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I propose to curate an exhibition on the subject of how the Self-Portrait evolved into the Selfie, to be named 'A Selfie Revolution'. Using theories from John Berger's 'Ways of Seeing', it is my intent to create an exhibition that will engage a teenage audience by enticing them with a modern custom, the Selfie, in order to educate them on the ways of perceiving. The exhibition will feature 6 items by 4 artists which will support my concept; not everything is what it seems, and that people can self-express and portray themselves in a way that they want to be seen, not how they really are.

The art of self-expression, more commonly known as self-portraiture, goes back years and years. Us humans have always loved to let others know what we looked like, especially through art, hundreds of years ago. This trend really started to boom during the 15th century, where experimental artists could get possession of cheaper, improved mirrors more easily. It gave artists the freedom to portray themselves in a certain light, a way to capture a version of themselves that nobody else can see. Similarly, a digital selfie in this generation does the same thing, but has more risk of being manipulated, not just by the creator, but a wider audience too, which is what I'm trying to convey in this exhibition; not all selfies reflect the true persona of the taker.

The venue I have selected to display my exhibition is Madame Tussauds in London. The museum, founded by wax sculptor Marie Tussaud in 1835, exhibits life-size and life like wax models which I believe is an ideal setting for my concept, as it shows people as they truly are. Using wall structures, I intend to build a 10-metre x 5-metre room in the lobby, closed with a roof on top, so the audience can fully immerse themselves into the exhibition with no distractions.

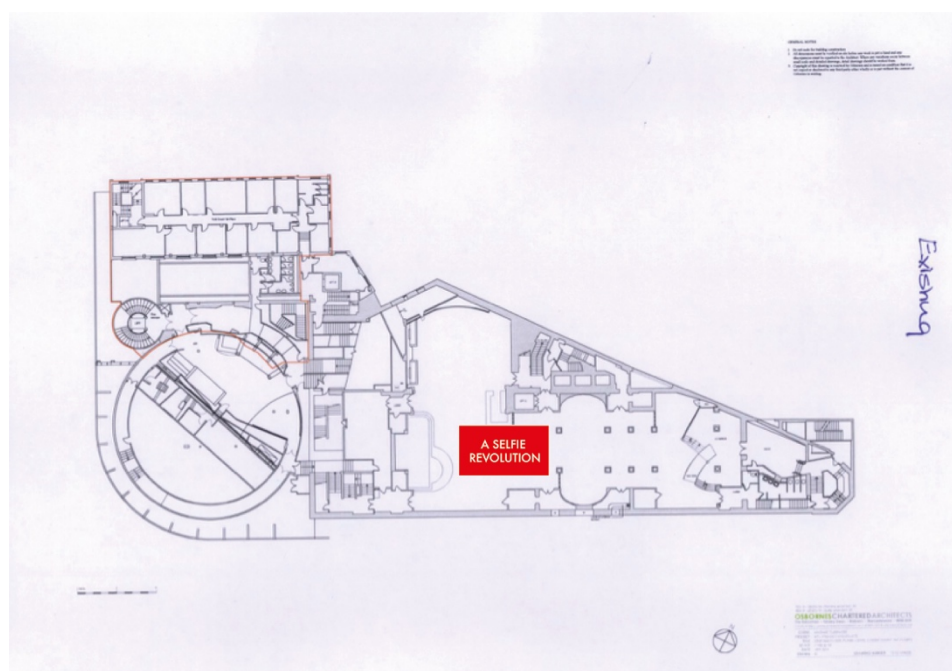


Fig One

Within the wall structure will be a path that meanders from one end to another, creating five 2-metre x 5-metre sections, each with their own pieces of work inside. As the viewer goes through the path, walking through each section, they will embrace the 'selfie' from an increasingly later era, each section getting more artificially lit as the viewer walks through.

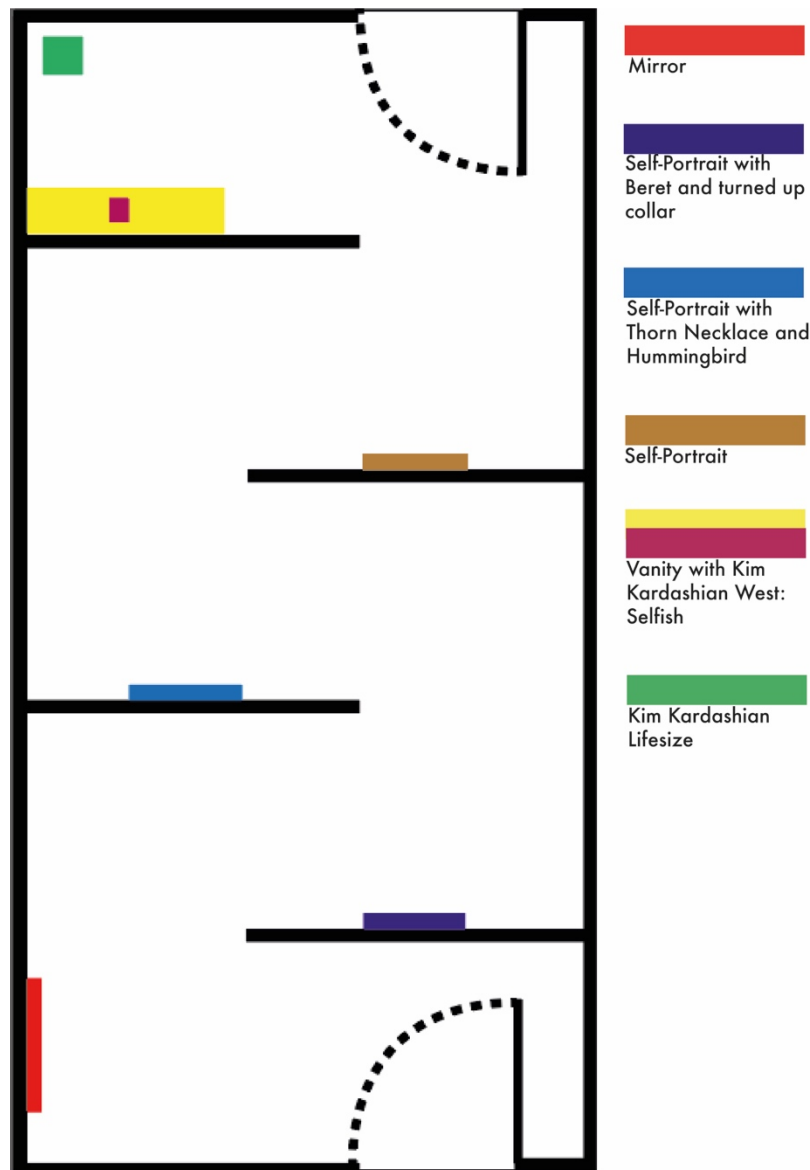


Fig Two

The walls are to be matte white, suggesting purity. It gives the audience a tranquil feeling as they walk in and creates a calm atmosphere, enabling them to fully enjoy and take in the experience. The matte effect on the walls is to make sure the audience is unable to see any sort of reflection before they begin their experience. The first reflection they see will be their own self-image in the ornate 15th century mirror displayed at the beginning of the experience, in section one. There will be no extra lighting in this room as during that era, there would have been no artificial lighting to enhance beauty for a self-portrait. This artefact has been chosen as a starting point of the exhibition as it pinpoints the moment in history where the selfie trend began, being the first way people could properly see how they looked.

Displayed in the second section will be Rembrandt's 'Self-Portrait with Beret and turned up collar'. Measuring 84cm x 66cm, the piece will fit nicely on the wide wall of section 2, so the viewer will be greeted with a later era as soon as they turn the corner from the mirror in section 1. There will be a light switch as you enter this section, supplying a slight glow of artificial light around the room, representing a new generation of the selfie.



Fig Three

Painted in 1659, this portrait provides visual evidence of the engrossing process of self-exploration. Although depicting himself as confident and accomplished by his smirked face, Rembrandt was entangled in financial issues, struggling to steer clear of bankruptcy. Rembrandt shows himself humbly sitting with his hands clasped in front of him, displaying himself as contented, which truly captures how artists are able to perpetuate misconceptions about themselves through their medium. The distinct quality of this Rembrandt piece is the use of expressive brush strokes in oil, which he skilfully uses to bring 'realism' to his face. Oil paintings endorse the privilege of wealth and capitalism, "oil paintings were themselves simple demonstrations of what gold or money could buy" (Berger, 1972, p. 99), making the viewer believe and desire the wealth of the artist that created it. I think this piece fits well with my concept of how people can portray themselves as someone they aren't and something they're not.

I intend to place Frida Kahlo's 'Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird' in the third section. Being only 47cm x 61cm, this piece will be placed on the wall in the same position as the one in section 2. The light switch in this section will provide more of a whiter glow, showing a more artificial, studio-lit effect.



Fig Four

Despite her neck bleeding from the necklace of thorns piercing into her, Kahlo gives the impression that she is coping through her antagonizing pain, by painting a calm and solemn look on her face. The idea of something cutting into her came from her psychological and physical suffering she was going through at that time, which she blatantly discards whilst painting her peaceful expression. This confirms how "The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled" (Berger, 1972, p. 7) looking at Kahlo's portrait is an experience that can't be bound by words but looking at it after knowing the true meaning and feeling behind it gives it a whole new perspective and allows Kahlo to be seen as she so wishes; contented and at ease. These qualities are acknowledged by her incorporation of the Hummingbird, which usually symbolise freedom of life, specifically one that's colourful and flying close to nature. However, if you look deeper into the meaning of the bird, its dark, black colour shows how it's lifeless, much like Kahlo herself at that time. Like Rembrandt's self-portrait in section 2, this piece is a true representation of self-expressionism and how the viewer's perception can easily be guided and steered into a certain direction by the creator.

In the penultimate room, I plan to display Vincent van Gogh's 'Self-Portrait'. This 65cm x 54cm painting will be hung on the wall adjacent to the one in the previous section. The lighting in this section will be whiter than the previous section. Again, showing how ways of self-expressionism developed through the years, and how ways of conveying yourself in a different way have changed drastically.

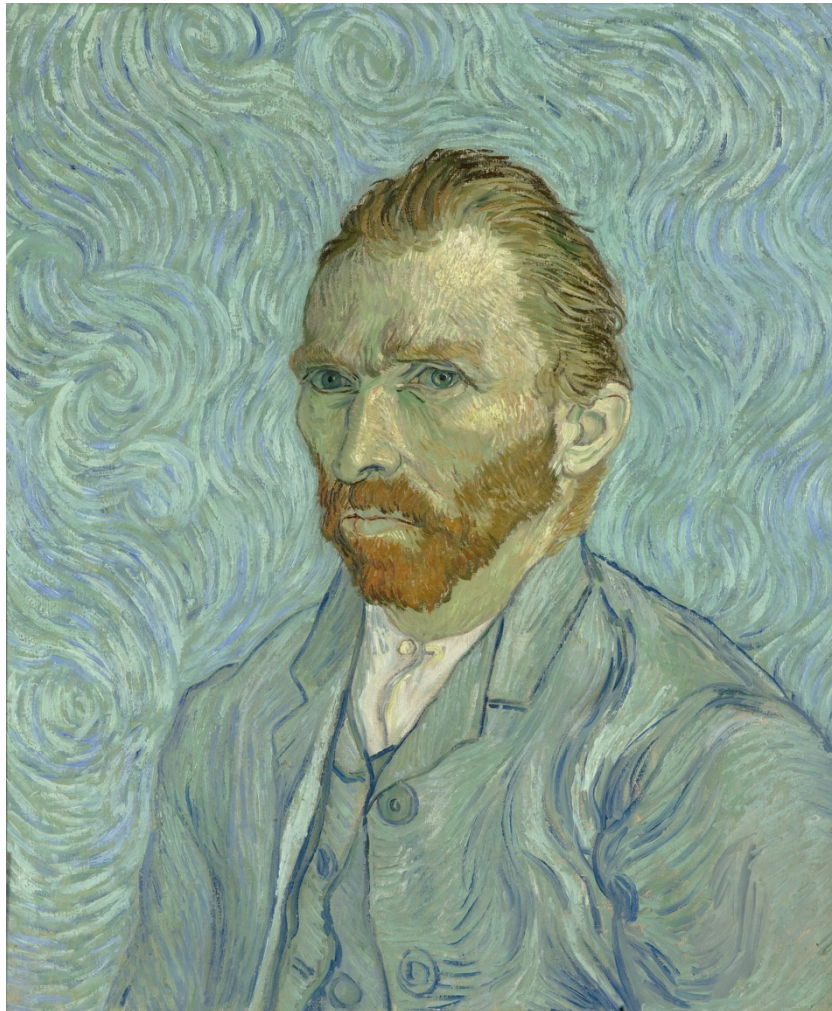


Fig Five

Painted at the St-Remy asylum in 1889, where he had self-admitted himself following a mental breakdown, this was one of the very last paintings Gogh created. Although his expression is calm, he definitely did not feel this tranquillity on the inside. The fragility of Gogh's life is shown within this painting, by use of the harsh, restless brushstrokes, and heavy lines of dark paint intensely thrown down onto the canvas, however, Gogh did not see it that way and did not intend to be perceived that way. The background is made up of light, harmless colours, implying to the viewer that the atmosphere was peaceful. I think this piece fits in perfectly with my concept of how people can literally paint themselves in a certain light and make others see them how they want to be seen.

In the final room, measuring 14cm x 19cm, Kim Kardashian's book 'Kim Kardashian West: Selfish' will be displayed on a vanity desk along with a lifestyle Madame Tussauds wax figure of her taking a selfie. The vanity will have a lot of artificial bright lighting, the section will also have a light switch that provides extremely white, almost blinding studio lighting.

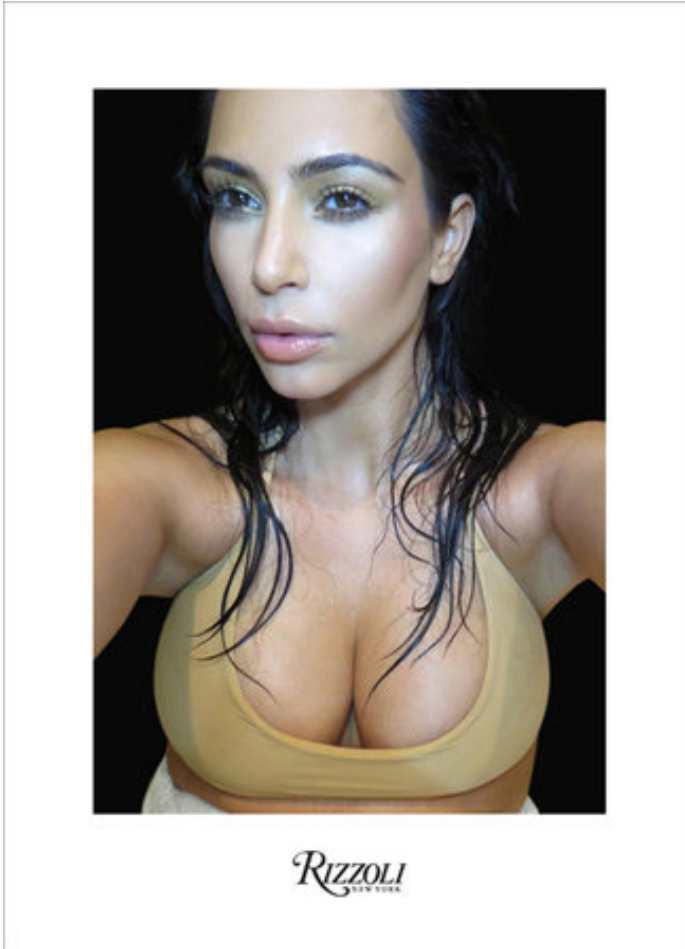


Fig Six



Fig Seven

Kim's fashionable style, DASH clothing store, stardom in Keeping Up with the Kardashians and multiple makeup and perfume lines, has gained her a huge following of around 240 million people who she connects with daily by communicating details of her life with her selfies. Globally known as the 'Queen of Selfies' she has now mastered the art of taking the most flattering and extremely personal photos of herself. Through curation, I decided to place these two together as the juxtaposition of them together supports my concept of not everything being what it seems, and that artists and creators can self-express and portray themselves in a way that they want to be seen, not how they really are. Whilst the book is crammed with overly edited, photoshopped images, the wax figure is an exact replica of Kim, flaws and all. With luck, this room should conclude my message to the viewer that not everything is what it seems, and that people can self-express and portray themselves in a way that they want to be seen and perceived.

I think that as the viewer goes through the exhibition path, they will definitely get a better understanding of how the selfie has evolved through the years. I think this is a good way of conveying my message, 'history always constitutes the relation between a present and its past' (Berger, 1972, p. 11), so I think allowing the viewer to experience how self-expressionism has developed through different era's, from a simple mirror, to over edited images with artificial lighting is a great way to do so. My hope is that after the exhibition, my viewers, especially teenagers, worry less about how they are perceived by people and don't get disheartened about how their selfies portray them online. In addition, it is important that they know even the people who seem the 'happiest' in their self-portraits are very misleading, they just know how to conceal it from the world. Showing them how basic and unedited life was from the 15th century should hopefully give them a historical perspective on the more important aspects on life and prove that not all selfies reflect the true persona of the taker.

Figures

- Fig One: Westminster Gov (2013) Madame Tussauds, Marylebone Road, London, NW1 5LR. Proposal [Photograph]
- Fig Two: Evans, M (2021) Exhibition Map [Digital Generated Image]
- Fig Three: Harmenszoon van Rijn, R (1659) Self-Portrait with Beret and turned up collar [Oil Painting]
- Fig Four: Kahlo, F (1940) Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird [Oil Painting]
- Fig Five: Van Gogh, V (1889) Self-Portrait [Oil Painting]
- Fig Six: Kardashian, K (2015) Kim Kardashian West: Selfish [Hardback Book]
- Fig Seven: Madame Tussauds (2015-present) Kim Kardashian Lifesize [Wax Figure, Sculpture]

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