

Ways of Perceiving, Curation Essay

Name: Francis Louis Ezard

Student Number: 2304248

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Tutor Name: Julia Lockheart

With mainly postmodernist theories, the aim of my five piece exhibition is to challenge the preconceived metanarratives of the pieces. I also aim to challenge credibility in the metanarrative of the exhibition space. Through curation, I found pieces that relate to this theme and explore it. "The very idea of an exhibition is that we live in a world with each other, in which it is possible to make arrangements, associations, connections and wordless gestures, and, through this *mise en scène*, to speak." (Obrist. H. U, 2014, p. 32). Keeping this in mind I also hope to not be "the curator as an overriding figure or *auteur* who uses artworks to illustrate his or her own theory" (Obrist. H. U, 2014, p. 32-33).

I would like to exhibit the pieces I have curated in an idealised space. I would like the auditorium of the Royal Opera House (ROH) as it was when it was originally built in 1732. As this is a place where the upper classes of the time would gather to enjoy what would be considered high art: opera, ballet and classical music. Evidence of this space being an upper class venue is that Charles II gave the ROH and the Theatre royal in Drury Lane exclusive rights to show spoken drama. By using this space and showing pieces that, at the time of its creation, would've been seen as less than by the upper classes who would've frequented the ROH, we break down the idea of high art and pop culture being separate and challenge the universal truths that people of that type hold about art.

The theories of postmodernism I will be focusing on will be Jean-François Lyotard's. "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives." (J. Lyotard, 1979, Introduction, para. 3). This shows that to Lyotard metanarratives that we build up of items and ideas are false as they can be proven wrong in different contexts. "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning." (J. Baudrillard, 1981, p. 79). In this Baudrillard comments on how the concept of universal knowledge doesn't exist because of the amount of information that exists and this turns us into sceptics, unsure if information we're receiving is true or if it changes under different circumstances.

We understand that people during the 18th century were massively prejudiced because many people during the time were slave owners. Women only got the same voting rights as men in 1928. Additionally, the attitude towards disabled people was that of fear. This paints the people of the time as distrusting and conceited.

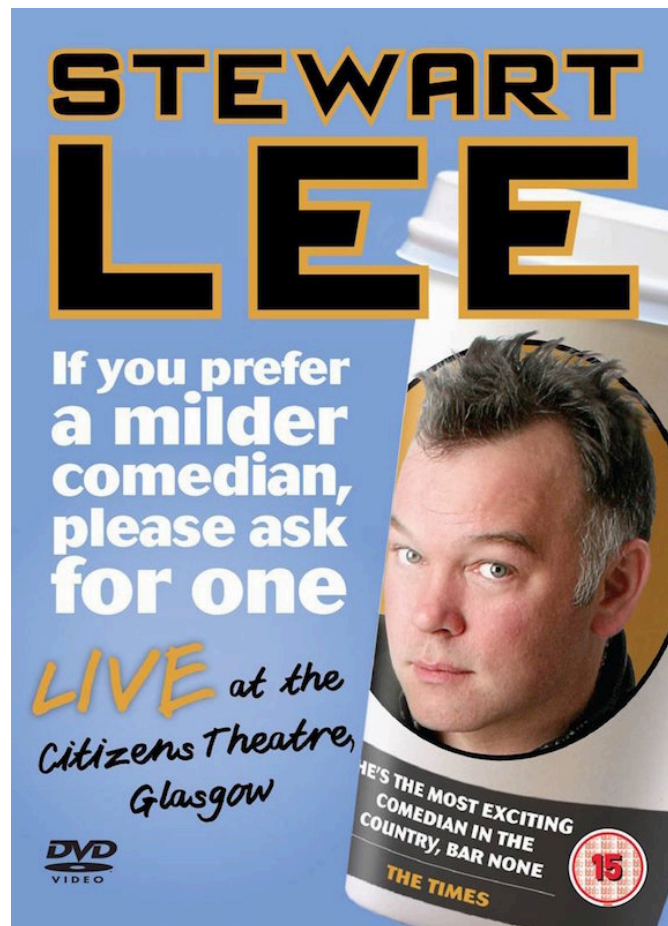


Fig. 1

My first piece will be placed on the stage and is a live performance of Stewart Lee's show, "If You Prefer A Milder Comedian, Please Ask For One". What is the metanarrative of the stand-up comedian? They have to appear likeable, "And if they like the performer, then you've got 80% of it made..." (J. Carson, 2001). And, they have to appear as if what they are saying is a stream of consciousness hilarity. "Comedians want things to appear natural and spontaneous, to give us the impression we're listening to a free flowing conversation rather than a carefully calculated routine." (J. Kingsford, 2020). Stewart Lee, as a comedian, is and does neither. Addressing the first point; he confronts the audience for not laughing when they should, he patronisingly explains the jokes after they fail, he's smug, narcissistic and believes he's above the audience: "I've not noticed anything about your lives. They're not of interest to me." Addressing the second point; he brings deliberate pieces of artifice into a performance that's supposedly spontaneous, he has a nervous breakdown and then reveals it was planned: speaking from the perspective of an audience member, "He came out. He ran around. He falsified a satirical nervous breakdown..." Also, he tells a tragic, supposedly real story about Richard Hammond for over 10 minutes to then say "Now, that story about Richard Hammond isn't true." This turns the audience into sceptics working out whether he's saying telling the truth. This piece utilises the theatrical technique of Brechtian alienation,

also known as the distancing effect. "...creating a distancing effect between me and the audience... I hope they admire the comedy, but I'd rather they didn't enjoy the show just because they think they liked me as a person." (S. Lee, 2010, p. 68). Lee wants to become unlikeable and fourth-wall breaking so the audience doesn't identify with him and focuses instead on the comedy. "Now Brecht used alienation precisely in order to reduce to a minimum the subjectivity inherent in the dramatic medium (the result of which is the identification of audience with character)" (W. A. J. Steer, 1968, p. 680). It also disrupts the universal truth of a location such as the ROH, during the time I would like it to appear. They wouldn't have an act of a stand up comedian appear, given Britain's stand-up comedy working class roots (with variety acts like Morecambe and Wise, Max Miller and Ken Dodd then developing into working mens clubs), on a stage like that. This is because of the people who would've gone, the attitudes of the time and they wouldn't have liked being spoken down to and being treated as lower than the performer. For this reason placing Stewart Lee, the performer, on the stage puts him on the same level as the perceived high art that would've played ROH during the time it appears. Breaking the separation between high art and culture.



Fig. 2

Lila Jang's chair looks like 18th century French furniture that has had the dimensions of the arms and seat distorted and it's devoid of colour. These aspects of it for me play on the time that the chair appears to come from. France being one of the most powerful countries at the time of the chair's "creation" thus being one of the countries that shaped the modern world. This distortion of the chair to me plays on the loss of credibility in the institutions that shaped the modern world. In 1789 to 1799 the

french revolution took place which would mean the chair is also a distortion of the main motto during the time for the revoltors “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”. Making us question if those values still hold weight in our current society. The overly puffy arms of the chair make us question whether the chair can even be sat down in, thus making us question the universal knowledge we share about chairs: they can be sat down in. This chair being in the exhibition space, an 18th century replication of the ROH, serves to directly represent the distortion of their ideas and proves the lack of credibility in them in the modern world.



Fig. 3

MSCHF's piece plays with Marcel Duchamp's idea of readymades, whereas a Readymade rejects art, creating a loss of credibility in traditional art itself. The trainers create a loss of credibility in postmodern “readymades” by making them for commercial use. Marcel Duchamp took mass produced products and made art out of them, “in addition to choosing and signing an ordinary object, it occurred to him that it was also necessary to de-contextualise it,” (J. Mundy, 2008, p. 125). This boot takes a mass produced product and makes fashion out of its image. Warping the medical boot and the philosophy of Marcel Duchamp to a consumerist society.

Placing the boot, which appears as medical equipment, in this space challenges that societies perception of disability and injury, and so it not only shows disabled or injured people are valuable members of society, welcomed in a place like this, but also that it can then become fashion that people wear to look trendy.



Fig. 4

Look 6 from Hodakovas Spring 2023 ready to wear collection inverts the metanarrative of how women should be dressed. The understanding is someone should be dressed without a bra being visible and with a garment that shows off their figure. The lumpiness made from bras goes in opposition of the institutions that have created the modern understanding of women's clothing, institutions that would've been represented in the audience of a show taking place in the ROH. This piece also brings to the forefront a functional item for women. Which challenges the patriarchal institutions which would have controlled what did with their bodies. These institutions that would've been made and funded by the men who went to places like the ROH.



Fig. 5

The final piece that I would like to exhibit is a wine glass from Katerina Kamprani's "The Uncomfortable" collection. In her words: "My work is intended to challenge assumptions about the functionality and purpose of common objects..." The assumptions she is challenging is the idea that day-to-day objects need to be useful and designed for making our lives easier and more streamline. The ROH during the time it has been recreated to look like would've been inhabited exclusively by the types of people who would've had servants and slaves and would scarily need to lift a finger to get what they want. By placing this glass in this environment we are making the types of people who would've gone to this place work and get challenged for what they want.

Excluding Stewart Lee's piece, which is on the stage, I would like the rest of the pieces to be in the Grand tier layer, evenly dispersed. This questions the legitimacy of the conceitedness of the people who would've gone to here by making the pieces be with the "Grand". Also the pieces will be on the chairs allowing people to sit by them, breaking the separation of high art and pop culture by making them be among the people rather than in a box behind a barrier.



Fig. 6

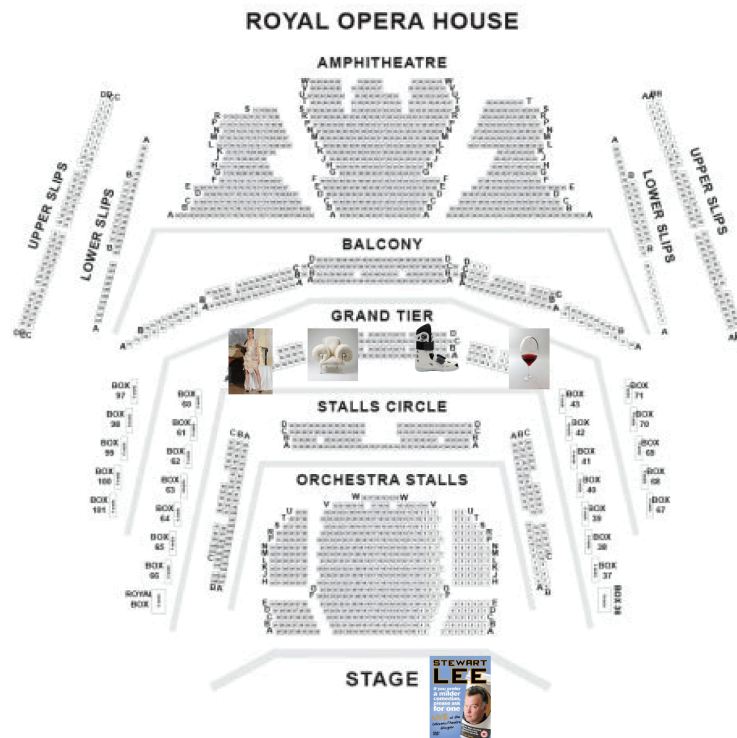


Fig. 7

I hope my aim to curate an exhibition that breaks metanarratives and universal knowledge about the individual pieces and the exhibition space has been achieved through use of postmodernist philosophy.

Figures:

Fig. One: Lee, S. (2010) *If You Prefer A Milder Comedian Please Ask For One*, Citizens Theatre, Glasgow

Fig. Two: Jang, L. (2009) *Untitled (Chair)*, Lux Art Institute, San Diego

Fig. Three: MSCHF (2022) AC.1, www.msCHF.com/shop

Fig. Four: Hodakova (2023) *Untitled (Dress)*, Vogue, Paris

Fig. Five: Kamprani, Katerina (2015) *The Uncomfortable Wine Glass*,
www.theuncomfortable.com/

Fig. Six: Shepherd, E. (1732) Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London

Fig. Seven: Ezard, F. (2024) *Exhibition Map*, Covent Garden, London

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