ART COMPARATIVE STUDY

This comparative study will scrutinise the links between three pieces of artwork that come from three different time periods and cultures: Käthe Kollwitz’ “Never Again War”, Shirin Neshat’s “Woman With A Gun” and Barbara Kruger’s “Your Body Is a Battleground.” The main theme in all of these pieces is repression.
Never again war is a street poster created in 1924, the image falls under the genre of “Expressionism”, this refers to the artist's expression of her feelings or emotions. The image is a simple yet detailed portrait. The person has one hand on the heart and the other up to the sky almost as if they are pledging or swearing to “Never again war”.

The image is a lithographic print with charcoal sketching which makes the line very thick and heavy putting emphasis the intensity of the image. The dark colour against the plain background makes the image very bold and strong.

Most of the lines are very sketchy and smudged in this image which mirrors the imperfections and problems of the time the piece was created in. However, both hands are drawn in detail, as both hands look as through a are a part of a pledge with one hand on the hear and one hand to god. This highlights that the only thing that is perfect and correct is the promise to improve and the promise of never again war.
AUDIENCE
Käthe Kollwitz was known for her sketched drawings that were powerful and intense. Her images were controversial, such as her image and sculpture of the woman with a dead child. The images were scrutinised by the audience during this time. As the audience were living in fear it is hard to determine how they would’ve responded to this piece as on one hand, war was what they feared but on the other hand without war they might lose their country to another.

AUDIENCE’S WORLD
Käthe Kollwitz created this piece after the end of World War one during a time whilst there was still conflict in Germany. As conflict was still common the living environment would have been very tense as the constant threat of war was there. The image would have been posted in the street in Germany. As the public would have seen a lot of pro war posters and not many anti war posters.

ARTIST
As a German who would’ve seen many pro war posters she wouldn’t have seen any anti war posters. This would driven her to create something different during a time of political turmoil.

ARTIST’S WORLD
Käthe Kollwitz was a german artist, she predominantly worked with: etching, drawing, lithography, printmaking, woodcuts, painting and culture. As Kollwitz lived during World War II, her artwork was heavily influenced by it. In addition to war being a huge impact in her Life and artwork, it is believed that Kollwitz suffered from anxiety during her childhood due to the death of her siblings. However, it is believed that she may have suffered from “Alice in Wonderland syndrome” a clinical condition associated with sensory hallucinations and migraines.
The image “Never Again War” by Käthe Kollwitz was supposedly inspired by an individual at a rally who threw his one remaining arm, he had lost the other in the war, and shouted “Nie wieder Krieg!” Meaning never again war. This was Kollwitz's inspiration, Kollwitz often created her piece of the stories she had heard from people rather and used the idea of the story rather than taking the literal imagery and detail.

After Kollwitz created this piece, the posters were plastered all around the city, after the story of the individual at the rally and these posters became popular, the term “Nie wieder Krieg!” was yelled frequently at anti war rallies with everyone mirroring the image in Kruger’s piece.

One hand on the heart and two fingers up is recognised as a “Schwurhand”, “a salute used in central Europe for Swearing Oaths”. (Whitner, 2006)
The Image ‘Woman With a Gun’ by Shirin Neshat is a very powerful image of a woman with arabic writing over her face and a gun down the middle. The rest of the woman’s body is covered by a burka which is the traditional clothing for women as revealing their skin is considered religiously inappropriate.

The monochromatic colour scheme add intensity to the work as it highlights the serious nature the image was created in, the contrast of black and white in the image mirrors the contrast in culture that Neshat exposes in this piece. The arabic writing over the face blatantly highlights the religious smothering that Neshat feels women in her country feel. The eyes stare directly at the audience with a blank, lifeless stare. Additionally, the gun is in reference to her country that has been involved in war for an extended period of time.

Neschat centres the woman in this image making her the obvious subject which puts her importance at an extremely high level. The intention of this image would’ve been highlight the living conditions and contrast of culture between Iran and America.
APPLYING MCAFEE KING’S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO SHIRIN NESHAT

AUDIENCE
The audience may find it difficult to connect on a deeper level with the art as it represents the harsh conditions of being a woman in an oppressive country. As Americans have not experienced the harsh realities of other cultures, the image becomes something shocking and interesting rather than something relatable.

AUDIENCE’S WORLD
Her work is primarily displayed in New York where she lives. New York is a very economically developed city in America that believes in equality and knows very little what it is like to have the cultural repression that people suffer from in Iran.

ARTIST
Shirin Neshat is an Iranian artist who lives in New York. Her image speaks from her cultural background to an audience who hasn’t experienced the oppression that is common from where she is.

ARTIST’S WORLD
The Artist grew up in Iran, a country that does not have equal rights. The oppression of women by the culture has been an issue that has been displayed in art for decades as it is something that is powerful and unknown to those in other cultures.

Woman With A Gun
Shirin Neshat
1994
‘Woman With a Gun’ by Shirin Neshat is one image from a series that explore gender issues in the Islamic belief. Neshat’s work has been so powerful in highlighting the issues at hand that she has been banned from her home country since 1996. Neshat’s piece is not only made to educate outsiders of the hardships that she and “the women of Allah” have suffered from, it also is made to empower “the women of Allah” themselves. Neshat believes that after the 1979 Iranian revolution, many woman became “brainwashed and submissive.”

Neshat’s series has supposedly empowered those without a voice, the majority of Islamic women are forced to wear veils which literally repress their freedom and allow them to have very little choice. The Persian text overlaying the woman’s face is used to highlight the contrast between the Islamic world that she grew up in with the modern society after the Iranian revolution.

The text overlaying the woman’s face is Persian poetry that uses themes such as femininity, exile and identity to highlight the repression that Islamic women face everyday.
The image ‘your body is a battleground’ by Barbara Kruger, is a close up of a woman face. The image is split down the middle with three bold captions. One half of the image is a regular black and white image whilst the other half is a negative image. The negative image has similarities to an X-ray. The split of image gives two perspectives, the outward appearance versus the inward appearance.

The outward appearance is the the way someone looks. How attractive or unattractive they are. On the other hand, the inward appearance is someone’s personality and other traits.

This is very closely related to the caption as it states “your body is a battleground” the battleground needing two opposing sides which are, outward and inward. These two conflicting sides that make up a person are highlighted in this piece. This may be in reference to the self-conscious nature of today’s society and the issues surrounding the presentation of beauty ideals by the media.
APPLYING MCAFEE KING’S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO BARBARA KRUGER

AUDIENCE
The audience would have responded positively to this image as it was all about supporting women’s rights. The image highlights the flaws in today’s society. The audience might be shocked to see this piece as it brings something to light that they might not usually pick up on.

AUDIENCE’S WORLD
The audience lives in a world where the media rules everything around us. We are constantly flooded with images of models on magazines. America is known for its high beauty standards and its perception of what is beautiful.

ARTIST
Barbara Kruger is known for her intense images that make bold statements. Her bold captions on black and white images. She has made huge political statements in previous pieces and continues to do so.

ARTIST’S WORLD
The image is a satirical piece which attempts to highlight the flaws in the modern presentation of beauty standards in today’s society. Magazines are something extremely common in today’s world as well as the constant release of images of models.

Your body is a battleground
Barbara Kruger
1989
‘Your body is a battleground’ by Barbara Kruger is influential piece it has inspired many artists such as Shepard foley, the Obey artist. The bold captions are now something seen frequently in pop culture, brands such as obey, supreme, offwhite, etc… have all adopted this style. Kruger’s work influenced mine as I created a piece that used some of her styles. I used her Bold riders on a red background on a monochromatic image. Kruger’s work inspired many create images that comment on flaws in our society. ‘Your body is a battleground’ comments on the scrutiny women go under and the piece was created for a women’s rights march in 1989.
COMPARISON OF “NEVER AGAIN WAR”, “WOMAN WITH A GUN” AND “YOUR BODY IS A BATTLEGROUND

Käthe Kollwitz - ‘Never Again War’

Barbara Kruger - ‘Your Body is a Battleground’

Shirin Neshat - ‘Woman With a Gun’
The three images share many key characteristics. The use of bold colours is seen throughout all of the images as well as a face being one of the key features in the piece. Additionally, another feature in all of these images is the use of text which has significance to the piece and the time it was created in.

Further, all of the people represented in the images are women. The women are all significant throughout the piece as they all highlight how gender can change the way an art piece is interpreted.

All of the images were made to inspire change, whether it be Rights, Peace, or Living Standards.

1. Your body is a battleground
   Barbara Kruger
   1989

2. Woman With A Gun
   Shirin Neshat
   1994

3. Never Again War
   Käthe Kollwitz
   1924

All images consist of contrasting colours that make the image appear to be more bold and intense. The use of black and white gives suggests the serious nature of all the images which supports the original intentions of the artists work.

The use of the intense gaze in both Kruger and Neshat's work highlights the severity of the issues represented in the pieces. Whilst Kruger looks at the issues of the portrayal of women in media and beauty standards, Neshat approaches the issue of repression women in her country and religion.
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ‘YOUR BODY IS A BATTLEGROUND’, ‘WOMAN WITH A GUN’, AND ‘NEVER AGAIN WAR’

Kruger is the only one to break the monochromatic theme. The use of red for the background of her text is something she does for everyone of her pieces. The bold text clearly highlights the meaning of the image, without the caption the image would not be as powerful.

Out of the three images it is Kollwitz’s image that does not comment on rights surrounding women. While the other two both have very clear goals of making a statement against the repression of women, Kollwitz’s image is strictly commenting on was and the importance of ending it.

All three of the images are created in different mediums: Shirin Neshat’s piece is created with ink on a photograph whilst Käthe Kollwitz used lithographic crayon and charcoal on paper to created her piece. Finally, Barbara Kruger’s piece is a photographic silkscreen on vinyl.
Kollwitz's image ‘Never again war’ is a propaganda poster that promotes the end of wars. She uses bold writing to caption her piece and has an image of a person that allows the viewer to see themselves in the piece.

My piece is a propaganda poster from the cultural revolution that shows Mao as an almighty being in the sky being worshipped by those literally below him. It is made up of many small images of Chinese people who lived through the cultural revolution or were negatively influenced by it.

Both Kollwitz’s and my own images are propaganda posters. Both of our pieces attempt to make a comment against society highlighting the issues of the government and how an individuals can represent a whole movement.

However, whilst Kollwitz’s piece is a lithographic print with charcoal detail. Whilst my piece is a digital collage.
Neshat’s piece shows how repression can silence a group of people and leave them without a voice. Her ability to shine light on repression and attempt to empower the women of Islam and give their voice back.

My piece attempts to try and do the same. I used the example of Tian an men square, during Mao’s reign thousands of people were massacred. I used Mao’s portrait that was printed over a collage of newspaper. Behind Mao’s image I put an image of the Tian an men riots.

In both my and Neshat’s work, there is text covering the face of the focus of the work. However, as Neshat uses text to highlight religious repression, I used text to highlight the way that media and figures of authority can distort the truth.
Barbara Kruger has inspired and influenced artists throughout the art world. Her ability to convey such strong messages with very few words has always moved me.

Her style of using bold letters on a bold red background overlaying a monochromatic image is something that is very confronting to the audience that makes them question and think about things that we are exposed to every day but don’t notice.

I mimicked Kruger’s use of bold lettering over a red background something that Shepard fairey also uses in his work. Fairey has said that Kruger was one of if not the biggest influence on his work much like they both are on my work.

The monochromatic image behind the text highlights the simple power behind the intentions of the text. 

Whilst Kruger’s piece is a photographic silkscreen on vinyl, my image is a stencilled spray painted image on my old Apple MacBook.