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Question 5: Choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess consider primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

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BA Hons, Fine Art: Studio, Site and Context

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Alex Duncan

I want to explore the idea of 'perfection'. How can someone become 'perfection'? What is 'perfection'? And how can somebody say something is perfect when everything has flaws? I will be able to figure this out by looking at where and when were taught about perfection while growing up, and looking into artists that express natural beauty, and fake beauty where you just jump onto the trends. To gather information and form my own opinion I will be looking at artists such as Jenny Saville, Impressionism movement and social media.

Impressionism shows the women and men all formally dressed up, and having to be someone who they're not. I feel like this represents growing up nowadays as everyone looks exactly the same following a trend, you don't see people being original or doing what they want. That's due to the idea of being perfect, and you should be this way instead of how you want to be seen. Auguste Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (Fig. 1, 1880/1881) in this painting there a group of people who look high class, dressed up all looking fairly similar. The use of rich and deep colours makes the painting come together and makes the scene look high class living, showing how people dreamed to live like that. It creates a happy atmosphere as they are living their best life, due to the colour use and the expression on their faces.

Throughout my art practice I have been inspired by Jenny Saville's work as it shows and represents the raw beauty. She makes the colour palette cold and dingy, not to fantasize or romanticize the nude model. She shows you don't need to be 'perfection' to create something so beautiful. I find her work very meaningful and represents more than just something sexual. It just shows a body just like everyone else's. Jenny Saville's *Strategy (South Face/Front Face/North Face)* (Fig. 2, 1993/1994) is a female stood in different angles and directions, so she can't hide her impurities and flaws. The subject is an overweight woman in white underwear, towering over looking down at you, at unflattering angles. This shows the power she holds as she's looking down on the audience, unbothered for an opinion, or judgement. From this angle she captured the excess skin and weight being carried, The colour palette Saville uses brings out the shadows and indents, extenuating her weight as the shadows creates the harsh creases in the skin. Instead of removing the impurities, they're on show to all the viewers which could make many people feel vulnerable, she does this by using tones of blue and purple creating a cold tone. The style of work she portrays is brutality, deformed and mutilated, she does this to stop male domination through portraits and nudes. Saville has changed the tradition of female nude paintings, as she has the model wearing unflattering underwear, and

painting different body type. Not just the standard curvy women that will get the attention and gazes. This is because she's very much anti-beauty but finding beautiful in the non ideal. It shows realness and not sexually objectifying the model.

Lucian Freud has made an impact on my work as the subjects and colour palettes I find intriguing. Freud's *Benefits Supervisor Resting (Fig, 3. 1995)* has the subject with the weight of 127 kilograms, laying down as if she is sleeping, having her at her purest and comfortable. The painting is breaking out of the classic traditional nude portraits, showing off themselves and not trying to correct the 'imperfections'. This is one part of a collection of having her in different positions making her sit or lay uncomfortable, creating a better expression. He didn't want his paintings flattering, he wanted it realistic and not sugar coated. It shows the humanity and vulnerable, making all the curves and dips in the skin noticeable. The colour palette accentuates the skin around her body as he uses yellow and blue tones, combining a cold and warm contrast, creating a different texture to muscle.

Women always want to gain the male gaze, meaning they always have to look pretty or achieve perfection, which is the message through *Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (1990)*. "Women are represented falsely", this shows the weakness, and that they're only there to please the males, and to be objectified. "One becomes a woman from constructed behaviours seen from others", this can relate back to when we were younger were influenced by the people around us, including parents, friends and even fairytale stories, as everything we do is influenced by something we've seen before. Whereas when you get older social media influence you with what clothes you wear, how to do your hair, and the way you act. People are so scared to break out of that bracket as they will be judged, or bullied. Due to seeing how everyone acts from social media, to newspapers and the television, showing how 'perfection' acts and looks, and most of the time they're ideal perfection is through surgery or fillers reflecting society's trends. You see people as young as 18 getting lip fillers as they see social media influencers getting them and see it as a desire of idolised perfection.

Media has a huge impact on how people view themselves and others, people can be very judgemental on what you wear and how you act. There's always new trends that people need to so or even need to modify themselves, as it's the new big thing to do. This leads people to spend ridiculous amounts of money, and can be left with a terrible job which can be dangerous. It can be from new hairstyles, makeup trend to botox and lip fillers, different things to modify the way we can look to be 'perfect'. A lot of the time this is influenced by models, as they have to be beautiful to be able to be a model and we want to achieve that by copying what they are doing. It shows false representation on what we should be doing to change our looks or style, when we should be more focused on other things. There can also be no inbetween with the judgement on social media, you could put an image on and you could be called 'slutty', or you could be called a 'prude' for dressing in too much clothing. There is constant judgement which leads people to mental health issues or even worse

suicide. It affects people and there's always warnings out there not to do it as it does have a huge impact on people, and how they react is something nobody knows till the time. Another thing with is also always commented on is peoples weight, if they're to 'skinny' or to 'fat'. There was an image of Molly-Mae Hagne that people were body shaming her about, this social media star is size six, so what do people think the perfect size is? There isn't one as it should be the size where you're healthy but also happy within yourself, so why should people comment. This article (*Tiffany Wallis, 2019, 1*) shows the response to the negative comments from these images. "I was a stone and a half lighter a year ago but that's because I was at the gym twice a day, and was obsessed with my diet", this shows that she wasn't mentally healthy, as it looks like it got obsessive, or actually healthy, as she says "I am healthier" now that she has put weight on. From this article it shows that she isn't really happy in her body right, but how much of that is a strain from media and different comments.

From all the social media there has an impact on people, which you can find many articles that show statistics that back up that it isn't very good for your mental health. From reading (*Katie Hurley, 2019*) it educates on the different aspects of media that can cause anxiety and /or depression. "Need to gain 'likes'", this shows that they don't care what they post as long as they have a high number of likes, it shows that media is a popularity contest. Instagram has taken away the number of likes for this reason, hoping that it can help with people's mental health and to not think that it is a competition and to show its not relevant. Another thing is cyberbullying, it's easy to be on the flipside as how easy it is to put someone down, but even easier to do it online as you don't see the reaction and you won't realise you've done wrong. But this can "elevate risk of suicidal thoughts." this is the worst possible outcome but it has happened and it will keep happening if media isn't monitored properly to stop these things happening. People think that cyberbullying is fine as they're only 'putting their opinion out there', this can also lead from what we are taught what is meant to be perfect, but in reality it's not like that. Another thing is comparing yourself to others, which will then put yourself down, without the input of someone else. It's the mind saying you are not worthy and others can do it better, but in reality you are doing your best and there is always room for improvement. But no two people are the same so we should never compromise as there's always going to be things that you can put yourself down about. Another thing that can come out of social media which can be bad is fake friends, they can lead you astray, peer-pressure others into things which they wouldn't normally do. It's just more people who they think cares about them but they have things to bring that person down with information, screenshots and photos, that you wouldn't necessarily would want people to know.

Throughout this essay and researching different aspects of where perfection has come from I've found that through all the negative of media and how people are portrayed, there's some positives, like celebrities talking out on how it affects them, instagram taking away the likes from people saying, just so there's no competition or

comparison. All of this is that bit of awareness to show that it does hurt people, even the ones you think it wouldn't. After the feminism movement in art people are more aware of what they make people look like just to make the artwork prettier, or beautiful. But I think the real beauty is in artwork think Jenny Saville's its raw and realistic, not everyone is skinny or a healthy weight, but we shouldn't shame them if they are bigger. That's the message I see across all of her work, it makes the women look more empowering, and confident within themselves. Lucian Freud is also another artist to show raw beauty through his paintings, by using an overweight model and a colour palette to accentuate the weight, dips and curves. Freud is one of the only male artists to paint a women and to not sexualise them, but still makes the painting beautiful even if that's not what he was aiming for. I like the difference in his and Savilles colour palettes but they still have the same effect and the same type of meaning as they have raw beauty. It's good to see the different type of style they have created other than the normal paintings of women looking beautiful, all the curves in the right places. The typical figure every woman wants, it's refreshing to see the paintings done different and to have made such an impact. I hope that other artists are inspired by this and create paintings like this so then it isn't a shock value its normal as that's how it should be seen as. More artists and social media influences should push this message, to show its okay to be different and that nobody is perfect, so don't alter yourself to accomplish perfection. One thing isn't talked about enough is male perfection, how they feel they should change. Male depression has risen and people don't take them as serious as they should. They should have a six pack, muscles, be tall, all these different things to be 'perfect' not everyone will be that and I find that we don't reassure men enough on how they are the best version of themselves, and not to change because media told you to, do things for you and to show off or impress. Male perfection needs to be spoken up more as its shadowed over with how women feels, its as if it doesn't matter how they feel, there needs to be more awareness. Media makes people want to impress to show off what they got where they're going and who they're with. It's all just a competition to impress. I think that the impressionist movement has shown that the people they were painting were higher class as you can see from the clothing, and the surrounding. This shows how people wanted to live the dream for that to be their life.

Can we argue that people are putting these photos up to just to be constantly reminded of the good memories they created and the people who have been apart of their lives. That it's just their way of expressing themselves through the memories, but yet they are being judged for showing off, so there is no inbetween. We should let people post what they want without thinking that they are showing off, or to show people what they haven't or can't have.

Reference List

Fig 1



Lucian Freud
Luncheon of the Boat Party
1880/1881
[Oil on canvas]

Fig 2

Jenny Savillie
Strategy (South Face/ Front Face/ North Face)
1993/1994
Oil on canvas

Fig 3

Lucian Freud
Benefits Supervisor Resting
1995
Oil on canvas

Samuel Allen Chambers and Terrel Foster Carver (2009). Judith Butler and political theory : troubling politics. London: Routledge.