

ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

**Review of 'someunconsciousthings' exhibition
Festival of the Unconscious
The Unconscious Revisited at the Freud Museum
24th June – 4th October 2015**

By Emma MacKinnon

A Creative Resistance

For this exhibition, the artist/therapists return to their ancestral home to reveal themselves through their collective works. Dream like images and conversations are formed visually and in writing.

It is the artists' unconscious made conscious that we engage with through these creations. The visitor is invited to take the role of observer and also of therapist. We witness the animal in man/woman kind, fragments of childhood, relics, talismans, and phallic imagery. Pregnancy, birth, babies and breasts - the classics of Klein. A group member comments that assembling the exhibition, and the ensuing relationships with individuals involved in curating and creating it, gave him/her a greater insight to a personal unconscious process, confirming the relevance of Freudian thought to art therapy. As a recent graduate I felt I gained richer understanding of those who had been my educators and that, in this space, I was continuing to learn from and with them.

The group writes: "The drama [art practice in art therapy] takes place within hospitals, schools, prisons and hospices...."

The staff of the MA Art Psychotherapy course, from the institutional bricks and mortar of Goldsmiths College, gathers in the family house of Freud which has become a museum; a place of objects to which more objects have been added. The building is also an object, itself derived itself from someone's imagination, and we perceive it through our own references both unconscious and conscious.

'Our articulations arrive unconsciously, but they are sourced from thousands of localities over our lifetime' (Bolas, 2009 p 2). Freud (1930) initially used the image of the city and its buildings as a metaphor for the unconscious. The artist Ai Weiwei talks of the governmental overnight 'renovation' of Beijing. As a part of this, the brickwork of his childhood home was covered with a concrete render: 'In one day the whole of Beijing does not have the same skin as before. Everything is painted' (Weiwei, 2011 p 15). A method of obliterating memory by removal of physical markers.

Cultural destruction is referred to in this exhibition in the bombing of the Mali temples. The Freud house currently stands intact; a museum fortress for the surviving contested legacy of psychoanalytic thought.

A wooden construction reminiscent of a ritualistic container, an Ark of the Covenant, also references, in its spiked exterior, the surrealist art of Man Ray at the height of the Dada movement in Paris. It appears to be both female and male - a penetrating container. Other objects resonate on this theme, for example the pyramid with 'its portal to the womb-tomb within the phallic monument'. These seem to be 'things' defending themselves. The exhibition is a manifest vision of the group's creative resistance to the deconstruction of wisdom.

A group performance was given as part of the exhibition private view:

The little family of staff exists, dimly illuminated at the back of a room within the Freud Museum, where they comply, and don't comply, with directives. There is no conscious leader. The intention is to collaborate. Agreeing to disagree and to accommodate difference within equality. They seem to have fun. It is playful. It offers an alternative to war.

I experienced this exhibition as a heartfelt homage, a reinforcement of belief. About remembering to remember, and not allowing the constructs of art and psychoanalysis, as methods of explaining the human condition, to become forgotten 'unconscious things'. In the presently observed age of left brain dominated thinking, or failure to see the bigger picture (McGilchrist, 2013), I take the word 'resistance' to mean a creative, rhizomic reaction to pinching bureaucratic world values - to the "network of small complicated rules" that now governs our lives and the "mediocrity that comes from too much monitoring" (Iain McGilchrist, Whitehead Lectures, Goldsmiths, December 2015)

"Where is the life we have lost in living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

(Eliot, 1936)

Perhaps the presence of the exhibition also suggests that, if we abandon our universities, our schools and our museums, which are places of creation, exploration and memory, to overriding digitalization (as opposed to the sensual, physical and experiential) – what we are experiencing is the distancing of the actual so the result may be a stunted, two-dimensional existence of ignorance, oppression and ultimately loss.

someunconsciousthings available at:

<http://www.i-m.mx/goldmaap/theunconsciousproject/freud-museum>

Biography

A fine art degree and travel fed an interest in anthropology and ethnographic textiles. After training and working as a textile conservator, Emma moved to school special needs support, and graduated from Goldsmiths MA Art Psychotherapy in 2014. She has worked with asylum seekers, young people and the homeless of South London and is

currently in a university pastoral role. Her interests include the evolution and demystification of art therapy.

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