

Portfolio of Writing

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Tasks in the order I received them:

Task one: Reflective writing (Jon's task)

Task two: Semiotic analysis (Ryan's task)

Task three: Manifesto (Julia's task)

Task One: Reflection (Jon's Task)



Reflecting on Sir Frank Dicksee's oil painting *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, with reference to Kolb's reflective learn cycle.

Two years ago I attended a trip to Bristol museum, where I laid eyes on what has to be my favourite painting, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* by Sir Frank Dicksee. I admired the work so much that I visited the museum again just to see it. This time I had had in mind Kolb's learning cycle, which I had learnt about in contextual studies. I was drawn to this painting for its strong sense of atmosphere, as an illustrator I was drawn to the characters of the painting. I was shocked to see the power roles reversed where the woman clearly held power over the knight. The image depicts a theme of chivalry as the knight must have placed the beautiful woman on his horse. I really loved the amount of expression in this piece translated through facial expression and body language. While the woman expresses almost a calm and perhaps scrutinising gaze the knight is so obviously in raptures at the woman's beauty, he looks like his breath has been stolen from him.

Upon further reflection and research I discovered the painting was inspired by the ballad: La Belle Dame Sans Merci by John Keats published in 1819 (poetry foundation, 2016), which means “The Lovely Lady Without Pity” (Ott, Bill. 2000: p124). This is the moment that Dicksee chose to capture in oil “I met a lady in the meads, Full beautiful – a faery’s child, Her hair was long, her foot was light, And her eyes were wild... I set her on my pacing steed, And nothing else saw all day long; For side long would she bend, and sing A faery’s song.” (Poetry Foundation, 2016) in the end the knight is left devastated when the elfin woman leaves after capturing his heart. I researched lighting, colour and meaning because Dicksee was known for his “bold and unusual lighting effects” (Chilvers, I., & Graves-Smith, J., 2009). The choice of using a yellow, summers day light portrays the beauty and warmth of the summer’s day “yellow is thought of as ‘warm’ ...is associated with the sun,” (A. Wierzbicka, 1990. Quoted in (John Gage, 1999.) ‘Colour and meaning: art science and symbolism’ Thomas and Hudson, p23) this later juxtaposes how the knight is left on “on the cold hillside” (Poetry Foundation, 2016). I really admired Dicksee’s ability of storytelling through image making, before further research I knew that the woman was alluring and powerful to the defenceless knight, during my reflection and research I came across the word “femmes fatale” (Ott, Bill. 2000: p124) which describes a woman who is very sexually attractive and will likely cause problems for any man attracted to her (Collins Dictionary, 2019), her beauty is a trap and Dicksee demonstrated this very vividly. To finalise my understanding of Kolb’s cycle, I applied what I had learnt and reflected on in my own work. I focused more on how I drew characters to express emotions, drawing postures that were relaxed and at ease or drawing them being rigid. In my watercolour and colour theory classes I noted down what colours, tones and lights brought about certain atmospheres, just like how Dicksee uses colour and light in his own work.

(word count: 550)

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Task Two: Semiotic Analysis



“A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable...I shall call it semiology” (de Saussure F. course in general linguistics. David Crow, 2003: p54)

During my studies in semiotics I came across the interesting concept that “the force of what we are seeing makes us not see what we are seeing” so in order to truly see the world around us and find meaning in images, we need to pay closer attention to detail and put more thought into what is denoted and connoted (David Crow, 2003: p57). Alongside my contextual studies I was doing some

more research into typography and signage after recently having a workshop in typography. In the book Edward Fella's: Letters On America (L Blackwell, L wild 2000) there is a collection of essays. In one such essay Blackwell talks about how there are signs everywhere and quotes Fella's fascination at all the signs in a street "they're everywhere, it's a very American kind of clutter." I agreed that there are signs everywhere, so much so that they clutter the high street and even our new feeds on social media. The biggest type of "clutter" comes from advertisement. But what do all of these signs mean? Saussure was a linguist and was only interested in the symbolic signs from words (David Crow, 2003). In Saussure's study of semiology there is a signifier, in my study of this topic my signifier is the sign above. This was a sign in my hometown which I almost didn't even see, at first glance the signifier is just a sign advertising key cuttings and so on. But upon looking closer we can find symbolic meaning and what is "signified". This sign is significantly different than the repeated printed "SALE!" signs that we see everywhere, it is hand written and rough. It speaks of a small business owner trying to make any attempts possible to find more business, even if it means putting a roughly drawn up sign into the middle of the street. Upon closer inspection you will look around and see that the shop, KeyShoes, is just around the corner from the sign, it's in a quiet street off from the flow of pedestrians where there are plenty of empty shops. Which signifies further the possible struggle for income that the shop owner is facing. People, and almost myself included, completely disregard the sign and many don't see it at all. Which links to Aldous Huxley's fear in A Brave New World (vintage books, 2007) of a passive society. We are hounded by so much "unfettered free-market capitalist expressionism" (L Blackwell, L wild 2000) that we have become passive to the signs around us, which solidifies that the force of what we are seeing makes us not see what we are seeing.

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Task 3: Manifesto

Task 3: Manifestos

- 1) Always practice my craft, not just for commission but for me.
- 2) As a good habit always seek to improve.
- 3) Take on projects that excite and inspire me.
- 4) But also take work that's realistic and gets the bills paid.
- 5) Never make something that sends a visual message of hurt.
- 6) Do away with the idea that I must have a specific style right now.
- 7) Consume the art of others and feel inspired rather than intimidated.
- 8) Build an online presence and share my art.



1) As a good habit always seek to improve:

Key word: Habit

As a young illustrator I understand that to succeed in my field of work I need to seek to improve my skills for my work itself to improve. I chose the key word “habit” because I want to associate improving my skills as an act of habit. By putting in the time to improve my skill I will feel more confident in my ability which would improve my happiness. Aristotle’s normative theory Nicomachean ethics states that to achieve “eudaimonia” or “human flourishing” we must practice being virtuous “we are what we repeatedly do, excellence is not an act but a habit” (Aristotle, Ross, Brown, 2009). Meaning that for us to achieve happiness, human flourishing or “Eudaimonia” we must practice the Aristotelean virtues. In my case I need to practice drawing, proportion etc. as a habit to achieve excellence in my illustrations. By cultivating these habits and virtues we will be happy “happiness, then, is something final and self-sufficient, and is the end of action.” (Aristotle, Ross, Brown, 2009)



2) Do away with the idea that I must have a specific style right now:

Key word: Style

In the illustration industry there is a lot of pressure on having a style, but the pressure to have a style creates a grey area where one's work becomes either heavily influenced by another illustrator's style, or their work is considered plagiarism. If you never developed your own style and just used someone else's, is your work really your own? Inside the business of illustration (Heller, Arisman, 2004) states that when forced to adopt a style "you will begin to look for one outside yourself" if we do this we stop experimenting and growing within ourselves to adapt any kind of style that could have been ours, all because of the pressure on having a style immediately. Arisman states that "style evolves naturally from a solid foundation in drawing" linking to my previous manifesto point. With practice and experimentation my skills and style will inevitably grow and become evident. "This is a natural, healthy, on-going process."



3) Feel inspired by the art of others rather than intimidated.

Key word: inspired

Rather than looking at work and seeing something I could never do, I want to look at every aspect that I like and be inspired. To think about how I could incorporate it in my own work. Picasso once said that “great artists steal” but in the end “Picasso did Picasso” (Heller, Arisman, 2004, p67) while he may have felt he was stealing concepts it was clear to see that he was inspired and remade concepts in his own way. I want to be inspired by the techniques that other artists use and experiment in using them, whether it’s how they make a woman’s hair look like its flowing to how they simply make a figure stand at ease and look natural. This would inspire me to think about how the body moves and how to draw it in movement, instead of “stealing their style” I will be inspired to do my own research on what I admire e.g. seeing an illustration of a moving figure and using Dynamic figure drawing (Hogarth, 1996) to learn how to incorporate this into my work.

(word count: 550)

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