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Is this what you call art?

I will be curating an imagined display space, the artists which I've chosen to exhibit embellish meaning in the 'readymade'. These are artists who have taken pre-existing items/objects and have put them in a new context. Defining them as art and questioning the way we perceive art and everyday objects. In this exhibition I will challenge long held assumptions of what should be by using artists and theories in an attempt to offer new ways of perceiving. I will touch upon theories such as surrealism who aim to "disrupt thinking and trigger the unconscious" (K. Levin 2019) This will exhibit at the National Gallery in London; to show an interesting contrast of objects out of context combined with deep foundations of traditional art in which the National Gallery situates. It'll showcase a timeline of artefacts dating from 1917 to 1998, showing how art, society and our personal relations with object have changed over time.

The term 'readymade' was originally coined by Marcel Duchamp to describe his own artwork, he chose mass-produced, commercial and utilitarian objects appointing them as art. Defined by surrealists as "manufactured objects promoted to the dignity of art objects by the choice of the artist" (Breton, 1929, p.227) 'Readymade' art has since been involved in many art movements such as Young British Artists (YBA) movement, including artists such as Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst. In the book *Pictorial Nominalism: on Marcel Duchamp's passage from painting to the readymade* by Thierry De Duve it talks about how Duchamp wrote a note to himself in 1912, "Marcel, no more painting; go get a job" De Duve suggested this was the result of "problemization of pictorial practice bought on by industrialization" (De Duve, 1991, p.21) This was the birth of the 'readymade'. Views on art were still traditional at this point, most believed art should replicate reality through narrative, demonstrating artistic talent. Duchamp was a pioneer in the Dadaist movement which questioned long held assumptions of what should be considered art, "Duchamp rejected all painting because it was made for the eye not the mind" (P. Trachtman 2006) This idea of discarding traditional views of art and changing the way we perceive art is what sparked the innovation of 'readymade' art. "Duchamp paved the way for conceptual art" (Moma 2006) by presenting work that was for the mind rather than pleasing the eye. I aim for this curation to derail and alter people's perceptions of art. Dean Daderko, a curator of contemporary arts held an exhibition called *It is what it is. Or is it?* In 2012, the artists explored the 'readymade' Daderko was intrigued to reassess the state of 'readymade' art 100 years from birth. He found context of the day we're living in is a significant factor to how the art is perceived, I look to explore this in my display space.

The artists I'm featuring are Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin. Their works will be shown in chronological order to depict the change in art, society and our personal relationship with objects.

In Christina Helena Rudosky's *Breton the collector: A surrealist poetics of the object* she talks about how André Breton the founder of surrealism believed the object was in crisis, in which he talks about how scientific studies and artistic experimentations around objects split off from

each other, developing on parallel courses. Science studies objects based on their materials and function however art manipulates objects for aesthetic purposes. Breton wanted “to return to a kind of primitivistic or primal vision that would be free of conventions and the challenge was to link the untutored vision with the imagination” (J. Willette 2011) The goal was for people to perceive these objects without the screen of cultural conventions, by taking the object from its original context it displaces and defamiliarizes it. Breton aimed to tap into the subconscious which links closely to Sigmund Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis.

This surrealist idea inspired my decision to showcase my exhibition in the national gallery in London. The national gallery exhibits some of the oldest and most expensive paintings in the world. The artwork is merely traditional paintings, there is no influence from contemporary art. A suffragette once slashed a painting here in protest for women’s rights, there were ‘black lives matter’ protests outside, yet there’s no evidence of art that addresses problems in the world. They are completely ignoring the global context. I aim for this exhibition to rebel against traditional art views that only accepts pictorial work and show a new reality.



Figure 1, *Inside the national gallery*



Figure 2, 'fountain' by Marcel Duchamp

Artefact 1: 'Fountain' by Marcel Duchamp, 1917. An iconic piece, that famously started debate whether 'readymade' is art or not. It's a urinal turned upside down signed "R. Mutt" Duchamp commented the reason it was upside down was to prove it was now a dysfunctional object. This piece was rejected when first exhibited, Duchamp released a journal called *The Blind Man*, which contained reasons for rejection "some contended it was immoral, vulgar. Others it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing" (M. Duchamp) They also said "whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain has no importance He CHOSE it" (Duchamp, 1917) It received much disapproval from critics as there was no previous knowledge for the 'readymade' to them this was purely utilitarian and should remain parallel to the arts. Put this in a modern-day gallery such as the Tate, it would be widely accepted due to our increased understanding of conceptual art. This piece would still spark scepticism in the national gallery due to its traditional standpoint but aim to alter those sceptics perception of art.



Figure 3, *Lobster telephone by Salvador Dalí*

Artefact 2: 'lobster telephone' by Salvador Dalí, 1938. "This is a classic example of a surrealist object, made from the conjunction of times not normally associated with each other" (Riggs, 1998) Like Dadaism the selection of the object is random however imbedded in the meaning of surrealist objects, is the "fetish" a concept created by Sigmund Freud. When we project our sexual desire on upon an ordinary object it becomes a fetish, "Lobsters and telephones had strong sexual connotations for Dalí" (Riggs, 1998). The fetish is something that replaces or substitutes an unconscious desire, Karl Marx believed commodities were becoming fetishized due to their monetary value and emotional attachment. Consumerism was reaching new levels in this period and 'readymade' art was exposing these underlying desires for objects. In the modern day "consumption is now frequently seen as our principal role in the world" (Higgs, 2021) with that in mind it'll be interesting to see how the world reacts to it now.



Figure 4, *'New Hoover Convertibles, Green, Red, Brown, New Shelton Wet/Dry 10 Gallon Displaced Doubledecker' by Jeff Koons*

Artefact 3: 'New Hoover Convertibles, Green, Red, Brown, New Shelton Wet/Dry 10 Gallon Displaced Doubledecker' by Jeff Koons, 1981. This piece is made up of 4 wall-mounted vacuum cleaners, placed in acrylic boxes with lights shining on them. Koons work is neo-geo conceptualist, art that criticizes the mechanisation of consumer society. There's a degree of irony to his work which he shows by presenting these consumer items as if they are unfailing pieces of beauty. But like Dalí and surrealism, Koons wanted to explore how we project our fantasies and desires onto objects. This was part of his "The New" series in which he wanted the 'readymade' to seem alluring and tempting, "gleaming seductively under the glare of fluorescent lighting, it is the newness of the 'New Hoover Convertibles' that gives them their appeal" (Artist Rooms, 2008) Koons was critiquing how society craves new commodities. Comparing this "readymade" art to the previous artefacts you can see how the machine aesthetic and technology is developing over time. If it wasn't new, then it wouldn't be as relevant to the global context. Exhibiting this work today may not have the same effect as Koons intended but it's still interesting to compare how society has changed.



Figure 5, 'Pharmacy' by Damien Hirst

Artefact 4: 'Pharmacy' by Damien Hirst, 1992. This is a room-sized installation, which will be installed in one of the smaller enclosed rooms in the national gallery. Hirst wanted to full replicate a pharmacy and the feeling of being in one to try altering people's perceptions. When Hirst originally showed it, people thought they mistakenly walked into a pharmacy, so they walked off in search of the art. Once again this shows how the 'readymade' taken out of context can change the way it's perceived tapping into our subconscious thoughts we didn't know we had about these objects. This work will not only manifest how technology and commodities have developed when comparing them to the previous works, but it will also show how modern art has developed since the first 'readymade'. It will show how far we've come since the traditional view of pictorial practice. The pharmacy is so far from traditional art and it shows how the traditional view has been overthrown, with art for the mind not just the eyes.



Figure 6, 'My Bed' by Tracey Emin

Artefact 5: is 'My Bed' by Tracey Emin, 1998. This work is the state of Emin's bed after she spent several days in bed, drinking heavily after a breakup. It's littered with empty bottles, condoms and tampons with blood on them, dirty clothes and a pregnancy test. This piece was highly criticized when first exhibited, people saying it's not art, but she has used the 'readymade' to translate the pain and emotion she was going through this is known as confessional art. Emin challenges "traditional expectations as to how women should present themselves by blurring the boundaries between art and life, public and private" (The art story, 2021) which makes it important feminist work, it's also post-modern as she uses non-art materials to explore what it's like to be a woman of the 21st century. In 1914 a suffragette slashed a painting of a nude women in the national gallery, protesting for women's rights. I will exhibit this piece in the same room this happened, as these are both acts of feminism and an urge to change the perception of women in the art world. Once again, the 'readymade' addresses outdated views of the art world and alters people's perception.



Figure 7, Painting that was slashed by suffragette

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Figures

Figure 1, inside the national gallery (2020) Available at: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/about-us/press-and-media/press-releases/room-32-reopens-to-the-public-after-a-21-month-refurbishment> (Accessed: 2nd May 2021)

Figure 2, 'Fountain' by Marcel Duchamp, 1917 (2021) Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573> (Accessed: 30th April 2021)

Figure 3, Lobster telephone by Salvador Dalí, 1938 (2021) Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dali-lobster-telephone-t03257> (Accessed: 1st May 2021)

Figure 4, 'New Hoover Convertibles, Green, Red, Brown, New Shelton Wet/Dry 10 Gallon Displaced Doubledecker' by Jeff Koons. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/koons-new-hoover-convertibles-green-red-brown-new-shelton-wet-dry-10-gallon-displaced-ar00077> (Accessed: 29th April 2021)

Figure 5, 'Pharmacy' by Damien Hirst Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hirst-pharmacy-t07187> (Accessed: 2nd May 2021)

Figure 6, 'My Bed' by Tracey Emin. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hirst-pharmacy-t07187> (Accessed: 28th April 2021)

Figure 7, Painting that was slashed by suffragette. Available at: <https://www.stylist.co.uk/visible-women/suffragettes-vandalised-art-paintings-national-portait-gallery-london-millais-rokeby-venus/186878>

Diagram of showing how the artefacts will be laid out in the gallery

