

1917, 2019. Film¹.

Directed by Sam Mendes.

Written by Sam Mendes and Krysty Wilson-Cairns.

Not art in the narrow sense.

The first time I watched 1917 in cinemas I was struck by the artistry of it. It stands out against the rest of the films in its genre thanks to both its exceptional cinematography, and the anti-war story it chooses to tell.

While commercial films designed for the big screen are not art in the traditional sense, 1917 has encapsulated the 'art' of cinematography. This is seen most exceptionally in the contemporary and skilled use of a technique that has been implemented since the advent of film in the early 20th century. The film is cut together in such a way that it looks to the unknowing viewer that it was shot continuously, with the exception of one moment.² Cuts are hidden in dark spots or when an object crosses the view of the camera. With the help of modern technology (no longer physically cutting film), this can be and is done in such a masterful way that it is nearly unnoticeable.

1917 holds both personal value to Sam Mendes, who's grandfather the film was based on, and to the audience who are deeply affected by the film's message. The film also showcases artistic value as the height of 2019 cinema, recognised by many institutions, including the Academy Awards³, Golden Globes⁴, BAFTAs⁵, and many more⁶.



¹ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8579674/>

² <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/12/30/21021190/1917-movie-sam-mendes-interview-one-shot>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qi78h-kwhKo>

⁴ <https://www.goldenglobes.com/film/1917>

⁵ <http://awards.bafta.org/award/2020/film/best-film>

⁶ https://m.imdb.com/title/tt8579674/awards/?ref=tt_awd



The Swan no.1, 1914. Oil on Canvas.
Hilma af Klint.

An artwork that matters to me personally.

While I do not remember the first time I saw one of Hilma af Klint's works, I have always experienced a sense of familiarity when viewing them, especially her *The Swan* series. While *The Swan no.1* is an exceptional painting alone, it stands better with the rest of its series. The duality of the series appeals to and soothes me in more than a purely visual way.



Throughout these works af Klint combines the use of thick oils in a slightly stylized fashion as seen in the swans' wings, as well as clean, defined lines to clearly communicate her intended symbolism. During her life, af Klint was drawn to religions, the esoteric, and mysticism. These influences can be seen through all her works⁷. While there are more direct links to religion in her first series *Group X*, similar themes can be seen in *The Swan*. The swans in this painting strive for unity despite their opposite natures⁸. Af Klint plays with binaries; black & white, male & female, life and death⁹, implying the alchemic fusing of opposites by the end of the series.

The abstract works she made are the first in Western history, years before other artists famed for their abstraction such as Malevich or Mondrian. However, her works were not exhibited until twenty years after her death in 1944, hence her recognition has not been as great as the men that came after her. While her works are timeless, they go alongside Modernism inviting a questioning of its rejection of tradition¹⁰.

⁷ <https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/exhibitions/hilma-af-klint-2013/topics/#:~:text=The%20suite%20called%20The%20Swan,white%20swan%20striving%20for%20unity.>

⁸ <https://www.guggenheim.org/audio/track/group-ix-suw-the-swan-no-1-1915-by-hilma-af-klint>

⁹ <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/artboards/hilma/the-swan/>

¹⁰ <https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/hilma-af-klint>



vocabulary of solitude, 2014-2016.

Installation.

Ugo Rondinone.

Contemporary artwork.

I went to see this work twice in the time it was exhibited after lockdown, with two different groups of people. The

wide open room full of lifesize clown manikins was striking both times. No two clowns are the same, different colourful costumes and different poses.

While the artwork is not about the clowns themselves, Artist Ugo Rondinone uses them as a conduit for his themes of searching for and holding onto authenticity within oneself. The distinct colours give each clown their own individuality, but also speak to being a colourful community of 'outsiders'¹¹. Rondinone also assigned each their own task to perform, to sleep, to sit, to cry, etc. The combination of these two elements invoke a response in the audience, to reflect on being their own individual self in the world.

The clowns are in the same space, but are explicitly alone in their posture and expression. As the title of the work suggests they are all resting in solitude, quiet and still. It's in their nature as manikins. The work calls us to also slow down our busy lives to get on their level, whether that is physically or simply mentally taking a moment, it pulls the viewer to reflect on themselves. The work speaks to our current society and way of doing things, how we rushed and how we have gone back to rushing after the stillness of lockdown and quarantine.

When visiting the exhibit myself, seeing the room full of colourful and individualistic clowns made me want to pick one that I identified with most. This also went for my friends. We chose different ones, but they all ultimately called to us for the same reason, their contemplativeness. It would have been difficult to ignore the work, it drew us in and we mirrored their contemplation back at them when choosing. Right is a photo of me mimicking my favourite.



¹¹ <https://www.aucklandartgallery.com/article/clown-time?q=%2Farticle%2Fclown-time>



This Tree is Mine!, 2022. Film.
Sriwhana Spong.

Contemporary artwork.

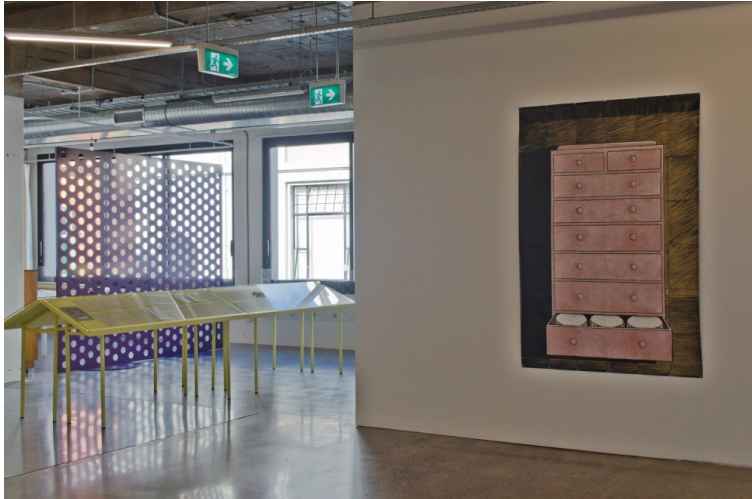
This Tree is Mine! is done in ink and shot on 16mm film. The flickering images are accompanied by a host of noises and a clear voiceover of a woman speaking about trees, and of women. Sriwhana Spong uses these elements to invoke her inspiration from female mystics of the mediaeval period. The flicking film is hypnotic, and the voiceover is powerful. The other noises in the film's audio growl and splutter, giving a more animalistic or demanding feeling to the work. Through the evocation of the mystics' dreams, other ideas around bodily autonomy and womanhood are expressed.

There is no real replacement for seeing this work in person. The combination of where it is exhibited, in a bank vault underground, and the work's messages work in tandem to give the viewer the full experience and impression that the artist intended. The red ink on the slides bubbles by in grotesque gut-like squiggles and red bloody splotches. Even the vault's carpet is red. This reminds the viewer, especially viewers assigned female at birth, of menstrual blood and reproductive organs. The bank vault is dark, close, and warm, imitating a womb. The viewer is fully immersed in the work.

"A woman sees in the dark, trees that renew her ... then in wakefulness, she sees, the same in her"¹². The words within the voiceover reminded me of the Hail Mary; "blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus"¹³. It commentates on the intersection of religion and womens rights that we are seeing today, especially in America with Roe v. Wade being overturned.

¹² <https://michaellett.com/exhibition/sriwhana-spong-2/>

¹³ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/prayers/the-hail-mary.html>



Door Window World, 2023.

Artspace.

Exhibition.

Founded in 1987, Artspace was designed to be an artist-led gallery that brought art to the community. They aim to “both promote NZ art and actively engage with voices from elsewhere”¹⁴ through their exhibitions, telling the stories of our ever-changing society.



The gallery operates by focusing the year’s five exhibitions around one question, “where does my body belong?” is 2023’s question. The exhibition I saw, *Door Window World*, leant into a domestic-centred interpretation, showing a combination of cross-decade

works from Maree Horner and J.C. Sturm, and their experiences with the household. These works included *Selected journal excerpts and ephemera* (1958, see in first image above), a curated selection of journal pages from when Sturm was in India, trying to balance the household and her poetry writing. Closeby to this there is an early 2000s TV in the Reading Room showing *Broken Journey: The Life and Art of J.C. Sturm*, a 2007 documentary on Sturm’s life. The last piece I will mention is *Chair*, a 2019 reconstruction of the 1973 work Horner submitted for her masters degree at ELAM. All of these works question what part we play within our own lives, how we relate to where we live and take up space.

All of the works exhibited, while not all contemporary in time, are presented to tell a narrative reflective of our society today. Artspace is doing something new with something old. They bring into question how we entwine our creative practices with the other more domestic elements of our own lives, and how this can affect both sides of that.

14 <https://artspace-aotearoa.nz/about#about>



Work No. 227: The lights going on and off, 2000. Installation.
Martin Creed.

Contemporary artwork.

Martin Creed's 227th work is simple in execution. He uses the gallery space as the artwork, turning the pre-existing lights on and off at 5 second intervals. Creed uses the lights to draw attention to the form of the walls- they become more than simply backdrops for artworks, but the art itself. It is a non-traditional investigation of space and time through everyday things like a room with lights in it.

The "misbehaving"¹⁵ lights become a conduit for challenging the generally understood function of the gallery. The timing between lights turning on and off also draws the viewer into the work. The average person spends only 8 seconds looking at an artwork before moving on¹⁶. It takes 10 seconds for *Work No. 227* to complete an on/of cycle, requiring the audience to stand and view it for at least that, if not longer to see if it will do it again. The absurdity of the piece invites contemplation and investigation.

The work's essence stays the same despite the differences in light and rooms at different galleries, however the reactions viewers may have can differ depending on what gallery they are at. For example, I found the images above (from the Tate) to be more interesting to contemplate than the ones below (from the MoMA¹⁷). This can come down to personal taste, but also relates to how we experience the gallery itself, and what values we hold aesthetically.



15 <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/creed-work-no-227-the-lights-going-on-and-off-t13868>

16 <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/guide-slow-looking>

17 <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/101549>