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EYES WIDE SHUT

THE DEPICTION OF EYES IN ART

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Introduction

The eyes can express what words cannot, sometimes nothing has to be said, people can communicate a number of emotions and feelings with one another just by making eye contact. When a more personal connection is formed with an individual we learn what certain looks mean, we know when they are sad, happy or angry. We are reliant on our eyes. We do not only use them to see, but to connect with other people. When speaking to others we make eye contact with them to show that we are listening and are comprehending what is being said. Staring at someone or something usually means we are particularly interested in what we are seeing. Continued eye contact can come across as intimidating; this is why when two people are having a conversation one or the other will briefly look away and then regain eye contact. Eyes in artworks have the same power to convey emotions and feelings, and also communicate and connect with the viewer. Different artists have different ways of portraying emotion in their artworks. They can do this by the way they present the eyes.

This paper will explore how different artists have chosen to depict eyes in their artworks, and the meaning behind them. Chapter one looks at artists that depict open eyes; and how direct eye contact has the power to deepen relationships, allowing the viewer to connect with the subject on a more personal level. Chapter two focuses on artists who distort the eyes, using abnormal shapes, sizes and unusual positing to convey a more complex emotion. Here, the challenging and composite meanings make the viewer question the artist's motive. In chapter one and two the subjects have their eyes open, allowing us to attempt to form some kind of connection with the subject, as we try to establish their identity. In chapter three the artists completely remove the eyes from the subject, whether it be by erasing them, covering them over or presenting a subject with closed eyes, this restricts the viewer from making eye contact, challenging the viewer to seek other ways to connect with the subject.

CHAPTER ONE



OPEN EYES

Eye contact is an essential form of communication. A lot can be discovered of a person just by simply making eye contact with them. A personal connection can be formed from holding eye contact with someone for just a short period of time. It is a way human beings show their acceptance towards one another and avoiding eye contact can be considered a rejection. Eye contact is a very powerful stimulator of love and affection, it is also a very easy way to make someone feel recognised and understood. Eye contact also has the power to deepen relationships.

Eye contact has the same effect in a photograph or painting, as viewers feel inclined to stare back at the image. The eyes have such a powerful effect because the paintings and photographs do not blink, they hold the constant gaze and as humans we cannot resist this and stare back. It is the viewer who breaks this connection, as they begin to develop questions of why the artist has chosen to portray the subject with this gaze.

This chapter will discuss the power of eye contact in artworks and how the four artists, Leonardo da Vinci, Johannes Vermeer, Roy Lichtenstein and Harding Meyer all have unique ways of presenting their subjects so their open eyes grasp the attention of viewers.



Mona Lisa, Leonardo Da Vinci, 1506¹

The *Mona Lisa*, created by the Italian Renaissance artist, Leonardo Da Vinci, has one of the most famous gazes in art history. It is the most visited, written about, sung about, parodied piece of artwork in the whole world². From the moment the *Mona Lisa* was completed in 1506, da Vinci has set a high standard for all portraits to follow. One feature that has made the *Mona Lisa* so remarkable is her powerful gaze. The artwork consists of a half-length portrait of a woman named Lisa Gherardini³. She is situated in what appears to be a window that overlooks a valley. There is a winding road featured in the background, leading towards a river. Further in the distance there are mountains, giving the overall painting depth.

¹ Da Vinci, Leonardo (1503-06), *The Mona Lisa* [painting], Wikipedia, Accessed 26/05/16, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona_Lisa

² Open Culture. (2016). Did Leonardo da Vinci Paint a First Mona Lisa Before The Mona Lisa?. [online] Available at: <http://www.openculture.com/2013/12/first-mona-lisa.html> [Accessed 26 May 2016].

³ Wonderopolis.org. (2016). Who Was Mona Lisa?. [online] Available at: <http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/who-was-mona-lisa/> [Accessed 6 Sep. 2016].

The colours used in the background are soft and muted, this would also be due to the age of the portrait resulting in faded colours. The *Mona Lisa* is sitting up straight, her torso is slightly turned to her left side while her head is facing the viewer. She appears to be contented from the expression on her face. Her face is very accepting towards the viewer. However, her arms are crossed over and resting on her lap, this is a signal of closed body language as she may feel like she is in a vulnerable position. She is wearing renaissance style clothing, and in her hair is a black veil, in this time period the veil would most likely suggest that this woman was mourning a loss.

The *Mona Lisa's* small dark eyes are heavy hooded, but at the same time appear soft and gentle, and appear to follow the viewer wherever they go. This is what is so interesting about this artwork. It is very intriguing to viewers and is a very clever technique, as the eyes immediately draw the viewer in which then allows the viewer to develop a deep connection. The gaze captures our attention by meeting our own gaze and holding on to it, allowing the viewers to feel a connection to the subject.

At the time the portrait was created it was very unusual for a subject to be smiling⁴. Although the smile is very discreet it adds a whole new dimension to the piece, the corner of her mouth is slightly upturned changing the appearance of her eyes making them appear more relaxed. Overall she appears to have quite a contented expression.

⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2015). *Mona Lisa* | painting by Leonardo da Vinci. [online] Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mona-Lisa-painting> [Accessed 7 Aug. 2016].



Girl with a Pearl Earring, Johannes Vermeer, 1665⁵

Girl with a Pearl Earring is another famous painting where the eyes are the focus, and like the *Mona Lisa* is very famous for the gaze of the subject. This portrait was created in 1665 by the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. The young girl in the portrait is said to be a maid who worked in the artist's home⁶. The girl is wearing a layered dress, a headscarf and of course the famous pearl earring. The white of the collar, eyes and pearl earring are highlighted against the dark and subdued colours of the painting, drawing more attention to the whites of the eyes. The girl appears to be sweet and innocent, she has a clear and pure complexion. The left side of her face is very pale, the right side of her face darkens and almost disappears in to the background. The girl's body is on an angle and has her head turned

⁵Vermeer, Johannes (1865), *Girl with a Pearl Earring* [painting] Brooklyn street art, Accessed 26/05/16, <http://www.brooklynstreetart.com/theblog/2014/10/20/banksy-hoax-does-dutch-master-remix-of-girl-with-the-pearl-earring/#.VOZdj2h97IU>

⁶Tchevalier.com. (2016). *Girl With a Pearl Earring* - The Story - Tracy Chevalier. [online] Available at: <http://www.tchevalier.com/gwape/story/> [Accessed 26 May 2016].

slightly backwards looking over her left shoulder. This is quite different from a traditional portrait pose, as the subject would usually have their body open to the viewer and not turned away. The way she is gazing over her shoulder so peacefully is very powerful, it automatically captures the viewers' attention. The soft gaze and the slight opening of her mouth is quite seductive. The wide constant gaze of her eyes may also suggest that she is looking at something that is making her scared or shy. The eyes appear to be glassy which also may suggest that the girl has been crying. The way the girl is looking back over her shoulder appears that something has caught and captured her attention, this is what then captures the viewer's gaze as we begin to wonder who is this girl? And what is her relationship and connection to this artist?



Crying Girl, Roy Lichtenstein, 1963⁷

Roy Lichtenstein, one of the most influential and innovative pop artists, portrays the eyes in his work very similar to the eyes of *The Girl with a Pearl Earring*. *Crying Girl* (1963 version) is a very recognisable piece of artwork. It consists of a comic style girl who is noticeably distressed. The girl has her hand raised to her mouth, and a fearful look in her eye as tears fall from them. There is no direct emotion

⁷ Lichtenstein, Roy (1963), *Crying Girl* [canvas print] Painting and Frame, Accessed 26/05/16
http://paintingandframe.com/prints/roy_lichtenstein_crying_girl_c_1963-14086.html

on her face but her eyes tell the viewer everything, they scream to the viewer telling us that this woman is in emotional distress. It is the crying eyes that capture the viewers' attention. If you cover the eyes it appears to be a normal face, but with the addition of the crying eyes it adds so much more emotion to the overall artwork. It makes people feel uncomfortable to see another person crying, as it evokes emotion and this is what draws the viewer to this artwork.

Like *The Girl with a Pearl Earring*, the subject is looking back at something which is obviously making her upset. However, unlike the previous two artworks the *Mona Lisa* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, *The Crying Girl* is not looking at the viewer. This makes the viewer wonder what it is she is looking at, and why is this making her distressed? There is nothing else given away in this image, as it is a very close up view of the girl's face leaving it open to interpretation for the viewer.

The technique replicates what is seen in a traditional comic image, with basic colours and use of Ben-Day dots, but the scale is vastly different. The vibrancy of the colours draws more attention to the crying eyes. The subject's hair appears to be blowing back into the same direction as her eyes are glancing, the tears are also being blown that way. The artist may have purposely done this to really emphasise that whatever is distressing this woman is behind her, she may be trying to run away from it. In *The Crying Girl* the eyes are the main focal point, as they are large and draw the viewer in. The dramatic eyes are also a feature in Harding Meyer's artwork.



Untitled, Harding Meyer 2012⁸

Harding Meyer is a Brazilian born artist. He creates large scale portraits of both men and women. He finds images when browsing through magazines, and the internet. He then removes the subjects from their original context and creates a beautiful realistic portrait⁹. This differs from artists like da Vinci and Vermeer who had their model in front of them. Meyer bases his work on someone else's image.

The most recognisable feature in all of Meyer's portraits is the dominance of the eyes. In all of his portraits the eyes are the first thing the viewer recognises, the eyes grasp the viewers attention which enables them to make a deep connection with the subject. In Meyer's portrait *Untitled* (2012), the large life like eyes draw the viewer in, the eye contact is unavoidable which gives the portraits an eerie feeling. The way the eyes are portrayed can make the viewer feel intimidated, as it is a very intense glare that the woman is giving, it is almost like she wants to manipulate the viewer. Unlike in the

⁸ Meyer, Harding (2012) *Untitled* [Oil on canvas] Wall Street International art, Accessed 27/05/16
> <http://wsimag.com/art/3590-harding-meyer>

⁹ Wall Street International. (2013). Harding Meyer. [online] Available at: <http://wsimag.com/art/3590-harding-meyer> [Accessed 26 May 2016].

previous works the eyes are not soft or full of emotion, they appear quite steely and cold, they look directly towards us, almost challenging us to stare back.

There are noticeable textured brush strokes on the woman's face, this may have been made with a palette knife. Despite this texture, the facial features are very detailed, and are finished off to perfection. The deep blue background makes the eyes stand out even more. When the viewer stares into the woman's eyes, it is almost like everything else around her disappears making her appear even more alive. This makes the viewer question their judgement, is this a photo or a painting? Although all of Meyer's portraits are on a large scale, they are still at the same time very intimate. As the emotion of the subjects is very clear and the eyes allow the viewer to form a deep connection.

Open eyes in artworks communicate many emotions and feelings to the viewer. They draw the viewer in, which then enables them to form a connection with the subject. The *Mona Lisa*, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* and Meyer's *Untitled* artwork all grasp the viewer's attention, because they make direct eye contact with the viewer. Immediately displaying the emotion portrayed. Whereas, *Crying Girl* captures the viewers' attention in a different way, as we are curious as to what she is looking at and causing her such distress.

CHAPTER TWO



DISTORTED EYES

Eyes in artworks can tell the viewer a lot about the subject they belong to. The way their eyes are displayed are usually linked with some kind of emotion, whether it be a contented expression like the *Mona Lisa*, or a more concerned, worried look seen in Roy Lichtenstein's, *Crying Girl*. Eyes in artwork have the power to capture and hold attention for a prolonged period of time, until the viewer breaks this connection. But what happens when the eyes in the artworks are distorted and in unfamiliar shapes and sizes? When viewers examine the artworks by Pablo Picasso, Joy Hester and Yi Chen thoughts of uncertainty come to mind, as the images are visually and conceptually challenging. We begin to wonder, why have these artists portrayed the eyes in such a peculiar way? Are the artists expressing a stronger message behind the challenging distortion of the eyes? Or have they left it open to the viewer's interpretation? This chapter will discuss distorted eyes in artworks, and explore the challenging meanings that the distorted eyes evoke.



The Weeping Woman, Pablo Picasso, 1937¹⁰

Pablo Picasso was a Spanish artist and one of the most important figures of the 20th century¹¹. Many of his artworks had a major impact on the art world, one of these artworks was *The Weeping Woman* created in 1937. *The Weeping Woman* is a cubist style painting; vibrant geometric shapes create a portrait of a very distressed woman. The sharp distinct edges carry the viewer's eye all around the painting, and the points of the triangular shapes near the woman's hands all point up towards her eyes. The woman and inspiration behind this painting was Dora Maar. Maar was Picasso's mistress, who suffered from mental illness, which is clearly portrayed in this portrait of her¹². This painting has the power to emotionally connect with the viewer, once this portrait is examined in depth the viewer can sense the pain Maar was feeling. The colours used reflect her emotion. The subject's skin is green;

¹⁰ Picasso, Pablo (1937), *The Weeping Woman*[painting], Pablo Picasso, Accessed 9/06/2016
<<http://www.pablocicasso.org/the-weeping-woman.jsp>>

¹¹ Biography.com. (2016). [online] Available at: <http://www.biography.com/people/pablo-picasso-9440021> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2016].

¹² Biography.com. (2016). [online] Available at: <http://www.biography.com/people/dora-maar-21215557#early-years> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2016].

reflecting her sadness. It suggests that she is so emotionally distressed that she has become physically ill. The light blue surrounding the mouth and what appears to be chattering teeth gives the viewer the impression of a cold and uncomfortable feeling. However, the rest of the image is made up of bright vibrant yellows and oranges. This is quite unfitting compared to the rest of the image, as we see the cool colours around the face. Picasso may have used colour in this juxtaposing way to really emphasise the confused and distraught emotional state of Dora Maar.

The eyes in this portrait are in a recognisable space; they are where we would expect to see the eyes on a human face. However, they are noticeably distorted, and quite small and dark. The eyes express a deep feeling of loss and depression. They are wide open like the woman is staring in shock and disbelief, which is exaggerated by the full lashes that appear to be attached to the eyeball. The eyes are displayed quite strangely, although the eyes appear to be sitting quite flat on the face, the eye socket is coming out of her head, and the actual eyeball is sticking out even further. The eyeballs appear to be sitting in the eye sockets like in ill-fitting cups, and there is a tear streaming out of her left eye, however it is not disconnected from the eye, it is a continuous line. This may be a message to the viewer from Picasso, that the pain Dora Maar feels will never end, and this pain will follow her for the rest of her life. At first glance the eyes of *The Weeping Woman* appear to be quite normal, but after further analysis it is easy to see that they are in fact very distorted. However, the eyes do fit in with the overall distortion of the portrait and face.



Child with Yellow Bird, Joy Hester, 1957¹³

Australian artist Joy Hester uses a different approach with her distortion of the eyes, as seen in *Child with Yellow Bird*, created in 1957. The artwork consists of a child holding and protecting a yellow bird, situated off centre of a dark and moody background. The colours used are all very neutral, the only pop of colour is the yellow bird. The child is shielding the bird with great fear in his eyes and he is looking up at what appears is going to harm the bird. There is an over exaggeration of the size of the left eye, taking attention away from the incomplete smaller right eye. At first glance the smaller eye almost fades away, but the shading around the eye pulls it back in. Hester may perhaps have made the large eye to be the main focal point of this piece, as the size of the eye really emphasizes the fear of the child. A very similar technique was used in *The Weeping Woman*; where the distorted eyes reflect the emotional state of Dora Maar. The distortion of the eyes can tell the viewer a lot about this child in Hester's work. The child is afraid and anxious; he is staring intensely at the mysterious danger. The other features of the face are also vastly distorted and out of proportion. There is no nose, the jaw is small and the size of the head is large and round.

¹³ Hester, Joy (1957), *Child with yellow bird*[painting] Accessed 9/06/2016
<<http://nga.gov.au/hester/Index.cfm?WorkID=43909&View=2>>

Another strange feature of this work is that in the title the subject is described to be a child, however the boy appears masculine and at first glance it does not appear to be a child. The image seems to depict an adolescent through the detail given on the forearm muscle tone. It appears the subject has a receding hairline, which once again may suggest the child is older than the title proposes.

On the boy's clothing there is a yellow pattern, the shape mimics the eye and also creates a link back to the bird's feathers, which really makes the viewer reflect on the abnormal distorted shape. Birds are a symbol of freedom, flying free in the sky. However, the bird featured is enclosed in the boy's arms and it appears like it is trying to escape, as it is flapping its wings which also brings life to the painting. The bird may be representing a stronger meaning behind this artwork, it may be the child that desires the freedom the inner turmoil that is depicted in the subject's eye may also represent this. As he is in a situation where he may have to decide under pressure to let the bird fly free, so the mysterious danger will not harm it. The boy may also fear that if he lets the bird go he will be all alone, the bird is giving him some kind of comfort and grounding.



Morning Margherita, Yi Chen, 2005¹⁴

Yi Chen is a Chinese artist who creates faces by using a collage method. Distortion of the eye, similar to that of Hester, is seen in Yi Chen's artwork; the eye is recognisable however the two vastly differ in size. Chen collects the imagery he uses for his faces from pop culture and Asian fashion magazines. He pulls together random features off different faces and arranges it to create a new version of the human face. Once this stage is completed he then uses the collages as models and repaints the face¹⁵. This is again a different method to that of artists who have had a model sit for them to paint. This method is similar to that of Harding Meyer who uses unknown faces. A lot of Chen's artworks feature dramatically oversized and un-proportioned heads, large unrealistic features and bulging eyes.

The 2005 piece, *Morning Margherita*, is one of Chen's portraits. This is a challenging artwork to look at and process. The viewer can see what appears to be a normal human face, however after closer

¹⁴ Chen, Yi (2005), *Morning Margherita* [painting], Marianne Boesky Gallery, Accessed 22 Jun. 2016. <<http://www.marianneboeskygallery.com/exhibitions/yi-chen/works/2>>

¹⁵ Marianneboeskygallery.com. (2006). YI CHEN - Exhibitions - Marianne Boesky. [online] Available at: <http://www.marianneboeskygallery.com/exhibitions/yi-chen/pressRelease> [Accessed 14 Jun. 2016].

inspection it is rather distorted and unrealistic. The positioning of the eyes can make the viewer feel uncertain, as when they first look at the image it is easy to determine the normal facial features. Therefore when they examine the rest of the artwork it becomes confusing as we are confronted with a strange version of the human face.

The first point of interaction for the viewer is the eye that is oddly placed on the side of the subject's head, while the other is positioned on the other side. The eyes are so far apart; the viewer becomes frustrated as they cannot see the other eye or where it is looking or make contact with both eyes at once. The larger and more recognisable eye is looking out into a different direction and does not make any contact with the viewer. This then makes the viewer wonder what is the subject looking at?

In *Morning Margerita* the emotion portrayed by the subject is more difficult to identify due to the collage effect, it is not portrayed as clearly in comparison to the previous works. However the subject appears to be somewhat mesmerised, as she looks back over her shoulder. The pouting lips and ogling eyes also may suggest this.

The eyes are lost, it almost give the impression as if they are floating, as well as the mouth and nose. They also seem to be painted with more detail and a different colour palette compared to the rest of the face, which appears very simplified. No attempt seems to have been made to merge the features to form a unified face, the collage effect remains very obvious. This may have been Chen's intention, to draw attention away from the imperfections of the unknown person he has created.

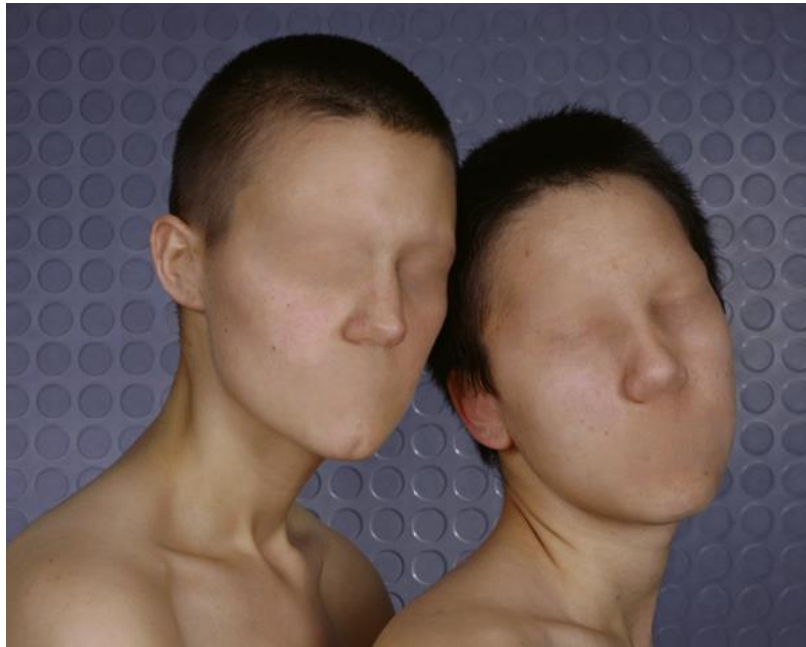
Although in all three artworks the eyes are distorted, they all still display some kind of emotion. Distorted eyes have the power to communicate more emotion than normal open eyes. This distortion of the eyes in all three artworks are challenging to view and process. Picasso, Hester and Chen all have different approaches and techniques of displaying emotion in their artworks, through the distortion of the eyes. The eyes of *the Weeping Woman* portray strong feelings of loss, depression and despair. The fear and distress of the child is expressed through the large bulging eye in the artwork *Child with Yellow bird*. Whereas the eyes in *Morning Margherita* appear to be captured by something unseen, the eyes don't connect to the viewer in a personal way.

CHAPTER THREE



ABSENT EYES

Sometimes artists make a conscious decision to not include eyes in their artworks. They can remove the eyes by digital altering, or the eyes may be closed or covered in some way. As viewers this is something we are not used to seeing when looking at a portrait, as eyes are usually an essential part of the face. Absent eyes in artworks challenge the viewer, as we look closer at the subjects trying to discover clues about their identity. We look at the faces expecting to see eyes, to make contact and from some kind of connection with the subjects. But when the eyes are missing thoughts of uncertainty come to our minds. As the only way we can form a connection with these people is gone, we begin to wonder why? And how will we make some kind of connection with them?



Pat and Kim, Aziz and Cucher, 1994¹⁶

Anthony Aziz and Sammy Cucher are an art duo who have been living and working together since 1991, based in Brooklyn, New York. Aziz and Cucher are photographers who create diverse collections, focussed on portraits and the body. The series *Dystopia* (1994-1995) consists of digital portraits of shirtless subjects. In all portraits the subject's main facial features, including the eyes, mouth and

¹⁶ Aziz and Cucher, (1994) *Pat & Kim* [digital imagery] Aziz and Cucher, Accessed 21 July 2016 <<http://www.azizcucher.net/project/dystopia>>

nostrils, have been erased. All of the images in the *Dystopia* series are quite confronting, the vacant faces bring a sense of uncertainty to the viewer's minds, as the audience would expect to see eyes, and make some kind of connection with them. Having no eyes just makes these subjects figures, more like objects rather than human beings. The subjects cannot connect with the viewer in anyway, but we are drawn to them and intrigued by them as we try to make some connection. The absence of the eyes in the portraits makes the subjects and the overall image lack emotion, not allowing the viewer to connect on a personal level.

The 1994 portrait titled *Pam and Kim*, is part of the *Dystopia* series. This image consists of two subjects with their eyes, mouth and nostrils erased. The areas which once contained these features are now almost too smooth, the skin tone and texture varies from the rest of the face, making it appear even more unnatural. Both subjects are facing the viewer, the subject on the right is sitting up straight and the subject on the left has their head tilted back resting on the other subject. The viewer gets a sense of a connection between the two subjects, but the viewer cannot make a connection with them. The image makes the viewer wonder about the relationship between the two, they are obviously close, perhaps sisters. We assume they are females at first, due to the title, but they look androgynous at the same time with their close cropped hair and lack of defining facial features, the more the viewer looks at the portraits, the less obvious it becomes. Having no features on the face draws attention to other areas and highlights the nose and ears. The defined cheek and jaw bones, and the smooth texture of the skin is more evident as we look for clues about the subject's identity.

The hard background against the soft skin, puts the subjects in an uncomfortable setting. The blue/grey background is indented with a repeating circle pattern, suggestive of a cold wet area, it varies to the other portraits in this series which have just one solid background colour. Overall this

portrait is uncomfortable to examine, as the viewer is prevented from connecting with the subjects in the way they usually could in a portrait.



The Blindfolded, Marlene Dumas, 2002 ¹⁷

Marlene Dumas is a South African born artist she creates figurative work mainly sourcing ideas from her memory. In Dumas' portrait *The Blindfolded* (2002), we have no connection with the subject's eyes. In Aziz and Cucher's work the eyes have been erased, where in this artwork we have been separated from the subject's eyes by the blindfold. The artworks are very similar in the fact that they have the power to make the viewer feel very uncomfortable.

The Blindfolded is made up of three panel portraits, all three subjects' eyes are covered with a piece of cloth. The cloth deprives the subject of sight, it also deprives the viewer from making eye contact with the subject. The blindfold is the focal point of all three portraits. In each portrait the fabric of the blindfold responds differently to each face. In the left portrait the blindfold is a crisp white, and runs smoothly across the face of the subject. Whereas in the middle portrait the blindfold is an off-white colour, the outline of the nose is presenting through the blindfold. The panels in the background wall also reflect the folding of the blindfold. The subject in the right panel, has the blindfold covering more

¹⁷Dumas, Marlene, (2002) *The Blindfolded* [oil on canvas] Zwirner & Wirth. Accessed 29/07/2016
<<http://www.zwirnerandwirth.com/exhibitions/2005/MD0205/blindfolded.html>>

than half of their face. The fabric caves into the eye sockets, and is pulled tightly across the arch of the nose. As the three images develop from the left to the right it appears there is more detail. The colour of the men's faces also appear darker from the left to the right.

The identity of these men is unknown, from what the viewer can see it is very hard to pick any defined detail about who they are. This is also due to the painting technique utilised, the subjects appear quite simplified. The blindfold could suggest both positive and negative meanings. The blindfold could be protecting the subject from seeing something that is disturbing for them in some way. Or the blindfold could be forced upon them, having their sight deprived from them could make them feel intimidated and frightened. The subjects in *The Blindfolded* are Palestinian men, and the artist created these portraits in response to the tragic situation in the Middle East¹⁸. Dumas is "an artist whose work is often so centred around the eyes, around looking and seeing, the blindfold represents considerable degradation. Someone who is deprived of sight is subject to that of others"¹⁹.

The Blindfolded can be interpreted by the viewer in many different ways. The life experience of the viewer could change their perception of this image. A child may see this image to be something like hide and seek or a game, whereas an adult may be able to see the violence behind the portraits. This then makes us wonder what have the subjects done to be blindfolded? Is it something they have done or are they being protected from what they are going to see?

¹⁸ absolutearts.com, C. (2016). Marlene Dumas: Name No Names - De Pont Foundation for Contemporary Art - Absolutearts.com. [online] Absolutearts.com. Available at: <http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2002/06/21/30035.html> [Accessed 29 Jul. 2016].

¹⁹ absolutearts.com, C. (2016). Marlene Dumas: Name No Names - De Pont Foundation for Contemporary Art - Absolutearts.com. [online] Absolutearts.com. Available at: <http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2002/06/21/30035.html> [Accessed 29 Jul. 2016].



Daphne Jones, Elizabeth Heyert, 2005²⁰

In comparison to the previous two artworks, Elizabeth Heyert's portraits are much more comfortable to examine. In the 2005 photograph entitled, *Daphne Jones*, there is a peaceful and relaxed feeling that comes with this image, as we see the subject resting with her eyes closed and hands gently crossing her body. However once the truth is discovered about this image, and the subject, it can make the viewer feel slightly uncomfortable. The subject is actually deceased, and the image was captured in a Harlem funeral parlour²¹. Elizabeth Heyert is an American photographer. *Daphne Jones* is a part of *The Travellers (2005)* series. All of the portraits in this series are of deceased African American subjects who passed away in the time frame of 2003-2004²². The subjects are very well-dressed, as

²⁰ Heyert, Elizabeth, (2005) *Daphne Jones* [digital imagery] Elizabeth Heyert. Accessed 25 July 2016 <<http://www.elizabethheyert.com/books/the-travelers>>

²¹ Elizabethheyert.com. (2016). Press - The Travelers - Projects - Elizabeth Heyert. [online] Available at: <http://www.elizabethheyert.com/projects/the-travelers/press> [Accessed 26 Jul. 2016].

²² Ibid.

their bodies have been prepared for their funerals. Heyert captured these images to honour the people and their culture²³.

Daphne Jones passed away in 2003 at the age of 49²⁴. The viewer can start to form a connection with the subject, unlike in Aziz and Cucher's work, as the viewer is given more clues about the subject. Even though the eyes are not open, the viewer discovers clues about the identity of the subject through her other features and her clothing. The subject is very well dressed, she is wearing a light blue dress with a matching jacket, completed with a soft white neck scarf and white lace gloves. The subject appears to be peacefully sleeping, her eyes are closed so softly. It is almost like she could be awoken from her quiet sleep. We do not make direct contact with the eyes, but there is such a strong emotional connection to this image, as when we learn that the subjects are deceased we make connection to people we have lost in our lives. The black background makes it appear the subject is standing up, although it is quite obvious she is lying down. These portraits cross the boundary of life and death; the gently closed eyes have the power to do this.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

The subjects in the artworks by Aziz and Cucher, Dumas and Heyert and all are examples of absent eyes, and although no direct eye contact can be made with the subjects, as viewers we are still able to find clues of identity. Whether it be the positioning of their body, the clothes they are wearing or the strong emotion portrayed. All three artworks have the power to affect the viewer in some way.

Aziz and Cucher's *Pam and Kim* makes the viewer feel uncomfortable, as the facial features of the subjects have been erased making it impossible for the viewer to connect with the subjects on a personal level. The human figures become simply objects once their facial features have been removed. The empty faces are confronting and uncomfortable to examine.

Dumas' *The Blindfolded* can also make the viewer feel unsure and disturbed. As we are disconnected from the subject's eyes by the blindfolds. We begin to feel even more uncomfortable when we learn the reality behind the portraits. We can see a human face, but we are separated by the cloth covering the subject's eyes. The blindfolded is depriving the subject of sight this makes us wonder what has, or will happen to the subjects.

While Heyert's *Daphne Jones* has a much more peaceful and relaxed feeling. As we know that her eyes are present and she appears to be sleeping. It is more comfortable for the viewer to examine as we are familiar with the sight. We search for clues in the clothing and other features of the subject so that a connection can be formed. There is a completely different feeling in all three works.

Conclusion

This paper explores the depiction of eyes in artwork and how they have the power to communicate, connect and express emotion to the viewer.

Artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Johannes Vermeer, Roy Lichtenstein and Harding Meyer all portrayed the subjects with open eyes. However, all artworks affect the viewer differently. The subjects all draw the viewer in for different reasons, whether it be by allowing the viewer to make the eye contact we seek such as in da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, or we are curious to see what has caught the subject's attention and what has caused them to display such emotion such as Lichtenstein's *Crying Girl*.

Artists such as Pablo Picasso, Joy Hester and Yi Chen are examples of how artists display their subjects with distorted eyes to express a more powerful emotion to the viewer, they do this by making the eyes unusual shapes and sizes like Picasso's, *The Weeping Woman*. In Hester's *Child with Yellow Bird*, the exaggeration of the sizing of the eye portrays a fear of the unknown. The artworks are challenging for the viewer to view and process, as we are not familiar with the representation of eyes to be so different.

Aziz and Cucher, Marlene Dumas and Elizabeth Heyert all remove the subject's eyes from them in a sense. They have done this by completely erasing the eyes, covering them or using deceased subjects with their eyes closed. This restricts eye contact between the subject and the viewer, so a personal connection cannot be formed. Clues of identity could be picked up through the subjects clothing or the positioning of their bodies. Aziz and Cucher's *Pat and Kim* can make the viewer feel very uncomfortable, as the subjects appear so unnatural in comparison to what we are used to, however

Heyert' s *Daphne Jones* has a calmer and more relaxed feeling, due in part to the fact that it is a more familiar sight to the viewer, we know her eyes are still present.

The depiction of eyes in art will continue to be an important aspect of portraiture. As eyes are able to express such powerful emotions and meanings, artists will continue to use the depiction of eyes in their work to express these messages through the eyes of the subjects.

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