claustrophobic and artificially lit interior. The viewers will naturally bring sand into the space on their feet from the beach and will transform the space over time through viewer participation. It is important to place an emphasis on participation as it makes the viewer more connected to the pieces. As Debord (1994) theorizes that the spectacle is not just images but how people interact through images. The pieces chosen aim to evoke conversation and bonding through shared struggle.



Figure 1: an image of an office space (2021)

Fluorescent lighting and lack of natural light will make the viewer feel closed in and give a claustrophobic feel to the exhibition (Figure 1). Considering the first piece is outside it will be viewed in natural light and the rest in artificial light but the messaging is the same, showing its consistency. An empty office space being eerie is due to spatial narrative. **Ratti (2024) theorizes that the uncertainty of the absence of people in space gives us a break from spatial narratives and draws importance upon human impact in a designed space.** I also intend to use ambient music and sound to enhance the atmosphere of the show. The album ‘Selected Ambient Works Volume II’ by Aphex Twin to be specific. This piece of

work is wrought with tension and subtlety. Only heightening the sense of unease and intrigue I intend to spark throughout the exhibition.

The inside section of the exhibition will be staged in the form of ‘Theatre-in-the-round’. It is a “form of theatrical staging in which the acting area... is completely surrounded by the audience” (Britannica, 2018). The importance of using staging like this is to bolster the emotional connection to the pieces in the exhibition with the focal point and always in view being ‘Can’t Help Myself’ by Sun Yaun & Peng Yu (2016) (Figure 2). It highlights aspects of work and the rituals we as human beings do to survive. In an effort to clean up the mess of bloodlike liquid the robot sweeps its arm back toward itself. In this effort it leaves the floor with smudges and drips ultimately leaving it worse off than before. It leaves the viewer feeling sad and empathetic for this machine that seemingly does not have emotion. It makes the viewer feel empathetic for the robot and its struggle as it is highly relatable. The robot’s struggle is Sisyphean, a task “requiring continual and often ineffective effort” (Merriam-Webster, n/d). Derived from the myth of Sisyphus. This piece is an effective summary for the exhibition’s themes.



(Figure 2)

The next piece, placed to the left of the previous piece hung from the ceiling is ‘The Ambassadors’ by Hans Holbein (1533) (figure 3). The importance of the placement of this piece is so when exhibition viewers enter, they view the skull hidden in perspective. The skull (Figure 4) can only be seen in correct proportion from side on. The skull has meaning about the transcendence of death, you can only see it clearly when you cannot see the world clearly and vice versa. The piece was painted in the middle of the renaissance, where the aristocracy were interested in two things: self-knowledge and knowledge of God. One man represents the best of man and the other best from God. We can see this represented by the items on the table. On the left we see items for learning towards God like the sun dial, and the astrology equipment, etc. On the right side are items related to human learning like the lute, sheet music and the globe. The skull is a form of ‘memento mori’ or vanitas meaning

“remember you must die” and “vanity”, respectively. The point of the painting was to remind the viewer that they are mortal, and that time is short and that no matter how much human knowledge they accumulated nothing could stop death.



(Figure 3)



a



b

(Figure 4)

On the right-hand side hung from the ceiling when you enter the space is ‘Smiley Face’ by Harvey Ball (1963), the contrast this piece has with the previous makes them a good fit to hang opposite each other. With the distorted skull remind the viewer of the inevitability of death it contrasts with the cheerful smile in the face of morality and the uncertainty of life. It is a universal sign that transcends language, spreading cheer, optimism and positivity. It can be interpreted as a threat to existential angst, it is a defiant gesture of positivity. Almost as a refusal to nihilism and despair as an existential rebellion. Ball was tasked to create a design that would boost morale at a company after a merger (Figure 4). After being paid around \$45- and ten-minutes work he had created what most people credit as the original ‘Smiley Face’. Neither the company nor Ball had copyrighted the design, so it became the peoples. The story can be seen as a failure on Ball’s behalf as he didn’t capitalize on his design, however its ability to be copied and spread made it the cultural icon it is today. Its innocence and look of joy spoke to people in a time when they needed it. If we look at the political climate of the

time and youth movements. The image itself is rather simple. A pair of asymmetric eyes and a smile in a yellow circle (for the layout of a badge). The simplicity of the hand drawn eyes and smile really convey the human aspect and reflects a childlike innocence. The yellow of the background brings the feeling of sunshine and joy felt in the warmer months.



(Figure 5)

Outside in front of the exhibition space I intend to place ‘**Slow-Motion Car Crash**’ by **Jonathan Schipper** (2009). This piece is a physical representation of a head on collision using two full sized automobiles (Figure 6). (Schipper, 2009) says from a fraction of a second this event is ‘stretched out’ to over a month. As a culture we rely heavily on outside items to convey how we feel and want to be perceived. “When we see an automobile destroyed, we see a reflection of our own inevitable death.” (Schipper, 2009). This very much relates to cars. They represent so much of humanity and society. The car is an extension of the body and ego. As an entrance piece I want it to cascade a bit of confusion and get the viewer thinking about the themes and feelings from the collection of works. Reminiscent as if we could slow down time ourselves and live in a moment. But regardless of how slow something is made the outcome remains the same. Placing this piece outside the main exhibition space highlights that the themes discussed are ever present.





(Figure 6)

The intention of the exhibition is not to scare or worry the viewer, it is to make them consider living consciously and to be clear that time is finite. With this finite time modern life has placed an importance on the unimportant. As Debord (1994) notes that early capitalism changed life's focus from existence to ownership, while post-industrial culture shifted it from ownership to appearance. This has caused us as a society to become dissociative and dissatisfied with our lives. Having the pieces 'overlay' each other visually, heightens their context together and brings a new perspective to viewing art and its messages.

The layout of the exhibition (Figure 7) is intentionally sparse with the walls bare, and the focal points being centralized. With the loud but understated backdrop of the office it becomes a piece in the exhibition itself. As the bulk of the exhibition is indoors only people who come inside will see the brevity of the exhibition, however with a large piece outside that will draw in viewers passively due to the intrigue. Hoping to primarily catch passersby.



(Figure 7)

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Figure 3: Holbein, H. (1533) 'The Ambassadors', *National Gallery*. Available at:

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https://www.researchgate.net/figure/a-Hans-Holbein-the-Youngers-painting-The-Ambassadors-located-at-the-National-Gallery_fig2_281685742 (Accessed: 06 May 2024).

Figure 5: *Smiley pin for The State Mutual Life Assurance Company* (2013) *Smithsonian Magazine*. Available at: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/who-really-invented-the-smiley-face-2058483/> (Accessed: 06 May 2024).

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<https://www.jonathanschipper.com/car-crash> (Accessed: 06 May 2024).

Figure 7: Downie, R. (2024) Faceless? Exhibition Map

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