

The evolution of art and taboo

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I will be creating an exhibition under the name of 'Erartica' within the confines of the Mission Gallery located in Swansea. A select part of the gallery will feature 5 specific artworks spanning from a variety of artists and time periods. The goal of this exhibition is to promote a narrative but also show progression within society as our perspectives on taboo shifts through our own sexual awakenings and the acceptance of others sexuality. The pieces selected show scenes of an erotic nature, however, nothing that would seem 'distasteful' to those who are put off by such a subject. In an ideal scenario, this gallery will be used to shift the outlook of those who are against themes such as sex. I'd argue the majority of the images selected are rather softcore as nothing extremely graphic is shown, I believe this is the key point that the public should focus on, no it's not something that you'd bring your family to; but for those 18 and over it's an educational art exhibition that talks about sex and its history in art and society all without being too daunting and in your face. Understandably, many people can feel somewhat threatened when faced with phalluses and vaginas, these are things

only seen in private, it seems almost invasive. (Sörensdotter, Renita & Siwe, Karin, 2016) notes that even medical students performing their first pelvic examination experience the examination to be uncomfortable because it is a body part that is connected to sex and to something private. Arguably, this shows that more needs to be done to break down the “traditional” norms of society and embed the reality that genitals are part of the human anatomy just like fingers and toes.

But I digress, that is work for the future of society, this gallery focuses on the present of our civilization. The gallery will be presented in a formal manner, minimalistic walls with descriptions of each piece underneath, the purpose is to let the art stand out and practically speak for itself.

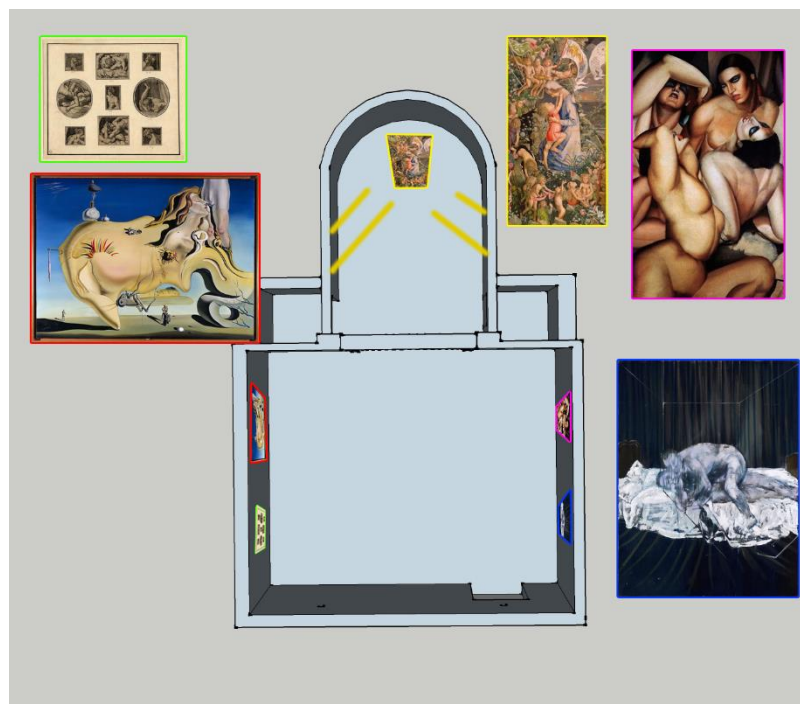


Fig. 1

As you can see, in this basic floor plan that I have mapped out each artwork will have their own breathing space, although the goal is to tell a narrative the pieces are not arranged in any particular order, this in turn gives the audience to stroll freely throughout the exhibition. Kant further emphasises this point as to why its so important into promoting education stating:

“The freedom to make public use of one's freedom in all matters ... the public use of man's freedom must always be free, and it alone can bring enlightenment among men...”

(Kant, 1970, pp. 55)

The main highlight of this exhibition is the piece within the upper room, this is the conclusion of the narrative, it presents the question of; Why is sex and scenes of an erotic nature considered taboo when they result in one of the most beautiful acts of nature, the birth of another life itself? This piece will be enlarged and projected within a dark room to bring forward the point of life being an almost light in the darkness but also as a visual representation of birth. (Monroe, 2008) makes this exceptional statement on birth stating that although birth is physical, birthing women are beautiful. Pregnancy and birth for some individuals within society has become almost as much as a taboo for some people as sex has. A fantastic example of this is protests breastfeeding, what was the norm for centuries, millenniums even, has become almost a shameful act. Therefore, we must re-educate

ourselves that birth and the changes that come with birth are “normal, stunning, sacred, sexy and exotic” (Monroe, 2008, pp.62).



Fig. 2

This piece is entitled I Modi (The Positions), it is the first image you are met with to the left as you enter the initial exhibit. These remains were originally created for a book created at the time of the Italian renaissance by Marcantonio Raimondi inspired by drawings by Giulio Romano. This piece is rather small so will have to be enlarged to 60cm tall by 65cm wide to allow the viewing of this piece to not be crowded and hard to see due to it only being around 20cm tall and 25cm wide. I have chosen this composition as it is a signifier of our steps forward in how sex is viewed from the eyes of a civilization and draws an eye-opening comparison to now. This Italian Karma Sutra faced heavy conflict from the Vatican and Catholic church, hence why the images are more suggestive than they would be; They had been precisely cut to ensure that they would survive any censorship from the Vatican as the Catholics were notoriously against any form of erotica especially when compared to other religions at the time as Brundage states:

“Protestant writers placed a different value on erotic love than their Catholic counterparts. While they were keenly aware that sexual love could disrupt human relations, engender violence, and distract people from spiritual issues, reformed theologians characteristically adopted a more positive attitude toward sex that was traditional in Catholic thought”

(Brundage, 1987, pp.552)

This is shown as Raimondi was immediately arrested upon the release of his book as requested by Pope Clement VII, in addition to this all copies of the book were to be burnt and destroyed; However, despite its religious censorship it was never fully destroyed as it found interest throughout mainland Europe and reiterations were consistently being created.

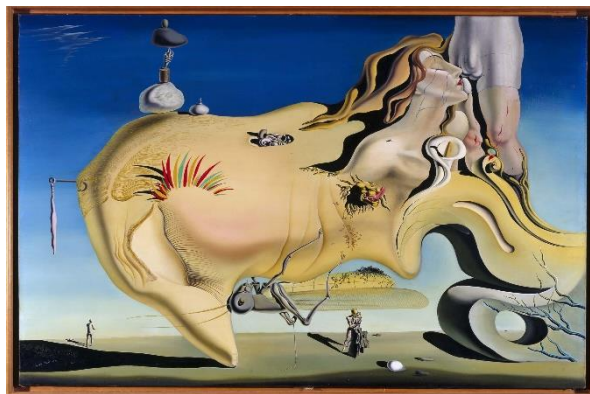


Fig. 3

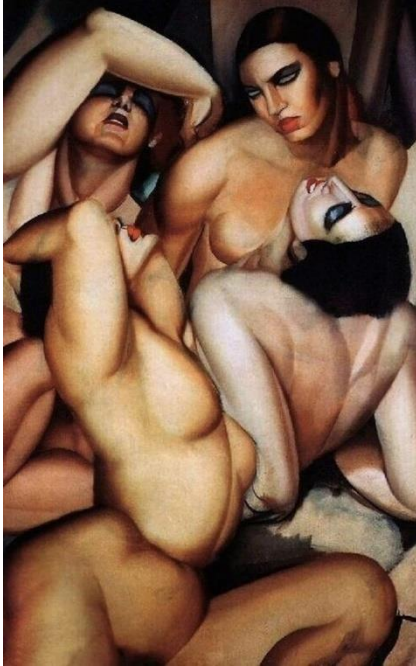
The next piece that follows on the left wall is a piece by none other than Salvador Dali, his piece 'The Great Masturbator' is one that you would think tells a story of tragedy but should be looked at as a brave, some would call these days, 'coming out' artwork. This piece is a depiction of Salvador's struggles within a sexual nature, it is a self-portrait of his self-described "heterosexual anxiety". Dali had consistently been open about his anxiety when it comes to eroticism all spiralling from an educational textbook that his father had left behind containing detailed photographs of venereal diseases. This resulted in him usually engaging in sexual activities using only masturbation stating it was his "core of eroticism". In reality, there is nothing strange about this, it's completely reasonable, and as I talked about previously, it's not abnormal to 'afraid' of genitalia, but there's no doubt in my mind that people may still see a situation like this and assume a plethora of unreasonable thoughts.

But why? A simple mindset fuelled by what is now popularly described as 'toxic masculinity'. A topic in which this state of mind shines brightest is erectile dysfunction as stated in an article by Irvine:

"Viagra advertising may challenge taboos, but it also reveals the persistence of stigma and shame. ED ads show that much about sex remains unspeakable. They reflect and reproduce dominant social norms about sex and sexuality, masculinity and femininity"

(Irvine, 2006, pp.40)

The piece measures up at 110 cm × 150 cm therefore the size will not be altered and will be presented as is intended.



Figs. 4,5

These pieces are presented on the right wall as you enter, this wall is dedicated to celebrating LGBTQ+ artists Tamara de Lempicka (left) and Francis Bacon (right), and the evolution of gay rights, though things are still not perfect, its no doubt that we have come far through the centuries, honouring others sexuality and being more respectful. That being said, we can't ignore the fact that the first country to recognise gay marriage by law was the Netherlands and that only happened 20 years ago. It's disappointing that we live in a world that shames upon erotica but greater shames those who engage within intercourse of the same sex. These are placed within the exhibition to broaden the minds of the public, this is very much needed as "American public opinion on the issue remains split (44 percent support legalizing same-

sex marriage; 53 percent oppose same-sex marriage in a May 2010 Gallup Poll)’’ (Becker, 2012, p.1007)

Each painting measures at 152.5 cm × 116.5 cm, I want each piece to be presented equally and side by side to get a feeling of unity.



Fig. 6

Here lies the magnum opus of the exhibition, this is what glues everything all together, this piece representing childbirth is a beautiful composition representing a shift of taboo within the conception of pregnancy and childbirth itself. The technological advancements of the twentieth century marked a new age for women and their children; Before this, childbirth and

pregnancy were viewed as a negative subject matter due to a high correlation of pain, trauma and death that had come as a result of conceiving. Created by Mark Lancelot Symons, 'Ave Maria' will be projected at 203cm high and 145.5cm wide.

To help aid with the narrative, designed leaflets will be handed out talking about each artwork in detail and what they mean to the narrative of the exhibition.

Figures

Fig. 1: James, J. (2019) Exhibition Map [Digitally Generated Image]

Fig. 2: Raimondi, M. (1524) I Modi [Engraving]

Fig. 3: Dali, S (1929) The Great Masturbator [Oil on canvas] Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

Fig. 4: Lempicka, T. de (1925) Four Nudes [Oil on canvas] Private Collection

Fig. 5: Bacon, F. (1953) Two Figures, [Oil on canvas] Private Collection

Fig. 6: Symons, M.L. (1927) *Ave Maria*, [Oil on canvas] Reading Museum and Town Hall

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