Ways of Perceiving (ADAD4019)

Essay: Imagined Exhibition

REM Exposure: A Photographic Journey Through Sleep

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20th April 2023

Introduction

Welcome to my photography exhibition on sleep paralysis and REM.

Through this exhibit, I aim to explore the complex relationship between these two phenomena and to convey the unique experiences of those who live with these conditions.

REM is a stage of sleep that is characterized by vivid dreams and rapid eye movements. During REM sleep, the body is typically paralyzed to prevent movement and protect against injury. However, in some cases, this paralysis can extend into wakefulness, leading to the experience of sleep paralysis (Jouvet,1950, pp.14–19,)

Through a collection of photographs, I aim to capture the surreal and often terrifying experience of sleep paralysis and to convey the imaginative nature of REM dreams. I explore the sensation of being trapped in one's own body, the vivid hallucinations and sensations that often accompany sleep paralysis, and the aftermath of a sleep paralysis episode.

I hope that this exhibition will raise awareness and foster a deeper understanding and empathy for those living with these conditions; due to stigma around this subject, sleep disorders are often misunderstood (chronic insomnia: a clinical study, BMC Psychiatry, 2022), Sleep is an essential aspect of our lives, and we must work to ensure that everyone has access to the rest and rejuvenation they need to live healthy and fulfilling lives (Walker, 2002, pp.321-34)

By exploring the intricate relationship between sleep paralysis and REM, I hope to offer a thought-provoking, immersive and interactive experience that sheds light on the fascinating and often unsettling world of sleep.

Context & Artists and Artworks

The curation of the exhibition is crucial in terms of how the theme of sleep is presented to the audience. The exhibition will be organized thematically (Georgia Rouette, 2007, pp.7-9), exploring various aspects of sleep such as dreams, hallucinations, REM waking and the progression of sleep.

The exhibition featuring the works of Hiroshi Sugimoto (1948), Sally Mann (1951), Sophie Calle (1953), and Frank Yamrus (1958) offers a diverse range of photographic styles and subjects, each exploring unique themes and approaches to the medium and theme.

Sally Mann is a renowned American photographer who has gained recognition for her black-and-white photographs that capture intimate moments of family life, as well as landscapes and architecture. Mann's *Deep South* (2005), hung on the right-hand wall of the gallery, is a series of black-and-white photographs that depict the rural landscapes of the American South. One of the key features of Mann's distinct visual style is due to her use of a large-format camera, which enables her to capture an incredible level of detail and tonal range in her images. Her use of high contrast and deep shadows creates a likeness to dreamscapes, the *punctum* in Mann's series *Deep South* (2005), *i*s discernible in the presence of snakes or alligators in the water - adding a layer of tension and danger to the images (Barthes, 1993) Portraying the feelings of unease that are often associated with sleep for people with sleep disorders, this is important for the narrative of my exhibition.

Date: 1999

Medium: Gelatin silver print

Dimensions: 37 1/8 × 46 3/4in. (94.3 × 118.7 cm)

I have included other works by Mann in the exhibition, Mann's *self-portrait ambrotypes* (2006 -2007).

Two images from the collection are hung in the rooms adjacent the archway, The ambrotypes are a series of photographs that capture the artist's image using the wet plate collodion process. By capturing the emotional essence of a moment, photography can provide a glimpse into the complexities of human emotion (Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 2003) The images are notable for their intimate and evocative quality, which draws the viewer into the artist's inner world. The use of the wet plate collodion process creates a distinctive aesthetic quality in the images, with an elevated level of detail and texture. The images have a dreamlike quality, with soft focus and a muted tonality that emphasizes the ethereal and introspective nature of the portraits. My intention behind putting these images in the exhibition, due to their haunting quality, is to coin a certain feeling of unease to the audience. The placement of the photographs, being in a dark secluded space adjacent to the archway of the mission gallery, means that the photographs are closed off the audience and therefore the visitor must interact with the space and seek out these images. I am re-creating the experiences of someone who battles with sleep and hallucinations during REM waking.

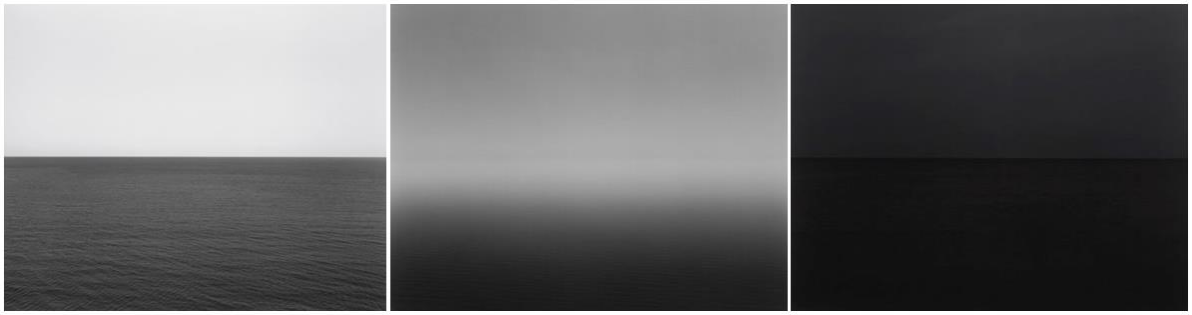
Date: 2006

Medium: Gelatin silver print

Dimensions: 38.1 x 34.3 cm. (15 x 13.5 in.)

Hiroshi Sugimoto is a Japanese photographer whose works explore the intersection between photography and time. Sugimoto frequently uses long exposure times to create blurred and abstract images. Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Seascapes* (1980), hung adjacent to the entrances of the gallery, is a series of black-and-white photographs that capture the ocean in various moods and states. The images are notable for their ethereal quality, with the ocean appearing as a timeless and abstract force rather than a specific location. The stillness of Sugimoto's *Seascapes* (1980) could be seen as a reflection of the

meditative qualities of the *aura*. note that the *aura* is often associated with the sacred and the timeless (Benjamin, 2008, pp.32), and Sugimoto's *Seascapes*, with their long exposures and lack of human presence, invites the viewer into a contemplative state. Deleuze notes that *the time image* is not linear or chronological, but rather captures the experience of time as a non-linear, non-continuous flow (Deleuze, 2013, pp.12-14) The seascapes capture the experience of time as a flow rather than a series of discrete moments, imitating the sense of moving through the stages of sleep.

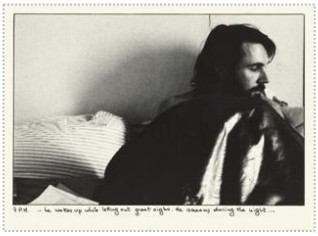


Date: 1993

Medium: Gelatin silver print

Dimensions: 42.3 x 54.2 cm (16 5/8 x 21 5/16 in.)

Sophie Calle is a French conceptual artist who often uses photography as a means of exploring themes related to identity, memory, and the human experience. Her works often incorporate text and other forms of media. Calle's use of *Anchorage* (Barthes 1977) in her photographic installation *Sleepers* (1979) provides context and directs the viewer's interpretation. Barthes notes that the *anchorage* function of language is to limit the possible meanings of an image and channel the viewer's conclusion in a particular direction. In *Sleepers* (1979), the captions provide information about the subjects of the photographs and their experiences, *anchoring* the viewer's interpretation towards a particular narrative and directing their attention. Calle's *Sleepers* (1979), images from the collection are hung on the left-hand wall of the gallery, her series depicts people asleep in public places, often in vulnerable or unexpected positions. The series explores the themes of vulnerability, privacy, and the relationship between public and private spaces. In the photographs I have chosen from Calle's collection the text is as follows: 'He wakes up while letting out great sighs, he dreams during the night...','Her sleep was impenetrable.' The text acts as an insight into the narrative I am presenting; sleep can be tumultuous for some and paralysing for others.



Date: 1979

Medium: Gelatin silver print

Dimensions: 61 1/4 × 176 × 1" (155.6 × 447 × 2.5 cm)

Frank Yamrus is an American photographer whose works explore the theme of masculinity and the male body. His black-and-white images of nude male figures often convey a sense of vulnerability and sensuality, and his use of light and shadow creates a dramatic and emotive visual style. Frank Yamrus' *Primitive Behaviour* (1994), hung on the walls adjacent to the archway (one on either side). The key features of *Primitive Behaviour* (1994) are the uses of black and white photography, which creates a stark contrast between light and shadow and emphasizes the raw energy of the images. The images are often composed in a way that emphasizes movement and action, with the human body serving as a focal point within the larger frame. The chosen photographs from Yamrus' collection *Primitive Behaviour* (1994) represents REM waking. During REM sleep, the body is typically paralyzed to prevent movement and protect against injury. However, in some cases, this paralysis can extend into wakefulness, leading to the experience of sleep paralysis (Jouvet, 1950) - Yamrus' photographs perfectly depict what this sensation feels like.

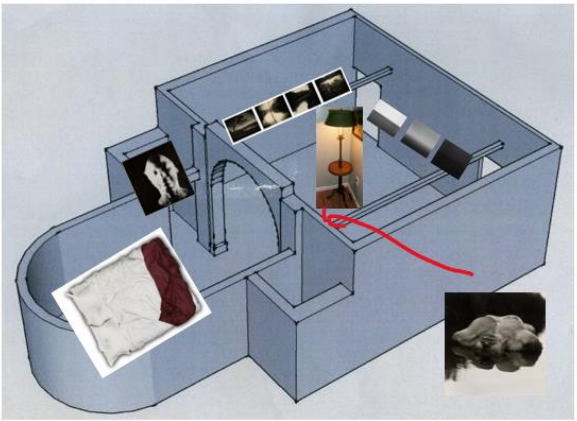
Date: 1995

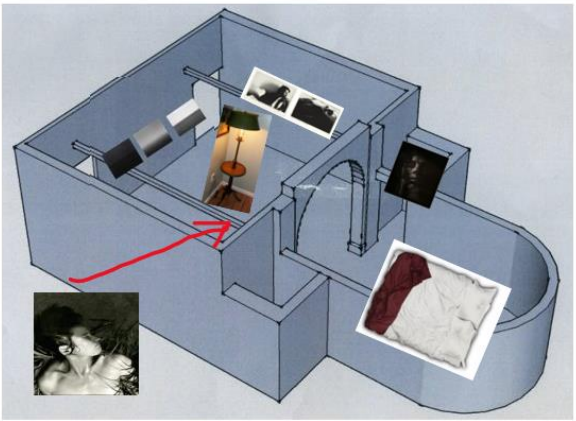
Medium: Gelatin silver print

Dimensions: 20 × 16 in | 50.8 × 40.6 cm

The exhibition offers a unique opportunity to engage with the diverse styles and subjects of these four talented photographers and to gain new insights into the power and potential of the photographic medium in creating different narratives and exploring different themes/ representations. I hope to convey the sense of vulnerability, malaise and cowing that I experience during 'bedtime', as an introspection.

Mission Gallery layout





Primitive behaviour pieces are placed on the inside wall when walking into the exhibition, facing the viewer as they walk into the space – adjacent to the archway.

Dramatic and contrasting lighting: I want to create a more dramatic effect and emphasize certain images and the theme within the exhibit, I am using contrasting lighting - To add directional lighting to highlight photographs and create shadows and contrast that add depth and intrigue to the space.

Use of sculpture and props: I have used a bed in my exhibition and a bed-side table with a warm tinted lamp placed on top to imitate a bedroom 'space' - this is to immerse the audience into the setting of a relaxed and vulnerable state.

The placement of images : the way I've placed the images is coercive to the narrative. It is organised thematically.

The dimensions of the images : All the images have different dimensions to implore different narratives.

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