

“I'm No Cactus Expert, But I Know A Prick When I See One”

-Image, Text, Therapy and Vengeance in Art by Women

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the roles of text and image, therapy and vengeance in art made by women since the 20th century.

It discusses the uses of text and image to create political artworks that can play important roles in feminism in regards to the artistic world and how often vengeance is used as a motivational source of inspiration. The dissertation addresses gender inequality and its place in art specifically created by women as it loosely follows a journey from the second wave of feminism in the 1960s to the present day. It also outlines, with reference to a body of artworks made by the author, a personal journey of pain, heartbreak and closure following a relationship breakdown and discusses the healing qualities of art as therapy.

Overview

October 2014 was the starting date of my Masters degree. October 2014 was also the beginning of a short but turbulent and devastating emotional encounter with a person who, as it felt at the time, succeeded in temporarily emotionally ruining me. From the breakdown of what couldn't really be described as a relationship, I was inspired to metaphorically take hold of the pain I was feeling and use it to create a body of work, which I will detail later. I began to focus on the relationship between art and feminism, what it meant to use art as a therapy and as a tool of vengeance. I delved further into the bodies of work of artists who have successfully crafted a career out of the relationship between text and image and I will hence discuss the points of comparison between my work and theirs.

The work I created in the run up to the 2015 Writtle School of Design exhibition included a series of fifteen lino prints that experimented with the relationship of text and image and three wire pieces, which were manipulated into legible words (figures 1, 2 and 3). I chose the mediums not for aesthetic purposes, but with techniques of production in mind. I will enlarge upon this later. I will also discuss the choice of

language within the work, the choice of mode of display and the reaction the work itself received, particularly during the opening night of the show.



Figure 1 Toni-Marie Harrold, This Isn't About You, 2015



Figure 2 Toni-Marie Harrold, This Isn't About You, 2015



Figure 3 Toni-Marie Harrold, *This Isn't About You*, 2015

Women Artists, Text and Image

On average, a single person will be exposed to somewhere between three hundred to four hundred advertising images a day (*Choice behavior insights at hill Holliday - we study how people make choices, and how advertising influences the choices they make*, 2006). Advertising is the most common form of text and image that we are exposed to on a daily basis. Since the nineteenth century modern advertising has become a regular staple in our every day lives. Perhaps it is the constant reassurance of text and image appealing to the consumer in a capitalist world that has lead the viewer into a sense of security in which every piece of combined art and language is designed to sell rather than to state an emotion or feeling; it is because of this that artists like Sophie Calle, Jenny Holzer and Tracey Emin are regarded with such controversy. Language and image in advertising tell the consumer what their lives are missing or what to purchase to achieve a 'wholesome' lifestyle; such is the capitalist 'dream'.

However, it is artists such as Holzer who, in 1978, produced several hundred clipped one-liners as part of her *Truism* series that stated opinion or emotion and offered nothing of consumer value. The *Truisms* were first thrown into New York's Manhattan streets with guerrilla style tactics; Holzer's statements, printed in black italic script on white paper, were wheat-pasted onto buildings, telephone booths and signs anonymously. Holzer's embarrassingly honest declarations have strong feminist thrust,

such *Truisms* as *Raise boys and girls the same way* and *Men don't protect you anymore* possibly stem from the politics of the 1970s decade, where (especially in larger cities in the US) feminists were staging protests for equality and small gains were being made, such as President Jimmy Carter establishing the National Advisory Committee for Women. A year earlier, in March 1969, the radical feminist group Redstockings organised an "abortion speak out" in New York City that encouraged women to talk about their, then illegal, abortions. Some women discussed their dangerous "back-alley" abortions, whilst others discussed how it felt to carry a baby to term and then have it taken away at birth for adoption. This was a subject in politics that only men had previously spoken about and where the focus had been on reforming existing abortion laws rather than abolishing them. Finally, four years after the abortion speak out, in January 1973 the Supreme Court made a decision to alter the abortion laws and the abortion restrictions during the first trimester of pregnancy were lifted. This historic alteration was named the Roe v. Wade Decision (Lewis, 2015). It allowed women to take back control of their own bodies, encouraging them to further fight for what basic political rights were denied to them, much like the Suffragettes in the first wave of feminism in the late 19th to early 20th Century who fought for their right to vote.

As Holzer progressed as an artist, her use of language began to develop along with her methods of broadcasting her *Truisms*. Her first large public installation was in 1982 in New York's Times Square, where she repurposed the media that surrounds public spaces. Political statements such as *Abuse of power comes as no surprise* (figure 4), *Protect me from what I want* and *Torture is barbaric* were reproduced from their previous script on paper form into large LED signage that flashed and towered over the square. The *Truisms* were transformed from fly-posted papers into huge, intrusive signs, overbearing in their size, which forced themselves upon the public. By taking a media form previously used solely for advertising and repurposing it into art statements, Holzer created something that the public had no choice but to glance at; the *Truisms* forced themselves upon the unsuspecting public, much like advertisements for consumer goods. However they do not ask us to buy; they ask us to think about the world we live in. The *Truisms* merely invaded the space the public subconsciously reserves for consumer attention, much like verbal assaults. The purpose of Holzer's *Truisms* was to compel a reaction. When speaking about her much earlier abstract

public installations, such as publicly displayed paintings on long pieces of fabric and artfully arranged breadsticks, Holzer said "People looked bemused, befuddled and vaguely interested as they walked on by. But the works weren't beautiful enough or compelling enough or understandable enough to make people stop" (Auping, 1992).

Holzer's statements were sometimes meant ironically, often politically, but were always thought provoking.



Figure 4 Jenny Holzer, "Abuse Of Power Comes As No Surprise", Selection from Truism, 1982, Times Square New York

Sophie Calle is a French photographer, writer and installation artist whose work often revolves around the themes of identity, intimacy and human vulnerability. Her earlier work is often centred around other people and their identities, depicting herself as a tool for the viewer to learn more about the human subject of her work through surveillance. In 1979, Calle followed a man she met in Paris to Venice, disguising herself and following him throughout the city, documenting him through photography. The piece, *Suite Venitienne*, includes a series of black and white photographs, the subject himself is only identified as Henri B. Leaving the man's identity ambiguous allows the viewer to then project their own interpretations of his identity onto the subject. *Suite Venitienne* followed just after a time when Calle had worked as a stripper, during a period in her life where she felt uncertainty about what to do next. Her life changed

when she saw a middle-aged man on the street and then later that evening saw him again at a gallery opening. "I overheard him saying he was going to Venice, so I decided to follow him. I felt completely lost at the time and I thought it would give me a purpose." (Preston, 2013)

In contrast to this, in 1981, Calle instead became her own subject. The project titled *The Shadow* saw her followed around by a private detective, hired by her mother for the day, leading the oblivious detective around Paris to specific places that held meaning for her. By being photographed in places that held sentimental value for her we can decipher the emotional connection Calle as a subject holds with the city and therefore begin to understand parts of her identity. Calle has said that it was an attempt 'to provide photographic evidence of my own existence'. These themes recur throughout the artist's work spanning decades, where she explores geographic connections to her own identity and then moves on to explore that concept in other people's lives. For example in 1996, in a piece titled *Erouv de Jérusalem*, Calle asked Palestinians and Israelis to take her to public places that held meaning for them, weaving an intimate map of identity through place and meaning.

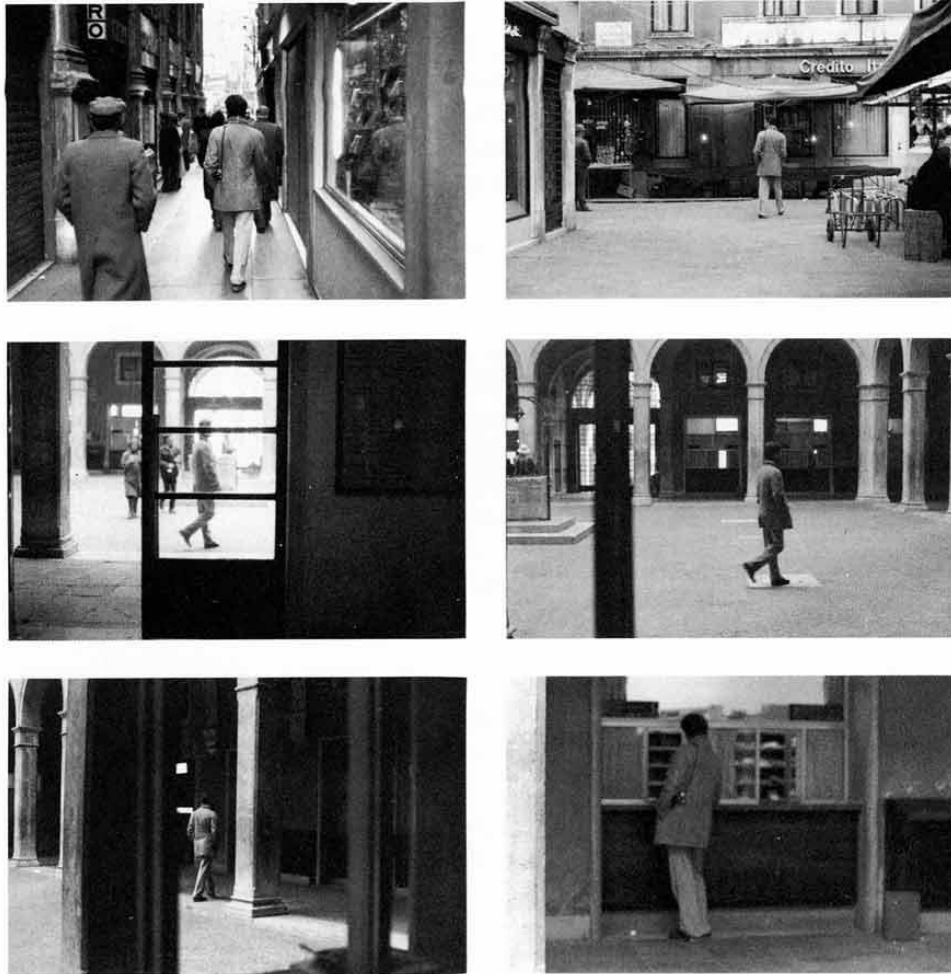


Figure 5 Sophie Calle, Suite Venitienne, selection of photographs from Suite Venitienne, 1981

In 2007 Calle turned her artistic eye back upon herself. After receiving an email from her lover brutally announcing that their relationship was over, Calle took the email, removed incriminating evidence of his identity and gave the piece to one hundred and seven women of a variety of ages and professions (and a parrot and hand puppet) to collectively help her dissect and understand it. The results were then presented in the French Pavillion. Her lover signs off the message with the sentiment 'Take care of yourself' and that is what Calle explains she did, "It was a way of taking the time to break up. A way of taking care of myself." (Preston, 2013) Her vulnerability during this period is important to the piece, she has effectively been left alone and broken up with by letter and hence denied closure or even a chance to discuss the breakup with her partner, known only as 'G'. All power she once held in this part of her life and identity has been stripped from her, the email being the last surviving fragment of the

relationship she once had. By allowing others into this very personal and raw part of her emotional life, she is taking back what little control she has been left with by deciding who can read the email.

The interpretations of the email vary from psychoanalytical notes on a printed copy of the email, a short story, interpretive dance and many more. Calle's decision to, in a way, eventually make the letter public wasn't an act of vengeance it was a small nod to its author that she was carrying out an act of self-care that he had wanted for her. She took the confusion and sadness that the break up letter must have caused and instead created something she could understand from a third person perspective, thus achieving the closure that was denied to her in the beginning. *Take Care of Yourself* subtly speaks out to those who have been hurt by the abrupt ending of a relationship. Calle sets an example of how something positive can emerge from such negativity. The body of work is a nod to women who have been humiliated by the ending of a relationship, it provides the hope that those who have been metaphorically kicked to the curb can pick themselves up again and use that humiliation to further and better themselves. Calle provides a healing mechanism, although she has said that's not what she set out to achieve when creating work "If the work is therapeutic, that is a side effect for which I'm thankful." (Jeffries, 2009)

Take Care of Yourself, from an outside view, is a reassurance that the pain won't last forever, that we all have the strength to 'take care of ourselves'.

Controversial young British artist Sarah Maple is no stranger to negative criticism. Born to a Kenyan Muslim and a Christian from the United Kingdom, Maple explores her own identity in her work and touches upon race, gender, sex and feminism. She was first discovered by the Saatchi gallery in 2007, winning the *4 New Sensations* award (Maple, 2016). Since then her work has been exhibited around the world in places such as Canada, Belfast, Estonia and London. Art critic Andrew Johnson dubbed her "The heir to Tracey Emin's throne...The best of the new young British artists" (Johnson, 2007) in an article in the *British Independent On Sunday*. Her artistic semblance to Tracey Emin are possibly the themes that both artists create work around, answering their own questions on the topics of feminism and what it means to be a woman artist post suffrage in a world that still faces gender inequality. Maple is a self confessed feminist

activist, using her work in innovative ways to promote her views. In 2009, on British tabloid *The Sun's* infamous *Page Three* 40th anniversary, Maple applied Guerrilla tactics to protest against the sexist newspaper feature that celebrates young women exposing their bodies for readers to leer at, dissect and judge. Maple created a satirical self-portrait as an alternative to the *Page Three* feature and inserted one thousand copies into *The Sun* newspapers in London in a November issue. Maple explained that she was not attacking the women who feature in the newspaper, but that she simply believes that women have made such progress in modern society in ways of gender equality that for there to be naked women in tabloids just undermines the progress that has been made. "It is not acceptable to have a naked woman on the third page of a national newspaper and I think that needs to be acknowledged. People think *Page 3* doesn't matter, but it is the most widely read newspaper in this country. All the pictures of women are in their underwear and the pictures of men are success stories, football managers, and business people. The clear message is that men are to take on the world, women are to be looked at." (Ewens, 2014)

Maple posed with large, plastic fake breasts (figure 6) to depict the ludicrous perceptions of women and the concomitant expectations of them as a result of how the media portrays them. Maple said when toying with the idea of the *Page Three* she initially wanted to use an image of an influential woman, but then realised that she could use anything as long as it made the readers think and react. Like Holzer, Maple appropriated a medium that people are exposed to every day. Maple's hijacking of a prominent, national tabloid is not dissimilar to Holzer's postings of her *Truisms* on billboards in Times Square. Both bodies of work disguise themselves as advertisements and newspaper items on first glance, however they capture and hold the viewers attention because the subconscious tells us that there is something slightly different to the thing they are pretending to be. When glancing at Maple's example of *Page Three*, unless one's eyes purposely seek out the breasts at first, one would just assume it is another naked woman in a slightly pornographic newspaper feature. However, it is the difference in skin tone in the chest area that alerts the brain to something that is out of the ordinary and encourages you to stop and read and react. Maple's *Page Three* makes one consider the ridiculous ways we view women and the misogynistic portrayal of women in the media. It questions what people expect to be the norm and almost shames them into reconsidering regarding women simply as sexual objects.



Figure 6 Sarah Maple, 'Sarah, 24, from Sussex', *The Protest of The Sun's Page Three 40th Anniversary, 2009*

In January 2015, *The Sun* eventually ended their four decade long *Page Three* feature after the *No More Page 3* campaign started by Lucy-Ann Holmes in 2012 reached 215,000 signatures and gained support of British MPs and other organisations. The end of Page 3 follows the feminist organisation UKFeminista's Summer School event, which extended over one weekend in August 2014 in Birmingham. The organisation provides unique training and resources to activists and feminist groups. Amongst the five hundred feminist activists attending the Summer School was Sarah Maple, who ran a workshop to encourage the participants to create their own Page Three, much like she had done, and to then slip them into their local papers. "...anything to make a *Sun* reader think, to make them question why we still have this and why we seem to see it as a 'British institution' now. Some of the participants simply had text like 'Bubbies are not news'. It was so great, especially the feedback from ladies who had put it in the paper. It was a very empowering thing to do." (Ewens, 2014)

Maple's active involvement in the Feminist movement comes across strongly in her work; she constantly questions the inequality of women through her different medias and statements. One of her most famous pieces of work is her *Vote For Me* mock campaign series, which her team staged a rally in London for. It is this body of work that won her the *4 New Sensations* prize by the Saatchi Gallery. *Vote For Me* depicts Maple posing as an MP, but with a satirical twist. In the four self-portraits she is pictured with a variety of props and costumes portraying her with a child's black baby doll, the artist dressed as a Playboy bunny, another shows her dressed in a Muslim Hijab and finally wearing a camouflage jacket, possibly meant to imitate a soldier. Beneath these portraits are bold red statements that read, "Vote for me or you're racist", "Vote for me or you're sexist", "Vote for me or you're Islamophobic" (Figure 7). The series makes the audience question why they vote the way they do. Perhaps it is because the candidate for election is of a minority group and by voting for that person, you can reassure yourself that you aren't racist, or homophobic, or sexist. Or perhaps it is because that candidate is of a minority group that you choose not to vote for them. Maple makes the viewer question every motive and encourages them to take a step back and view their decisions and choices from a third party point of view. Using such powerful language in accusation form such as 'racist' and 'sexist' makes the viewer want to rebel against the label that Maple is trying to assign for them, it is a way of bullying the viewer into metaphorically 'voting' for her and is perhaps a social comment on how media today bullies society to bend to their will.



Figure 7 Sarah Maple, *Vote For Me*, Selection from *Vote For Me*, 2007

Maple is no stranger to forceful reaction to her work, much like Holzer, although the responses Maple receives are much more radical. After winning the Saatchi '4 New Sensations' award, Maple was given a wider platform to showcase her work and her first solo exhibition, entitled *This Artist Blows*, was held at SaLon Gallery in Nottinghill, London. During the year leading up to this exhibition, Maple's latest painting *Haram*, 2007, caused uproar in the Muslim community. The painting depicts Maple herself in conservative Muslim attire, a traditional Burkha and Hijab, cradling a piglet with the impression of blood dripping from the crook of her elbow. Maple later stated that the 'drips' were in fact not blood, but a liquid that was 'blood-like', a seemingly thin attempt to take away from the controversial content of the self portrait. Islam depicts that pigs are 'unclean' and must be avoided, *Haram* created intense backlash from segments of the Muslim community, stating the self-portrait was a blasphemous critique of the Koran.



Figure 8 Sarah Maple, Haram, This Artist Blows, 2007

Following the first week after the opening of *This Artist Blows*, the SaLon Gallery fell victim to vandalism where a brick was thrown through the window, the gallery also admitted to receiving emails threatening death in regards to Maple and her family. In an interview with BBC News in 2008, Maple responded to the accusations of offence, countering that her Muslim upbringing was the inspiration behind her work and was supposed to provoke thought and not offence. "I'm not just doing it to be offensive or be malicious, because that's not in my nature and that's not what I'm about as an artist. I just want to make valid points about East and West cultures and whether we can combine the two successfully." (BBC, 2008) Maple defended her artistic freedom, however she later claimed that even her parents refused to talk to her in the days following the opening of the exhibition, "It was horrible. Even now I feel paranoid, if I could take it away, I probably would, but I don't regret the work I made." For two years following the controversial show, Maple was unable to make art.

Maple isn't the only artist to receive critical backlash. Sophie Calle fell victim to the vengeful unhappiness of a man who had been unaware that Calle was using him as a subject in a work by her, featured in the French newspaper *Libération*. Calle had found his address book in 1983 on the street and contacted all of the people who were listed inside, asking them to describe the owner of the book to gain a textual portrait of the subject. The quotes were then published. Angered by what the subject thought was an invasion of his privacy, the man demanded the newspaper publish a nude photograph of Sophie Calle in retaliation. In hindsight, Calle said "I really didn't think I had done anything to displease the man, but he reacted very badly. I did feel guilty, but, to be honest, the excitement I felt was much stronger than the guilt." (Preston, 2013)

Like Sarah Maple, Calle did not regret the work but the reaction that it attracted. It is interesting to note that the retaliation technique that Calle's subject carried out is termed as 'Revenge Porn' and is now a criminal offence in the United Kingdom. Perhaps the reaction of the subject would have been less dramatic had the subject been female rather than male because a study found men lash out more violently when they feel humiliated.

Tracey Emin, a contemporary British conceptualist, works along the parameters of bold, controversial statements. Like Calle, Emin is a storyteller; she utilises her own experiences, and sometimes tragedies, in her work, which is used to make the viewer feel as if they have an emotional connection to the artist. An example of this is Emin's most renowned piece of work *My Bed*, which was short-listed in 1999 for the *Turner Prize*. The bed was Emin's real life bed, transported straight from the artist's bedroom in all of its haphazard glory. It acted as a haven, a place of venting the emotional upheaval and a place to recover following the difficult break down of a romantic relationship. The bed, strewn with crumpled and stained sheets, dirty underwear, old newspapers, cigarette butts and empty liquor bottles is a symbol of Emin's periodic vulnerability. Within the confines of *My Bed* the visual evidence of the healing of the individual is non-existent, rather it is the devastation of the break up that is presented to us. The chaotic appearance of the installation reflects the artist's emotions at the time of creation; it is apparent that Emin has stayed put on the bed for days on end, refusing to leave the place that she once shared with her partner even though they had left her and the bed behind them. It is almost as if *My Bed* is a metaphor for the artist herself: dirtied and then

tossed aside with the old cigarettes and empty bottles, an object to be used and then discarded rather than treated with care and kindness. *My Bed* is intensely personal; Emin allows herself to be scrutinized and every insecurity and imperfection is laid bare. It is embarrassingly honest - more so than if the artist had stripped down to her bare skin and stood upon a plinth for people to analyse. It is more personal than bared flesh; it is the deep, raw wounds of a turbulent and destructive ending to a relationship. It is the only tangible part of the relationship she once had that remains. There is no obvious fight in this piece, there is no 'fuck you and what you have done to me' statement, there is only turmoil and sadness. There is only 'this is what we have done to each other' and 'look at what I have been left alone with'. There is no revenge to be sought out, only self pity, but there is hope too. The bed stands alone in it's devastated glory, laden with debris - the fall out of negative emotion and yet it is empty of the woman who had once occupied it. Like the lover who left his partner and caused the temporary emotional destruction, the artist has also left the bed behind; perhaps to seek to move on from the break up, perhaps to seek out an act of self care.



Figure 9 Tracey Emin, My Bed, 1998

The piece *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* (also known as *The Tent*) was a tent appliquéd with all of the names of the people the artist had slept beside in her lifetime. Viewer preconceptions were often that it was a candid name and shame of notches on Emin's bed post rather than the actual innocence of just sleeping beside someone. Among the names were Emin's grandmother and her two aborted fetuses. Emin drew inspiration from being branded as a 'slut' in her teenage years; the appliquéd tent reinforces the viewer's possible quick judgment of the title and of the intimacy of lying beside these people by physically having the viewer crawl inside the tent to read all the names. The tent includes 102 names, although only 32 of the names were actually Emin's sexual partners. The tent wasn't about sex, but about the intimacy of lying and sleeping beside someone, be it in a bed, on a sofa or on a plane. It explores the intimate innocence of sharing one's personal space when one and one's companion are at their most vulnerable state: asleep. Although only a small percentage of the names were actually involved in sexual relationships with Emin, the tent still has an undertone of

vengeance. Emin explained that the tent caused her trouble because some of the named people had been involved in clandestine affairs with the artist on the side. However her response to their complaints about naming them was “You shouldn’t have slept with me then, should you?” (Goldman, 2015).

She pulls no punches, she refuses to be sole person blamed for an action that two people entered into to. She names and then moves on, as if the act of creating art about them releases her from the memory of the emotional intimacy she once shared with someone. It is an act of closure and one last 'fuck you' to the person who had emotionally impacted upon her.



Figure 10 Tracey Emin, Everyone I Have Ever Slept With, 1995

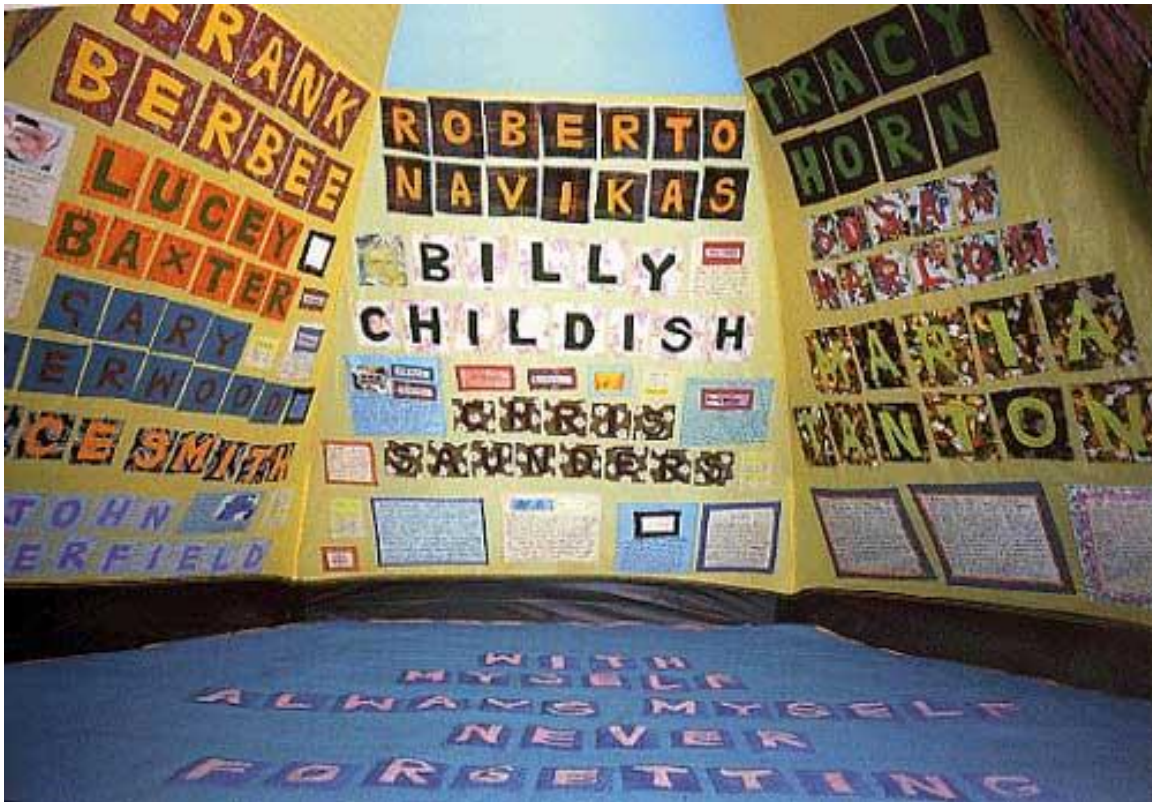


Figure 11 Tracey Emin, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With*, 1995

After *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* and the controversy it attracted by publicising names, Emin moved away from naming people in her art pieces. Most recently, Emin's 2014 show *The Last Great Adventure Is You* saw the artist's work evolve. The 'you' was no longer a person, a subject like one of the many names inside *The Tent*, it became rather a form to address herself. "The 'you' started off as someone else, but then it became about me" (Emin, 2014). As Emin's work progressed she found that her art became about her, the person she was becoming and the person she felt she was when making the art. It began as someone else, someone who influenced her to create work, either to gain perspective, revenge or a therapeutic tool. As Emin's work grew, she herself grew and evolved with it and her art became more internalised, reflected more on herself as she found her own independent existence outside of relationships. "The last great adventure is you. Or me. But never us, there is no us." (Emin, 2014) *The Last Great Adventure Is You* explores the artist herself. The large illustrations in pencil, ink, gouache and bronze bear the artist's naked form of her body, but there is no tone of vulnerability, only exploration and realisation. Not only has Emin found herself

spiritually she has also found herself physically, something she publicly displays in her work.

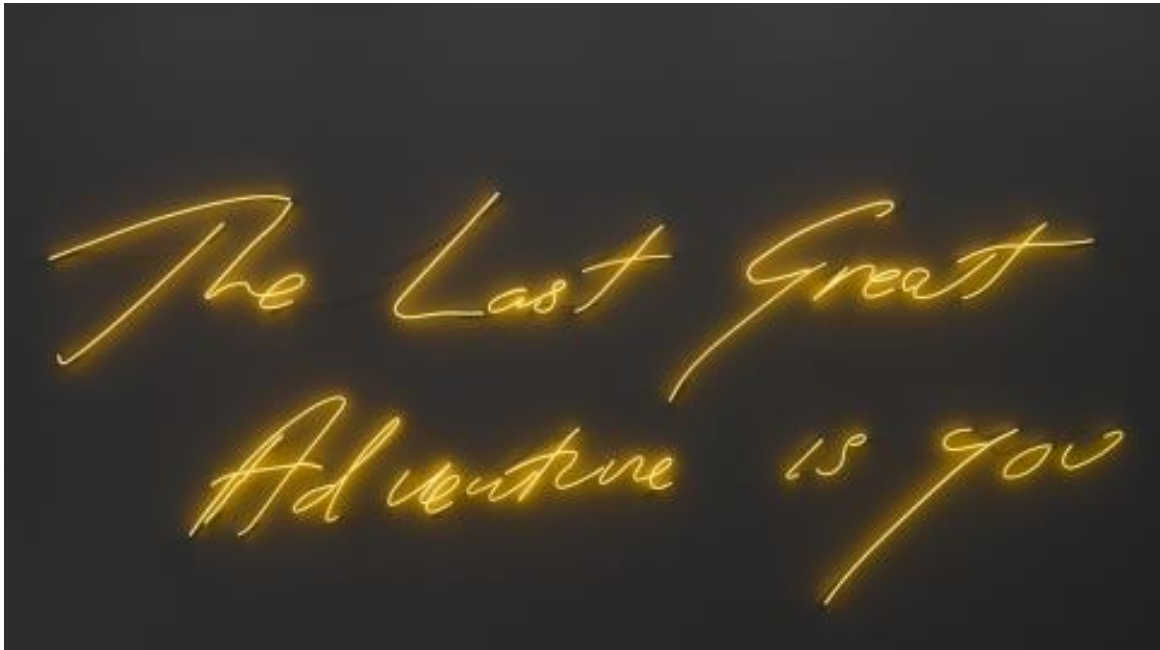


Figure 12 Tracey Emin, The Last Great Adventure is You, 2014



Figure 13 Tracey Emin, The Last Great Adventure is You, 2014

Art as Therapy

An interpretation of *Take Care of Yourself* could read it as an unintentional therapeutic art form, which could inspire others to find a means to heal themselves. Although the actual work itself was intended to heal the artist and allow the spectator an intimate look into how this took place. Art therapy is a relatively modern discipline within therapeutic work; Adrian Hill, a tuberculosis patient recovering in a sanatorium who discovered therapeutic benefits to drawing and painting because the work engrossed the mind, only coined the term 'art therapy' in 1942. French artist Jean Dubuffet worked with patients suffering from mental-health issues living in institutes, and used the term 'art-brut' which described the practice as art created outside the boundaries of official culture. Since its beginning, art therapy has been used to improve the depression and locus of control in prison inmates (although mainly in the United States), in pediatric trauma patients where the treatment is mostly used to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder and in marriage and family counselling sessions.

Art therapy is a triangular relationship between patient, therapist and visual image. The therapist works with the patient for the therapeutic application of image making. There is a distinct difference between 'art as therapy' and 'art therapy'. Art used as therapy emphasises the healing potential of art, whereas art therapy must partake in its namesake of both art and therapy. For example, Calle's *Take Care Of Yourself* could be interpreted as distinctly art as therapy, the effect of creating the art and finding closure along the way could allow the artist to heal without the psychological dissection of a trained and certified therapist. Both art as therapy and art therapy are free from the anxieties of critiques and scrutiny, the art solely made for the purpose of offering healing.

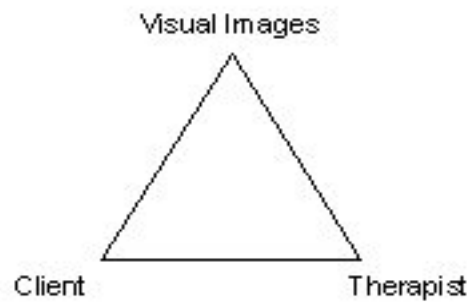


Figure 14 An image representation of the triangular relationship in art therapy

Art as Vengeance

Revenge is the action of hurting or harming someone in return for an injury or wrong suffered at their hands. The emotions related to the act are anger and grievance, both temporary states caused by frustration and aggression (Dictionary, 1350).

Revenge is an enduring theme in art. From plots in plays, characters in television and film, lines in literature and stories in songs, the subject of revenge is a common topic throughout many cultures and time periods. Tales told in the Bible's *Old and New Testaments* heavily influences some of the oldest artworks drawing on the topic of vengeance in western culture.

An example of this can be seen in Juan De Flandes' *Herodias' Revenge* (figure 15) that depicts Salome presenting the head of John the Baptist to Herod and Herodias. While Herod stares at the severed head, Herodias sits ready with a knife to pierce the tongue of John the Baptist in revenge for the saint's condemning of her sinful behaviour.



Figure 15 Juan De Flandes, Herodias' Revenge, 1496



Figure 16 Adolphe William Bouguereau, Orestes Pursued By The Furies, 1862

Whilst vengeance as a theme exists across all spectrums of artistic forms, possibly the most common art form we encounter on a daily basis is music. Contemporary female musicians such as Taylor Swift and Beyoncé are well known for seeking out revenge in their lyrics and calling out the people who hurt them. Swift is possibly most famed for writing songs about the men with whom she was once romantically involved with, something that has bought her much criticism. One of Swift's most pointed songs *Dear John* is an explicit message to her former romantic partner John Mayer and his mistreatment of her during their relationship with lines such as "Don't you think nineteen's too young to be played by your dark, twisted games?" and "Wondering which version of you I might get on the phone tonight, well I stopped picking up and this song is to let you know why". Swift uses her artistic medium to publicly address those who have caused her emotional pain. Because of her fame and popularity it is possibly the most brutal acts of vengeance the artist could carry out against those who have spurned or hurt her because she invites the masses of listeners into the breakdown of her relationships and addresses the reasons as to why with cutthroat honesty.

Revenge is still a strong theme in contemporary art. For example although Calle's *Take Care of Yourself* was a journey of closure, acceptance and self-care, it is hard to deny the subtle undertones of vengeance in the piece. *Take Care of Yourself* is essentially, stripped to its bones, Calle uniting women from all facets of life against a single man who has wronged her. It was a social experiment, a chance for women to break from the victim persona that men often cast upon them and instead take back the power one loses when a relationship ends. The subject known as G sent the email possibly expecting a single response from Calle. What he actually received was an army of women's responses united with Calle, which completely pick apart his email and throw into question his behaviour and mental states.

Another in the line of spurned lovers is famously Frida Kahlo, whose turbulent marriage to Diego Rivera inspired one of her most famous paintings which cemented her place in the art world, unhindered by Rivera's artistic shadow. *Las dos Fridas* (or *The Two Fridas*) followed Kahlo and Rivera's divorce in 1939, a final end to a relationship plagued with affairs, separate homes and countless break-ups. *The Two Fridas* (figure 17) depicts Kahlo's opposing emotions and personalities about the breakdown of her

marriage, set under a dark, stormy sky that represents the relationship. The two Fridas are clutching one another's hand. They are united this way and also by a single artery, which connects their two hearts. Frida is explaining symbolically that she needs only herself, that she is her own lifeline and that she will support and care for herself. The Frida on the right holds a pair of scissors that have severed an artery leading from her heart, perhaps indicating that the vein that once led to Rivera's heart has finally been cut away, linking her only to herself but also indicating her physical as well as emotional pain. The Frida on the right clutches a portrait of Rivera an indication of who she once was - the Frida that Rivera once loved and cared for - a reminder of what he had first fallen for. On the left is the Frida Rivera has abandoned, her bleeding heart exposed and in pain. However she is a new Frida, one without her husband's shadow. *The Two Fridas* helped Kahlo establish herself as an independent artist away from Rivera's artistic success, making *The Two Fridas* one of her most successful vengeance artworks.



Figure 17. Frida Kahlo, *The Two Fridas (Las dos Fridas)*, 1939

Emin's *My Bed and Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* also have vengeful undertones, perhaps more subtle than Calle and Kahlo. Although *My Bed* is a three dimensional metaphor of her isolation, a place that Emin had built out of sadness, from the pain came a tangible object that reflected the end of the breakup and ultimately won her for the *Turner Prize* - something positive rising from a negative emotional upheaval. The *Tent* whilst also representing all levels of intimacy also shamelessly names the people who had sought out affairs with Emin despite already being in existing relationships.

Emin casually brushed off the uproar caused by the named men who adopted the attitude of "if you didn't want to get caught you shouldn't have done it".

Revenge as an artistic form can either be one of the most subtle or most deliberate forms of publicly inviting the audience to journey through the aftermath of a relationship break down, whether that relationship had been platonic or romantic. At its core it is possibly one of the most successful ways to exact emotional revenge because it displays to a wider audience all of the subject's short comings. For example their blatant disregard of the artist's emotions. It reverses the roles of victim and culprit, driving the supposed victim to create something tangible that often acts as a tool to overcome and express negative emotional upheaval, which then in turn becomes a therapeutic art form.

Background, Intentions, Influences

The fact that therapeutic art is made solely for oneself is an interesting contrast to my own work. Where I was creating art to help heal myself after the breakdown of a relationship, I was also aware of the fact that the work would eventually come into the public view. Like Calle, I never named the subject my work was influenced by, but at the same time I was aware that there was a high probability of my subject viewing my work and applying his own interpretation. I created the body of work to help myself through a difficult period, to help myself find closure and move on, but I also created the work in anger after my subject had told me "...It's okay, but to be honest, all your work looks the same." The anger and humiliation I harboured began to fester and I knew that I wanted some kind of retribution, some kind of revenge because for all I was suffering he felt nothing, as if I was disposable. I wanted to publicly humiliate him the way he humiliated me, so what better way than to boldly state all the things I wanted to say to him but was denied the chance to. The act of cutting into the lino was a way to take care of myself, much like Calle's was to share her break up letter, but in a much more private way. As I cut away the excess polymer it was symbolic of the parts of my life I was cutting away after I had my own break up, like the anger I felt and the humiliation I was reliving in my head every day. Unlike Calle, the prints became pieces of vengeance art; I wasn't looking for closure I was searching for a way to let him know how he'd hurt me and

what I now felt for him. It was important to me to document my emotion and reaction to the break up, since like Calle I was removed physically from the actual ending of the relationship. As an obsessive person I relived the worst things he had said to me constantly and slowly they became the subject of my reaction prints. I began giving the prints titles that were direct quotes from our worst arguments in the hope that if he had doubted that the prints were about him then those qualms would be squashed.

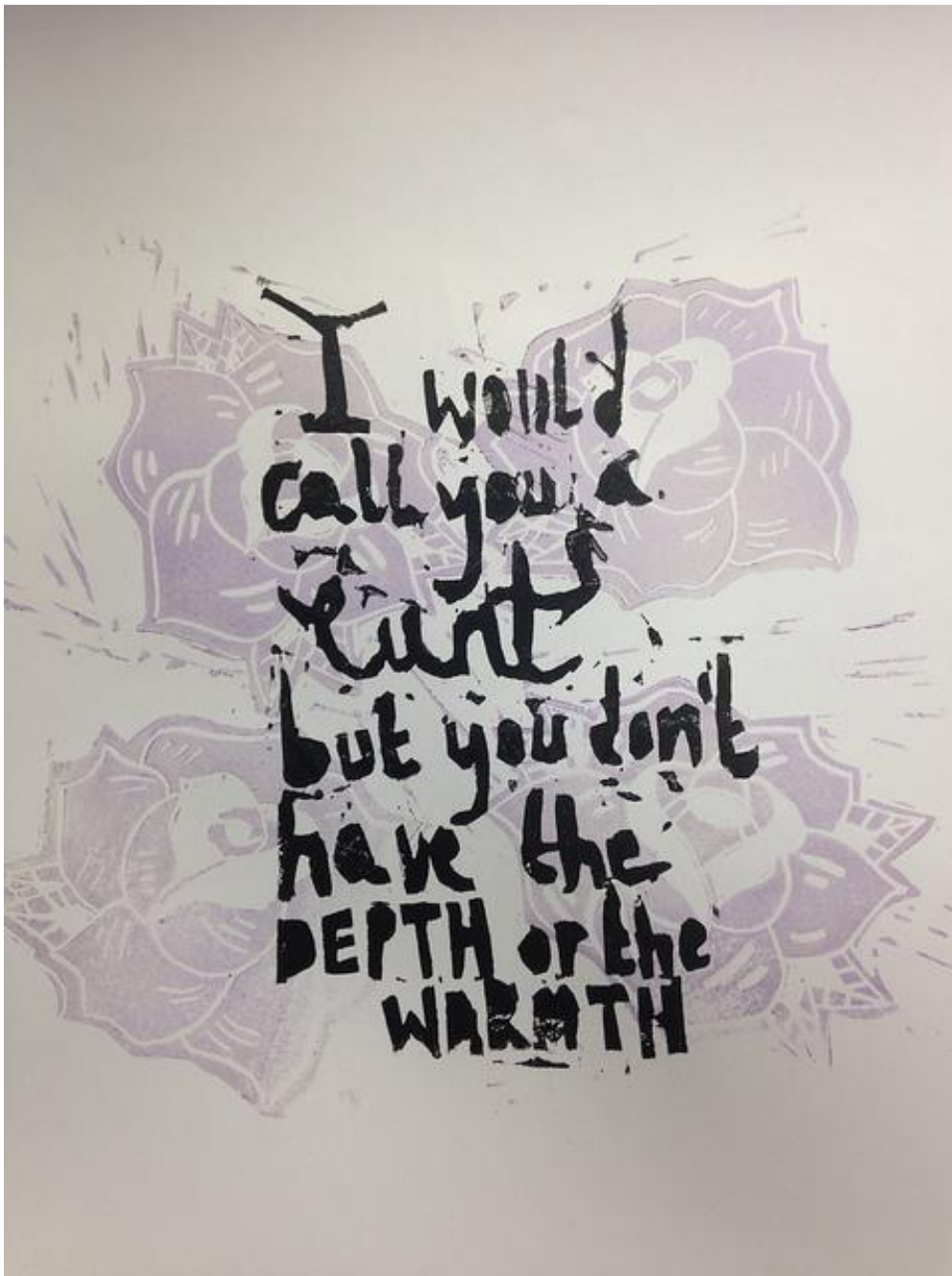


Figure 18 Toni-Marie Harrold, "I'll treat you right" VS "You're a miserable cunt" selection from This Isn't About You, 2014

The very first lino print design I created used slightly stronger language than older work I had produced; a crudely cut out cactus in a teacup silhouette sat above the line "I'm no cactus expert, but I know a prick when I see one". Unlike Holzer, at this point there was no interest in reaction, the print was merely a way to channel the anger. As the weeks progressed and the prints multiplied, I began pinning them to a board above my workspace. Although on public display, I viewed it as a 'safe place' because it was a working artist environment, I reasoned with myself that the worst feedback I could receive would be constructive, so I continued to pin the prints up. I didn't consider that the artist environment would occasionally hold host to others who weren't so artistically minded. Two tradesmen were working in the studio, both male and one slightly older than the other. The younger stated with a smirk as he walked in "Sorry ladies, I'll try to keep the swearing to a minimum." He was then pointed towards my prints and with a smile was told "Not to worry, we've heard worse", the reaction my work received then wasn't one I had anticipated or even considered, the smirk and swagger disappeared as he read the contents of the prints and rhetorically spat "Why?!" before beginning his work, not bothering to try and crack jokes again.

This was the beginning of an interest in the reaction to my work for me. When I first started the prints, despite not being concerned with public reaction, the only person I had wanted to read it was the one person who had hurt me and who had caused me to lash out artistically. The tradesman's tone, that was joking and smug beforehand, changed dramatically into spiteful, perhaps even venomous, tones. One can't help but consider that the man's male ego had been punctured at this point; despite women being considered fragile I have yet to come across anything as fragile as a man's ego. Swearing has been considered a masculine form of talking for decades, teenage girls and older are often told "It's unladylike to swear" and yet society accepts that a man can use all the cuss words under the sun and no one tells him that it is "un-man-like". The contents of the prints are easily determined as the product of a woman artist and I can't help but think that because something seen as masculine (cuss words and swearing) had been used by a woman that this had deeply offended the electrician who seemed to think it was reasonable for him to swear in public, but not for me to print these words onto paper and quietly display them.

As an artist, my work has consistently featured text and image. The decision to explore lino print came into fruition during the first days of the events that inspired my body of work. For a month prior to creating the body of work I found myself suffering with a creative block, unable to create anything I was satisfied with. During my graduating year of my Bachelor's degree I experimented with mono print and creating image and text on different surfaces, such as tissue paper, cardboard and textured wallpaper samples.

During the period of the creative block, I returned to mono-print hoping that the familiarity of it would help spark inspiration. The hope was in vain, perhaps because I felt as if I had taken mono print to the point where I could no longer develop the actual print creating skill. While I was going through the motions with the mono prints, I was told by a peer, ironically the one who would go onto inspire the body of work, that "all your work looks the same", which inevitably stunted my creative flow even more. Two weeks later, after our brief, shattering encounter I came across polymer lino blocks and began to cut into it with a rusted scalpel. I found that it had more to do with the therapeutic act than it had to do with the final outcome, a way of releasing my anger without hurting others or myself. As I began to create more prints, I developed my lino cutting skill levels and purchased correct tools for the task. Now armed with a woodcarving tool instead of an old scalpel I found that I was creating lino carvings with ease, with much more appealing results in contrast to my earlier cuts.

I chose lino print because of its therapeutic attributes as well as its ease of mass production. I was able to release the frustration and humiliation I felt, whilst also reproducing the prints until I felt better. Much like Calle I was taking care of myself. The idea of reproduction stayed with me for a while. I researched fly-posting with the intent to wheat paste the prints in local areas I had been with the person who had hurt me. However because of the language used in the prints I felt the risk of getting caught or identified outweighed the benefit. Unlike Holzer, whose statements were relevant to politics and the feminist movement at the time, my prints were aimed at just one person not society. It was one thing to be lectured by different people in a controlled artistic environment where my work was created to exist, it would have been a wholly other thing to display the prints in public without censorship where I would not have control over who would read them, my concern was mostly for children and the backlash I would face from their parents.

I chose to create prints of my own reactions and emotions instead of just printing the insults directed at me because I didn't want his opinions of me to become immortalised, I wanted to move on and find my own closure, whilst also throwing my own, metaphorical, verbal punches. As the seven months of print making in this series progressed, the explicit language began to peter out, I found myself healing and the anger that had fuelled my prints ebbed away. This was a parallel to the development of my lino cut and print skill, the very first - more angrier prints - were crudely carved out of polymer with a blunt and rusted scalpel knife, an example would be the print titled *I'll treat you right" VS "You're a miserable cunt* (figure 19). The sharp, undefined edges of the print make it almost difficult to read. However as my skill developed and I found the more traditional and practical tools for the job, I made the decision to not recut the print, but to instead leave it in all it's crude glory. It complimented the actual text of the print, the crudeness of the language and the cut style belonged together, which contrasted with the carefully cut image I layered behind the type. It's important to note that I first began cutting my designs with a scalpel knife because it is symbolic of my emotion at the time.

I was in such a rush to project my feelings of anger and turn them into something tangible that I used the closest object I could think of that would complete the task I was aiming for. The fact that it was an old, rusted and almost blunt scalpel is almost reminiscent to the breakdown of the relationship that influenced the print series. As my cutting skills developed I left the scalpel behind, just like as I healed I left the memory of the relationship behind. I grew and changed as a person alongside my cutting and printing skill, which is something that is noticeable when the prints are displayed in their grid. The tone of the prints become slightly softer in progression, moving into more image based designs rather than text, like the jellyfish print (figure 21).

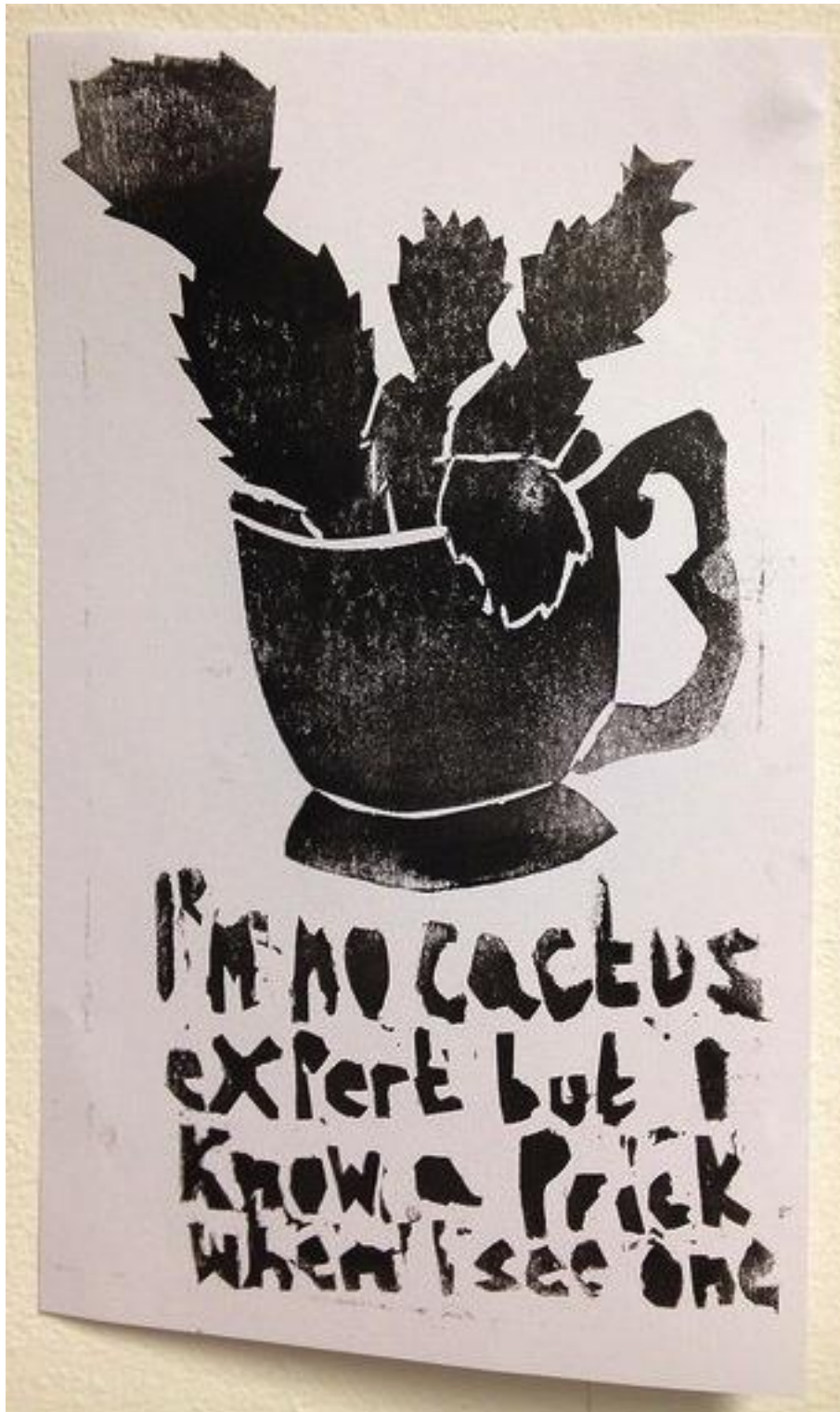


Figure 19. Toni-Marie Harrold, "You're Reading This Wrong. I'm Not Bothered", selection from *This Isn't About You*, 2014

Presentation of Work

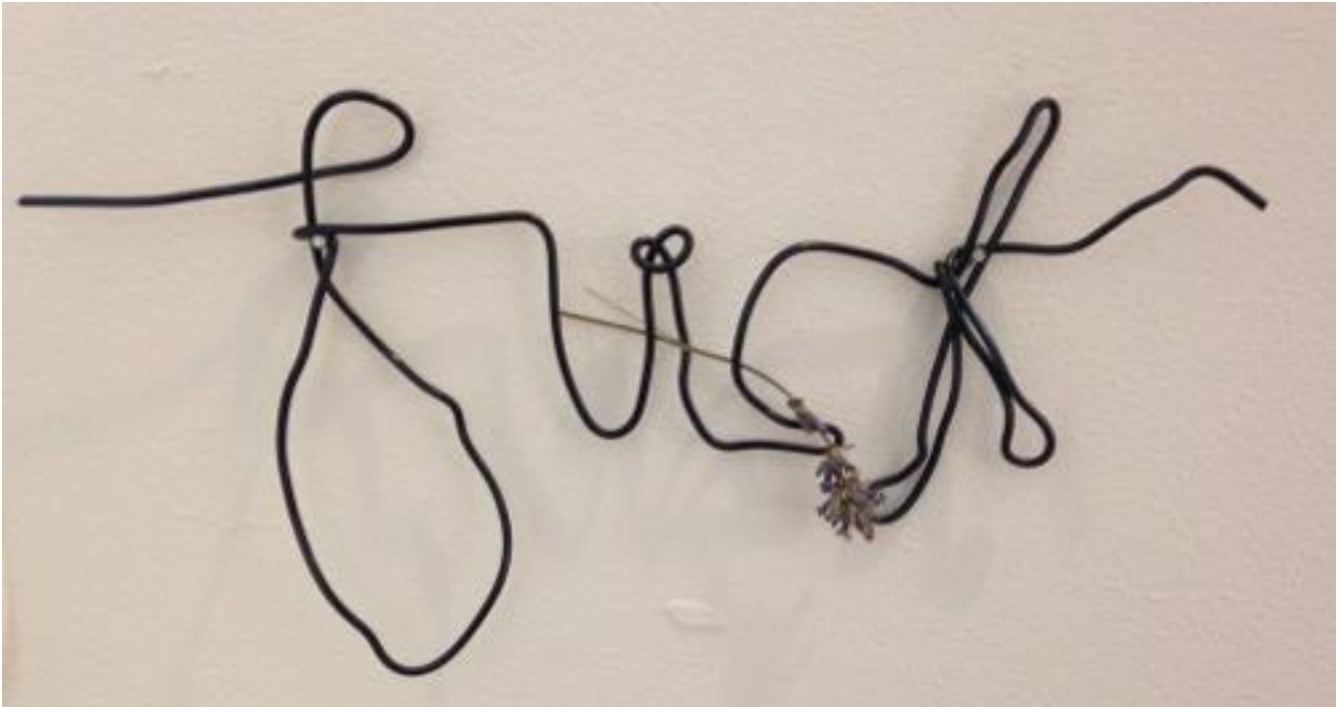


Figure 20 Toni-Marie Harrold, "You were a really good friend to me" VS "thanks for being another reason to hate your gender", wire selection from This Isn't About You, 2014

In the early stages of developing my lino print skill I also began to experiment with wire, which is something I had briefly touched upon in my third year of my undergraduate degree. I wanted to explore methods of image making that could also translate into text. I found that the wire could be manipulated easily into letters and words because of the continuous line of material, whereas manipulating it into an image wasn't as effective. *You Were a Really Good Friend to Me VS Thanks for Being Another Reason to Hate your Gender* was the first piece of wire-based text I created. In this body of work, it is the only wire piece to include a contrasting natural object in the form of a piece of Lavender flower, which I had sourced from an area which I used to frequent with the inspiration and subject of my work. I chose to include the Lavender because it softened the brutality of the word *Fuck* with the plants natural beauty. The fragrance of a lavender flower is often used in products such as bath oils because research has shown that the scent relaxes the body and mind. This, then, creates an interesting contrast between the natural qualities of the plant and the human made word 'fuck' which is often used in more stressful situations or environments.

The ambiguity of the word *Fuck* contrasted well with the decisive nature of my lino prints, fuck can be used to describe an act or something that is said in anger after an accident (for example stubbing ones toe) or even said in reaction to something that has been said or happened. It is the ambiguity of the word that encourages the audience to interpret the work in their own way or even impart empathy when reading the contents of the artwork, which is what I set out to achieve when gathering the prints and choosing the show pieces.



Figure 21 Toni-Marie Harrold, This Isn't About You, 2014

When deciding upon the pieces I wanted to include, I wanted the prints to somehow convey a story of progressive anger that finally fades to some form of personal closure. By beginning with the statement 'I deserve better' in the left hand grid, I was able to begin to convey a story of sorts with images. As the prints lead the eye through the two grids in which they are arranged, we are able to see the tone change from almost self pity to scathing anger aimed towards a third person and on to acceptance where the

second grid ends on 'And you don't deserve me'. As well as the text in the prints, the imagery is equally important. The most important text and image pairings are the first and last prints displayed. In the first print we see a knife piercing a hand. The statement accompanying the image implies that another person has stabbed the knife into the palm. In contrast to this, the last print the audience views is a hand gripping a dagger and therefore metaphorically taking back control of the situation and perhaps gaining the closure that is obviously needed.

The most effective layouts I experimented with were grids. Whilst visiting London's Saatchi Gallery, Tate Modern and Margate's Turner Contemporary gallery I was able to carry out research into effective print display methods. Had my prints been larger than the A5 size I would have considered only showing two to four prints, however because of their size, coupled with the wire pieces. I made the decision that the prints would be more striking if the quantity was larger. I chose to lead by example of the research I had carried out and followed the composition of the Rule of Thirds (*Rule of thirds*, 2016). This kept the composition from being split horizontally or vertically and therefore drew attention to the centre where the eye was then drawn out and onto the rest of the composition.

When it came to hanging the prints, I initially had the idea that all the prints would be framed in plain black frames which wouldn't interfere with the tone I was trying to convey. However, after purchasing the frames and inserting the prints inside, I found that the frames markedly reduced the works' overall impact. They appeared too uniform, which undermined the state of the prints and their story. However that being said there is one print that I kept framed and hung. The decision to frame "*I'll treat you right*" VS "*You're a miserable cunt*" (figure 22) was a happy accident. During the short period where I considered framing all of the prints, I happened to pick up the first print I had to hand while I was experimenting with framing, which happened to be the "*I'll treat you right*" VS "*You're a miserable cunt*" print. Of all the prints I then went on to put in the frame, this was the only one that worked with the frame, rather than getting lost in the frame.

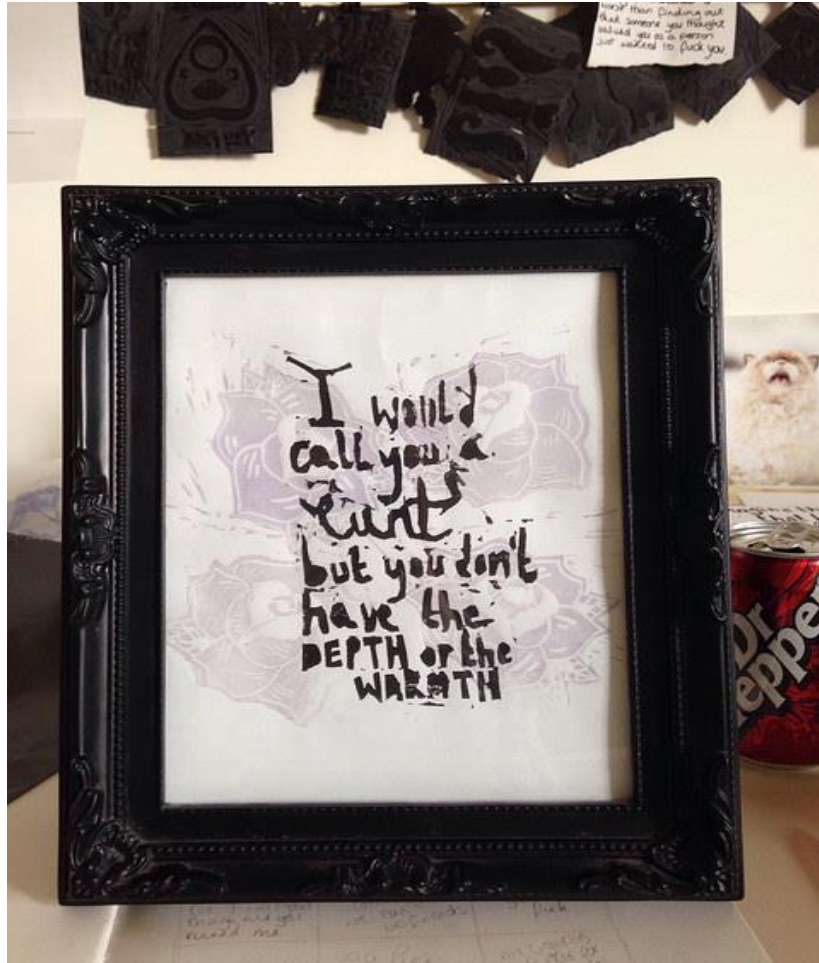


Figure 22. Toni-Marie Harrold, "I'll treat you right" VS "You're a miserable cunt", selection from This Isn't About You, 2014

Responses: Both Negative and Positive

The tradesman, whose name I didn't catch and probably wouldn't even credit, sparked my interest in reactions from strangers who weren't used to my work. During the exhibition in June where my work was being shown, I was exposed to just how strongly some people reacted to my work, usually critically and not at all constructively. A few examples: I was told that the language in the prints was "unnecessary" and "vulgar", I was told "If I was your teacher I wouldn't have let you put the prints up at all" and "I thought this language was far too vulgar to come from a young lady" and the prints were described as "disturbed" and "not art at all". For such language that is so common place in public now, especially with the younger generation, it was surprising just how many people considered the swearing in the prints to be offensive and even repulsive. Unlike Jenny Holzer, because my body of work stemmed from a subject so personal and

sensitive, I actually struggled with the thought of other people reacting to it and I struggled with it even more when they did.

During the end of year show where my prints were displayed, I endured four hours of criticism about my choice of language and why I was allowed to show them. It took exactly thirty seconds after walking into the building on opening night to be cornered by a gentleman in his sixties who recognised me from my place of work. After pleasantries were exchanged, he insisted that I show him my exhibiting work, something I would later regret and wish I had said I was just visiting instead. As we walked towards the room I was showing in, he told me "I hope your work isn't the one with all the swearing." I found this intriguing, that despite walking around the gallery rooms, my work would be one that stuck with him. It made me consider that perhaps the only reason my work was so memorable was because it was so insulting and crude. After two minutes of awkward silence, mostly on my part, but one can never be sure, the gentleman turned to me and asked me to explain why I was so angry. After explaining for the first of ten times over the evening he told me that he felt there was very little need to use the language I had. I left the conversation at that and bid him farewell. I can understand that perhaps he felt I was overreacting and lashing out in my work, possibly because he was unable to relate to the emotional turmoil I went through, but I reassured myself that art is subjective and not everyone is going to relate to how I felt. I didn't realise that his reaction to my work was the most positive I would experience that evening.

Throughout the four-day run of the show, I received mostly negative criticism of my work. I was told that it was "unnecessary" and that I was possibly "feminist scum" which was an interesting reaction that only followed the viewer taking a moment to read my name plaque. I was repeatedly told that if that person had been my lecturer then they would not have allowed me to show such "disrespectful" art, that it wasn't even art at all and one gentleman even wanted me to read the contents of the prints to him because he didn't believe that such language could come from "someone like me".

In the midst of all this negativity, I received feedback from a group of teenagers visiting from an education provision for young people with mental health difficulties. As soon as they discovered my show space they became enthused, some saying that they could

relate to the content of the prints because of the language used, which contrasted greatly to being told that the language used was vile. One girl stated that she swore a lot in every day conversation and that she struggled to internalise the swearing to keep up a polite conversation, but she found it inspiring to see it written down and used in an artistic form, because that's how she felt daily. It was interesting to note that the group of teenagers were female and that the body of work made them feel almost liberated from the social taboo that is swearing. Women are told constantly from a young age that "it is unladylike to swear" and that a woman swearing is one of the biggest turn offs for men (*12 big physical turn Offs that guys always notice!*, 2013), however men are never told that it is 'ungentlemanly' or that it is a turn off, we simply accept their choice of language. Like Emin explored in *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With*, there is a social construct that favours gender inequality. For example, a man is celebrated for the high number of women he has slept with, but if a woman were to match that number she would be slut-shamed. In 2016, where gender inequality still exists, women are still told that they are vulgar if they happen to utter words such as fuck or bollocks. Men in particular, even in the media, are quick to tell a woman how terrible she is for using the same language that they use on a regular basis.

In 2014 *Daily Mail* columnist Quentin Letts published an article following the *Glamour's Woman of the Year* awards where actress Helen Mirren stated when accepting her award "Your 40s are good. Your 50s are great. Your 60s are fab. And 70 is fucking awesome." (Showbiz, 2014). The article published under the headline *Why do female stars swear so much? Pass the carbolic soap. After Helen Mirren turns the air blue at an awards ceremony, QUENTIN LETTS urges modern female celebrities to wash their mouths out* goes on to describe Mirren as an uneducated trollop, infantile and embarrassing (Letts, 2014). Throughout the article, despite male celebrities like Graham Norton being referenced, there is little discussion of male public figures swearing or indeed how uneducated they sound. The article merely focuses on how women are becoming less respected by men for using the same language they do. "The more girls swear, the less they will be held in respect by blokes. How can that be good for women?" (Letts, 2014). Taking examples from my own life, I can see that this is a popular opinion especially with men. I have often been told that I shouldn't swear and the only reason I am given is a reference to the fact that I identify as female. However, while Letts insults women for

simply using words that society have deemed impolite, men, such as actors Bill Nighy, are congratulated on their boldness in using such language. In an *Esquire* article in 2014, Nighy was even asked advice on how to insert the word fuck correctly into a sentence within the first paragraph. "I find it very difficult," says Bill Nighy, and there is no reason to doubt him, "not to say 'for fuck's sake'. Very few people use the f-word correctly and properly. It's pronunciation. The insertion of it into a sentence." (Wilson, Renwick, and Pope, 2013). The writer of the article, Paul Wilson, goes on to talk to Nighy about his near-miss swearing on live television during interviews on more than one occasion, never once insulting Nighy by calling him an 'uneducated trollop', or talking of his 'vulgarity'. In fact Nighy is portrayed as a kind of cheeky schoolboy who should be indulged and even encouraged to continue his spew of profanities. However had the same interviewer met with actresses Winslet or Mirren with intent to discuss the same use of language, the opinion and portrayal of the actresses would be in stark contrast simply because of their gender.

It isn't just the acting world, this specific type gender inequality also happens within the music industry. Rapper Nicki Minaj, a self-proclaimed feminist, often uses profanities such as *dick*, *pussy* and *bitch* within her lyrics. Minaj is often urged by fans and critics to cut out the profanities, however she stands by her artistic choices by asking why men, especially in the same industry's genre, aren't asked to do the same "Why do people ask me to lose swear words? Do people ask Eminem to lose swear words? Do they ask Lil Wayne to lose swear words? Nobody stops them." (Corner et al., 2016). There appears to be a double standard within society when it comes down to women and men. Women are constantly told how to speak, how to dress, how to act, when there are very few rules society puts in place for men.

Interestingly the word 'cunt' has been described as the most offensive swear word (*Cunt*, 2016)

in the English language, with the most taboo surrounding it. A dictionary definition of cunt describes it as a noun, which refers to a woman or a contemptible person, it is one of the most hateful and powerful examples of verbal abuse (Dictionary, 1275).

It is also the only word in the English language that can be used to reference the whole of the vagina. I chose to include this word within my work simply because the subject of

my work happened to call me a *cunt* more than once during an argument. It made sense to me to reclaim that word, to take what was one of the worst insults I have received and turn it back upon it's user. There is much debate about the etymology of the word *cunt*, with several different sources each tracing back the word to different branches of history. One source can be traced back to Oriental Goddess Cunti (Summer and profile, 2011), alternatively known as Yoni of the Universe, which translates to vulva. However, most sources consider the word to derive from from a Germanic word *kuntō*, which appears as the word *Kunta* in Old Norse (*Kunta*, 2016). It can also be argued that *cunt* descends from the basic Latin *cunnus* for *vulva* (*Latin profanity*, 2016).

As a word that describes part of the female anatomy and being a woman with one between my legs, I did not agree with the feedback I received especially surrounding the print *"I'll treat you right" VS "You're a miserable cunt*, (figure 18) I believe that it is my right to reclaim that word and use it wherever is appropriate.

Conclusion

From Holzer to Calle, Emin, Maple and Kahlo women artists have addressed the oppression of women, their treatment as objects and stereotypes. Women are openly fighting back. Feminists question the gender inequalities, the unfair advantage men have as sexual beings whilst women are either viewed as sexual objects or criticised for their sexual prowess. Women artists are also doing this, especially the more contemporary artists such as Emin and Maple who use their sexuality and the oppression they have experienced in todays localised society as major influences in their work, examples being *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* and *Sarah, 24, From Sussex*. Their artworks question their treatment in contrasting ways. Whereas Maple calls out the sexism in tabloids with her artistic and mockery of Page Three features in a slightly political way, Emin addresses the ways in which her peers have passed judgment on her sexual prowess in the subtlety of her tent.

Vengeance in art is sometimes a difficult thing to discern because of the vulnerability and very personal tones of the artworks. It is almost like stumbling across a very personal diary entry and blushing at the things you read on the page. Art as vengeance is very much like this - it aims to humiliate those who have caused physical or emotional harm and in the process it can either empower or embarrass the viewer. The notion that

emotional art by women can embarrass the viewer possibly stems from the generality of male artists shying away from creating deeply emotional art, preferring to be stoic and literal rather than openly vulnerable for an audience. My body of work stands in the tradition of difficult and embarrassing. From the reactions I received, whether negative or positive, it was proven that my art made an impact and by the end of production of the prints my revenge became artistic - it was no longer personal. Beyoncé says that "...best revenge is your paper." (Knowles, 2016) and the honesty of it is, regardless if Emin or Calle really wanted to exact their revenge they did so anyway by publicising their work and earning recognition and money from it. My work isn't just vengeance, it stands with women. It takes back the verbal abuse women are subjected to by men and instead creates something beautiful. My work falls into all of the spectra of art I have discussed. I took my artistic skills and transformed them into a personalised therapy, into a statement against gender inequality and into vengeance against those who had hurt me with the use of text and image whilst also creating something beautiful.

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