

Reflection Statement.

What is art? Is there one objective, precise definition, or is it destined to become another vague umbrella term oft-sprouted by many and understood by none? This is the exact purpose of my Extension II Major Work - to examine the dynamic facets of art and its myriad interpretations, starting from its genuine, almost cathartic origins and culminating in its postmodern breakdown.

My work incorporates a multitude of highly distinctive voices to propagate the notion that the truth regarding art is not singular; instead, it is composed of a conversation of divergent viewpoints and narrators, an idea that stemmed from my research into Lyotard's concept of Grand Narratives¹ as part of the *Preliminary English Extension Unit, Postmodernism*. I realised that art itself was a "totalizing cultural...schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience"² (McCallum's definition of a Grand Narrative), and I aimed to decompose it into its constituent "mini-narratives".

Despite the intricate references and underlying themes regarding art in my work (which may perhaps hold more interest for those acquainted with art history and appreciation), it has the potential to engage a multitude of adult audiences due to its broad-ranging and transcendental concepts, including the universality of loss and difficulties of ascertaining one's identity in a postmodern society. Literary magazines such as *Kill Your Darlings* or *Voiceworks* offer a realistic conduit to my targeted audience.

¹ Whereby metanarratives and "petits recits" (mini-narratives) stood in diametrical opposition to each other, and postmodernism was defined as an "incredulity" towards the former.

² McCallum and McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (1998).

Initially, I felt that a short story cycle was most appropriate for the development of my ideas, namely these “mini-narratives” within art. This decision was evoked by my reading of Susan Mann’s *The Short Story Cycle*, wherein she defines the eponymous cycle as “a collection of short stories in which the narratives...[create] an enhanced...experience when reading the group as a whole as opposed to its individual parts.”³ However, whilst writing, I realised that this structure could be constrictive at times and limit the manipulation of form that I wanted to incorporate. As a result, I finally settled on a three-story cycle, interlaced with multimedia articles, including magazine pieces and gallery brochures. This structure has enhanced and perfectly complemented my concept. Individual stories represent single facets of the vast history of art, but my holistic work reveals a linear progression allowing expanded insight into the myriad motivations shaping artistic creations. The multimedia pieces serve as frames, providing contextual information and presenting glimpses into the countless perspectives constituting art.

Further research into the cycle structure, including the reading of *Nocturnes*⁴ and *Dubliners*⁵ supported my integration of links, both overt and subtle, between individual stories in my collection. These included thematic links such as loss and nostalgia, as well as the recycling of characters to create a complex, yet unified, web of interactions within the “art world”, a style also drawn from my reading of Bret Easton Ellis⁶. Investigation into my broad-ranging “frame pieces” came from many sources, including magazines

³ *The Short Story Cycle*, 1989 (Susan Mann)

⁴ *Nocturnes*, 2009 (Kazuo Ishiguro); a short story cycle revolving around the common motif of music.

⁵ *Dubliners*, 1914 (James Joyce); a cycle based on the commonality of location. My reading of this collection was inspired by the Preliminary Advanced English Unit, *Journeys*, in which ‘Evelyn’ was a set text.

⁶ Notorious for his postmodern techniques, Ellis’ novels often share characters in unusual fashions - for example, a character mentioned in passing in one novel could be the protagonist of another, or two characters could be uncannily related, and the like.

such as *Art And* and *Colors*. The latter⁷ was particularly influential in the sardonic, pretentious voice adopted in my ‘Intermission’ framing article – “I have yet to find a single person, be it an art critic...gallery owner...passerby, who has a simply “neutral” stance on Pollock”. Further viewing of performance poetry and keynote speeches allowed me to capture a poetic ease in the speech transcript just before the second story, alliteratively describing the metaphorical “black hole of empty galleries and vagabond vendors”⁸. Dissecting brochures and advertisements such as those of *NADA*⁹ also allowed me to capture an authenticity in the program leaflet included in the first story – “Rydberg’s acclaimed artwork...has been lauded by publications and critics”.

As I progressed with my work, I found that maintaining the quality of both the stories and framing pieces was a delicate balancing act, and difficult to achieve at times. As a result, I decided to reduce the number of multimedia articles, whilst still retaining their pastiche nature to show a collage of voices.

My first story, regarding the conception of art, borne from genuine intentions, was inspired by reading of research into the feminine, intimate portraits of Vermeer through reading *Vermeer: The Complete Works*¹⁰ which sparked my decision to use artworks as a motif for the voyeuristic exploration of the motivations behind art. Concepts from McCallum’s aforementioned thesis² which examines metanarratives inherent within children’s tales are also evident in the nursery style I adopt in my first story - “This is the

⁷ *Colors*, a magazine unfortunately defined by its ridiculously arrogant writers.

⁸ Extract of my *Extension II Major Work*

⁹ *New Art Dealers Alliance*; in particular the “El Local Club” and “Art Basel Miami Beach” online leaflets.

¹⁰ *Vermeer: The Complete Works*, 1997, Arthur K. Wheelock

living room. This is the rug.”¹¹. I linked its childish tone with the innocent conceptions of art, yet imbued it with an Ishigurian¹² nostalgia with a reflective tone that forebodes its later decay.

This decay is hinted at in my second story, where art has devolved into merely a playing card in Neal’s arrogant gripe for supremacy. I have chosen a post-9/11 context, based on my previous research into the art world within the New York microcosm following this event.¹³ I found the economic obsession of art galleries in this period especially interesting and revealing as to just how much of the modern art society was founded on financial and status pillars. The introductory passage establishes this perfectly through the foreshadowing of the “art scene’s...need of a savior” which is personified by Neal himself. Religious imagery in this story is used extensively, alluding to “Moses parting the Red Sea”, “a Nativity scene, a Crucifixion”, in order to parallel the art world’s almost idol-worship of Lange. This celebrity infatuation signifies its decay, further fleshed out through the last piece in my literary triptych.

This decay is encapsulated in my third story, characterising the protagonist Margeaux, an art fraud, as an embodiment of postmodern art. I drew heavily on my research of Dadaism and the Duchampian “Readymade” movement (presenting “found” objects as art) and pop art (appropriating and replicating lowbrow media as art) to present notions of the collapse of art in a detached, postmodern society. This detachment was inspired by

¹¹ Extract of my *Extension II Major Work*

¹² Inspired by the author Kazuo Ishiguro’s delicate, brooding tone in works such as *A Pale View of Hills* and *Never Let Me Go*.

¹³ Including such works as Steve Martin’s *‘An Object of Beauty’*

my study of the *HSC Extension English Unit, Navigating the Global*, examining the ways in which global tensions can corrode individuals' identities – they become “flattened of affect”, as Margeaux is. Margeaux's breakdown is presented through fluid manipulation of text: “With a slow dissolve, we now return to the pastel room of before. It's transformed now into a Lynchian, surreal space, the walls not-quite-pastel, instead radiating light and dark. Cue dream sequence.”¹⁴

I used this passage to reveal Margeaux's rapid descent into mania, my prediction for the future of art, a post-structural orgy of works devoid of passion or emotion. This is furthered through my use of a film-script type prose, which I developed through the reading of screenplays such as those of *500 Days of Summer*, *The Tree of Life*, and *The Rules of Attraction*¹⁵. Passages such as “Switch it up. Let's all go Wes Anderson now, because you know how I love him. Pastel, overwhelming pastel.” use highly objective language to reveal the depersonalised nature of postmodern art.

This third passage is definitely the most liberal in terms of post-modern literary techniques, abundant through my embedding of filmic and authorial references in this segment. I drew on the Derridan ideal of *Deconstructionism* in order to maintain a sense of reader independence, disenfranchising the role of the author. Margeaux, the narrator, frequently intrudes into and even challenges the reader's assumptions, but ultimately the choice of ending is theirs. This split book-end choice encapsulates the metafictional irony of this piece as a whole, examining how all art is replica, and all literary works are thus

¹⁴ Extract of my *Extension II Major Work*.

¹⁵ All postmodern films exploring detached characters.

so as well. By constructing this inextricable parallel between art and literature, I reveal both to be merely frauds, merely facsimiles of each other, which is enhanced by my inclusion of several passages written in the style of other authors, notably the “Bret Easton Ellis”-inspired section in the middle.

Ultimately, my investigation into both research and content has been integral to the development of my major work, which employs a variety of interesting technical and language features to provide an answer to the burning question: what makes art, *art*?