

Fine Art: Studio, Site and Context

Year 2

Student number: 2003745

Student name: Branwen Jones

Changemakers: Creativity and Value Creation

ADAA5000

Tutors: Paul Duerinckx and Alex Duncan

Assessment Component 1: E-Portfolio Submission

Word count – 1920

Guidance specific to this assessment: E-portfolio

- *Written in **UK** English in an appropriate academic style using an appropriate medium for the task. Please refer to additional Moodle resources for guidance on the production of mind maps and posters.*
- *Focus only on the tasks set in the assignment.*
- *Length: 2000 words (**or equivalent**) +/- 10% (5 marks will be deducted from the overall mark where the word count is exceeded).*
- *Use Grammarly to check spelling and grammar before submission.*
- *Note the 'or equivalent'. The outcome should reflect the work you have put into this, not just the volume of written words.*

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1. A critical evaluation of my use of social media as an art student

How I use social media

I currently make limited use of social media, neither as an art student nor in my personal life. This is in part a question of generation but also politics. I grew up with telephone landlines and had my first mobile phone in my late twenties. Since reading an article in the early 2000s about the right-wing libertarian vision of the founders of Facebook¹ I have had an antipathy towards social media, because of the immense corporate, political and social power of IT companies and the increasing use of algorithms, data and machine-learning in all areas of life. Many commentators have analysed the dangers of corporate-driven datafication central to 'platform capitalism' (Srnicek 2017, Beer 2019, Joque 2022). So much of how personal data is used is unknown by the ordinary person, who, through the constant use of their smartphone, hands over ever more data about their habits, tastes, movements, contacts, and daily activities (Greenfield 2018: 20-27).

I am also concerned about the mental and physical health effects of excessive mobile phone and social media use. The appearance of the smartphone has in a short period led to a transformation in people's bodily comportment, inter-personal interaction, mental habits and attention. Research shows that social media can be addictive, with negative and depressive psychological effects (Seymour 2019). Tech companies employ psychologists to design addictive features into the functionality of apps, which operate in a manner similar to gambling machines (Busy 2018; Nir with Hoover 2014). People spend hours on their phones, descending into a virtual world of likes and followers instead of engaging in actual social interaction. Richard Seymour (2019: 199-200) warns:

The spread of smartphone ownership has expedited the colonization of more and more of life by these attention-seeking industries. They work themselves into the interstices of the bulks of time we spend at work, eating, going to the toilet, socializing or in transit, and gradually enlarge their share.

¹ This was a long article in the *Guardian* Saturday magazine, some time between 2004 and 2006. I have been unable to locate the article because it was before the creation of digitized archives, and the *Guardian* help-line were unable to assist.

Prolonged mobile phone use is also harmful to the neck, shoulders, spine and thumb (Khaleeli 2014).

Is it possible to resist the datafication and algorithmic driving of our lives in this era of digital platform capitalism? For an artist, a principled refusal to use social media could be a foolish, even arrogant posture likely to lead to artistic failure, exclusion and anonymity (Delphian 2020). Being an artist implies wanting to communicate; to make work and show it to others; to collaborate; to be part of a community of artists; to reach audiences. It implies engaging with the world, and the digital is part of our world. Artists exist in the present and need to engage, even if critically, with the energies that charge the present. I therefore need to develop an informed and careful strategy towards social media, rather than outright refusal.

The relevance of different apps and sites

Instagram

I created an Instagram account in 2020 prior to starting my degree. I uploaded images of work I made for the summer project RESTART, and began following other students. I accrued 34 followers – a mix of fellow students, artist friends I had followed, and unknown people.

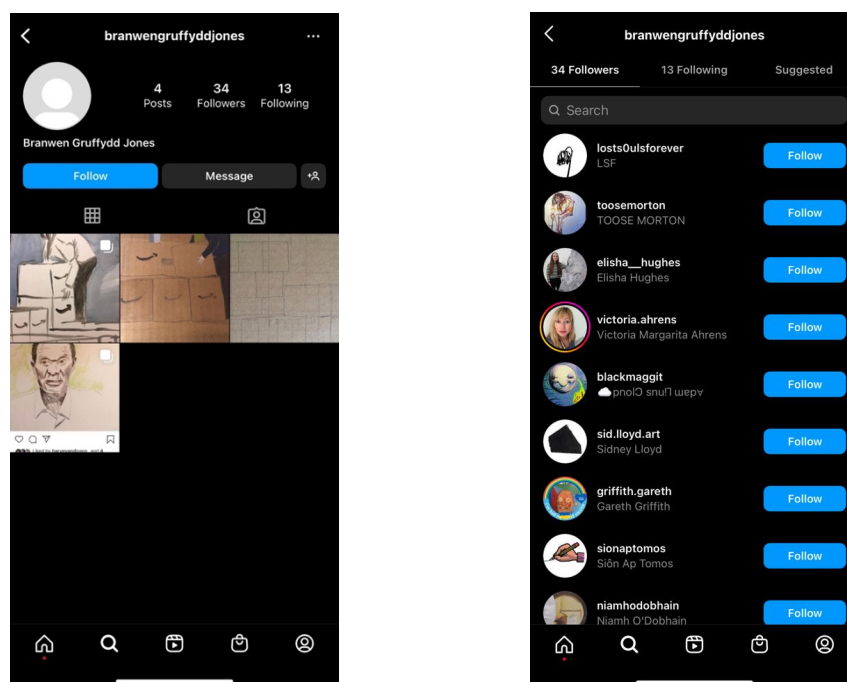


Fig 1: screenshots of my dormant Instagram account. Author's images. See <https://www.instagram.com/branwengruffyddjones/?hl=en-gb>

When the course started I forgot about the account, then forgot the password so lost access. My initial foray into Instagram quickly died. The practice of instagramming was out of synch with my everyday habits, and it felt too early to be presenting anything in the public realm.

Now, in 2023, I feel reluctant to resume Instagram. I know that it is increasingly significant for many practising artists (Delphian 2020). Nevertheless my suspicion about the ways in which tech corporations use personal data to construct networks prevails. When I click on the app, even without logging in, I receive prompts for who to follow. Some of these are total strangers, some are people I have encountered who have nothing to do with my art practice. I might have temporarily saved a person's number, and Meta, which owns Instagram and Whatsapp, has found the information. I dislike the idea that technology owned by huge corporations is trying to construct my world in this way.

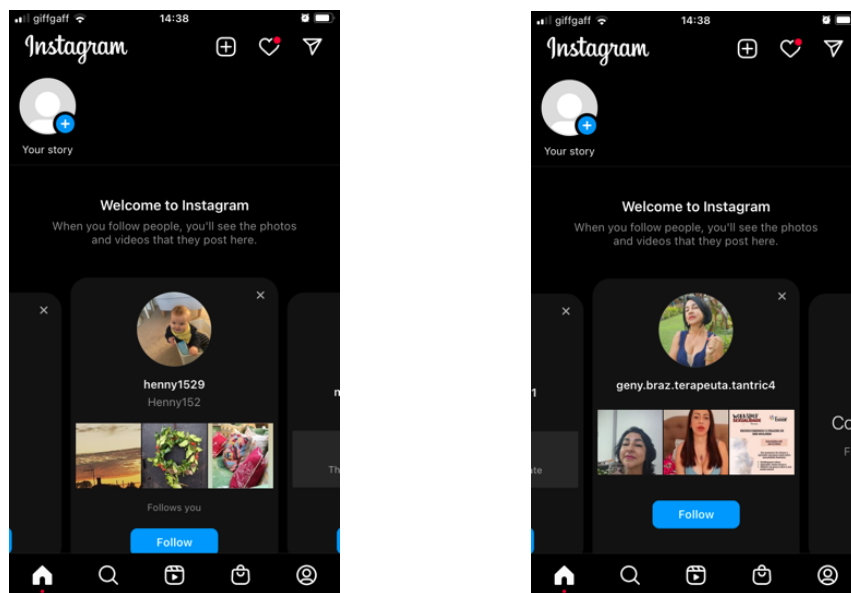


Fig 2: screenshots of Instagram's suggestions of who to follow. Author's images.

Vimeo

I created a Vimeo account in 2021 to upload an animation I made in first year. I chose Vimeo over you-tube because it provides an advertisement-free facility even for free accounts. I chose the settings as: not findable by search engines; work only accessible to those who have the link

(<https://vimeo.com/557340516/85bb2484a9>). This gave me confidence that I could maintain control over who saw the work. For this reason, this account only has two followers: my mother, and a friend in Portugal I sent the link to.

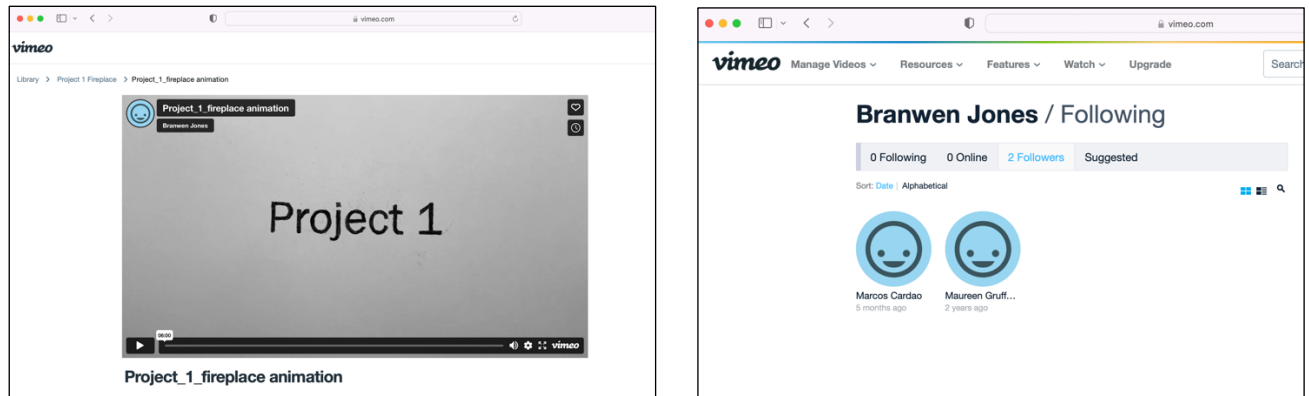


Fig 3: screenshots of my Vimeo account. Author's images.

I am continuing to make video and animation work. When I have additional finished pieces I will start to reveal rather than hide my work.

Twitter

I have two twitter accounts which I use only for receiving information, not making posts. One follows individuals and institutions in the art world, mainly in Wales, the other follows journalists and political commentators.

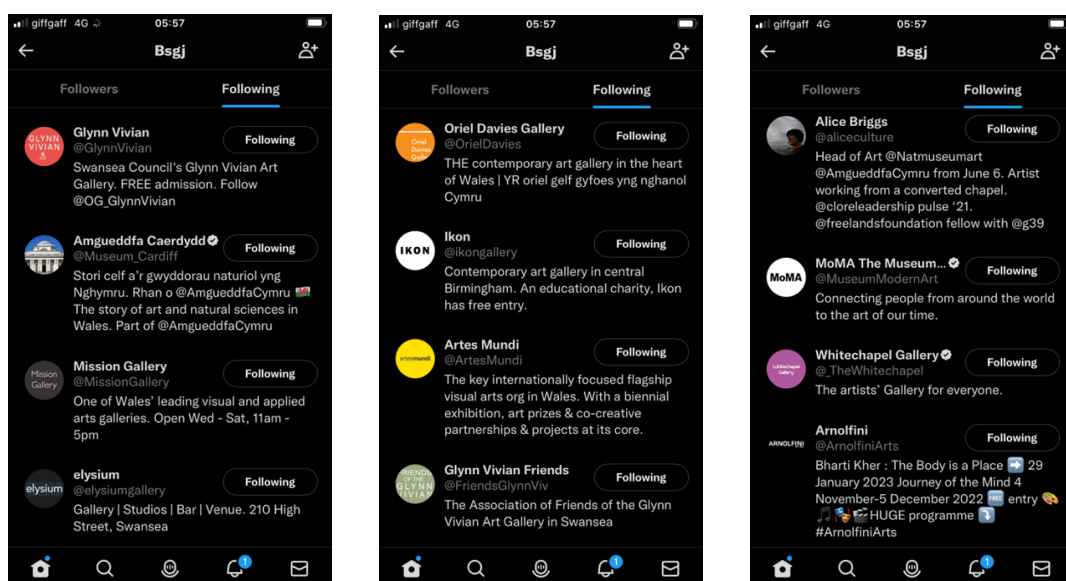


Fig 4: screenshots of my art twitter account indicating some of the institutions I follow. Author's images.

My use of twitter is sporadic, and lately has largely ceased. I sometimes access useful information, but overall I find the experience unpleasant. It entails being hunched over the phone, and after a while my thumb starts to hurt. Scrolling through posts is frustrating because there are often far more algorithm-driven suggestions or random posts than posts from entities I have chosen to follow.

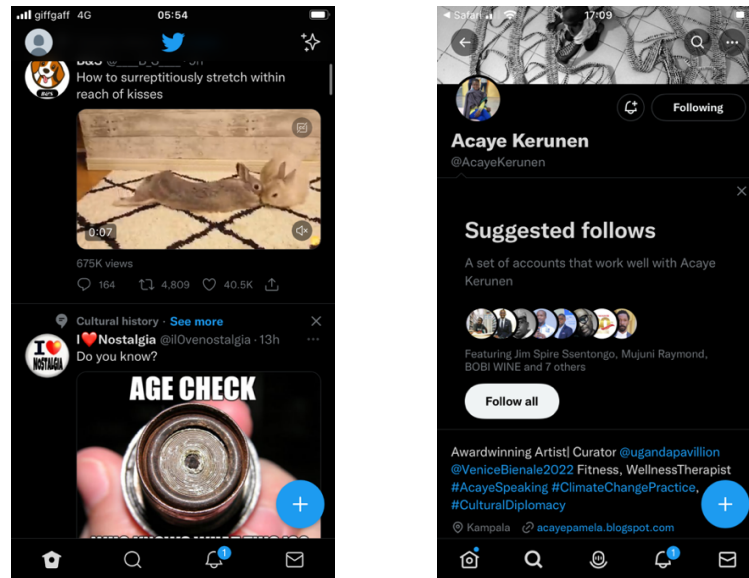


Fig 5: screenshots indicating the frequency of random unwanted posts in my feed; and the way that Instagram is so insistent on suggesting not just the odd account to follow but an entire ecology of apparently similar accounts. Author's images.

At a later stage as I near the end of my degree I will be more rigorously attentive to my art twitter account, to seek information about competitions, open calls, residencies and exhibition openings.

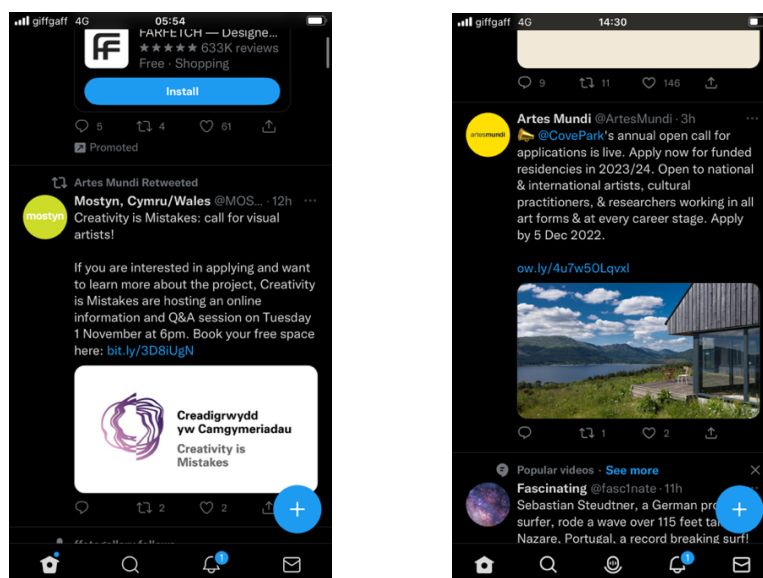


Fig 6: screenshots of relevant posts in my feed with information about open calls, residencies and so on. Author's images.

Looking ahead

Social media, especially Instagram, is increasingly important as a mechanism for artists to present their work to the world and to build networks. What appears on our social media is likely to be the first impression that others will get of our work (Delphian 2020). For that reason, as well as my concerns regarding tech companies, I prefer to adopt a cautious approach while a student. During the remaining time of my degree I will explore possibilities for a web-site and will start to compile professional-standard images of my work, so that by the final year I will be ready to present a professional impression to the world.

References

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2. Artist Statement

Longer version (350 words)

How can an argument be presented visually? What are the possibilities for elaborating an analysis, position or critique through construction, drawing or animation? My work addresses a range of concerns which are primarily political and largely related to the history of colonialism and its contemporary legacies. Working out how to express these concerns through art, in a way which is not simply illustrating an idea, is not straightforward. My current practice therefore explores how ideas can be expressed through art. An idea might be embedded within material and form or suggested across a juxtaposition of images. This allows space for ambiguity and interpretation, and also for playfulness or humour; it evades the precision and authority of a written analysis. Art provides possibilities for indirect and affective rather than direct and cerebral communication.

I often use materials which are found, collected or given. This might be stuff which is to hand; the encountered detritus of the present; or salvaged materials from more distant times and places – an item from a second-hand shop; a neighbour's reclamation off-cuts; a box of hinges found in a relative's basement. I make models, forms, imagined entities, or assemblages of images, often experimenting with and inventing techniques of creation and construction. Recent materials have included newspaper, tissue-paper, wire, wax, cotton, turmeric, charcoal, plastic, and floorboards.

I have been making work in a range of media including drawing, stop-frame animation, sculpture, printmaking, and site-specific installation. While sometimes venturing into the digital, I am especially drawn to material process and experimentation. I enjoy using my hands and eyes. This involves a tactile and bodily engagement with diverse materials through visual and haptic encounter, using trial and error.

Some elements of this practice might even constitute a mode of resistance. My desire to learn skills of physical making is a critical response to a world which is increasingly mediated through the

screen. The contemporary person swipes, clicks and downloads but does not know how to carve, cast or weave. Material practice offers both refuge from and resistance against the deskilling and alienation of the contemporary algorithmic, data-driven, consumerist world.

Shorter version (166 words)

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BRANWEN JONES

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3. CV

BRANWEN JONES

Education

2020-present BA Fine Art: Studio, Site and Context

Swansea College of Art

University of Wales, Trinity St David

Exhibitions

2022 BA Fine Art First Year Summer Show, Swansea College of Art, 10-17 June.

2022 *Confronting the Present*, Creative Bubble, Swansea, 9-13 May. Curated by Abby Poulson.

2021 BA Fine Art First Year Summer Show, Swansea College of Art, 6-24 June.

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1992 Aberystwyth Open, Aberystwyth Arts Centre, December

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Talks / Presentations

2022 'Waste Colonialism' online presentation, Swansea College of Art, 27 April

Skills and experience

Photoshop; Premier Pro; InDesign; Audio

Exhibition set-up

Zine-making

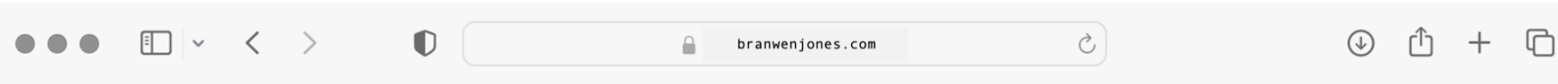
Member, student digital liaison committee, Swansea College of Art

Notes and reflection on CV

At present, at the start of my second year (studying part-time), the contents of my CV is very limited. I have only included items relevant to my current and future art practice, omitting previous professional experience and education which is not art related. The presentation 'Waste colonialism' was only a two-minute presentation in our module, but I included it simply as an illustration of the kind of thing that might go on a future CV (I would not include that student presentation on an actual CV).

The process of compiling the CV, and the other exercises for this module, have made me more aware of the importance of building up elements of professional practice during the time of the degree. By the time of my final year and graduation I need to be ready with a professional-standard portfolio of images of my work, CV, social media profile and perhaps a website, or profile with Axisweb. I intend to take every opportunity to participate in and help to organise exhibitions during my remaining time on the degree. For example, I will be submitting work to the Swansea Open in January 2023.

In addition to exhibiting work and organising exhibitions, some additional skills and experience I would like to gain during the remaining time on the degree or afterwards include volunteering as exhibition invigilator, eg at Glynn Vivian, or Chapter Arts Centre (Cardiff); and helping participate in educational art workshops for children or young adults in local schools and colleges.



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