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Programme of Study: Graphic Design

Module: ADDA4023 Ways of Perceiving

Task: Curate an exhibition = 1361 words

The earth's voice through design.

This exhibition has been curated to showcase the ongoing global environmental crisis. From climate change refugees to animal extinction, each piece provides an opportunity for reflection and evokes action for change. As Lippard writes “Whilst artists are never the vanguard of political movements, once they are swept into action they can be valuable allies” (2007, p.409). These creatives are endeavouring to give the earth a voice through visual concepts. The selection of varied art and design mediums offers a unique perspective to the problem and it is intriguing to observe the approaches employed by the artists.



This exhibition is showcasing in underground train stations, the reason being there is a high footfall of people, who have time to think. This exhibition may interrupt people's busy schedules and suggest the bigger picture going on around them. Seeing the problem in a visual format can encourage people's reactions. According to Flavián, Sarasa and Orús "When a picture of the product appears together with textual information, users remember more information (2010)."



TRY TO DIGEST IT TRY TO DIGEST IT



Fig 2, (Zotov and Klimanov, 2019, *Try to digest it*)

This collection is the gateway into the concept of the exhibition. These artists have created this contemporary advertising campaign “to raise public awareness about microplastics in our food” (Zotov and Klimanov, 2019).

The subversive design challenges the viewer to reflect on the complexities of the situation and to imagine what their future could look like if no action is taken. As explained by Hamidi and Baljko,

Subversion can afford the user within his or her community and context an opportunity for empowerment. One way to accomplish this is by encouraging and actualizing social practices, such as collaboration, democratization, and creative expression, via interactive activities that are mediated by digital media (2014, p.30).

The collection of advertisements are aesthetically pleasing, the ‘food’ looks like meals you would see in restaurant advertisements. This high reaching, expensive appearance grabs

your attention. “Coca-Cola, Harley Davidson, McDonald’s, and Apple, all sell consumers the idea of belonging to something special” (2020, cited Jannika, p.28). Zotov and Klimanov are selling the information in a way that people trust and can resonate.

At first glance the designs express the nature of the problem, however the use of facts in these designs make an even stronger argument. “That horse bucks every time”, (facts) will likely lead to a better decision over statements about its “beauty and fame” (propaganda)” (Nelson, 2015). The artists including real information rather than describing the problem is a clever and powerful tool which gives the problem a much stronger narrative.



Fig 3, (Stanley, 2019, *Protect What's Precious*)

This next piece was created to promote Mission Blue's campaign that "The creation of Marine Protected Areas helps safeguard the ocean from trawl nets that bulldoze the seafloor" (Tallerico, 2019). The team photographed in the Bahamas, impressively 15-20 feet underwater.

This photograph initially exuded a fairy tale and Disney like impression; however, it is portraying a deeper and darker message, much like many of the Disney stories. The fairy tale like scene portrays a woman underwater without any breathing or swimming restrictions, her symbolic white dress floating in an aesthetically pleasing manner. The model Christina Wren stated in an interview, "I wanted to embody an ocean guardian standing off against one of these trawl nets coming in towards a reef" (Richman-Abdou, 2019). This fantastical idea is resembling many of the fairy tales written to date. As written by Basotti,

The female figures act inside the fairy tale as narrators, collectors, authors, and protagonists, courageous heroines often subjected to adventurous journeys to overtake dangerous proofs (2015, p.73).

This portrayal is significant in the messaging, in reality there are not any 'guardians' stopping these trawling nets at the bottom of the ocean; however, the viewers are prompted to consider their position and contemplate becoming a guardian themselves by taking action.

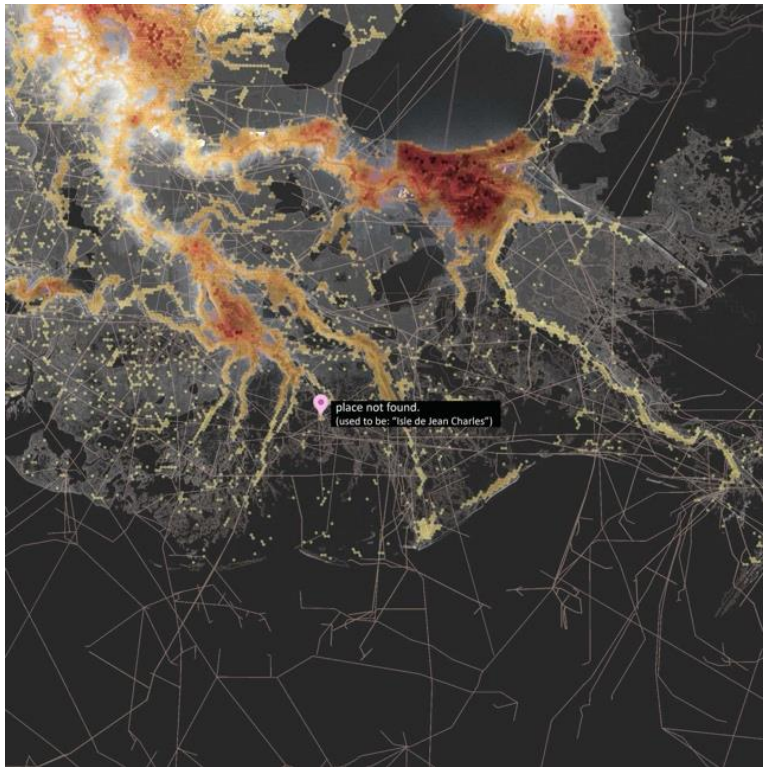


Fig 4, (Li, 2023, *Used to be: 'Isle de Jean Charles'*)

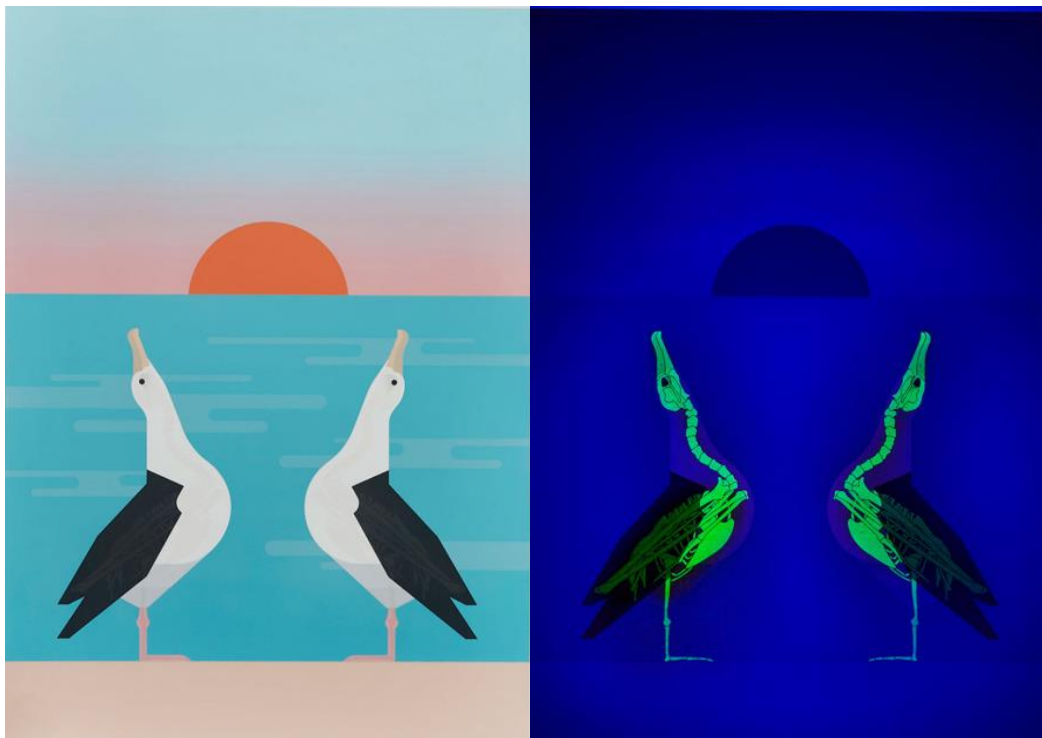
The tragic story behind this digitally data focused design shows the displacement of the “Biloxi Chitimacha Chitimacha Choctaw Tribe due to climate change. Their home, the Isle de Jean Charles in Terre Bonne Parish, Louisiana is no longer habitable, and they are being forced to relocate” (Li, 2023).

The powerful and creditable message that is portrayed by Li through data is captivating. Similar to the ‘Try to digest it’ advertisement the factual information aids this piece, without the small piece of text and location marker, the viewer could misunderstand the message. “The form and expression of a data visualization will be of importance in the way the viewer or reader perceives and comprehend the matter being communicated” (Engebretsen, 2020, p.261). The design principles Li has used to explain the problem is commendable.

One can only imagine the feelings of devastation this community must feel to be ripped from their homes and uprooted elsewhere. It's natural to assume that in such circumstances they would have feelings of displacement and not belonging. Li's work evokes thoughts on the subsequent events and the possibility of such occurrences happening closer to home. The impact of data being used in this manner is explained by Kosara, Cohen, Cukier, and Wattenberg,

Coming from a governmental organization the most obvious way I see in which data visualization can change the world is through transmission of knowledge from experts to the people. If all citizens had perfect information each time they made a decision, our economy and society would be stronger (2009).

In this instance the earth's voice is being portrayed through the voices of the affected people, drawing stronger reactions for the viewer.



Video included in exhibition (<https://undertheskin.co.uk/films/albatross-courtship/>)

Fig 5, (Harrison & Harrison, 2019, *Albatross Courtship*)

The Harrisons have created several screen prints covering a range of endangered animals.

“This interactive artwork has been created in partnership with the Albatross Task Force to protect this iconic seabird from the growing threats that currently plague our oceans”

(2019). Included in this exhibition, is the opportunity to see the artwork as a normal screen print and in the UV format. A short video showing the process is available to watch whilst in the exhibition space.

The role of artwork is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist (2011, quoted in Simanowski, p.123).

Originally by Bourriaud, this observation is relevant. The interactive nature of these prints provides an opportunity for the viewer to be immersed into the problematic world that these animals are facing, which inevitably elicits a stronger emotional response than if you were to only see the first screen print.



Fig 6, (Soldi, 2020, *The Sound of Strength in Numbers*)

This final piece exhibited conveys a message of group activism and unity holding the world together, like the previous pieces in this exhibition there is a deeper message. Soldi expressed “What I do is not enough, but my main contribution is through art and it is super interesting to see some things that I’ve created helping to spark conversation about topics” (Soldi, 2020).

Considering the lack of eyes and mouths in the illustration, these absences symbolize a key message that people are overlooking and not talking about the crisis the earth is currently facing. Fahlander writes,

Representations of bodies, for instance, are not necessarily ontologically different from biotic bodies, meaning that images can be as associated with agency and person hood as any human being. Thus instead of representing particular beings, anthropomorphic imagery may comprise a viable technology for controlling, affecting, and exploiting the ani-macies of the world (2021, p.303).

Suggesting that the use of blank faces in this illustration prompts the viewer to self-reflect on their own inaction, questioning whether they are indeed one of these blank faces.

Through these thought-provoking visual concepts, the desired outcome is for people to reflect, act and to spark conversations that could inevitably make an impact on current struggles the earth is facing. Visual concepts have power all over the world, as written by Peter and Akpan “With the difficulty faced by people in crossing “word” language barriers, the arts have the capacity to join people through a common language” (2020, p.28). The deeper message behind all the artistry in this exhibition is a language that everyone needs to learn if we are to build a more sustainable and better future.

The burning question hopefully sparked by this exhibition will be, “What actions can I take?”.

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Figure 1: Parsons, A. (2021) *London's Lonely Underground*. Available at:

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Figure 2: Zotov, V and Klimanov, D. (2019) *Try to digest it*. Available at:

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Figure 3: Stanley, B. (2019) *Protect What's Precious*. Available at:

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Figure 4: Li, C. (2023) *Used to be: 'Isle de Jean Charles'*. Available at:

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Figure 5: Harrison, E and Harrison, J. (2019) *Albatross Courtship*. Available at:

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Figure 6: Soldi, P. (2020) *The Sound of Strength in Numbers*. Available at:

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