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Ways of Perceiving ADAD4019

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Words 1638

Do Not Stand for it.

When I was a child of about 11, I visited an art gallery in a museum. It was an unpleasant experience as it was crowded and the paintings were mainly oil portrait images of royalty and rich people from English history.

I remember they were surrounded by gaudy and ornate gold-coloured frames and that I had to crane my neck to try to see properly. I also remember that I had to shuffle along in a queue, regardless of how slow or fast I wanted to go, fenced behind a fancy, thick red rope. It was hot and airless and I was not able to position myself in a way that I could see and peruse.

The art meant little to me and made no positive connection and I felt queasy. I remember the feeling of relief when I escaped outside. John Berger (1972), in *Ways of Seeing*, suggests that many historical oil paintings and their display were a way for the social elites to maintain their positions of power and control. Later Berger argues that many examples of this genre of art only serve the vanity and self interest of the wealthy and were not intended to engage and enthrall me as a spectator and I interpret this view as meaning that often this genre of art lacks integrity and is insincere.

While being trapped in the crowd in that gallery I could hear other people pass admiring comments and exclaim wonder and amazement at these expensive works of art and I felt excluded and ashamed that I lacked the ability to appreciate these paintings in the same way. It felt as if they were seeing something obvious and delightful but that was invisible to me. The fact that these works were presented in a traditionally formalised gallery setting invited an appreciation that I was not able to respond to. Berger points out that trends in art appreciation are tastes preserved mainly for the rich.

He also talks about the 'bogus religiosity' that surrounds many works of art and how this affected and perhaps insincere celebration is linked to the market of art objects as commodities.

Berger points out that since the age of photography, where an exact reproduction can be made repeatedly, it is the cynical emphasis on the originality of the art that is to be venerated, otherwise the object itself loses some market value and a reduction of income for the market participants.

I do not believe that all art is bogus, commercially derived or meaningless and I do not think John Berger did either. He refers to masterful artists such as Turner and Rembrandt but points out that these brilliant practitioners were very much the exception to the rule.

As a curator of an exhibition, I would be keen to avoid creating a similar experience for my viewers.

My space is represented in a digital format at

<https://www.artsteps.com/profile/606c2327b46ebd9c0713e1cc>

My initial intention was to avoid interaction with a digital interface and to construct my curatorial space as a wooden model. I am increasingly troubled by how much time we seem to be forced to sit in front of screens and like Bennett who writes, "I want to promote greener forms of human culture and more attentive encounters between people-materialities and thing-materialities." (Bennett, (2010, p.5).

It occurred to me that a digital site juxtaposed against the themes of my collection may add another layer of contemplation. Can there be a vital active spectatorship in the digital world?

Louisiana Channel (2018) sets an interview with Hiroshi Sugimoto in a beautiful building of concrete and glass next to the sea. It seemed to me that the digital building in Artsteps closely resembles this place and the imagined setting was in one sense perfect. It provides a virtual feeling of space, light and tranquillity that I would not have been able to achieve with a model. I reluctantly accept that this digital tool is useful and raises a question in my mind; how does a digital experience compare with a real-life event?

In this setting the exhibition could be described as an installation perhaps. Bishop (2005) suggests that if a viewer is 'embodied' in the space where a number of senses are intentionally engaged then this term is contestably appropriate. I wish to use the location, the setting, the wind, the sea, the building and the works themselves to create an immersive experience. Although my claim to an installation may be questioned by Bishop with her thoughts on 'decentred subjects' and 'activated spectatorship'. I wonder if in my exhibition the spectators are sufficiently embodied to call it an installation, particularly as they are not embodied at all but interacting with digital zeros and ones.

Perhaps an installation is not an appropriate term and this show takes on a more traditional structure. Perhaps it does not matter what it is called.

Bishop describes how the conventions of descriptive categorisations are challenged and reimagined by Robert Morris with his interchangeable interpretations of the words gallery and environment.

I enjoyed visiting the Rothko rooms at the Tate Modern. I was captivated by the sublime and deeply pensive experience and I believe that I entered a state of heightened perception.

I would want my curated images to be on a large scale, similar in size to the Rothko works in the Tate. Barthes (2000) states that an image should be large enough so that the viewer does not have to study it. I want the viewer to be able to sit comfortably in front of them and still have their views filled by the image. I do not want the viewer to have to peer into a small frame even if it means not using the original work of art but rather an enlargement.

Perhaps in contrast to Berger, Benjamin (2008) seems to argue that an original has more value in a non-monetary sense than a copy as it carries with it an aura from the artist which might be lost in a mechanically reproduced copy. I can sense the validity of his argument and this presents me with a dilemma. Perhaps in a perfect world if the original is not large enough for comfortable viewing, then we could have the original and a high-quality large print by its side. But if it appears in digital form then this further confuses the situation.

I hope to present uncomplicated and naturalistic works by masters of their craft and I consider all to be sublime, poetic, deeply sincere and worthy of lengthy interaction. I would hope to suggest that images can be simple in composition and yet provoke a meaningful dialogue. I believe that the artist's love and honesty in creativity shines through and I believe that the pieces I have chosen are magnificent examples, albeit in digital imagining.

I would hope that a viewer will be invited to contemplate and meditate on the beauty of the natural world and also to reflect upon the existential current dilemmas facing us.

The virtuoso artists I wish to show are Fay Goodwin, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Mark Rothko, Michael Ackerman and Lang Jingshan. I also include a photograph taken by Nasa's Cassini spacecraft. The works are presented in a minimalist, airy and light filled, concrete and glass building situated on a cliff top next to the Bristol Channel. There are swaying trees outside and the sound of the wind and ocean can be heard through the many open windows. We are on the Gower coast and the day is sunny and the air is warm and scented by the sea and an occasional waft of vanilla tinged gorse. Fat bumble bees cruise by and there are cries of seagulls. We are alone in the gallery; but we are not, we are sat in front of a screen.

If it were real, I intend to seek to create a sense of heightened perception and to invite a lingering gaze. Bishop, refers to Carsten Holler's *Lichtwand* (Light wall) 2000, which intentionally makes the spectator uncomfortable, but my intention is to make the viewer as comfortable as possible. There

will be no gawdy and ornate gilt frames nor heavy red ropes to cordon people. Viewers will be able to sit at a comfortable distance.

Bishop notes that In the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that the viewer is an elemental part of cultural interaction and that pieces do not stand alone. She explains that these ideas were widely explored against a background of increasingly minimalistic works during the 1960's. There was questioning around the objecthood of an artwork.

My exhibition is presented in a minimalist environment and some of the works might be described as sparse but I would argue, not bare. Rothko's *Black on Maroon* for example is intended to be gazed at and the work itself is only one part of the artist's intentions. The Tate Britain (2020) explains how Rothko himself would sit in front of his works for hours on end and that his instructions to the Tate specify precisely how they were to be presented. Rothko wanted his viewers to immerse themselves in his paintings, to be enthralled and engaged. The fact that he rejected payment for this commission and that he committed suicide just hours after donating 9 works to the Tate leaves me in no doubt about the deep sincerity of his craft.

My inclusion of Fay Goodwin was carefully considered as I felt that I had to include at least one woman. I could have chosen one of several British landscape photographers whose work I admire. I assuage myself of guilt over these thoughts as the history of art is itself apparently sexist. My pool of female works is limited by this discrimination. For example, Grundberg, (1990) describes the work of 47 artists, only 7 of whom are female.

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