



Three Ages of the Woman and Death

Notes on the Representation of Transience of Life in Art

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ABSTRACT

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In the written part of this bachelor's thesis a report of the artistic process of the artwork Three Ages of the Woman and Death is presented; an overview of the working process and development of the artwork is provided. The author explains the process behind the creation of the installation. The sources of inspiration, archetype work and traditional art themes and possible meanings could be found in this work.

The report includes research on the subject of transience of life in art history. The subject of life and death originating in the primordial past is one of the central topics inherent in all cultures of mankind. The matter of fragility of youth, the inevitability of death has been used by artists of different times as the fear of death, as well as the fear of aging is rooted deeply in our subconscious, it influences every aspect of human's life and serves as a source of inspiration. The subject of death in the works of Renaissance artist Hans Baldung Grien and contemporary artist Christian Boltanski is discussed. The discussion of the Camera Lucida, the philosophic essay written by Roland Barthes, is provided.

The theoretical part also includes research on the subject of ageism, fear of getting older, and its impact on mental health of women. Research material is based on writings of art history and psychology studies. Research methods include hermeneutics and semiotic analysis.

Key words: contemporary art, vanitas, gender, ageism, installation

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	4
2 HANS BALDUNG GRIEN'S 'THREE AGES OF THE WOMAN AND DEATH'	6
3 ANALYSIS ON 'CAMERA LUCIDA' BY ROLAND BARTHES.....	8
4 THEME OF LIFE AND DEATH IN CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI'S ART	10
5 FEAR OF GETTING OLDER AND AGEISM.....	13
6 FOLKLORE AS THE SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND WORKING WITH THE ARCHETYPES	16
7 THE PROCESS OF THE ARTWORK 'THREE AGES OF THE WOMAN AND DEATH'	20
8 CONCLUSIONS.....	27

1 INTRODUCTION

The written part of this bachelor's thesis includes a report of the working process and development of the installation *Three Ages of the Woman and Death*. My background in art history serves often as my source of inspiration. The artwork *Three Ages of the Woman and Death* is a contemplation of the relevance of the art theme originating far in the past.

The main aim of my artwork is to reflect relevant issues such as mass anxiety and fear of growing old; inability to accept one's own body image by women. It also reveals some global environmental issues which are taking humanity closer to the edge of extinction.

Female image as a traditional symbol of life, fertility, and motherhood is especially important for this artwork as the way to illustrate how the origin of life is a subject to death. I have been interested in the eternal topics of life and death, transience of life and the afterlife as well as their historical context which I will briefly expand on for clarity. Apart from that, I have tried to explore gender, societal and environmental issues relevant nowadays, through the method of installation.

The painting *Three Ages of the Woman and Death* by Hans Baldung Grien, created in the 16th century, has inspired me to create my own artwork related to this subject. The idea of life and death peacefully existing in one frame, connected and residing in harmony was inspiring. Society has changed a lot since the 16th century, yet we have the same fears and worries as the people who lived so far in the past making this topic as relevant as ever.

As a contemporary artist I didn't want to repeat the old masters' medium and create a painting but I wanted to show the relevance of this problem nowadays, in today's realities by using contemporary methods and appropriately modern materials. In this report I will cover the meaning behind the chosen medium and objects in my installation.

In my thesis work, I will also discuss *Camera Lucida* (1981), the book written by a French philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes. It consists of his contemplation of photography, honesty of the medium, its ability to capture time and repeat moments. It addresses how the medium can precisely reflect the transience of life and the imminence of death.

I will analyze the artworks of Cristian Boltanski, a contemporary artist whose artistic methods and philosophy are close to mine. I will discuss the psychological phenomenon of the fear of getting older and death anxiety and try to analyze how modern culture and unattainable beauty standards dictated by mass media impact the mental health of modern women.

2 HANS BALDUNG GRIEN'S 'THREE AGES OF THE WOMAN AND DEATH'



PICTURE 1. Hans Baldung Grien, *The Ages of the Woman and Death*, 1510

Hans Baldung Grien (1484/85 – 1545) was a German painter and printmaker. The diversity of his works is truly extensive, he is famous for his paintings, prints, portraits, allegories, religious and mythological motifs. Most of the artworks due to the time period were heavily influenced by religion. During his artistic career Baldung was seriously concerned with the theme of the transience of life like many other artists at his time. The themes known as *Vanitas* and *Memento mori* have been widely utilised throughout Western art history and have gained a new revival during the Renaissance era, of which Hans Baldung Grien was a part of. He created a number of works on the philosophy of vanitas, such as *The Ages of the Woman and Death* (1510 & 1544), *Death and the Maiden* (1517), *The Seven Ages of Woman* (1544), and so on.

The Three Ages of the Woman and Death is a reflection on the fundamental tensions of a human being, the search for sensuality and its loss with death. According to Robledo Estaire (2017, 65), Sánchez Artola (2003) wrote, the tragedy of the awareness of the ephemerality of earthly pleasures or Vanitas - are the special interests of the German master¹. (Robledo Estaire 2017, 65; translation from Spanish by the writer.)

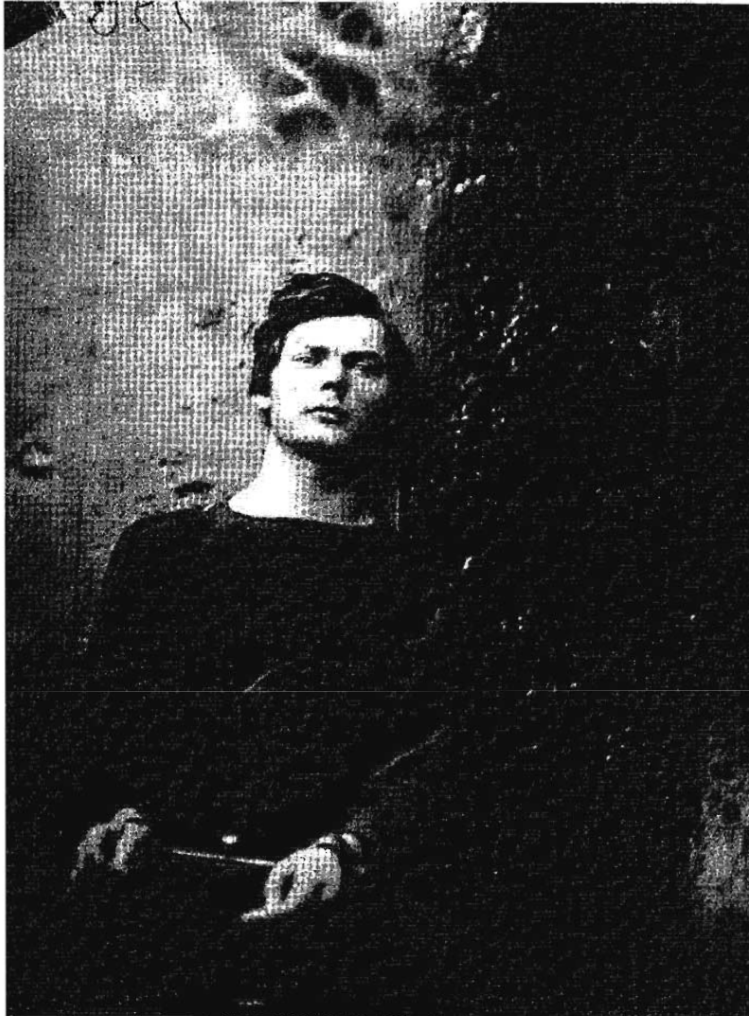
In this painting Hans Baldung Grien presents a symbolic interpretation of the stages of life of a woman in the constant presence of death. The figure of a child is covered by a veil. The child is innocent and can't see the true colors of life. The young woman takes no notice of the figure of death, she is too busy with looking at her own reflection in the mirror. This action is a symbol of vanity and transience of mundane existence. The old woman in the painting is the only one who notices death. By a gesture of her hand, we can see how she tries to stop time and drive the figure of death away. The figure of death stands still and unwaveringly holds the hourglass over them.

Three Ages of the Woman and Death is a perfect allegory of the cycle of human life and true to its theme brings to the viewer, the aspect of mortality salience (the awareness of death inevitability). It reflects the stages of life as they are with impeccable honesty and even describes the psychological states of the subjects depicted depending on their age category.

¹ Es una reflexión sobre las tensiones fundamentales del ser humano, la búsqueda de la sensualidad y su pérdida con la muerte. Esta tragedia, la conciencia de lo efímero de los placeres mundanos o vanitas, es algo que interesa especialmente a este maestro alemán. (Robledo Estaire 2017, 65)

3 ANALYSIS ON 'CAMERA LUCIDA' BY ROLAND BARTHES

"Every photograph is a certificate of presence." (Barthes 1981, 87).



"He is dead and he is going to die . . ."

ALEXANDER GARDNER: PORTRAIT OF LEWIS PAYNE. 1865

PICTURE 2. A page from Camera Lucida book, Barthes, 1981.

Roland Barthes (1915 – 1980) was a French philosopher, critic and semiotician. *Camera lucida* is a critical essay on photography Barthes wrote after his mother's death. Roland Barthes, while grieving for his mother and searching for her in old photographs, wrote one of the most influential studies of photography (The Guardian, 2011). The essay consists of a series of short contemplations of the essence of photographs and their ability to make an impact on the spectator's

emotional state. As examples Barthes uses personal and other people's photographs that have impressed him on different levels.

According to the Barthes' theory, other art methods are incapable of depicting life with true honesty. All the other mediums are highly subjective and artificial. Before photography was invented people tried to capture time by creating paintings. However, painting, even a very realistic one, is still a very subjective method. It still has the trace of its author. Photography captures moments literally, repeats them and makes those moments last eternity. Photography has an unique capability to occupy several temporal planes, it gives an opportunity to behold the moments of the past in the present. (Barthes 1981, 30-31.)

Barthes has analyzed a number of photographs and noted "the matter of co-presence of two discontinuous elements" typical for some images. He has named those elements as the studium and the punctum. The studium refers to the study that allows the discovery of the main operator or in other words, is the main interest of the photography. It is an interest "but without special acuity". The punctum, a word for trauma derived from Latin, breaks the studium and inspires a personal meaning. The punctum is a detail that attracts and holds the spectator's attention; it is something that "wounds" the viewer mentally, on a very personal level. (Barthes 1981, 42-43.)

Barthes states that the quintessence of photography is the "that-has-been". The photograph is a captured evidence, a visible proof that a moment really happened. This fact also proves that this moment has passed. "The photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially." (Barthes 1981, 4.) All photographs show something that has already dissipated in the time continuum which directly ties the medium to death. Every photograph is a memorial for Barthes; the very essence of the medium is its spectral conjuring of death-in-life. (The Guardian, 2011.)

4 THEME OF LIFE AND DEATH IN CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI'S ART



PICTURE 3. Installation by Christian Boltanski, Reserves: The Purim Holiday, 1989

Christian Boltanski (b. 1944) is a French artist, photographer, sculptor, and filmmaker. He is famous for his mixed-media installations, where he uses photographs and everyday life objects. Boltanski creates installations out of the ordinary materials within the context of global historical events.

The main running theme of his artworks is dedicated to memory. He explores subjects of identity, remembrance, collective memory, death and loss. Boltanski's artworks are a deep contemplation regarding the reconstruction of the important historical events, his works explore the subject of collective memory and remembrance. (Jones 2015, 30.) In some of his artworks, he makes references to tragic historical events like World War II and the Holocaust. The works often contain personal items like his own pictures from archives. He uses documents, real and manipulated photographs.

A photograph is the way to present the human in their absence, even if they are gone forever ² (Clair 2012, 110; translation from French by the writer). Boltanski explains one of his works as: “I suppose part of the work is also about the simple fascination of seeing somebody who is handsome and imagining his ashes.” (The Tate Gallery).

During his artistic career, Boltanski consistently relied upon discarded materials, their meaning cannot be reduced to the enduring appeal of existential themes. Christian Boltanski considers art as a way to explore the question of necessary memory. (Smith 2016, 646.)



PICTURE 4. Christian Boltanski *No Man's Land*, installation, 2010

His works raise an existential question - what remains of us after we die? Is it only a pile of clothes or a collection of old photographs? In the installation *No Man's Land* he has used a countless amount of clothes as a reminder of millions of people who have lived and died. The clothes are a trace of our existence, still existing after we are all gone from the material plane. It seems like there is nothing personal left, the identities of the owners are totally erased in these amounts

² “Le document photographique nous présente l'être, en son absence, comme s'il était absent pour toujours absence.” (Clair 2012, 110).

of belongings piled together, it is a reminder of the ultimate anonymity of death. The huge pile of clothes can also be seen as a reference to the Holocaust. In places like Auschwitz huge piles of things left after people have been murdered are real (pic. 5).



PICTURE 5: Shoes that belonged to people brought to Auschwitz for extermination, photographed by Paweł Sawicki, 2008

Smith has noted that Boltanski's art should be considered in the relation to historical contexts, beside the tendency to link his use of ephemeral materials to issues of mortality and transcendence (Smith 2016, 646). The resemblance between the installation and the actual historical evidence of mass murder of millions of innocent people is highly noticeable and disturbing.

5 FEAR OF GETTING OLDER AND AGEISM

Fear of getting old is inextricably linked with the fear of death which has deep and complex roots. Some causes of this problem can be found in natural instincts where fear of death is a natural and normal phenomenon inherent for all living beings. Another reason for this fear, scientifically called *Gerascophobia*, may lie in the anxiety of being left alone, becoming useless to society or disabled due to age and finally being completely forgotten. Those people who exhibit this fear strongly tend to view life as a form of self-obliteration rather than natural progression that has its own benefits at every life stage.

According to developmental psychologist Erikson every person goes through a range of multiple crises as they reach the stages of late adulthood. This advancing theory explains the concept that as an individual marches through the stages of life and arrives at the late stages, they reach the point of maturity he has termed as *ego integrity*. Erikson (1950, 268) explains this phenomenon as the acceptance of one's one and only life cycle as something that had to be in his follow-up research (1982, 65) he has delineated it as a sense of coherence and wholeness. Therefore, ego integrity is a stage of the radical acceptance of one's one and only life and people that have found the meaning in their life and have accepted it, tend to be more resistant to the fear of death.

There is also an undeniably strong connection between growing old, death anxiety and gender. Thorson and Powell's *The Death Anxiety Scale* (1992, 511) shows that women tend to have more death anxiety and gerascophobia than men. Also, researchers assume that age and culture could be dominant in why women's score of fear tends to be higher. (Thorson & Powell 1992, 508.)

Historically, women have been valued primarily for their youth, looks and ability to bear children. The older the woman becomes the less valuable she becomes to the point of being legally allowed to be discarded by her husband.

In modern days, this premise no longer holds true, yet according to innumerable research, women still find themselves being judged daily upon their looks to the point of them possibly affecting their education and career opportunities.

Moreover, unhealthy beauty standards, dictated by mass media can make a huge negative impact on a woman's mental health and emotional well-being. Recent research has found that women in their mid-life are developing more body image insecurities and having more eating disorders than they have ever had in the past. Dissatisfaction with one's own body image may foster a serious negative affect because appearance is a central evaluative dimension for women in modern society. (Thompson & Stice 2001, 181.)

The insecurities and dissatisfaction with the changes they are going through are forcing women to get plastic surgeries or drive them to use all of the possible, often unhealthy, ways to lose weight. According to Thompson & Stice (2001, 182) women's satisfaction with their appearance develops with the media influence. Self-comparisons to popular societal standards for attractiveness may cause eating and anxiety disorders, depression and body image disturbance. Therefore, society pressure is creating a dangerous environment for both, physical and mental health of women. (Heinberg & Thompson 1995, 325.)

The perception of body image includes both: a cultural and social construct (Rudd & Lennon 2001, 121). In some cultures, the social pressure on an individual seems to be stronger than in others. This culture difference was vividly noticeable during my exchange year in Japan. From my own experience, it seems like in Europe social pressure and ageism still exist, but in a less obvious and aggressive way.

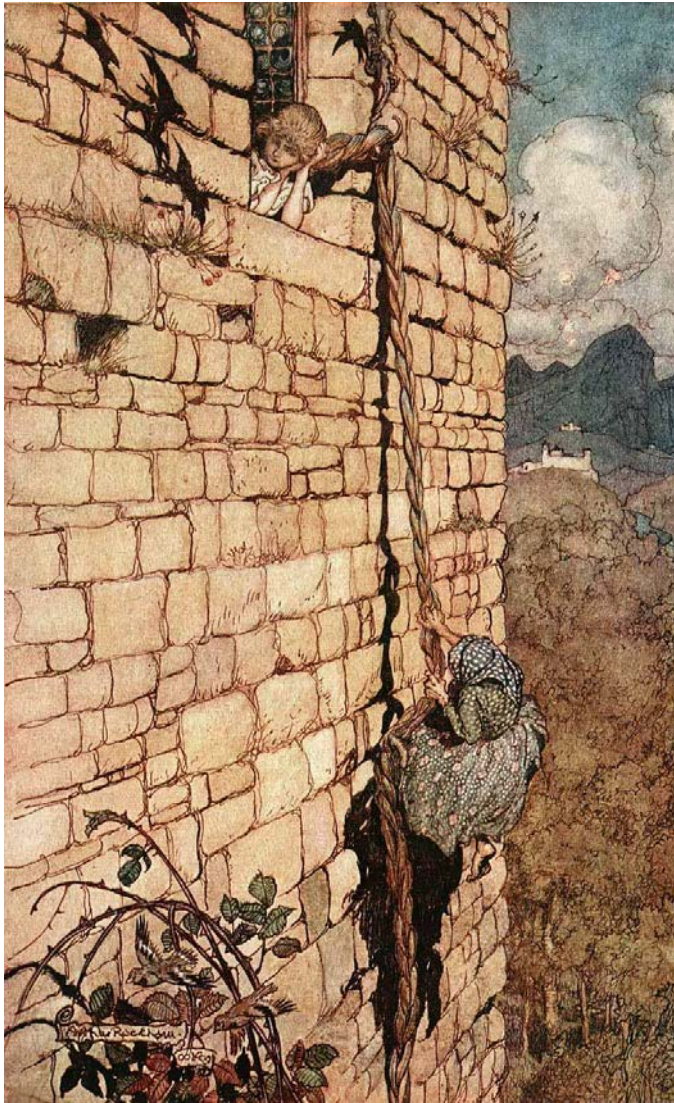
Asian unnatural beauty trends together with the social pressure seem highly disturbing. The obsession with plastic surgeries, heavy make-up and popularity of purikura (プリクラ) a photo booth, are quite common in Japan. A purikura would make an illusion of a younger look, change the size of people's eyes, the shape of their ears and mouth, and make them look taller and thinner. As a result, we can see an image that has nothing in common with the original image of a person. All those things together may create an unhealthy and dangerous environment for a woman, and especially as she is getting older.

Moreover, I have witnessed a curious situation, happened in a Japanese language class. While introducing herself, my classmate mentioned her age, 27 years old, the same age as me at that point in time. A teacher, an adult Japanese woman, has said that a woman should not talk about her age after she turned 25. I would not have paid much attention to this remark, if those rules are applicable for men as well, or people of any age, not exceptionally for women over 25 years old. This comment has made me feel uncomfortable about my own age for a moment. It has also made me feel bad for women who live under a constant aggressive pressure of society where they can't mention their age in an informal conversation without feeling insecure and inadequate.

Why should someone be ashamed of their age? Why do physical beauty, youth and appearance seem to be promoted by mass media as more important than the valuable inner changes happening to a person as they grow older? I have asked those questions myself when I have begun developing my artwork.

Considering all the aforementioned facts along with my own thoughts and experience I haven't been keen to make any accents on the physical changes occurring to people as they grow older. In my artwork, I have aimed to mainly address the inner changes one goes through with time and echo personal developments. Therefore, I have chosen installation as a form of this artwork, it gives me more freedom to be more metaphorical with the forms and play with archetypes and allegories rather than show only the obvious physical changes of a human being going through life.

6 FOLKLORE AS THE SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND WORKING WITH THE ARCHETYPES



PICTURE 6. Arthur Rackham: Illustration to a fairy tale of brothers the Grimm *Rapunzel* ,1909

I often find the inspiration for my artworks to be rooted deeply in literature and folktales. In my opinion folklore is a wonderful concept to work with, it is a rich source of archetypes, it contains infinite potential for possible meanings and symbolism applicable to any artwork.

Stories that have been told to us when we have been kids are not as simple as they may seem at first. Rereading them again, as adults we can discover a lot of

new, interesting and unexpected details; and learn that they are far not as innocent as they seem at first. Often those short folk stories contain plenty of wisdom dwelling in them far from the days long past and are full of patterns and archetypes still relevant and applicable nowadays. The word «archetype», derived from Greek, is used to describe a constantly-recurring pattern or a prototype in mythology, art or literature. The phenomenon of archetypes has always been present and existed in human consciousness. (Cuddon 2013, 51.) This term is heavily based on comparative anthropology and takes large inspiration from Jungian archetypal theory.

According to Jung, archetypes are primordial types; universal images that have existed since the remotest times (Jung 1969, 5). This definition speaks of the continual repetition of characters, patterns, symbols and ideas allocating kindred traits throughout numerous, historically or culturally unconnected examples in literature, media, art, etc. Archetypes are rich and diverse cultural heritage from our ancestors, it is an antecedent product of the collective unconscious (Cuddon 2013, 51). Archetypal language is universal, it can be unconsciously decoded by anyone, regardless of the cultural background.

For example, hair is an ancient archetype for life, feminine power, vitality, fertility and youth. It appears in myths, folktales as a physical attribute of powers for both goddesses and regular women. We can, for instance, find this archetype in ancient Greek myths about Medusa who has living venomous snakes in place of her hair as her physical attribute of power. It also occurs in ancient legends about Norse goddess Sif and her golden hair. Her hair represents wheat, as she is a goddess of the harvest in Norse mythology. It appears again in a German folktale about Rapunzel. Her long, constantly growing hair mirrors the wild untamed nature of a woman trapped and locked in a tower for many years.

I especially want to focus on a folktale called: *The Woman with Hair of Gold* or *Zlatovlaska*. *The Woman with Hair of Gold* is a Slavic tale which tells a tragic story of a woman who was murdered.

There was a very strange but beautiful woman with long golden hair as fine as spun gold. She was poor and without mother or father, and

lived in the woods alone and wove upon a loom made of black walnut boughs. A brute who was the son of the coal burner tried to force her into marriage, and in an effort to buy him off, she gave him some of her golden hair.

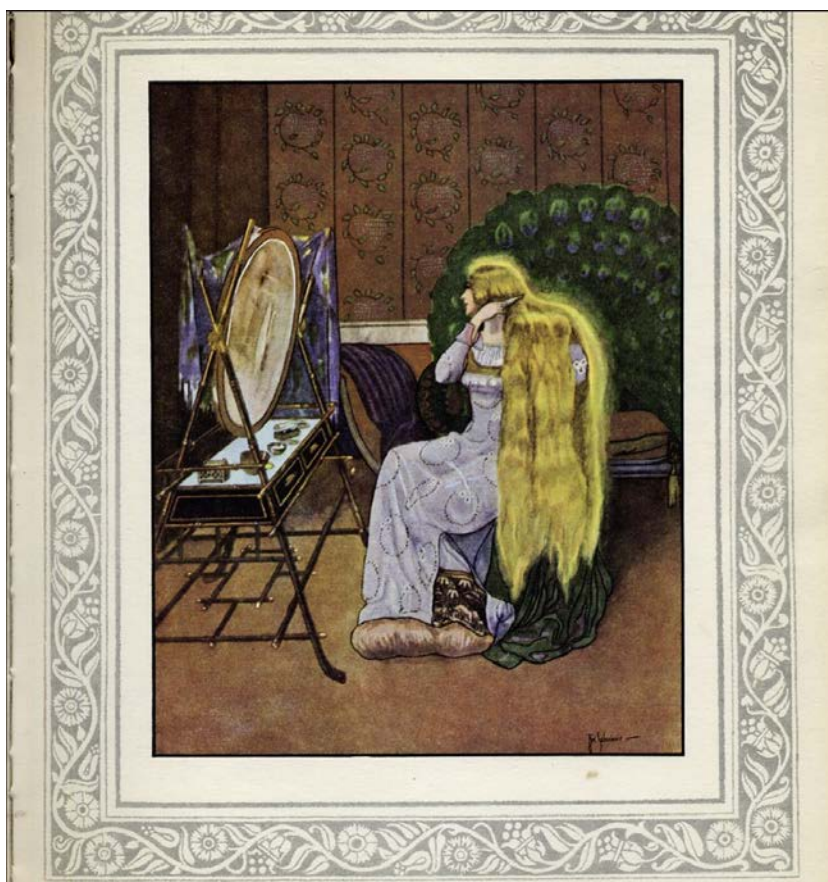
But he did not know or care that it was spiritual, not monetary, gold that she gave him, so when he sought to trade her hair for merchandise in the marketplace, people jeered at him and thought him mad.

Enraged, he returned by night to the woman's cottage and with his own hands murdered her and buried her body by the river. For a long time, no one noticed that she was missing. No one inquired of her heart or health. But in her grave, the woman's golden hair grew and grew. The beautiful hair curled and spiraled upward through the black soil, and it grew looping and twirling more and more, and up and up, until her grave was covered by a field of swaying golden reeds.

Shepherds cut the curly reeds to make flutes, and when they played them, the tiny flutes sang and would not stop singing,

- Here lies the woman with golden hair murdered and in her grave, killed by the son of the coal burner because she wished to live.

And that is how the man who took the life of the woman with golden hair was discovered and brought to justice so that those who live in the wild woods of the world, like we ourselves do, were safe again once more. (Pinkola-Estés 1992, 277.)



PICTURE 7. Artuš Scheiner: Illustration for fairy tale Zlatovlaska, 1911

The story is built around the heroine's golden hair, it is a physical feature symbolising the value of inner beauty of a young woman. It is a magic material which still exists even after the heroine's gone. After her death, hair continues to live, it turns into golden reeds, growing and seeking justice. Her hair represents her strong will to live, even after her death.

It is a story that has inspired me to use hair as the main material for my installation as a symbol of life and vitality as well as a physical attribute of a living woman. As well as the story, my artwork also echoes the stage of the afterlife. It is about life, but it is about death as well and everything that comes after. After life, there is still something transcendental left. Some abstract things like memories along with something real, like photographs or descendants.

7 THE PROCESS OF THE ARTWORK 'THREE AGES OF THE WOMAN AND DEATH'

The artwork *Three Ages of the Woman and Death* has been presented in Gallery Himmelblau during 4.11.2020 - 29.11.2020. It has been a part of the TAMK's Fine Art degree show - Atomic Jungle 2.0. *Three Ages of the Woman and Death* is an installation work that consists of mixed media sculpture and a series of black and white photographs. The installation has been made from recycled elements, reflecting environmental issues.



PICTURE 8. Anna Bern: Installation *Three Ages of the Woman and Death*. Photographed by Tiago Mazza Chiaravalloti, 2020

As we have discussed before, the transience of life is a classical theme in art, having been a source of worry for humankind since the beginning of time. The idea for this installation has come to my mind a few years ago, when I studied art history. I have been long fascinated by how painters of Dutch Golden Age have been able to find a delicate way to depict the idea of death and transience of life. Their paintings are highly allegorical, and every small detail is not random and has a meaning. There is a stark contrast between them and the painters of the Middle Ages with their brutal and straightforward ways of depicting the same subject.

The fear of getting old and dying will always be relevant for every human being, and I am not an exception. The topic constantly appears in art and literature, in scientific research and in everyday life. Female images have always been a traditional symbol of life, fertility and motherhood. Gender is especially important for this artwork so as to illustrate how the origin of life is a subject to death.

I have carried the concept of this installation for years, studying art and looking for a suitable way to turn my ideas into an art piece. The *Three Ages of the Woman and Death* is a classic theme in art, typical for Medieval and Renaissance painting. Perhaps in modern realities it is even more relevant than ever, as the mass anxiety is caused by mass media and modern culture promoting and popularising unhealthy beauty standards.

Even in art, quite often the process of growing old is shown in a negative way or is being avoided at all. Thus, the main aim for me has been to find a delicate way to talk about the inevitable things, such as death and aging. To show the process of growing old as something positive and represent death not as the end but as a part of life. The goal has been to illustrate the importance and beauty of every stage of life without highlighting the obvious physical changes happening with age. *Three Ages of the Woman and Death* takes a critical view of existential and environmental issues.

I usually choose photography or video art for my artworks. I do paintings less often but this time I have decided to challenge myself and try to create an installation. I've never done an installation before, but in this work I have strived to be as metaphorical as possible and create an abstract yet decipherable artwork.

In my opinion, aging is not only about physical changes, it is more about valuable experience, memories, knowledge and impact one person can make on others during their lifetime and even after. This may be a very sensitive subject to some people, I neither want to play on negative feelings nor shock the viewer, I have an entirely opposite goal.

The installation *Three Ages of the Woman and Death* is an allegory of nature as well. Most aspects of nature are “born” from the Earth, that’s why nature is quite often feminized and represented as a woman in many cultures. Mother-Earth or Mother-Nature is a chthonic, primordial symbol of life inherent in many ancient beliefs. The word “Nature” itself is derived from Latin and means “birth”.

I have used recycled materials to emphasize the importance of respect for nature. It was fundamentally important to me to find the old objects with their own history. In my opinion, it is better to fix a thing or find a new usage for it rather than buy a new one. Finding the constituents has been one of the hardest parts of my work, I have spent months looking for suitable materials in second hand stores, flea markets and have even asked collectors. The age of the objects used in an installation ranges from one year to two hundred, and many years in between.

I have chosen to represent the three stages of life with water taps: the innocence of childhood, the blossoming of youth and the wisdom of adult life. After death, however, there is no longer a physical presence. Only intangible memories remain.

Usage of water taps as a base of the installation is a conscious decision. Water taps in this work serve as a metaphor not only for a flow of life, but also as an attempt to make the viewer think about water waste, one of the biggest problems of our time, leading us to water scarcity. Water is the source of life, the end of it means the end of everything, the end of life on the earth and this, again, refers to the title of my artwork.

For the taps representing the stages of life I have decided to use hair. Hair is a metaphor for human life – running like water, no one can stop or reverse it and it is impossible to make it run slower. The source of life is as irretrievable as the source of water. Hair in my work reflects the vitality and physical presence of a person in this world.

Because the artwork is highly metaphorical, I have had to find cues to make the abstract forms readable for the viewer. I have decided to use colors for this purpose. As Humphrey (1976, 96) has noted, among mammals only the monkeys, share our ability to perceive colors – all others are nearly or completely color-blind. Our unique ability to distinguish colors has evolved because it contributes to biological survival, but today we perceive colors not only as a signal that evokes our instincts but also as a cultural code. Today colors are used as a strong symbolic language in art, design, fashion, etc. (Humphrey 1976, 95-98.) “The variety of colors may be represented by those primordial relations which belong both to nature and the organ of vision; there can be no doubt that these may be made use of as a language.” (von Goethe 1840, 351).

At the beginning, I had an idea of making hair of different colors for each stage of life, but I have decided upon the idea of making a monochrome work. Monochrome helps to avoid any obvious accents and associations with physical changes, one naturally undergoes throughout the course of life.

I have chosen white color as the main color for every age in an attempt to make it more neutral and more water-like. Plus, the whole work would look more organic and harmonious. The white color base allowed me to make stronger accents with the colorful details.

White is the color of the new, the pure, the pristine. It is also the color of soul free of the body of spirit unencumbered by the physical. It is the color of the essential nourishment - mother's milk. Conversely it is the color of the dead, of things which have lost their rosiness, their flush of vitality. When there is white, everything is, for the moment, unwritten upon. White is a promise that there is nourishment enough for things to begin anew, that the emptiness or the void would be filled. (Pinkola-Estés 1992, 74.)

For the first water tap representing childhood, I have used a lock of loose white hair, to illustrate the innocence and purity of a child.

For the tap representing youth, I have made up braided hair with a vibrant red bow on the end. In many cultures red symbolises both youth, blossoming beauty and death. I have used red color as the main highlight in my mostly monochrome installation. The emotional connotation of red switches between negative and

positive, is a significant stimulus to human brain, thus red requires attention (Kuniecki, M. & Pilarczyk, J., 2015, 2). Gilbert (2017, 27) described red as a color associated with blood, we often read it as a color of sexuality and fertility, red conveys energy and sensuality. In a young age for a girl it is a sign of her growing up and maturing into a woman.

For the third tap representing adulthood, I have used a thick, long lock of loose hair with insertions of red beads connecting the stage of adulthood with the stage of afterlife.



PICTURE 9. Anna Bern: *Three Ages of the Woman and Death* installation details. Photographed by Tiago Mazza Chiaravalloti, 2020.

For the tap representing the stage of afterlife I have chosen to use beads. Each bead is the meaning of each action done and each word spoken. There is no physical presence of a person anymore, but it still affects the lives of other people.

When curating my artwork, artist Fanni Niemi-Junkola has suggested that I should change the color of the wall. It has proven to be valuable advice that has made noticeable changes to the whole perception and integrity of the artwork. The impact of color on apprehension is notable and even the smallest modification of the wall's undertone can make a big difference. Originally, the wall in the gallery has been white, but I have painted it in light golden yellow. It has made a tremendous impact, it is almost invisible for the eye but it greatly changes the overall look and impression of the artwork. The main color of my work is white and the light golden undertone has made the artwork separate from the wall better. It has added the depth and made the installation look more dimensional and harmonious. Plus, the light yellow color matches well with the other details of the installation, like golden water taps and golden beads.

The work also reflects the importance of the connection between generations. Photographs are another important part of my installation. I have used photographs in the installation to add an emotional aspect to the artwork. I have used personal photographs from family albums. Many people have the same kind of photographs in their photo archives similar to the ones I have used in the installation. The old photographs with the faces of people we have seen only in pictures, our ancestors and relatives, but, somehow, their lives still have an impact on our own.

Family albums are always filled with images of some significant moments of our own lives, or moments of lives of our ancestors, captured on a camera: a wedding or the birth of a long-awaited child. The pictures I have used in my artwork are simple yet so personal and meaningful for the people captured in them. The moments captured in the photographs can evoke memories and make the moment repeat.

I have used old photographs which have been taken almost two centuries ago and pictures which have been taken only a few years ago. There are four photographs correlating with the number of life stages represented with the water taps.

I have included the pictures of my grand grandmother. In those photographs we can see her once as a young lady and another as an elderly woman. There is a lifetime in between those two frames and the photographs occupy many temporal planes. She is not here anymore but, somehow, is still present. I have also used pictures from my friend's family album. The moment captured in a photograph is the beginning of a new life. The photograph is taken right after the woman has given birth to her daughter. In the next picture we can see the same girl, grown a little bit older, yet she is still a child, laying in water. The whole life is ahead of her. It can be read as a representation of the next stage of her life and continuation of the life cycle.



PICTURE 10. Anna Bern: *Three Ages of the Woman and Death* installation details. Photographed by Tiago Mazza Chiaravalloti, 2020.

The photographs I have used are from different eras and represent both the past and present. I have strived to make them look as similar as possible. It is important for me to make the pictures look timeless. The monochrome palette has helped me to reach this goal. Thus, photographs echo the style and idea of the installation and complement it.

8 CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the works of Baldung Grien, Barthes and Boltanski convinced me that the subjects of imminence of death, transience of life and death anxiety are still relevant, and they will be relevant as long as the human race exists. This subject worries people, it is the essence of most of our fears as well as the source of inspiration. The works I used as references might seem so different at the first sight. And they are, they represent different eras, made with different purposes, and divergent art mediums.

The art methods are constantly evolving as well as our life in general, art pieces and objects have a myriad of forms and mediums making them difficult or even impossible to compare, but despite all the distinctions they are frequently unified with the same concept, the same fear, they make us think about the eternal, existential things. They open the questions without providing us with answers.

In the past the level of medicine was low and mortality was dramatically high, the topic of death was the main focus of the art of the past centuries. The consciousness of our ancestors was centered on everyday survival. Moreover, in the past the phenomenon of beginning a new life was linked with a phenomenon of death more vividly than nowadays. Over the last century the statistic of deaths from pregnancy or childbirth has decreased greatly. Maternal mortality and infant mortality rates were dramatically higher, this fact alone was enough to shape the mentality of people. This might be one of the reasons why an image of a woman was so common to represent the whole circle of life in the paintings of old Masters, as a symbol of the beginning and the end of life. During the pregnancy and labor women were literally between life and death due to the extremely high risks of dying.

Luckily, the line between the start of life and death is not so thin anymore and apparently, we don't see this connection so distinctly. The level of modern medicine and our current technological advancement allow us to live longer and happier lives, we do not need to daily struggle for existence anymore. Now life in general is more comfortable and safe, and the fear of death has evolved into the

fear of aging. Sometimes this fear takes truly irrational forms and greatly affects the emotional well-being of a person.

The writings on psychological studies I have used in my research only prove the importance of the problem of fear of getting older and death anxiety; it clearly demonstrates its influence on the mental health of a person, women in this case. As we can see, today, those natural fears could be exaggerated by our popular culture and social media, so often centered on the physical beauty. Now it is not only the fear of getting old caused by natural instincts, but it is also the fear of looking old caused by unattainable beauty standards dictated by modern culture. Don't we see ourselves when we look at the scenes depicted on the canvases from past centuries? The painting, created so many centuries ago, isn't it still a reflection of our life? In a constant chase for youthfulness, in our vanity and obsession with physical beauty we can lose the focus for more important things and face the fragility and transience of life only when it is too late to change anything. *Three Ages of the Woman and Death* by Baldung Grien is an allegory of the circle of life and thus it always correlates with our society, regardless of the era. The modern woman could be seen in the reflection of the mirror, in her chase after the beauty ideals.

So far, it is the biggest art project I have done, in both a theoretical and a practical sense. This installation is a compilation of philosophical questions, art history and psychological studies. Quite often, the roots of present problems can be found in the past. As well as the possible answers, inspiration and the patterns for artworks, the language of archetypes that everyone can read unconsciously.

In my opinion, choosing an installation as the artistic medium is the right choice. This way the work is more open for interpretation and it has a wide space for finding personal meaning for the viewer. I am happy with the feedback I have received. It is interesting to see how people can relate to the work I have created, on both, personal or global levels.

Some people have been surprised to see the tap representing the afterlife stage to be, according to them, "prettier than others". But after reading the statement of

my work and learning more about the message I have put into this artwork they have agreed with the idea and accepted that the concept of death can be represented not only as a shocking terror or decay. This first reaction proves that in our culture aging, the transience of life and death are considered to be only something negative. It is a terrifying thing, until we try to look at this concept from a different perspective. It is normal for the human brain to focus on negative aspects of things that scare us. It is rooted deeply in our inborn instincts and acquired fears as it has helped our ancestors to survive by paying more attention to possible dangers. In the end, the mortality salience, the capability of understanding the finality of life is the thing that makes us value our existence. In my opinion, the way to find peace and decrease the influence of this fear on our lives is to present the subject of death in the context of memory.

All the feedback I have received and the reactions have proved to me that I have successfully tackled the problems I set before myself in this particular art piece. I am satisfied with the results and the work I have completed, analyzing the subject from many various angles, from psychological and scientific viewpoints to art historical contexts to spiritual aspects.

I see a lot of potential in this subject, in future I will continue developing it further. The field of research is truly immense; it can serve as a great source of inspiration with a possibility to create artworks in many other different forms and mediums. The eternal topics of life and death are inherent with our culture, this is a rudimentary aspect of our existence, rooted deeply in our unconscious and affecting every part of every person's life. They are close to every human's heart.

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LIST OF PICTURES

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PICTURE 2. *A Page from Camera Lucida Book*, 1981, Roland Barthes

PICTURE 3. Installation by Christian Boltanski, *Reserves: The Purim Holiday*, 1989 Retrieved on 27.05.2021.

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PICTURE 4. Christian Boltanski installation, *No Man's Land*, 2010 Retrieved on 22.03.2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/10/arts/design/10boltanski.html>

PICTURE 5. Shoes that belonged to people brought to Auschwitz for extermination, photographed by Paweł Sawicki, 2008 Retrieved on 22.03.2021. <http://auschwitz.org/en/gallery/exhibits/evidence-of-crimes,1.html>

PICTURE 6. Arthur Rackham: Illustration to *A Fairy Tale of Brothers the Grimm Rapunzel*, 1909 Retrieved on 27.03.2021. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arthur_Rackham_Rapunzel.jpg

PICTURE 7. Artuš Scheiner: Illustration for fairy tale *Zlatovlaska* Retrieved on 27.03.2021. <https://www.wikiart.org/en/artus-scheiner/illustration-for-zlatovlaska-and-other-tales-7>, 1911

PICTURE 8. Anna Bern: Installation *Three Ages of Woman and Death*. Photographed by Tiago Mazza Chiaravalloti, 2020

PICTURE 9. Anna Bern: *Three Ages of the Woman and Death* installation details. Photographed by Tiago Mazza Chiaravalloti, 2020

PICTURE 10. Anna Bern: *Three Ages of Woman and Death* installation details. Photographed by Tiago Mazza Chiaravalloti, 2020