

Student Name: Rachel Kestin

Student Number: 1907798

Programme of Study: Creative Advertising

Word count: 1589

Tutor/s: Jon Pugh and Martin Bush

To curate an exhibition from one's own mind. However, the mind can be a scary place!

Or is that what this exhibition content is going to make you believe? "The way we see things is affected by what we know or by what we believe" (John Burger, 2008, p.4).

Within the exhibition, that is named '*Presence of Past*', the spectator is going to be taken on a metaphysical experience with a composition of art works that depict examples of supernatural beings over five centuries. There will be five pieces of art that have been created by four different artists. They each portray the artists representation of a different kind of supernatural. The aim of the exhibition is to give people an insight of how the supernatural can make you feel, not to intentionally scare but to fuel the bodies adrenaline. The expectation of the exhibition is for the spectators to let down their guard and experience the supernatural from a whole new dimension. Viewing art pieces from centuries past with an open mind, as said by René Block (2014) "The participation of the public should take place in the mind".



Figure One – Warwick Castle Dungeon

The exhibition will be held within the dungeon of Warwick Castle – Figure one, in the hope that this area will enhance the concept of the supernatural. It is a place often visited in large numbers by the general public. This beautiful picturesque castle steeped in history will set the perfect scene for the supernatural artwork. “Historical buildings and archaeological sites can be used to establish the history of a nation in people’s minds” (Bernard M. Feilden, 2007, p. 23). The dungeon, an already dank, old, decaying area, that would not require much work to set an ominous scene. Nature has already taken its course on this area, with moss growing, water trickling the walls and putrid smell of decay. When entering the dungeon there are six steps down, the stairs will be split down the middle, to create a one-way system, as show below in Figure Two (below). The one-way system will take visitors clockwise round the exhibition and back out using the same stairs. Right in the centre of the dungeon there is a cesspit, a small hole in the ground, this will have barriers around it for health and safety purposes. There will be a quiet but chilling sound track on in the background, to add to atmosphere. Each picture will be enlarged to A2 size and be encased

in an old-fashioned gold frame, with a plaque displaying the art name, date and artist. The framed pictures will be hung on the wall 1.5 meters from the ground and have a small gold light fixture above, this will be the only source of light in the area.

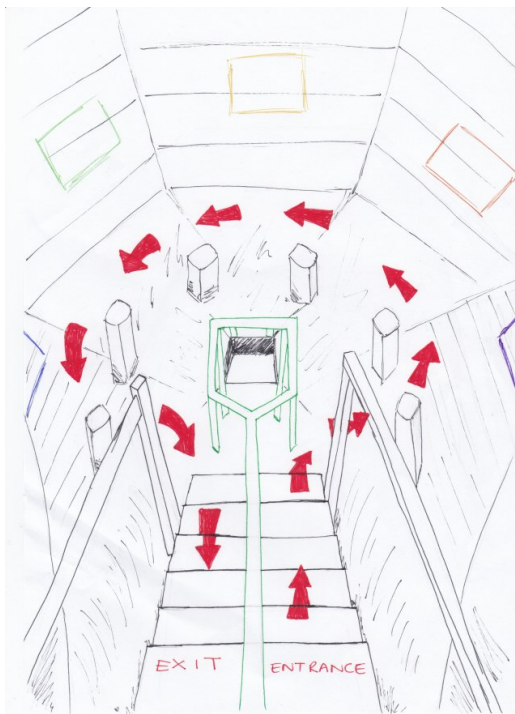


Figure Two - Mind Map

Mind Map of exhibition colour Key:

Purple Frame – Figure Three

Orange Frame – Figure Four

Yellow Frame – Figure Five

Green Frame – Figure Six

Blue Frame – Figure Seven

Red Arrows – One-way system

Green – Safety Barrier

On entrance to the dungeon and directly to the right will be the first piece of the exhibit.

This art piece named '*Hell*' by Hans Memling – Figure Three (below), was painted c.1485, the oldest of the chosen pieces. As the title of the art suggests this is a portrayal of hell, the devil himself implying there is no redemptions when you arrive. This immediately links to the concept theme of the supernatural. Does heaven and hell actually exist? Is there a devil and other evil creatures waiting to punish you for your sins when you die as the artist has set out to display? Religion plays a large part of my exhibition, if you are religious you may already have strong beliefs about the afterlife:

The explanation for religious beliefs and behaviours is to be found in the way all human minds work. I really mean *all* human minds, not just the minds of religious people or of some of them. I am talking about *human* minds because what matters here are properties of the minds that are found in all members of our species with normal brains. (Pascal Boyer, 2008, p.11).

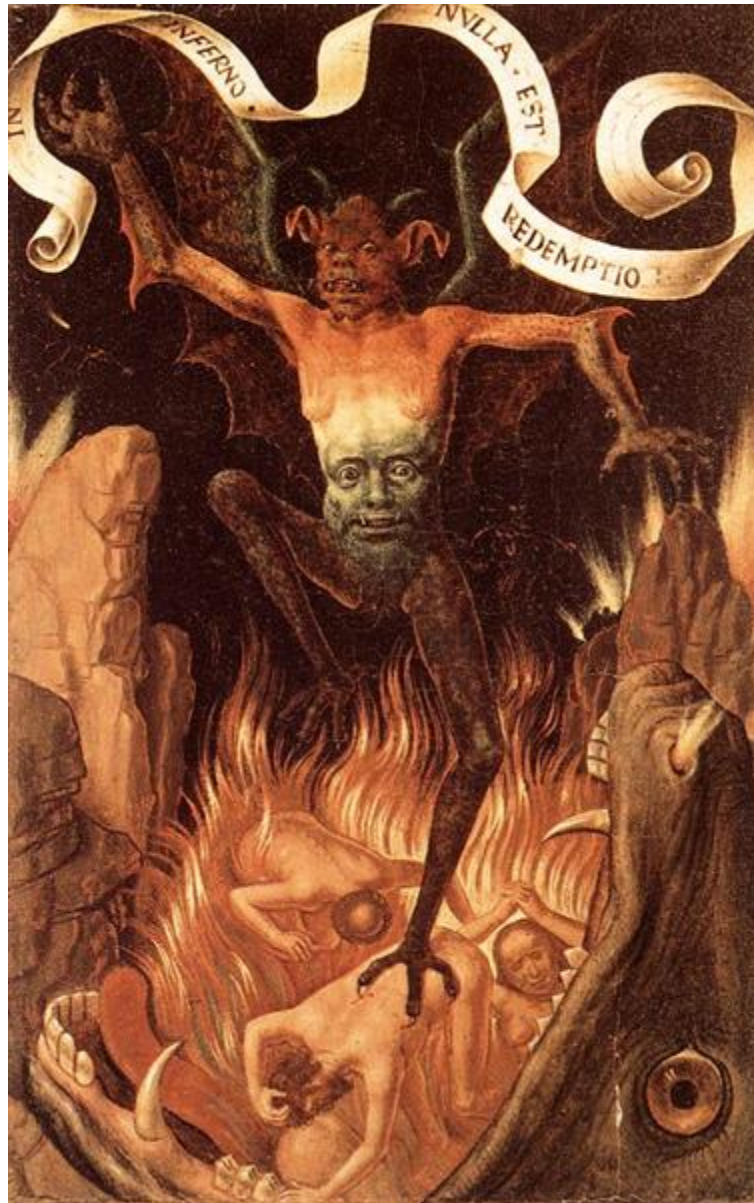


Figure Three – *Hell* by Hans Memling

Moving forward you approach the next framed picture - figure four (below). This piece created by Caravaggio in 1596-98 showing the head of the well know woman of Greek mythology called Medusa. The choice of this art piece is because the story of Medusa is fairly well known “a woman with snakes for hair who turned people into stone by looking at

them” (Caravaggio, 2009). Most can identify at a glance who this woman is. As the first image in my exhibition shows a character that is always depicted as a male, it was only fitting to follow with a supernatural female as the second image. Both equally as scary and both strong characters within the realm of the supernatural.



Figure Four – *Medusa* by Caravaggio

Leading on from Figure four, you approach a slightly different piece of artwork. Figure Five (below) – ‘*The nightmare*’ – by Henry Fuseli painted in 1782. The picture itself showing a woman in a deep sleep experiencing sleep paralysis. Although sleep paralysis can be petrifying it is not normally described as supernatural:

Let me say in plainly. If you have had a Sleep Paralysis and, upon awakening, see people who aren't really there, trust that you are not suffering a psychotic breakdown. Nor are you necessarily haunted by ghosts or malevolent entities, which is the historical and folk explanation for this phenomenon (Ryan Hurd, 2011, p.16)

But that being said, what you see within your dreams are supernatural figures, as Dr. Noelle Paulson (2015) describes "The figure that sits upon the woman's chest is often described as an imp or an incubus" so the supernatural is present within this image and keeps within the curational ideas.



Figure Five - *The nightmare* – by Henry Fuseli

As shown below – Figure Six is the next art piece on show in the exhibition. Named '*The Witch and the Mandrake*' another piece by Henry Fuseli painted in 1812. The choice to include an art piece of a witch because not only was it painted by Henry Fuseli 30 years after his painting of *The Nightmare*, it links back to the first image – Figure Three, of the Hell. Witches are renowned for using magic and spells are said to draw their power from the devil "Many French models of witchcraft depicted the witch more as a demonized heretic –

a being defined by her willing entry into the demonic pact and her worship to the devil” (Hans Peter Broedel, 2013, p.6). Although witchcraft is still practiced by people today, it is known as a “ultimately supernatural” (Hans Peter Broedel, 2013, p.4).



Figure Six - *The Witch and the Mandrake* by Henry Fuseli



Figure Seven - *Premonition* by Henryk Weyssenhoff

The last piece of art that is on display in the exhibition is '*Premonition*' by Henryk Weyssenhoff painted in 1893 – Figure Seven (above). At a glance the supernatural component of this image is not so obvious. A harder look however shows a hollow ghostly presence of death or otherwise known grim reaper, a conjured figure in which collects our souls after we die. That begs the question do we have a soul:

Most nonphilosophers seem to believe that each person has a nonphysical soul that continues to exist after the death of the body, perhaps in heaven, hell or purgatory. But this view is not widely held by philosophers, because the existence of a nonphysical soul is usually thought to be problematic. (Bradley, Feldan and Johansson, 2015, p.2).

The choice of this piece of art is because it is haunting to look at and leads to questions such as, what is death and where do we go after we die? This image is displayed last in the hope that the spectator will leave the exhibition feeling a little more open minded to the idea of the supernatural, as eventually, death becomes us all.

Of course, people that enter the exhibition will already have their own beliefs, do they or do they not already believe in the supernatural. This itself will immediately determine their attitude towards the exhibition. Some may walk in brave with no fear, whilst others may be put off by the location itself, the exhibition name, the darkness or their own irrational fears. The hope is to challenge them and their mind because after all "The 'normal' world out there is not really so normal at all. There is a great many paranormal features that need to be explained" (Rupert Matthews, 2010, p.10).

Overall, there was a choice made to use five pieces of different artwork that fit within the concept of the supernatural and they have complimented each other well. These images have portrayed just a small fraction of possible supernatural encounters or beliefs that have been experienced or documented. There are many other products that could have been used to portray the supernatural, however the decision to use art/artists throughout history

to show this concept proves how the supernatural has had an impact on people over hundreds of years and will continue to do so for many more. What the spectators of this exhibition choose to see and experience when viewing these selected art pieces is ultimately their choice, after all “A Firework display seems more interesting than an empty parking lot, even though vision uses the same mechanisms to see both of them” (Mark Turner, 1996, p. 43).

Bibliography

Bradley, B and Feldam, F and Johansson, J. (2015) *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death*. UK: Oxford University Press.

Broedel, H.P. (2013). *The Malleus Maleficarum: Theology and Popular Belief (Studies in Early Modern European History)*. UK: Manchester University Press.

Burger, J. (2008). *Ways of Seeing*. Great Britain: Penguin Books Ltd.

Boyer, P. (2008). *Religion Explained*. London: Vintage Books.

Feilden, B.M. (2007). *Construction of Historic Buildings*. Abingdon: Taylor and Francis.

Hurd, R. (2011). *Sleep Paralysis, A guide to Hypnagogic Visions and Visitors of the Night*. California: Hyena Press.

Matthews, R. (2010). *The Little Book of Paranormal*. Stroud: The History Press.

Turner, M. (1996). *The Literary Mind, The Origins of Thought and Language*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Caravaggio (2009). *Medusa 1957*. Available at: <https://www.caravaggio.org/medusa.jsp> (Accessed: 29 April 2020).

Dr. Paulson, N. (2015). *Henry Fuseli, The Nightmare*. Smart History. Available at: <https://smarthistory.org/henry-fuseli-the-nightmare/> (Accessed: 1 May 2020).

Ruttimann, S. and Seinsoth, K. (2014). *Issue 22, Politics of Display*. Available at: <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-22-43/interview-with-rene-block.html#.XpHTrS2ZMU>

List of Figures

Figure One: *Warwick Castle Dungeon*. Available: <https://stratfordobserver.co.uk/news/dungeon-set-to-reveal-dark-side-of-warwick-10124/> (Accessed: 17 April 2020).

Figure Two: Kestin, R. (2020) Exhibition Map. [Hand Drawn, Scanned].

Figure Three: Lizzy Vartanian. (2019). '*The scariest art works in art history*'. [Blog]. 31 October. Available at: <https://theartgorgeous.com/scariest-art-works-art-history/> (Accessed: 29 April 2020).

Figure Four: Lizzy Vartanian. (2019). '*The scariest art works in art history*'. [Blog]. 31 October. Available at: <https://theartgorgeous.com/scariest-art-works-art-history/> (Accessed: 29 April 2020).

Figure Five: Tate. (1998). *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and Romantic Imagination*. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/gothic-nightmares-fuseli-blake-and-romantic-imagination/gothic> (Accessed: 29 April 2020).

Figure Six. Tate: (1998). *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and Romantic Imagination, Room 5 Witches and Apparitions*. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/gothic-nightmares-fuseli-blake-and-romantic-imagination/gothic> (Accessed: 29 April 2020).

Figure Seven: Mutual Art. (2008). *Henryk Weyssenhoff, Artworks*. Available at: <https://www.mutualart.com/Artist/Henryk-Weyssenhoff/6DADC19A34A385C2/Artworks> (Accessed: 29 April 2020).