

Practices in Context

My work explores the science of alternate and parallel universes, using installation and sculpture to transform spaces and create new worlds, with each installation making a new dimension and life within. Using film to create flows of bright colours and visually stimulating imagery that run with this out of world experience, being so bright that it's almost alien. With each dimension comes the fantasy characters I create, narrate and bring to life. Wanting to use dramatic dress up and costume to become the character which theoretically is another version of my self only from another place out of our own reach. My work touches on identity where I question my own identity and the endless possibility of it, whether I am one person or infinite different versions of myself. Finding more confidence in the ability to perform when playing someone else and having multiple personas that highlight different interests and opinions make for a more dramatic performance, being someone else creates new energies and movements that your everyday self isn't aware of or isn't familiar with.

Key words

Persona

Identity

Performance

Persona

In 1970 artist Cindy Sherman began using photography as her main practice where she would use the camera herself to take self portraits, although it was never truly herself that the camera was portraying. "I feel I'm anonymous in my work. When I look at the pictures I



never see myself..sometimes I disappear"

This is how Sherman described her own work in 1990 in an interview with New York Times. Sherman's images would portray the different personas and social roles of women, transforming herself into desirable roles, such as 'The woman next door', becoming the image of the woman who's having an affair and also playing the persona of an emotional woman whose husband had an affair. The cliché Hollywood fashionable young woman was a strong subject in Sherman's work

as it was the New York culture and mass aesthetic she was surrounded by at the time.

Sherman's theatrical role playing was built up from costumes, makeup and transformed spaces. Using her bedside corner and one piece of rearranged furniture to create the illusion of a hotel room and a camera turned in on her self to unveil the various iconic characters created through her visual fiction. Sherman's work and mass variety of scenarios bring to light how unstable self identity is and how often we have to compromise it between social conformity and personal identification.

In Sherman's images she creates a story and a life, a happening before and a happening after the one freeze frame we see. A movie still from a film that she invites the audience to

come and narrate themselves, giving us the free thought to decipher and decide who these women are and what they're doing.

One of Sherman's biggest influences is horror movies, it was the adrenaline rush from being scared that she liked to recreate in the idea of her work, the sensation and physical feeling of calmness and relief we experience after the movie is over is what gives Sherman drive in her work. Having something that induces fear and unpleasant emotional response is what inspires Sherman as the film art has the strong ability to draw us into these horror scenarios and false worlds, making us believe that this is our truth and reality.

In Sherman's work she creates the roles of women in gruesome conditions, the classic horror film female icon was one often created, it was the woman herself that showed the detail of horror as Sherman wanted her style to be very subtle and only show the horror elegantly, leaving the traditional theatrical horror story visuals left under the surface and not obvious, relying on the woman's expression to tell the story.



Performance

Marina Abramovic is a Russian performance artist that formed in the the 60's to challenge traditional art forms such as painting and sculpture, cutting down the distance between audience and artwork, using her own body as the media. Abramovic's work is a very physical test of the body and mind, testing her body in how much it can withstand and testing the limits of her mind. Her Performances are physically violent and the confrontation with blood and self harm performed in religious scenarios and knife held game play, she challenges the relationship between performer and audience, Abramovic said about her audience that 'They're like dogs, They can feel immediately that you are afraid, that you are insecure, that you are not in the right state of mind'.

In Abramovic's performances we are watching one of 3 versions of Marina, one a product of two national hero parents with no limits and strict power, the second version of Marina is the young daughter of those parents, a little girl who didn't get any love or affection, a very sad child full of disappointment and vulnerability. Finally, the third version of Marina, the Marina that's able



to think above all of those issues that childhood had marked her with, a woman who is full of wisdom and spiritualness.

A lot of Abramovic's earlier performances involved props and objects, building her up to one of the most important performances of her life, taking place at The Museum of Modern Art, from March 14th to May 30th, presented by MoMA, 'The Artist Is Present'. This performance was purely about the presence of the artist, the simple performance that was played by the artist's physical presence where she directly and silently challenges the audience. For a total of seven hundred hours, during the Museum's operating hours, Abramovic sat in silence at a wooden table in the centre of the Atrium, passively inviting the audience and museum visitors to join her in a shared gaze for how long each person chose, eventually Abramovic decided that the table was unnecessary and there needed to be nothing between herself and the other person, allowing a complete connection in gaze and no object in between. Here we see the clear growth of development throughout Abramovic's work and how she works with the audience, beginning with self containment and an aversion from looking directly at the



audience, to complete engagement and direct eye contact.

In the same exhibition Abramovic took five other artists to collaborate and participate with and be a part of her performance, performing themselves. These five participants were taken to a nature retreat where they would have to follow the rules of Abramovic's saying. They were forced to fast and mentally and physically train the body, doing basic exercises to create and release the body's natural endorphins and pay

attention to the physical sensations felt, separating themselves from the outside and working on the inner calm of the body. The performance would take place for three months so they had to find their own place and sense of space within, to empty the mind and be present in the now. It was a very meditative state of mind Abramovic was training them to reach.

Abramovic believes that performance is a very emotional action, that having these emotional approaches and open connections will create the direct energy between the audience and performer, Abramovic says in The conversation series, Koenig books, "My work is not only about the artist. I want to address the public...without moving, motionless, controlling our own breathing and observing this, you experience something completely different. Your mind will start to work in a really different way".

Abramovic believes that the artist must be determined and be in the right state of mind with strong stamina in order to conquer not just new territory but to enable the artist to create new work.

Identity

Grayson Perry is an English contemporary artist known best for his cross -dressing, vases and tapestries, in his work he often mocks and dissects the traditional British foibles, fashions and prejudices. Basildon born Perry, 24th March 1960, creates classical shaped

vases and decorates them as if a canvas, using bright and metallic colours he tells a story and illustrates maps and subjects of an autobiographical history. Portraying attractive subjects and some comedically not so attractive, in Perry's ceramic decoration we see the recurring appearance of 'Clair', his female alter ego.

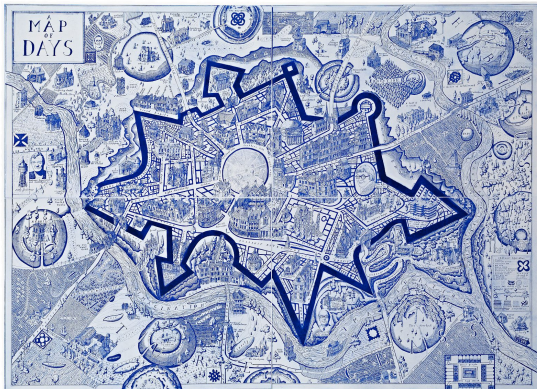
Perry has published two autobiographies, 'Grayson Perry: Portrait of the artist as a young girl' 2007 and 'The Descent of Man', 2016. In 2014 Perry had his tv documentary aired on E4 22nd October for the first time, in the series Perry creates a range of diverse portraits where he explores the subjects identity.

The portraits and identity details are not just gathered from the visual appearance of the person or a traditional sitting, Perry acts as a psychological detective where he involves himself in his subjects life to see what they're about and their personal identifications shown only by whitening their living, Perry delves into the lives of others who are all in some way trying to define themselves.

Perry has always thought of identity as quite a slippery term that is too much associated with politics, it is these issues that confront us daily and yet are not spoken about that fascinate him, Perry's work to him is his way of bringing these issues into awareness, he

believes it is his job as an artist to confront these issues and talk about them openly.

Perry sees identity as a difficult subject to tackle as it's a shifting thing that's always changing. Perry creates a self portrait that appears as a walled city, in this city scape Perry portrays the complexity of identity, 'The Map of Days' works as a metaphor, the wall around the city being a metaphor for his skin, the physical body and labelled buildings



within the wall titled 'Common Humanity', 'Alpha Masculinity' and 'Sexism' stand for the details that build him as a person as buildings build for a city. Perry told Steve Hopkins in an interview for Arts Fund that "that is the nature of ourselves - our identity works only in company... created by other people as much as ourselves."

Cross dressing began in Perry's life when he was a child, using it as an escape to enter a fantasy world. Although a cross dresser, Perry has no uncertainty of his gender identity, for him dressing as a woman has a sexual aspect and is exciting, he has no intentions or desire to fully transition into a woman, he sees for certain that he is simply a man who enjoys wearing dresses.

Claire came to life when Perry was bored with the responses to him in female clothes, his appearance didn't provoke enough and were too conventional. From the conventional female clothes



Perry then began to dress in a much brighter, flamboyant way. It was the reactions caused by these large and outrageously frilly dresses that his persona, Claire, was born. Claire appears in many of Perry's pieces, posing in a variety of different guises, making an appearance on a pot as a young girl in a dress and again in a tapestry as an adult woman lying nude on the sofa.

These three key words and artists have led me to question whether we are aware of when we are performing a persona or whether we are being true to our self identity and is there really a difference. Claire is a part of Perry's identity and has been since he was a child but does that mean it is not a performance? He still puts on a dress and awaits a reaction, the reaction is from the audience and as a performer the audience is half the art. Is there really a point in which we are not performing ourselves to another? Whether we dress up or play ourselves, everything we do is in front of some form of audience, so does the self labeling of played persona, performer or true identity have any difference at the eyes of an audience? It's also led me to the simple question of what is the relation between the three and how do they connect.

