Reflective learning

What is Art?

(Link to relevant learning log: https://joeatoca.wordpress.com/2017/04/03/project-1-arts-and-ideas-exercise-1/)

Referring back to my learning log, I agree with my two original points, namely that art is the output of human creativity and that it has to be original. The comments regarding classification of art in my first point feel irrelevant now. I had simply not appreciated just how diverse contemporary art is. I have learned, however, that originality in art may take many forms, such as; technique, media, subject matter and so on.

I would add a third point, namely purpose. Art is a deliberate act, it is not an accident. That is not to say that art cannot be borne from experiment, accident or chance. Rather, the experimentation, the accidental discovery of approach or method, and so on should be the result of a deliberate pursuit of some creative output. In particular there has to be intent to produce art as opposed to utility.

(146 words)

What have I learned?

I feel I have learned to open my mind. As interested as I was in art before I started this course, I had little interest or appreciation of contemporary art, with the exception of Grayson Perry. I am now approaching it with an inquiring mind, willing to listen to the context and seek understanding. I have also learned how important context is. At the risk of sounding trite, I would go as far as to suggest that it allows for appreciation of art rather than just liking a particular piece or having a passing interest in the subject.

(98 words)

My learning log

Working full-time has meant that my learning log is not yet comprehensive. I am blogging and want to involve little or no paper. Drawings will be scanned and other creative output will be photographed. Having never blogged, I have had to learn to use WordPress. It is no surprise therefore, that I am behind with write-ups but I expect to bring it up to date within two or three weeks.

Two artists have inspired thoughts for a project. Whilst researching Duchamp’s’ Fountain, I discovered 3 Standard Stoppages (1913-14) and Network of Stoppages (1914). Their roots lie in acts of chance. I was also intrigued by Douglas Huebler’s Location Piece 25, Rome, and its involvement of the owner of the prints being produced. I have the seeds of a plan to produce colours by chance and then assemble those colours according to an order chosen by a person. It is only a plan at the moment!

(155 words)
Interpret Jeremy Deller’s *Battle of Orgreave* and reflect on the importance of time and place in this piece.

**Introduction**

For many, the Battle of Orgreave represents a turning point in modern British History. Digby Warde-Adlam (2014) described it as “…the moment that Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government smashed Union power and began the rapid dismantling of British industry.” It has also been a source of controversy for over 30 years. When the current home secretary, Amber Rudd, announced that there would be neither a statutory inquiry nor an independent review into the events at Orgreave, Barbara Jackson, secretary of the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign, was quoted in the Guardian as saying, “…the decision meant there would be ‘no transparency, no accountability, no truth and no justice’” (Travis, 2016). It is against this background that Deller’s work needs to be considered.

**Time**

Deller’s decision to employ an historical re-enactment group suggests a desire for authenticity and so the battle is fixed at 18 June 1984. Employing The Sealed Knot, however, hints at a more subtle time reference. Their website describes their re-enactments as principally the “…skirmishes and sieges of the English Civil War” (The Sealed Knot, 2017). Jonathan Jones (2001) wrote in the Guardian that Deller had “…even thought of calling it The Civil War, Part II.” Deller is suggesting that the battle is a continuation of a struggle stretching back centuries.

The installation has time at its centre in a literal sense. Two of the four walls have a horizontal timeline running across them. On first inspection it appears to be a timeline for the miners’ strike but again, subtle details demand consideration. It starts with an explanation of the Ridley Report (fig. 1. below).

![Figure 1. Deller Jeremy, start of the timeline from “The Battle of Orgreave”, (2001)](image-url)
By choosing this starting point, Deller is stating that the miners’ strike was an event that was foreseen and its consequences planned for.

At the other end of the timeline, sitting after the details of the end of the strike, is the painting “I am a miner’s son” (see fig. 2 below). The son is surrounded by drug imagery whilst the coalmine lies in the background. On 1 April 2001, the Guardian published an article headlined, “Heroin epidemic grips the valleys”. It continued, “After the demise of mining, drugs are killing youths in towns where community spirit is already dead.”

Added poignancy comes from the note that the painting was purchased from the Koestler Trust, thus suggesting that the painter was, or had been, in prison. Deller is clear; we are feeling the consequences of the battle in the present.

![Figure 2. Darren, “I am a miner’s son”, (2007) from Deller Jeremy, end of the timeline from “The Battle of Orgreave” (2001)](image)

**Place**

As with the time, the place of the re-enactment is specific; it is Orgreave, but subtle images ask the viewer to understand more. The fields upon which the conflict starts remind us of the agricultural roots of the town prior to the building of the coke plant. The charge up the street passes a school and rows of houses. This serves to emphasise that the miners are defending their homes, their community, possibly even their way of life. The accents and location also emphasise this is in not London, the seat of power.

The installation tells us more. The roots and consequences of the battle lie in, and affect, the whole of the UK. This is achieved both by entries on the timeline but also by a striking, red image of the UK (see fig. 3 below). Each place named on the map has an entry on the timeline.
The map includes the Republic of Ireland and names Brighton. The IRA bombed the Grand Hotel in Brighton when Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet were staying there during a Conservative Party conference. Their intention was her assassination. Deller’s intention is to link us back to the Civil War and remind us that another consequence was the protestant Oliver Cromwell’s conquest of Ireland.

It is interesting to contrast this with Deller’s work, “The History of the World” (see fig. 4 below). Deller said of this piece, "I drew this diagram about the social, political and musical connections between house music and brass bands – it shows a thought process in action. It was also about Britain and British history in the twentieth century and how the country had changed from being industrial to post-industrial." This gives us some insight into thoughts that may have influenced The Battle of Orgreave. Civil unrest, Orgreave, Deindustrialization, Privatisation, Advanced capitalism, are all linked, via Brass Bands, to The North. All of these resonate within The Battle of Orgreave.
Conclusion

In the article mentioned above, Jonathan Jones also wrote, “The Battle of Orgreave is a history painting.” It is certainly part of the tradition of using art to illustrate history. The re-enactment fixes the battle itself in time and space. The use of the Sealed Knot asks us to view both the time and place beyond the specifics of Orgreave, and to consider this a national struggle endured over centuries.

The installation adds flesh to these bones. We are asked to consider the miners’ strike in particular, as a political event that was foreseen and planned for as part of a broader change of UK politics and economics, the consequences of which are felt today. We are also asked to consider that this impact has been felt over the whole of the UK, as well as the Republic of Ireland.

It is important to note another part of the installation (see fig. 5 below). It is tempting to think that as the image is black and white, then so is the situation. Deller, however, has included a shelf, with books from all sides of the political spectrum at the time. We, the viewers of the piece, are now invited to read and research the background to Orgreave from many different perspectives. And so we make up our own minds.

Tate Britain’s 2015 exhibition, “Fighting History” was described by the Tate as looking at “…how artists have transformed significant events into paintings and artworks that encourage us to reflect on our own place in history.” It is no surprise it included this work.
Figure 5. Deller, Jeremy
from “The Battle of Orgreave”, (2001)
List of Illustrations


Bibliography


Self-Evaluation

I am a Mathematics graduate so I have no grounding in academic writing. When I completed my PGCE there was an element of writing but not sufficient for formal tuition. In terms of general approach and using citations and references correctly then, I don’t know what I don’t know and so I am looking forward to finding out if I am showing signs of understanding how to write appropriately.

Having said the above, I have had to do a lot of formal writing during two careers (computing industry and teaching), so I am reasonably confident that my communication is of an acceptable standard. I will now use the assessment criteria points from the course manual.

**Subject based knowledge and understanding**

I feel I have an understanding of the subject content commensurate with where I am in the course. I do believe that I have also demonstrated that with my discussions about the time and place of the work. I am, however, looking forward to finding out if my tutor agrees! I also feel that I have demonstrated my understanding of the various contexts in my introduction as well as in the detail of my observations about Ireland, the Ridley Report and the longer term consequences of the strike as a whole.

**Research skills**

I have researched beyond the websites given in the assignment notes including the Guardian article about drug abuse in the former pit communities in Wales, the Apollo.com article and the Tate Britain exhibition.

**Critical and evaluation skills**

My analyses of the time and place along with the comments about the black and white image of the police and arrested striker should display these skills. This is another area where I am looking forward to my tutor’s comments, in order to understand if my writing is demonstrating an understanding of criticism and evaluation.

**Communication**

I think my writing style is generally clear and (fairly) concise. I hope that the way I have presented my assignment and the use of illustrations displays some skill in communication.

**Conclusion**

I have very much enjoyed undertaking this task. I thought the re-enactment and the installation were enormously interesting. I hope my writing has conveyed some of that enthusiasm. I did struggle to keep it within the word count as there is so much of interest to examine and discuss. The use of former police and miners in the re-enactment, the selection of books on the shelf, the fact that the year was 1984 and the Orwellian connotations that brings, the blood-soaked appearance of the map of the UK and Ireland as well as the significance of the timing of the IRA bombing, were all topics I would have pursued if the word count had been higher. (454 words)