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Y2 photojournalism

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Movement, Ageing & deterioration

Research in practice

This essay explores my 3 keywords : Ageing, Deterioration and Movement. They will be supported by artists/photographers and philosophers that study/create art on these subjects such as James Hoskings, Giacomo Balla and Parmenides. These 3 keywords are compelling to me, I find the dilapidation and ageing of nature fascinating, whether that be a natural process or caused by humans. The ageing of the human body is seen as a taboo topic by our society, I would like to probe and explore these negative connotations surrounding it. I feel my third keyword 'Movement' went perfectly with my other words since it's broad with its meaning and has strong links to ageing and the passage of time. I would like to research into what ways artists express motion/movement in their work too. The research and further development of these three keywords will help me form a final question that will be used in my dissertation.

Ageing

My first keyword Ageing , a process of something becoming 'older'. This term can be used for the human body, plants and animals. I will be focusing specifically on the ageing of the human body.

"Ageing is the process during which structural and functional changes accumulate in an organism as a result of the passage of time. The changes manifest as a decline from the organism's peak fertility and physiological functions until death." (nature portfolio, no date)
<https://www.nature.com/subjects/agein>

Our society today is obsessed with the youthful human form, and with the rise of social media being in our everyday lives, we have created unrealistic views on how the ageing body really looks. Although in art, the ageing of a body shows a passing of time, it has negative connotations within mainstream culture. Features such as wrinkles, grey hair and sagging of the skin are generally dreaded. Below are some artists that I researched to explore ageing, specifically the older female human body, and why many see it as a taboo topic.

I researched 'Joan Semmel', an artist who creates work on the older female body. Born in 1932, American artist Joan Semmel is a painter, writer and also a professor. She is best known for her painted self portraits. Her paintings show images that aren't generally seen in a positive light by our society. She creates oil paintings of her own body (self portraits) with vibrant colour palettes.



Her work has given me a real raw sense of what ageing means, specifically the female body. I love that the paintings are very realistic with the general features of ageing such as sagging, wrinkles ect but there's also an abstract look to the work too, it reminds me of the work of cubism, with the bright colours and shapes used.

Joan Semmel (2018) *Revisiting*, available at
<https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/aia-reviews/joan-semmel-2-2-62632/>

“Through her paintings, she refuses to portray the naked body as a subject created to appeal to the male gaze. Through this, Semmel reclaims her own sexuality, thus exalting the topic of female sexuality and reinforcing a representation of the naked body that rebels against societal influence”. Alexandra Oduber (2019) ‘A Necessary Elaboration’ *Medium*.

<https://medium.com/lotus-fruit/joan-semmel-a-necessary-elaboration-fc1cfc0b7bba>

I like how Joan Semmel’s oil paintings are not intended for the ‘male gaze’ and are shown in an ‘unsexual way’, creating a raw view of the ageing female body. I think this goes against all negative connotations that society has for the ageing body. In today’s society, there is little to say about the ageing female body, it is generally centred around a young person/middle aged body and the attractiveness of it. Viewing the work myself, understanding that these paintings meanings, I find them in some way beautiful. The obvious aged bodies shown show a passage of time and movement through life.

I researched another artist, James Hosking. A San Francisco photographer and film-maker who is best known for his project into drag queens who work at ‘Aunt Charlie’s Lounge’. The club is set in a poverty struck neighbourhood which is known for addiction. The project offers viewers a raw insight into the personal rituals behind club scenes. This documentary style project offers viewers a rare glimpse of the transformation of drag queens behind closed doors. James Hosking hoped that this project would create a wider understanding of gender and ageing. When looking at Hosking’s project as a whole, I get a raw, new understanding of the people in these images. They are not defined by their age, showing the ageing human body in a new light, going against stereotypes of the older generation and ageism. Ageism is a discrimination based on the individuals age.



James Hosking (2009) *Beautiful by night* available at
<https://www.motherjones.com/media/2015/04/aunt-charlies-drag-james-hosking/>

I researched 'Aristotle's theory of ageing'. Aristotle was a famous figure in ancient Greek philosophy who showed fond interest in subjects such as physics, biology and criticism. Aristotle was also a student of Plato for a number of years which I found interesting as Plato's allegory of the cave is something I have extensively researched before. Plato and Aristotle had different opinions concerning old age. They differed with the optimistic and pessimistic views on ageing. Aristotle is famous for rejecting Plato's theories. Aristotle was the creator and originator of 'The scientific study of life'. He was one of the first to show interest in the subject of ageing. He describes ageing as a natural process and has issued many pages of research on death, youth, old age and life.

KEYWORD 2 : DETERIORATION

My second keyword is 'Deterioration'. Often referred to as something declining, worsening or failure. Since I've looked at ageing and deterioration within the human body, I'd like to explore deterioration in nature. This is called environmental degradation. This means the failing of ecosystems and habits. This is mostly caused by humans and pollution. Deterioration is usually referred to as something getting progressively worse. Deterioration is caused by physical damage and chemical activity. Chemically-induced deterioration consists of carbonation, corrosion of steel reinforcement, sulfate and acid attacks, or alkali-aggregate reactions.

I have explored some environmental artists who raise awareness about our planet's issues. Environmental art is a movement which started in the 1960s, it uses a wide range of media and techniques to get the message across. I found Chris Jordan, a Seattle based photographer/artist who transitioned to the art world from being a lawyer. His art combines photography with photoshop skills to show the viewer how easily we have destroyed our planet. An example of Chris Jordan's work is a photograph entitled 'Cigarette Butts' (2013) in which 139,00 cigarette butts are displayed in a collage form. It expresses how much is smoked and discarded every 15 seconds in the U.S. These have large impacts to our environment, especially our water sources. Not only are they not biodegradable, it leads to deterioration of our



wildlife. When seeking a philosopher that studied 'Deterioration', it was difficult to pick out someone who specifically studied this subject. Plato came to my attention, as he is known to have studied ageing, death and old age.

Chris Jordan (2013) 'Cigarette Butts' available at
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-10-08/americans-smoke-139-000-cigarettes-every-15-seconds-and-they-re-all-in-this-painting>

My second artist of research is Dan Dempster. An artist who places large pieces of steel into the ocean and uses the salt water to 'paint' his 'canvases'. I am really interested in art from natural processes and this links to my keyword of deterioration. Inspired by his childhood, his art has strong connections to the water and ocean. Deterioration of artwork, in particular paintings, can be produced by environmental factors such as temperature fluctuations, relative humidity variations, ultraviolet radiation and biological factors among others. These factors can represent deterioration in an art piece. Rust is a result of the corroding steel after iron particles are exposed to oxygen or moisture. When Dan Dempster's work was placed into the water, after a period of time, the iron particles were lost to the ocean's acidic electrolytes. For example Dan Dempster uses rust to represent deterioration in his art, rust gets worse over time which can also be linked back to ageing.

Movement

My next chosen keyword is 'Movement'. Which translates to the act of moving such as within the body or in nature. It could represent a change or development within our society too. Within art we use the term 'movement' to categorise art works through the years. Some examples of art movements, in non particular order, are futurism, cubism and fauvism. When I think of movement, I think about the human body and the movements within it and on further research, I have found interest in the human eye and how specifically artists use movement in art to redirect our interest. Movement can be seen as the path the human eye takes through artwork to the focal areas such as certain colours, lines etc. The most effective technique to show movement in art would be directional brushwork. Another technique could include using warm and cold tones to show the movement of temperature in an art piece. Contrasting smooth and impasto textures can also be a technique of movement.

I researched the artist Giacomo Balla, who was part of the Italian Futurist group. He used the idea of fast machines such as cars which he would use to express his ideas of the nature of speed. His initial start of these projects began with sketches of a car which then would be developed into a distorted image which created the illusion of speed.



Giacomo Balla (1913) *The car has passed* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/giacomo-balla-688>

"the car has just passed through this scene, leaving us not with an image of a moving car, but an image of speed itself".

<https://garethleaman.com/2009/12/11/the-sublime-and-giacomo-ballas-abstract-speed-the-car-has-passed-1913/>

Although his painting at first glance is quite inconceivable, after carefully examining, you can start to pick out the main subjects such as the sky, landscape and the white road the car would have travelled on. The vehicle would have passed from the right of the scene, creating the movement. Although the car is not actually present, the distorted movement is evidence it was once there. Futurism was an art movement, originating in Italy which expressed speed, technology and violence. During these times, technology was changing dramatically with the introduction to more trains, trams and automobiles. With this growth of technology, led to an altered sense of self for men in particular and much excitement. The futurist groups promoted this new form of speed and it began a popular appearance within their work.

Artists can create movement within their images or artwork with rhythm by repetition of colours or lines ect. Lines can be expressed as a possible path, maybe to lead you in a particular order through the artwork. Lines could be straight or zigzagged depending on what the artist is trying to express. They may use primary colours to symbolise what certain subjects mean. This repetition is called 'motif' and I believe art must have a motif of some kind.

Philosophy of movement/motion is about exploring questions on the existence and nature of motion. The philosophy of movement/motion was studied by many influential philosophers such as Parmenides and Democritus. I did further research into philosopher Parmenides (475 BC), a greek philosopher who was the founder of metaphysics and ontology. They believed that movement is perceived but cannot actually exist. This theory links to the art of Giacomo Balla, and how although the car isn't physically present, it leaves us with our perception of speed itself.

In conclusion , I have researched three of my chosen keywords in depth, looking at specific artists and philosophers of that chosen subject to support it. I knew I wanted to explore the passage of time in some way. This term is very broad, so I looked at the ageing of the human body, closing in on specifically the female body with my chosen artist Joan Semmel. I also looked into the decay of materials and the environmental side of my other keyword deterioration. I was fascinated by the research I found on my keyword of 'Movement' and the futurism art movement. With careful consideration, I have decided to explore the passage of time and movement. I would like to explore if movement can be perceived or is it just the aftermath of the moving object that we see. I want to continue my research into the futurism movement and specifically how the artists expressed speed and fast movement. All of this has led up to my question in which I wish to research and write about next year in my dissertation which is "How do artists express movement in their work".

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