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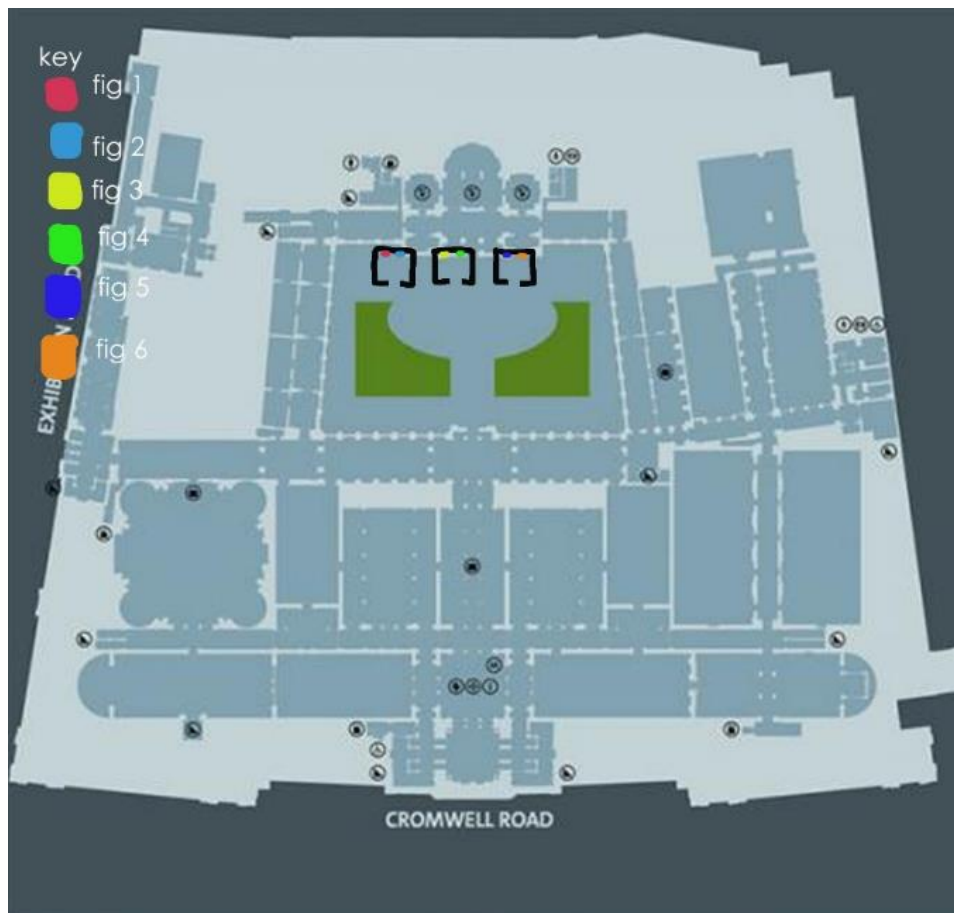
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For artists, inspiration can be found anywhere. Creatives will travel the world to find a source of influence for their pieces. For disabled artists however, it is not as easy. Many disabled people are confined to their houses, perhaps even their beds. The name of my exhibition is *'Art in Isolation'* and will showcase three artists who have faced adversity from their health and therefore have been bound to their rooms.

Artist Louise Bourgeois said that *'solitude, even prolonged solitude, can only be of very great benefit'* (Gotthardt, 2019) . This shows how creatives view isolation, to them it is a choice. It is a way to connect with themselves and enhance their work. For the artists in my exhibition, it is not an artistic preference, but a way of survival.

I will exhibit in the V&A in London. I will build three 10x10ft rooms, one dedicated to each artist. I will show two pieces of each artists' work. The first will be a rendition of their bedroom or living space that they were confined to. The second piece will be a self-portrait showing their interpretation of their disability and how it affects their self-image.

The V&A is one of the largest galleries in the world, by putting the small rooms within the gallery I will create a sense of claustrophobia. I want the viewers to walk around the vast space of the gallery and admire to work that comes from across the world, and then go into the small rooms to mimic the feeling of having full freedom that gets turned into isolation after illness hits. My audience will hopefully understand how inspiration sometimes has to be found within oneself.



Map of V&A, featuring my exhibition.

Frida Kahlo

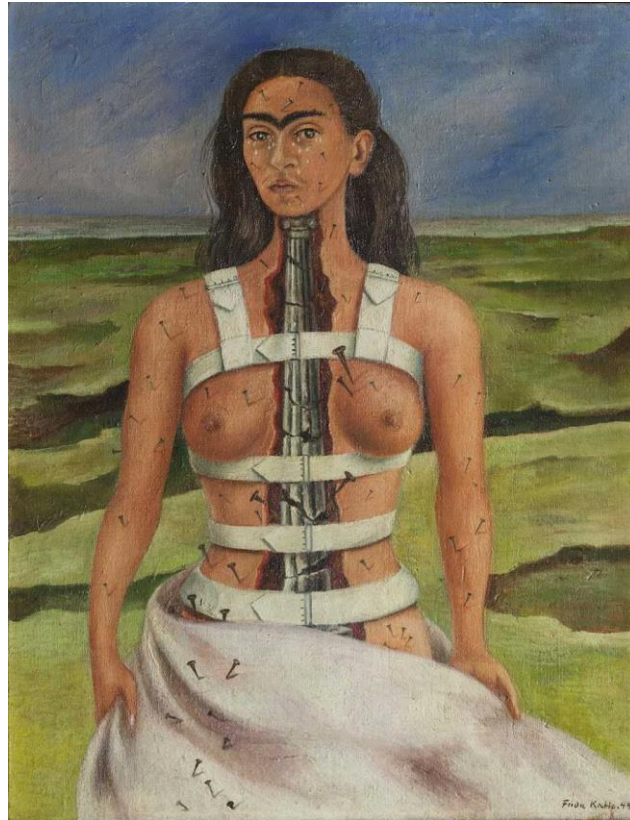


Fig 1: '**The Broken Column**' (Kahlo, 1944)

Her health was described as 'notoriously *tragic*' with ailments such as '*scoliosis, Polio, syphilis*' as well as a '*catastrophic collision*' (Launer, John, 2018) .

In '*The Broken Column*' Kahlo paints a vulnerable rendition of her injury. We see her spine replaced by a column with nails piercing her skin, seemingly trying to keep everything from falling apart. This is a raw way to show how it feels to have a body that is failing you. I think the decision to paint herself naked was to show the humanity of disability. Even though she is full of metal and bound with a spinal brace, she is still flesh and bone. I think this piece will

work as a way for the audience to empathise with Kahlo as she has captured her pain in a literal sense.



Fig 2, *'The Dream (The Bed)'* , (Kahlo, 1940)

Near the end of her life, Kahlo was bed bound. She still found a way to participate in her passion of painting by using a *'folding wooden easel set at an angle and a mirror fixed to the canopy of her sick bed'* (The Lancet, 2018). The dedication to her craft is astounding. To most artists painting is a second nature, but Kahlo had to fight to be able to do what she loves.

'The dream (The bed)' is the piece I will use to showcase her isolation while bed bound. We see two renditions of her body. Above her bed there is the Skeleton who is strapped with

explosives holding a bouquet of flowers. Like in *'The broken column'*, she is using metaphors to illustrate her pain. She is showing the fragility of her body, at any point the explosives could go off and ruin her. We see Kahlo under the beds covers tangled in vines. The contrast between the explosives on her skeleton and leaves on her body is a good representation of the disconnect between the sickly body and the person behind them. She is telling you that although her physical form may be failing her, she is more than that as a person.

I agree with the statement that *'Her paintings provide a unique and personal view of chronic pain, which was clearly a catalyst for her brilliant catalog of work'* (Courtney, O'Hearn and Franck, 2016). While Kahlo would be talented, disability or not, its hard to imagine what her work would look like without her pain's influence.

Vincent Van Gogh



Fig 3: **'Self-Portrait With Bandaged Ear'**, (Van Gogh, 1889)

It is wildly speculated what mental illnesses affected Van Gogh. Medicine and the understanding of conditions have progressed remarkably since the late 1800's. According to the journal *The Neurologist*, '*acute intermittent porphyria, epilepsy and schizophrenia have been proposed*' as some of the possible disorders that may have affected him , (WK Strik, 1997). No matter what was affecting him, it is clear that he was suffering.

It is said that '*van Gogh cut off his ear lobe in a fit of mania*', (Selina Cheng, 2016). In this self-portrait we see him wearing a bandage presumably from his injury. In the painting the

viewer is given no explanation as to what happened or how he is feeling, it is simply a representation of how he looked at the time he chose to paint himself. It is interesting to compare this to Kahlo's pieces. While she painted to express her disability to visualise it through imagination and metaphors, Van Gogh does not acknowledge what he is suffering with. I hope my audience will notice this contrast between the two artists, it may help show how no two people are the same and it is natural for people to have differing feeling towards their illnesses.



Fig 4: ***'The Bedroom'***, (Van Gogh, 1889)

'The Bedroom' is a painting that Van Gogh crafted while in Arles in 1888. He wrote of his time in Arles saying, 'After the crisis I went through when I came here, I can no longer make plans or anything else'. (Gogh et al., 2014)

He '*repeated the composition twice more while confined to an asylum*' (Lewis, M., 2016). To me this shows that his bedroom was a place of refuge and sanctuary, so much so that when his condition got too difficult to manage, he could look back on it and find comfort.

It is interesting how Van Gogh seems to have a different opinion to his health than Kahlo has about her own. I believe that the lack of knowledge of what he may have been suffering with was partly to blame, he may have not understood what he was ailed with himself.

Aubrey Beardsley



Fig 5: '***Self-Portrait***' (Beardsley, 1892)

Beardsley was unwell for all of his short life, '*at age seven, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis*', which ultimately led to his death at age 25, (Kosik, 2018). He is one of my personal favourite illustrators because of how humorous and risqué his work can be.

Compared to the other artists I am exhibiting; Beardsley has a different way of using his illness in his work. He used his '*extreme thinness*' in this self-portrait which in turn became '*part of his distinctive style*' within his art. In Fig 5 we see him exaggerate his features, such as the dark under eyes and slim face. He once said that '*If I am not grotesque, I am nothing.*' (Burdett, 2020). To me this shows that he has taken his sickness and turned it into part of what makes him celebrated as an artist. This piece shows what could be considered tragic as playful, he is poking fun at the effects of his illness but allowing the audience to laugh with him. He is showing us who he is as an artist and a person unapologetically. His willingness to show himself as grotesque is brave, it must take a lot of strength to take the physical effects of your illness and materialise them in such a bizarre fashion.

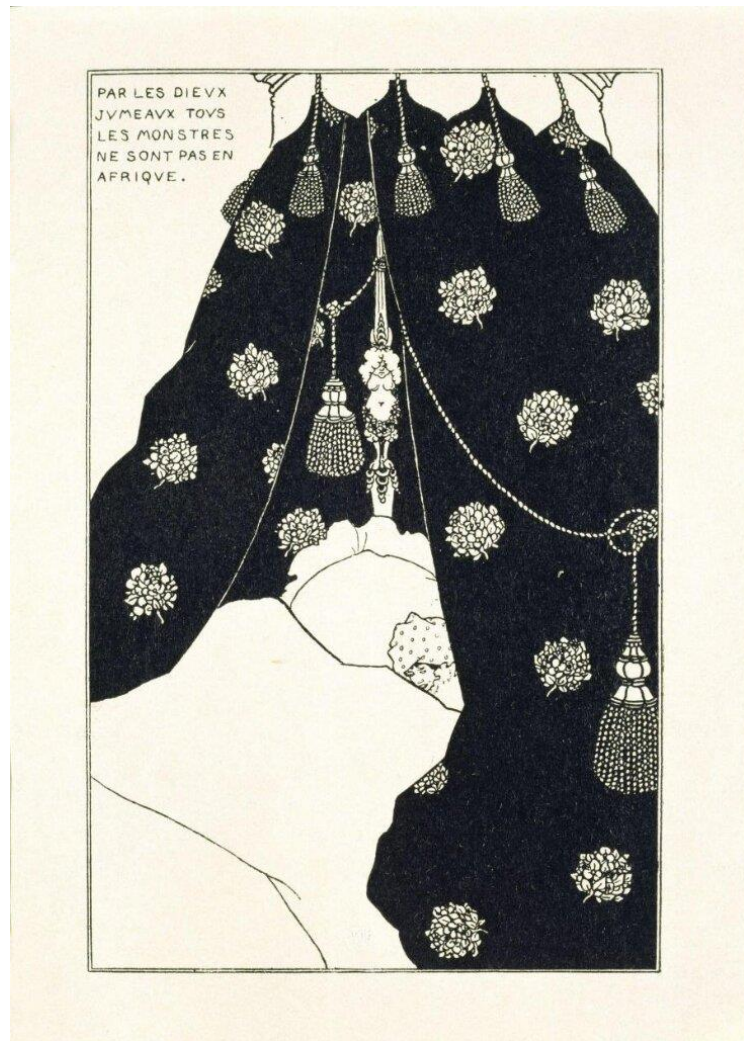


Fig 6: *'Self-Portrait In Bed'*, (Beardsley, 1894)

Beardsley *'suffered a violent hemorrhage'* when he was 23 which would lead to his death two years later. (Kosik, 2018).

The text in the top right corner of *'Self-Portrait in Bed'* reads *'par les dieux jumeaux tous les monstres ne sont pas en Afrique'*, which translates to *'By the twin Gods, not all monsters are in Africa'*.

This is believed to be *'in reference to the artist's frail health and the danger of tuberculosis'* (V&A, 2006). There is a huge tonal shift from the self-portrait in fig 5 to *Self Portrait in Bed*.

The humour we previously saw seems to have gone and we are seeing a more fragile

depiction of Beardsley's self-image. I am unsure if he is referring to himself or his illness as the '*monster*' mentioned in the piece, but either way it is upsetting to see him struggling so visibly. It makes me wonder if as his health deteriorated, so did his want to be shocking in his appearances in his work.

I hope my audience will leave the exhibit with an understanding of the complexity of disability and isolation. While all three artists were unwell and facing solitude; they all interpreted it differently. Frida Kahlo used her imagination to materialise her feelings and pain using dark imagery. Vincent Van Gogh painted very matter-of-factly; he was simply painting what he saw regardless of what was affecting him. Aubrey Beardsley candidly showed the affects of his sickness, no matter how shocking. We can't expect all of them to have the same feeling towards their health because we as disabled people cannot fit into one box. There are those of us who will wear it on our sleeves, and those who need more time to heal.

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