Comparative Study

This comparative study will examine the links between three artworks from three different artists. The artwork explored is as stated:

- Damien Hirst’s “Nessus”
- Anila Quayyum’s “Sublime Light”
- Barbara Hepworth’s “Sculpture with Strings”

The main theme explored throughout this comparative study is the repetitions and patterns in life; organically, socially and historically.
The patterns created by the insects in the mandala are similar to the patterns and layout of drawn mandalas. This creates an effect where from far away, an unsuspecting observer wouldn’t even guess that the artwork was made of insects.

In a mandala, different colours symbolize different meanings. The most prevalent colours in this piece seem to be green, blue, black and orange. These colours are representative of physical healing, emotional healing, mystery/deep thinking, creativity/transformation.

Contrasting colour rows

There is a vast variety of colours present in the artwork. The bright colours such as green, orange and yellow and blue compliment the dark colours such as black, brown, and dark blue. Hirst has placed the insects in a way that creates ‘rows’ of the juxtaposing colours. It is laid out in a way that the different rows are alternating in bright and dark colours, creating a contrasting effect.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Audience’s World</strong></th>
<th><strong>Audience (response)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Artwork</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In our society, people are usually discomforted by the idea of death. Death is known to be a morbid topic in our society. This context is significant for this piece as the artistic elements are comprised of dead insects.</td>
<td>As death is known to be a morbid topic, this juxtaposes the bright, elegant and sophisticated patterns created by the insects in the piece. The audience’s response is likely to be awed at first and pulled in by all the bright colours and intricate patterns, followed by surprise once the audience realizes what the piece is made of.</td>
<td>As Hirst was born and raised in a western society, he must be aware of the social implications of death. This piece was perhaps a way for him to experiment or test his audience’s reactions when looking at this piece as it is extremely well made, yet made of things society may find discomforting and/or displeasing.</td>
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**Artwork name:** Nessus  
**Completion date:** 2009  
**Material:** Preserved insect corpses  

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**Artwork**

[Image of the artwork]
Damien Hirst was born in Bristol, England in 1965 and currently lives and works in Devon and London. Damien Hirst possesses an artistic style that was quite unique in his time period. Hirst’s art usually consists of preserved animal carcasses. This is most interestingly seen in his entomology painting series, where he uses a variety of different coloured bugs; most commonly beetles and butterflies. Examples of these can be seen on this page.

Using dead insects as the medium of art is something that greatly interested me as insects are things that are usually perceived as repulsive and disgusting; yet Hirst manages to create a colorful, intricately patterned mandala piece out of these insects.

In addition to the nature and perceived image of insects juxtaposing the aesthetic of Hirst’s outcomes, the spiritual meaning of the mandala paired with the fact that the insects are dead is extremely symbolic. The mandala represents wholeness; reminding us of our relation to ‘infinity’ and extending beyond and within our physical body and mind. Essentially, the mandala represents our life and our desire to find our true purpose. The symbolism of the mandala is greatly juxtaposed by the fact that the medium of the artwork is dead insects.
The following picture displays a sculpture piece created by Barbara Hepworth, titled “Sculpture with Strings.” Hepworth created this in 1961, using plaster from 1939.

The rounded edges and the reflective, wooden looking surface of the sculpture creates a sleek-looking finish. The sculpture appears to be hollow in the top right area, with strings strung from the center of the piece to create a net where there would otherwise be a hole.

The sculpture is placed on a rock which is in focus, unlike the background. The slightly smaller size of the sculpture causes the rock to appear large, as if it is a pedestal for the sculpture to be placed on. The background creates a calm, tranquil atmosphere as the sky appears slightly orange, perhaps due to the sun setting as well as the sea behind the sculpture and the trees.
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<td>Many people consider sceneries such as the background of this photograph to be relaxing; inducing feelings of serenity and calmness. Considering that this piece was completed in 1961, before the age of technology, spending time outside was perhaps valued much more than it is in modern society.</td>
<td>The response that this piece may induce in the audience is feelings of tranquility and relaxation as there is a very calm mood, most of which comes with the background in relation to the sculpture and its placement. The colour of the sculpture suits well with the colour of the background and the sleek, reflective finish of the sculpture’s surface may induce feelings of satisfaction within the audience.</td>
<td><strong>Artwork name:</strong> Sculpture with Strings  <strong>Completion date:</strong> 1939/1961 (cast in 1961 with plaster from 1939)</td>
<td>Hepworth believed that landscape was very important in displaying sculptures, holding the opinion that “no sculpture really lives until it goes back to the landscape, the trees, air &amp; clouds.” Perhaps this piece and many of her others were made to convey this opinion to her audience in hopes of showing the importance of landscape.</td>
<td>Hepworth was born in Wakefield, Yorkshire, UK in 1903. As this was a very long time ago and technology was very limited, it is likely that she spend most of her time near her hometown. The landscape of the UK allowed Hepworth to use backgrounds such as the one seen in this piece.</td>
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</table>
Significance

The background of these piece creates a relaxing, serene tone which suits the colour of the surface of the sculpture. The smooth brown is supported by the lighter, low opacity orange colour of the background, presumably created by a sunset. The sculpture’s smooth texture contradicts with the texture of things in nature; however its colour causes it to seem fitting to its environment due to trees being in the background as tree stumps are brown.

“Sculpture with Strings”

Perhaps what Hepworth is trying to convey with this abstract sculpture being in nature is that just because things may look different to each other it does not necessarily mean that they don’t belong together. The is an abstract, man-made object and so is not natural. However, when placed in nature, it seems as though it was meant to be there in the first place.
This is a very unique piece named “Sublime Light” by Anila Quayyum. This installation not only uses shadows as a medium for the art, but the stencil used in order to create the shadow can also be seen as part of the art.

The symbolism of the mandala in addition to the way that this installation is delivered to the audience is highly symbolic, as the mandala is a circular, 2D object yet is it emitted from a 3D cube, almost the opposite of a circular 2D object.
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<td>In western culture, geometric ornamentation may be found in areas of religion such as churches or cathedrals. Many Buddhist temples contain complex geometric art such as this and many tourists walk into these temples just to admire the artwork and beauty of the place. In addition, in western culture, things that are different than the norm are seen as ‘unique’ and ‘special’</td>
<td>This piece was inspired by a palace in Spain and so perhaps some of the audience may relate the artwork to some sort of landmark or establishment which reminds them of the patterns seen. This artwork would most likely be seen as very unique to the audience as the steel cube in the center was cut by lasers in an extremely intricate pattern, yet the walls around the cube seem to be the larger medium for the patterns. This would cause the audience to want to think about how the installation works and how Agha created it like that.</td>
<td>Artwork name: Sublime light Completion date: 2015 Material: Lacquered steel and halogen bulb</td>
<td>Agha’s works in a cross disciplinary fashion with mixed media. She creates artwork that explores global politics, mass media and gender roles within our society. As a result of this, this causes her artwork to challenge her audience; hopefully causing them to think deeply about her what her artwork is trying to convey.</td>
<td>Agha received an MFA in Fiber Arts from the University of North Texas. This suggests that the artist is familiar with cultural context in western society as she would have spent a few years in the US while she studied for her MFA. In addition, she was originally born in Pakistan and so Islam may mean a lot to her.</td>
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Significance

It is important to note that Agha was inspired by the Alhambra Castle in Grenada, Spain in order to create this installation. This is significant because in the 9th century, the fortress fell into ruins and was then rebuilt by rulers of the last Muslim dynasty in Spain from the 11th – 15th centuries. As Agha is from Pakistan (which is a Muslim country), she might hold a particular value for this due to it being a piece of history in her culture.

Sublime Light

The cube shape is central to this installation. The cube is placed in the center of the room between the 4 walls around it. Since each face of the cube has the same pattern carved into it, when light shines through it casts shadows on the 4 walls, all with the same artwork, using the edges of the face of the cube as a border which separates each side of the wall.

The center of the pattern is very mandala-like. This is relevant because mandala is a symbol of spirituality and exploring our minds. This is significant because:

a) Agha was inspired by religious artwork
b) Agha wishes for her audience to explore her artwork through her symbolism.

Because the mandala is seen as a symbol of expanding our minds and reaching spirituality, it fits with Agha’s goal of trying to get her audience to think about what her artwork is trying to convey through the complex patterns and designs of Islamic art.
Uses light/shadow
Consists of a mandala
Made of dead insects
Background is significant to piece
Is symmetrical
Is an installation
Made of 3D objects
Made of lacquered steel and halogen bulb
Is in black and white
Uses light/shadow
Lighting is important to the piece
Uses string
Cast in plaster
Is a sculpture
Colour is important in this piece
Utilizes nature
Made of 3D objects
Consists of a mandala
Is symmetrical
Is a 3D collage
Vibrant with many contrasting colours
Made of dead insects
Is in black and white
## Similarities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All</th>
<th>“Nessus” x “Sculpture with Strings”</th>
<th>“Sculpture with Strings” x “Sublime Light”</th>
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| - The only similarity between all three different pieces of art is that they are all made of 3D objects. | - Colour is important in both of these pieces.  
  - important in “Nessus” as it is a mandala shape, requiring the colours of the piece to be symmetrical. In addition, it causes the piece to look more vibrant. Important in “Sculpture with Strings” because the background is important to the piece  
  - Nature is used in both of these pieces as dead insects make up “Nessus” and the sculpture is placed within nature | - The main similarity is that lighting is key in both pieces. If the lightning was positioned somewhere else in “Sculpture with Strings”, the reflected light on the sculpture would have caused the piece to look different.  
  - Light is important to “Sublime Light” because it is the way the artwork is delivered to the audience. | - Are both symmetrical  
  - Both contain a mandala within the artwork  
  - The mandala is significant because even though mandalas are present in both pieces, their symbolism and meaning comes from different places. |

- The only similarity between all three different pieces of art is that they are all made of 3D objects.
## Differences

### “Nessus” x “Sculpture with Strings”
- They are made of different materials
- “Nessus” is made of dead insects while “Sculpture with Strings” is made of plaster
- “Nessus” is a collage of 3D objects while “Sculpture with Strings” is a sculpture
- “Sculpture with Strings” is a manmade object placed in nature while “Nessus” is natural objects placed together to make a manmade object

### “Sculpture with Strings” x “Sublime Light”
- Made of different materials
- “Sublime Light” is made of lacquered steel and a halogen bulb
- “Sculpture with strings” is a sculpture while “Sublime Light” is an installation
- Utilizes the background differently
- “Sculpture with Strings” uses existing nature as background while “Sublime Light” creates its own background using shadows on walls

### “Sublime Light” x “Nessus”
- Made of different materials
- “Nessus” is very colorful while “Sublime Light” consists of different shades of gray
- Sublime light is an installation while “Nessus” is a 2D outcome
Significance to “Nessus” to my own work

The main influence that Hirst has had on my artwork is his medium. Using dead insects in order to create something so vibrant and attractive made me think of a link to my theme; that our flaws all come together to create something beautiful. This inspired me to make an animated mandala which was designed from random shapes copy and pasted on a 360° axis to symbolize that there is “Beauty in our Flaws”.

The link between “Nessus” and my own piece is that I used a variety of vibrant colours (all the colours change in the animation) in order to attract the audience’s attention through a unique outcome with a constant shift of colours as well as music paired with the animation. I aimed to create something familiar yet unusual; just as Hirst did in “Nessus”.

Nessus
Damien Hirst
2009

Beauty in our Flaws (animation)
2016
Significance of “Sculpture with Strings” to my own work

The influence this piece had on my theme was to consider the environment and its symbolism in order to convey the message of my theme. As Hepworth uses the environment in order to convey her values towards nature, I have done the same in the sense that I used nature in order to convey a message.

The similarity between “Sculpture with Strings” and “Life in Death” is that unnatural materials were used in nature in order to create an outcome. Both pieces are also trying to trying to make a link between the natural and unnatural.
Significance of “Sublime Light” to my own work

The main thematic influence that this piece and Agha had on my outcomes is that she wishes for her audience to explore her artwork through her symbolism. This is my exact goal, especially with my piece “Fresh Start”. This piece conveys the message of starting anew and being able to regrow even though we may feel broken. The two pieces are not visually similar, but Agha’s use of the mandala and its spiritual symbolism is a definite link to my theme as I wish to encourage the audience to improve their mental well being and knowledge of their own personality.