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Ways of Perceiving (ADAD4019)

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Exhibition Title – “A Journey Through A Breakdown”

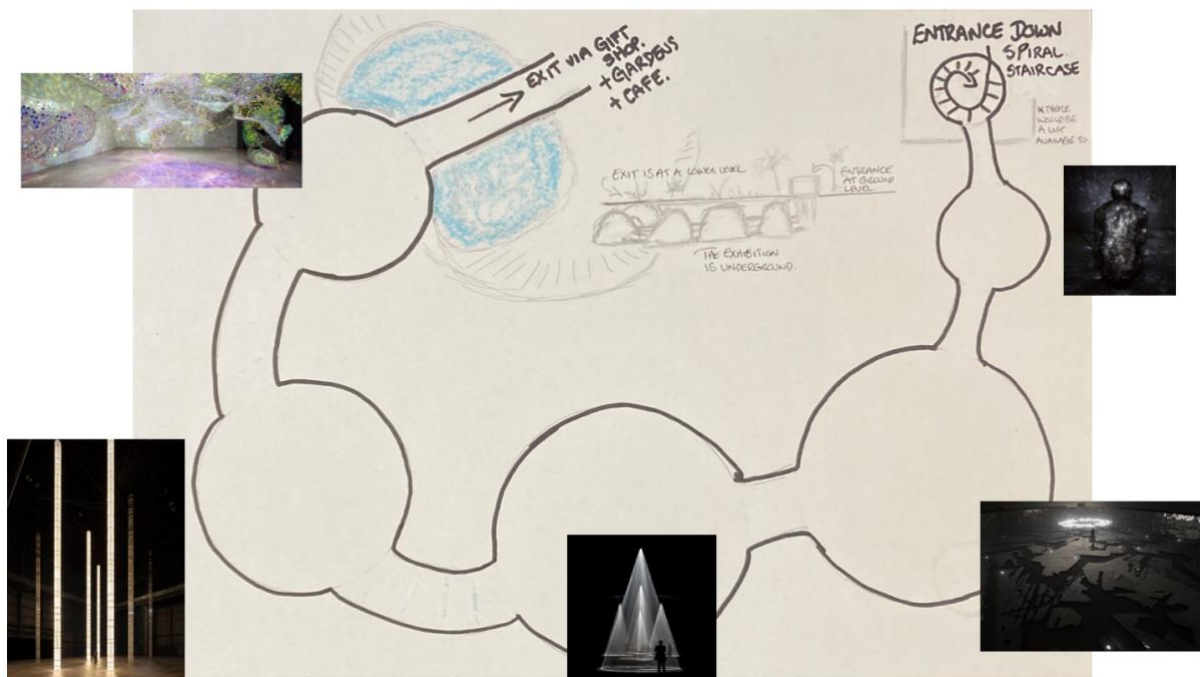
A seemingly simple task, to put on an exhibition. But what is curating? In his book “Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Curating”, Hans Ulrich Obrist gives us this definition -

“curating is being involved in the creation, production, realisation and promotion of ephemeral situations.” (p167). In an afterword of the same book Yona Friedman elaborates further with this statement - *“It is the Curator who “makes a text” out of the collection of distinct messages formed by each work of art displayed in an exhibition” (p207).*

The exhibition I am curating is based on a narrative of mental health and well-being, and it takes the form of a journey from breakdown to ‘recovery’ through the medium of installation Art and Light.

With the theme of mental illness I wanted to site the exhibit in a dark confined space initially, and read a quote from John Berger – *“The Visual Arts have always existed within a certain preserve; originally this preserve was magical, or sacred. But it was also physical, it was the place, the cave, the building, in which, or for which, the work was made” (p32).* As such, I first thought of a Cave, like the Caves of Lascaux in France which *“still have about them something that seizes, spellbinds the visitor, quickens his pulse” (Skira, p56-57).* However the layout was wrong, I wanted the viewers to start the journey in one place and emerge at a different location. Then I remembered visiting “The House at Tahiche”, which is run by the Cesar Manrique Foundation, in Lanzarote. This would make a great imagined space, being a series of rooms created underground, from lava bubbles in an old lava field joined by lava tunnels, and accessed via a spiral staircase at one end, and exited via a collapsed lava bubble at the other.

Map of the Exhibition:



The viewer commences the journey by descending a spiral staircase to the lower level. The process of negotiating stairs forces you to slow down, to pause, to concentrate on, and engage with your surroundings, and so it focuses your mind on the experience ahead, whilst letting your eyes accustom to the growing darkness of descending underground. "The darkness does not enslave and disempower you. It emancipates you from the realm of images where everything has already been settled" (Carter, p49). From here on the interpretation of each artwork is offered by me, the curator, but ultimately you may see things differently due to your current state of mind and emotional state.

At the base of the stairs you then progress into the first space:

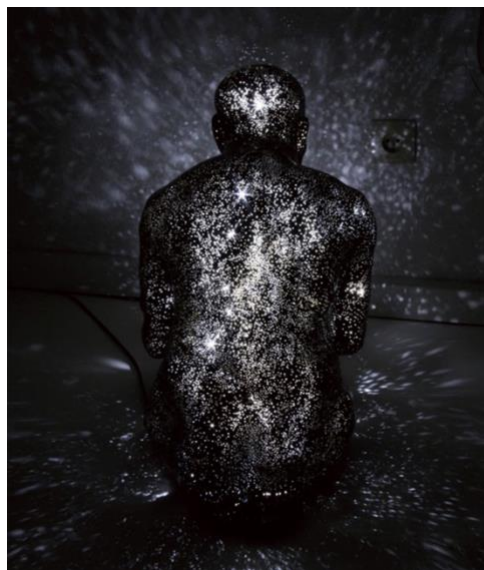


Figure 1

Within this space you are aware of a figure crouched on the floor to one side of the room. Light is emanating from hundreds of holes pierced in the figure, which spangle the space with light. The Artwork is by Mihiko Ogaki, and is entitled "Milky Way Figure" (2013). It is composed of fibre reinforced plastic, embedded with bright LED's. The holes within the figure are metaphors for the number of emotions a person embodies and experiences within a lifetime. My interpretation of this is that some people just experience too much emotionally, and then one day something happens and it's just too much. The person crumples, overcome by life – almost 'exploding' in their mind which is represented by the fractured light projected around the room.

For many people this is, sadly, where their journey ends, but for others it is just the start of an often long, difficult and circuitous path to a position of being able to function within society again.

To continue the journey from here you will have to pass through the confined space of a lava tunnel, much like *"To live is to pass from one space to another, while doing our very best not to bump yourself"* (Perez, p6) It's all we try to do in life, move forward in the hope that what lies ahead is better not worse.



Figure 2

Emerging from the tunnel, you will enter a black dimly lit space. However, *“Is black hopeless? Doesn’t every dark thundercloud have a silver lining? In black lies the possibility of hope. (Jarman, p138).*

This installation is by Lee Bul, and is entitled “Civitas Solis”(2014). It is comprised of Polycarbonate Sheets, Acrylic Mirrors and LED lights.



Figure 3

The viewer negotiates a twisting path through floating fractured mirrors, which In the context of this exhibition can be interpreted as similar to that of wandering with a fractured mind, disorientated, trying to make sense of what is going on in your head. All the while trying to get to the light, the ‘hope’ that Jarman alludes to. After all, Is that not what we want in the dark, to see some light?

From here you then enter another tunnel and progress to the next space, which is another dark space, this time illuminated by a series of veils of light, that appear motionless at times, but then move and 'draw' on the floor.



Figure 4

This Artwork is by Anthony McCall, and is entitled "5 Minutes of Pure Sculpture" (2012). The installation comprises of a series of these 'veils' that lead the viewer across the space. The veils of light appear 'solid', but you can pass through them. In Edward T Halls book, "The Hidden Dimension", the author says the following; *"A persons sense of space is closely related to their sense of self, which is in an intimate transaction with their environment"* (Hall,p63). With this installation you can 'touch' the veils, and pass through them, yet they appear solid. For people dealing with mental health many obstacles appear 'solid' on some days, but not on another. In some publicity for this work I see people lying down on the floor, and I imagine that's a person having a bad day mentally, unable to push through that mental barrier at that moment. Regrouping almost, before pushing on once more.

Through another tunnel, you will then emerge into another space, which is occupied by immense Pillars of Light, that have pierced through natural holes in the ceiling.

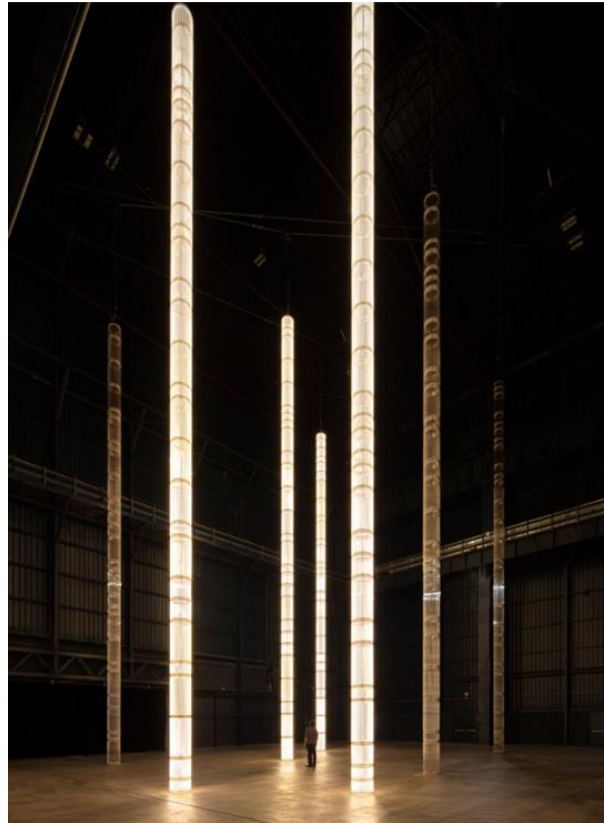


Figure 5

This is an installation by Cerith Wynn Evans entitled “Star Star Star/Steer (Totransversephoton)” (2019) These pillars are 20 metres high, and they pulsate with a glowing warm light, that alters in intensity. Sometimes just one or two illuminate, at others all of them illuminate. They are Monumental in scale, and a Monument “*is an attempt at the tangible expression of permanence or, at the very least, duration*” (Auge, p60). In the context of this exhibition the pillars represent strength, and the pulsating light represents a growing awakening of the person, a slow realisation that things might be okay. The pillars going through the ceiling make the viewer wonder what is beyond this space, just as someone recovering from a breakdown might begin to wonder and be curious about going forward with life, ie duration.

The viewer now passes through another tunnel to emerge into another space. This one has large holes in the ceiling letting in natural daylight, there are more bigger holes towards the back of the space. The space is also painted white towards the back of the room reflecting the light, and colours of the next installation. This is an example of ‘phenomenal’ art and “*The intention of phenomenal art is simply the gift of seeing a little more today than you did yesterday*” (Irwin, p18) in Jan Butterfeild’s Book . Rather than seeing the artwork and interpreting it through intuition or deduction, you perceive it with your senses.



Figure 6

The installation is by Soo Sunny Park, and is entitled “Unwoven Light” (2013). The artwork is comprised of Chain link fence fitted with plexiglass coated in dichroic film. The work is suspended in the air, and moves across the space in a sinuous organic form. The colour shifts depending on the light and viewing angle.

This piece marks a turning point in ‘the journey’. The dancing light brings feelings of wonderment and joy, feelings a mentally ill person may not have experienced in a long time. Like wise the colours of this piece can convey feelings not felt in a while, “as pinks are seen as romantic and healthy, whilst purples are seen as contemplative and sensual, and the pure white on the walls can be interpreted as “a clean slate” (Eiseman, p23,p47 &p56), or a fresh start.

This installation leads out beyond this space, and leads the viewer out into the open onto a bridge where the dancing light will be intensified by direct sunlight, and bounced around the outside walls and off the water of the pool you have to cross over, before entering the garden on the other side. You would then exit via the gift shop, an illusion to a return to ‘normal life’.

In conclusion this is a simplistic take on the mental health journey for the purposes of an Exhibition. In reality everybody’s journey will be very personal and unique to them, as will their interpretation of the exhibition. Referring back to the beginning of our ‘journey’, Mihoko Ogaki’s crouching figure is often interpreted as alluding to life, death and rebirth. A mental breakdown is like this, in that you ‘die’ mentally, but hopefully you are then ‘reborn’ (the same person, but forever different), through whatever help you can access on your journey.

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FIGURES

- Figure 1 – Ogaki, Mihoko, "Milky Way Figure" (2013), (thisiscolossal.com), (accessed 05/03/2022)
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- Figure 4 – McCall, Anthony, "Five Minutes of Pure Sculpture" (2012), (trishclark.co.nz), (accessed 05/03/2022)
- Figure 5 – Evans, Cerith Wyn, "Star Star Star / Steer (Totransversephoton)" (2019), (studiointernational.com), (accessed 05/03/2022)
- Figure 6 – Park, Soo Sunny, "Unwoven Light" (2013), (soosunnypark.com), (accessed 05/03/2022)