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Ways of Perceiving - Exhibition Curation Task (1569 words)

“(Im)mobile” - Exhibition Curation

For my curated exhibition entitled “(Im)mobile”, my intentions are to marry the themes of electronic devices and their use in generalised society with bad posture and consequent musculoskeletal pain, showcasing five artworks from four different artists that will complement - and in some respects, exaggerate - these ideas. I plan to construct my exhibition on the second floor of the Apple Store in the Zorlu Shopping Center, Istanbul, as I believe a building belonging to a leading company in technology and digitised media production will succeed in providing a new angle to the artworks that it houses, not to mention its simplistic yet stark design. In this regard, the location and the artworks’ subject matter are very much standalone concepts; only when placed in context of each other does the overarching theme begin to reveal itself.

Mobile phones, computers, and tablets are an indubitable necessity in modern society, and as technology evolves rapidly before our eyes, it is becoming increasingly difficult to be without it, to the point where it even invades the lives of the youngest of our population Palaiologou (2014). Of course, with this prolonged exposure to bright screens and portable devices, our physical health is at jeopardy, which is what I aim to cover in this exhibition. Apple Inc. has been the leading company for supplying such gadgets since its conception and continues to be the most successful technology brand today (Wood, 2020), which is why I believe it to be appropriate as the setting of my exhibition. The decision to hold it in the Zorlu Centre location was one made in consideration of the pieces not being overshadowed by the building; described as “deceptively simple” (Foster + Partners, 2014),

its interior is minimalistic and orderly - futuristic even - providing the perfect canvas to display artworks onto. The sparse and colourless nature of the second floor will provide the viewer with few distractions, thus enhancing the works exhibited inside.

Without education about the physical risk of excessive mobile phone and laptop use, medical conditions such as Ankylosing Spondylitis (NHS, 2017), Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (Wheeler, 2019), and Asthenopia (Bedinghaus, 2020) will only persist and grow more common. In fact, a 2012 study of Finnish students on computer use and pain intensity found that “moderate/severe pain intensity was most often reported in the neck-shoulders (21%); head (20%); and eyes (14%)” (Hakala et al.), painting a concerning picture for future generations. All my pieces address these issues not only through their content and style, but the way in which they are displayed in the exhibition: I plan to exhibit three of my five curated artworks on the floor as to force the viewer to strain their necks and spinal cords, while my fourth piece will be displayed on the ceiling, again influencing the viewer to stretch in uncomfortable ways. Finally, my last piece will be mirrored on every digital screen in the room, proffering the “eye strain” element of the exhibition. In keeping with this bleak and sobering atmosphere, each piece I’ve curated is drawn in a traditional, natural medium and is near or completely devoid of colour, complementing the modest setting around them.



Fig. One

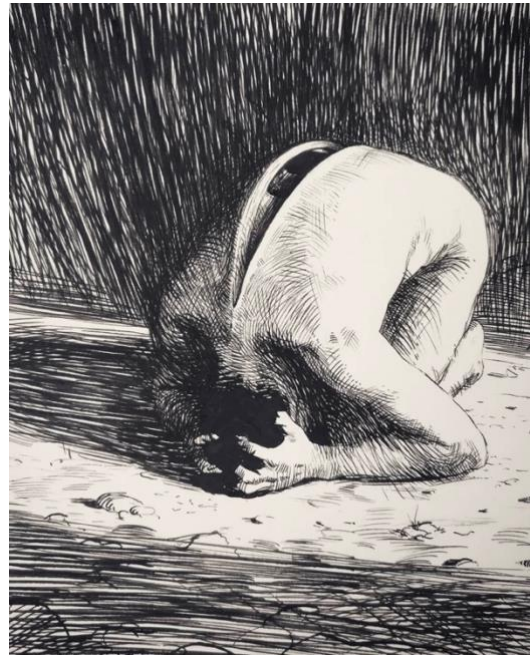


Fig. Two

Aligned in the middle of each end of the space, I will set up my first two pieces - “Heavy Head/So Tired” (Fig. One) and “Empathy” (Fig. Two) by Miles Johnston. Both done in an erratic pen scribble style, I have chosen these two pieces for their depictions of bodily pain and fatigue. Johnston (n.d.) has said about his work:

“Instead of focusing on literal representations of the world, I depict the surreal and abstract qualities of our subjectivity with the goal of creating works with a deep emotional resonance”,

a quality which I feel is of great importance to my exhibition. The figures in these works radiate anguish and melancholy in a very visceral way that I feel viewers can empathise with, especially with the added pressure on their neck from looking down.



Fig. Three

Going in the centre of the room is the 2D charcoal sculpture "Untitled" by Vicky Tsakali, directly below the piece plastered on the ceiling (Fig. Three). This sculpture is part of a series; however, I chose this one in particular for the defied spine and the grotesque imagery of one pulling their own skin away from themselves. In addition to this, the piece is in keeping with the exhibition's subdued or otherwise monochromatic colour palette. The layout of the room I plan to exhibit in will remain unchanged for every piece but this one, for I plan to close the gap between the two tables in the centre of the room to display this on an elevated level (which should hopefully cue the viewers in to looking up and noticing the piece on the ceiling). Due to its two-dimensional nature, this piece will not be visible from all sides, which I am planning on using to my advantage by facing it away from the stairs where the viewers will enter and in the direction of figs one and two; this way, once the viewers are finished viewing these pieces, it should hopefully draw them further into the exhibition, acting as a sort of "anchor piece" (O'Donnell and Dunn, 2019).

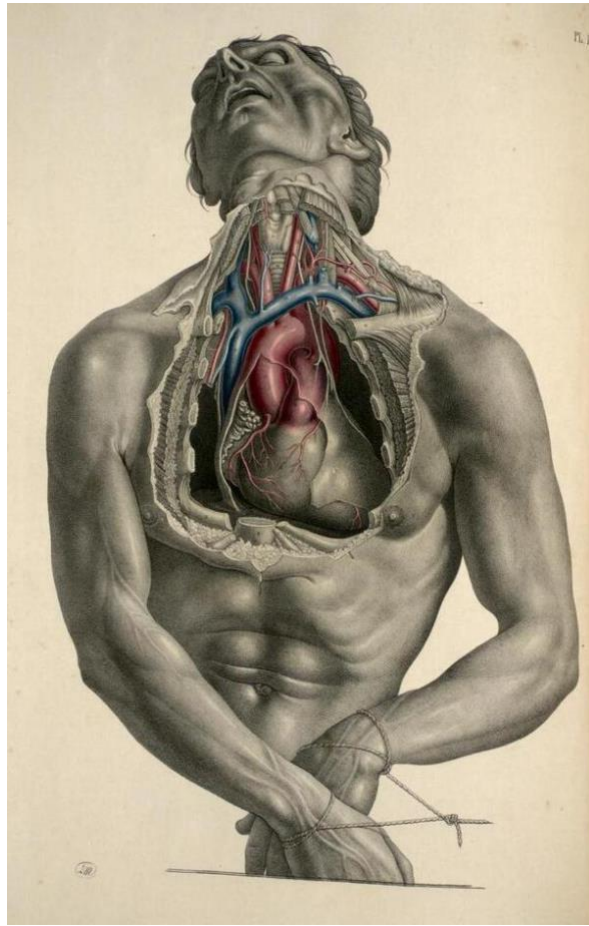


Fig. Four

Displayed on the ceiling will be my fourth curated piece, “Untitled” by illustrator Joseph Maclise as seen in Fig. Four. Anatomical art has a requirement to be extremely detailed for clarity’s sake, so the result is often quite grotesque and uncomfortable to look at. Research shows that when viewing painful or disgusting imagery, we as viewers express “pain empathy” - that is, begin to feel the pain ourselves (Benuzzi et al., 2008) - which is a reaction I plan to trigger with the help of this drawing and the sensation of stretched skin around the neck area when looking up. This piece will be the largest work in the exhibition, playing with the viewer’s sense of perception and allowing the presence of it to become more oppressive.



Fig. Five

The last piece I will be showcasing in my exhibition is this watercolour piece “Tired Eyes” by Sarah Ratliff, as shown in Fig Five. The ailment inspiration behind this piece is DES (or Digital Eye Strain), which is characterised by Sheppard and Wolffsohn (2018) as “burning, irritation and tearing and dryness”. I plan to utilise the pre-existing technology on display on the second floor to project this across the room (changing the orientation of the device if needs be); considering the screens being used will be on full brightness and the main sources of light in the exhibition, this work will hopefully not only convey eye tiredness, but induce it as well. Following on from the research on pain empathy, the intensity of the gaze and its overwhelming atmosphere of exhaustion should instil strong emotion in the viewer, and hopefully, they will begin to see themselves in the image.

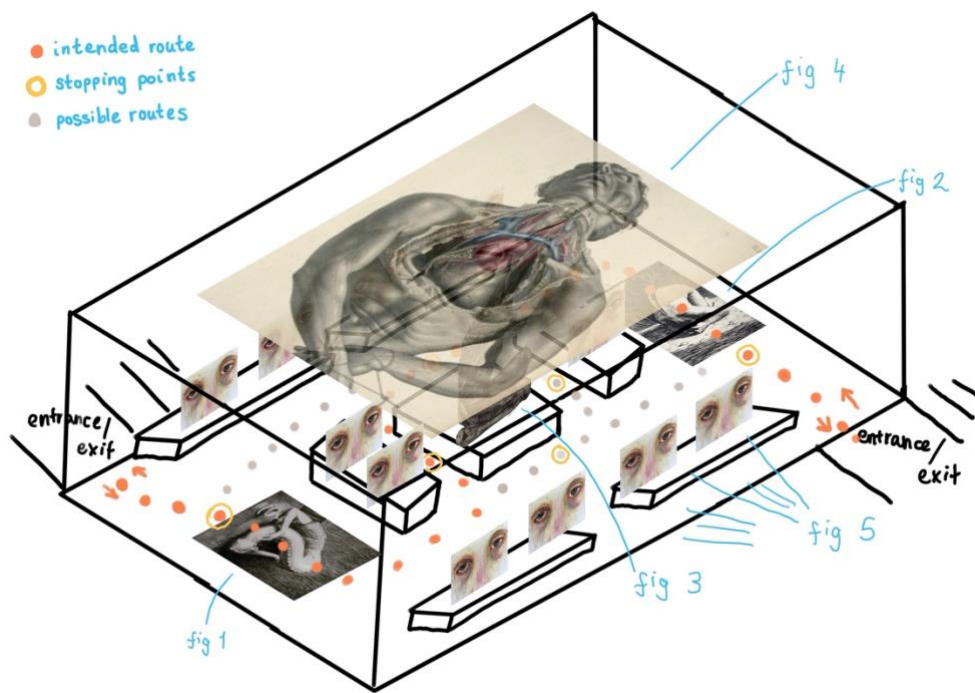


Fig. Six

As shown in Fig. Six, the intended route for this exhibition is in a snake-like path, with possible routes to be explored after-the-fact. In order to capitalise fully on the discomfort I want people to feel viewing my exhibition, I plan to manipulate the atmosphere of the exhibition itself using light and temperature. As mentioned above, I want the main light sources to come from the appliances in the room, both in the hopes of maximising the success of eye strain while viewing fig 5, but also to quite literally highlight the problem for the viewers, to show them that the root of a considerable amount of their pain is glaringly obvious. I understand that the appliances being the sole light source would hamper the visibility of the other pieces, so I would also employ the normal electrical lights in the building operating at lower capacity. The next sense I would stimulate in my exhibition would be sound. Out of all the senses to be triggered by external sources, a 2017 study noted sound as one of the two senses reported to be felt the most intensely in an exhibition study (Vi et al.), therefore I aim to bridge the gap in the two isolated concepts of technology and musculoskeletal pain with a cell phone interference noise loop (Soundsnap, 2018).

While the source of this sound is from a mobile phone, the sporadic snapping and popping noises mixed into this audio clip are reminiscent of cracking bones in my opinion, which, surrounded by supporting imagery, should hopefully translate to the viewer as well. The temperature of a room can also massively impact the viewing experience for the audience; both extremes can incite agitation and immobility. I have decided to drop the temperature of the room considerably lower than that of outside the exhibition, since cold conditions starve joints in the body of warmth and cause them to stiffen, resulting in slight muscle pain and tension (UPMC, 2020).

It is an important distinction to make that this exhibition's intent is not to scald or scare the general public about the manner in which they use their devices, but rather to serve as a reminder of what can be causes of physical strain in our lives. I would call it a successful exhibition if the viewers left more aware of themselves than before, and if it encourages any kind of discussion.

List of Figures:

Fig. One - Johnston, M. (2021) *Heavy Head/So Tired* [ink on paper]. Available at:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CM47lPrJBk/> (Accessed 23 April 2021)

Fig. Two - Johnston, M. (2019) *Empathy* [ink on paper]. Available at:

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Fig. Three - Tsakali, V. (2018) *Untitled* [charcoal]. Available at:

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Fig. Four - Maclise, J. (1856) *Untitled* [pencil]. Available at:

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Fig. Five - Ratliff, S. (2016) *Tired Eyes* [watercolour]. Available at:

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