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Word Count: 2376

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When asked to analyse the work of illustrators who are considered to tackle difficult, sensitive, and shocking themes, I want to consider how different perspectives, times and cultures may change how each person interprets the meaning of these themes, especially within the world of art. An example of this could be how shocking theme to someone might be a difference in culture such as clothing or food. To show an understanding of analysis and the overall question I will delve deeper into these words and their true meaning and investigate illustrators and artists who I think create work that provokes, tackles, or explores these chosen themes. To properly analyse the works, I want to define the exact meaning of each theme word given within the question and display my perspective and how I have picked out artists/illustrators that I would consider, explore these themes, and how their art is placed within this bracket analysing the depth and meaning behind influential works. The word difficult is defined as "Something difficult is not easy to do, understand, or deal with." (Collins,2023). The word sensitive is defined as "If you are sensitive to other people's needs, problems, or feelings, you show understanding and awareness of them."(Collins, 2023). The final word shocking is defined as "You can say that something is shocking if you think that it is very bad."(Collins, 2023). Using these definitions will help analyse the various themed illustrations and artwork shown within the analysis and how these definitions will correlate to that.

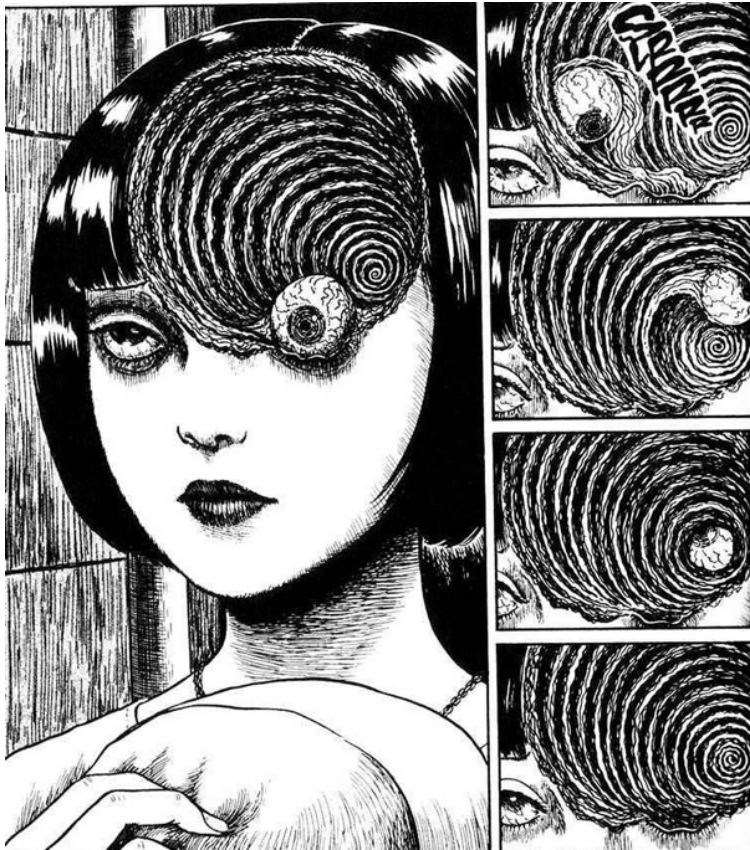


Figure 1. Ito, Junji. (1998) *Azami's Scar*

When considering illustrators to analyse for the question, Junji Ito was the first to come to my mind as an illustrator I have always admired his work and so have chosen to analyse why it would be considered to fall under the themes of difficult, sensitive, or shocking. Junji Ito is a Japanese manga artist who creates highly detailed disturbing horror illustrations within his manga books to tell his stories. Figure 1 is one of his most known pieces from his manga book *Uzumaki* and shows his intricate artwork and why some audiences may find it shocking and strange. Many of his illustrations include a lot of gore and gruesome inclusions, which depending on perspective and how you view the horror genre can be seen as shocking or invoke a sensitive feeling toward graphic illustrations such as Junji Ito's works. His work falls under the horror genre touching on sensitive and graphic themes that provoke an unsettling feeling that is natural for most people to feel, so it depends on how sensitised a person is to see this horror content that they will find it shocking. Junji Ito's work and illustration continue to be an influence on me as an aspiring illustrator, shaping me to see darker and less explored sides of illustration. Examples of this are the disturbing and unnatural side that is most often avoided due to how most find it unappealing and sensitive to look at, whereas

he embraces his disturbing yet complex illustration style throughout his artworks showing his acute use of skill to conjure disturbing yet intriguing and nightmarish stories. A feature I have noticed about Ito's work is how he only uses monochrome colour for every one of his books and how he uses these two shades in harmony to create depth and use them in contrast to one another while still being able to create illustrations that provoke fear and emotion without the use of any prominent colour to show symbolism such as death and darkness. "Numerous cultures associate black with death, mourning, darkness, and the artistic iconography itself used it to represent the devil, especially in medieval paintings." (Cinzia Franceschini 2021)

His unique style uses lots of spirals and detailed line markings, these details create extreme depth and help appreciate the details that are put in when creating his shocking illustrations. The main reason for creating art as shocking as Junji Ito's is to inflict a shocking feeling upon the observer, this has been seen throughout history when illustrators and artists use sensitive subjects such as gore to create art to inflict a certain emotion such as disgust or shock to the niche unsettling theme.



Figure 2. Géricault, Théodore. (1819) *Anatomical Pieces*

Another artist who also did this is Théodore Géricault a 17th-century French artist who painted raw works of art such as amputated body parts, portraits, and battles. These artists both have the same feeling of wanting to inflict a grotesque and unsettling feeling upon the

observer, but the main difference is that Junji Ito uses a much more abstract and modern approach to how he creates his work conjuring the stories that he has created from his creative mind. Ito's work leans into the genre of cosmic horror, a horror-like genre that uses unrealistic themes. while Théodore Gericault uses references from real events and for his artwork which when analysed makes it more shocking and traumatic for the observer due to the torn-apart limbs in Figure 2 being parts of a human that existed and lived at one point in time and has been gruesomely brought back to life by this talented artist in an unnatural and yet disturbing vision. Another aspect to analyse between the two artworks is the fact that when Gericault painted this within the 17th-century extreme themes such as torture and death were at the time somewhat normalized within that society, compared to today's more modern and empathetic society a lot of gore is censored due to it not being normalised as much as it was during the 17th century "Until the 18th century, torture was an accepted part of the judicial system." (John Welford, 2022). This indicates that today, people would react a lot differently to shocking themes of art due to how sensitised they became throughout history making Ito's and Gericault's work that much more unsettling in the modern day and age. I find these artists' work to be quite shocking and sometimes difficult to look at as themes such as torture, hallucinations and death which are commonly avoided in most artworks due to the sensitivity and how disturbing they can be in some cultures. Their work if anything could also be viewed as intricately thought out such as how Junji Ito uses cosmic horror a mixture of his imaginative abilities to create scenarios that couldn't physically happen in real life such as in Figure 1, making it that much more terrifying and shocking that scenarios such as this can be conjured by the human mind invoking fear into most that see these pieces.



Figure 3. Picasso, Pablo. (1937) *Guernica*

Each person is different, so each thing a person observes is interpreted differently, especially artwork. Some find something shocking, and some may process that completely differently. This could be due to a person's history, trauma, passion, and multiple other factors. One of the main goals of creating illustrations and artwork is to tell a story, provoke a feeling/thought or bring awareness to something. "This is one of the most important discoveries ever in art. The value of it cannot be appreciated until it is felt." (Danz, 1941 p.276). One of the most well-known artists in history Pablo Picasso created the artwork mural Guernica to protest the Spanish Civil War and the bombing that killed hundreds within Guernica a city in Spain. By analysing the painting, I can see that the mural is showing a sensitive and difficult subject just from the extreme symbolism and expression used at first glance, the use of monochrome is also present here which for Pablo Picasso is unusual as he was known for creating colourful expressive abstract paintings. However due to the seriousness of the incident Picasso chose to use monochrome shades to express his true empathy toward this serious point in history using it to symbolise the loss of life and the shock he felt to what had happened within his birthland. The painting shows the aftermath of a tragedy something that nobody wants to experience making it a sensitive topic for some such as Pablo whose home country was attacked enraging him to channel his emotions and produce one of the most powerful pieces of art in history, it shows how war will bring nothing but darkness, pain and suffering to innocent and unknowing lives such as those who resided in Guernica at the time of the tragedy.



Figure 4. Haring, Keith. (1989) *Ignorance=fear*

When analysing illustrators who have created work to protest and bring to light difficult themes, Keith Haring was an illustrator activist and used his work to bring awareness to what sometimes is seen as 'difficult subjects such as HIV/AIDS and safe sex. These during the 1980s were seen as difficult/sensitive to talk about and still can be stigmatised even today and the negative aura that surrounds the subjects. "Fear, stigma, and ignorance. That is what defined the HIV epidemic that raged through the world in the 1980s, killing thousands of people who may only have had a few weeks or months from diagnosis to death"

(WHO,2023) I wanted to analyse this illustrator work as the subject he tackles can be seen as 'shocking' to most that his work was targeted toward such as the government. He displayed his art in subways and streets to capture the attention of as many people as possible to display this tragic problem that was so prominent during his lifetime affecting thousands of people due to the lack of research and bad stigmatisations surrounding the pandemic. His use of bright colours and unique bold and alluring illustration style captured my attention, and I was able to easily analyse and research this protest artist and the sensitive themes he covered. "This was unfolding in a political context intensely hostile to gay men and women, with, in the USA, conservative forces condemning people living with HIV / AIDS as 'immoral'," (Dana Rosenfield 2018). The fact that the AIDS and HIV epidemic was related to homosexuality during the 1980-1990s shows how history discriminated against homosexuals declaring them as "immoral" and pinning this disease on them. This then makes the subject of HIV and AIDS a much more shocking and sensitive subject to people living in the 1980s-1990s which is why Keith Haring's illustrations were viewed as shocking, whereas today the subject of HIV and AIDs is more uncensored and talked about.

HIV and Aids were unfortunately Keith Haring's cause of death which makes this artwork that much more shocking knowing that he wanted to use his illustrations to help raise awareness of the combed-over subject within the 1980s which makes his illustrations iconic, inspirational, and everlasting.



Figure 5. Tan, Shaun. (p.6,p.7) *The Arrival*

I decided to analyse the well-known children's book illustrator Shaun Tan, this talented children's/graphic book illustrator tackles the sensitive theme of immigration within his book "The Arrival", in a very clever and meaningful way to create ease for anyone who reads it helping a younger audience understand the difficulty of immigration and moving away and how it can have an impact on them. While analysing his work I have noticed how this could be an extremely difficult theme to understand the concept of being somewhere completely different to what someone is used to, especially for children. "Tan even avoids pinning his story to a particular language. "The Arrival is completely wordless. A system of incomprehensible yet eerily familiar symbols takes the place of words on signs and documents. "(Gene Yang,2007). Analysing Tan's book and how he uses no words and swaps them for mysterious symbols helps people understand the story appreciate the symbolism and picturesque artwork within the story and provoke many feelings mainly the feeling of the unknown and change. The beautifully illustrated pictures within can be universally understood telling a thoughtful story about immigration and using clever symbolism throughout his novel. The old art style he uses throughout gives eery and the faded dull colours try to show how the story is being told from the past telling the story of many lives that have been in that exact situation. To make the story more intriguing for children I have

noticed that he adds interesting elements within his works such as dragons and small creatures. This helps appeal more to children by making the sensitive story more fun and digestible to what can be a difficult subject that most children may find harder to understand. When analysing the illustrator's work you can see why he has decided to tackle this sensitive topic and has aimed it toward a much younger audience to help others understand the difficulty faced in the past and present on the subject of immigration having to flee to survive and travel from their own country and home, as someone who has not experienced immigration, reading through the book helped broaden my understanding on why this illustrator decided to help others understand this sensitive theme through illustrating visually pleasing illustrations that show the stories of immigration in a more whimsical universe. The brilliant use of symbolism and storytelling throughout really brings the illustrations to life without the need for much colour or structure showing that difficult subjects such as this one need to also be addressed.

To conclude what I have analysed I have explored illustrators and artists who use the themes of difficult, sensitive, and shocking subjects and explored the deeper definitions behind each word linking them to relevant artworks and symbolism seen within the work. Analysing many different illustrators/artists and their unique art styles from various genres, timelines and cultures has helped me understand what I would define as shocking, difficult or sensitive, and how each figure analysed provoked most of these feelings while being so different from one another. The extreme use of symbolism and thought put into these artworks to make them shocking, sensitive or difficult to look at is what truly helped me analyse the bigger picture behind the art and the artist. Overall, the question of finding illustrators and author illustrators that tackle sensitive, difficult, or shocking themes differs from art style and artist and how they intended for the art to be viewed, every interpretation is unique such as my own and how I have described why pieces and artists/illustrators inflicted these feeling upon me.

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