



Proposal for
*The Museum of
Patheticness*

Sadie Hennessy

B.A. Hons. (*Theatre*) Dartington College of Arts

M.A. (*Fine Art*) Central St. Martins

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The Museum of Patheticness



Matt's Gallery
22 . 07 - 19 . 08 . 2011
Free with exhibition

THE MUSEUM OF PATHETICNESS

A Power-point presentation for Matt's Gallery,
London, 2009.

It has been a long held ambition of mine to establish a Museum of Patheticness.

My interest in the idea of patheticness was kindled by my sightings and

subsequent collection of 'Pathetic Graffiti' – that is, graffiti that makes you scratch
your head and wonder why anybody bothered to make such a mark on the wall.

This graffiti becomes special by its sheer pointlessness. Anybody interested in
seeing some examples, is welcome to look at my short pamphlet on the subject
called 'Fucking Buses are Crap'.

Or ruder still:

SUCK ME OF

(actually maybe that's just equally rude)

Anyway, if you are a connoisseur of the
rude yet pointless sub-species of
'graffito patheticco' then perhaps the
following is for you:



HARRY MUFF

I will end my discourse with a favourite
photograph from my collection (see back
of leaflet). This fine and final example
encompasses everything that I have
been celebrating in my little pamphlet.
The feebleness of the message is truly
pathetic, yet it's spirit is magnificent-
ly humbling.

Burrah!

Please send examples*
of pathetic graffiti
to:

The Museum of
Patheticness
c/o

sadiehennessy@hotmail.com



Silly sausage

*A somewhat pathetic prize
will be given to the best
entries.

*This essay was originally written as a speech for
the inauguration of The Museum of Patheticness (MoP).
The MoP has yet to be built. Let alone inaugurated.
Pathetically.

**FUCKING BUSES
ARE CRAP**



CRAPPET.

A Short Essay on
Pathos & Graffiti
by
Sadie Captain Hennessy

www.sadiehennessy.co.uk

Pathos is a Greek word, defined by the dictionary as: that quality in speech, writing, music or artistic representation which excites a feeling of pity, of sadness - Pathos has the power of stirring tender or melancholy emotion. It is a pathetic expression or utterance. In ancient Greece the pathetic arts were the transient or emotional ones rather than the permanent or ideal.

There is no more transient (or emotional) art than graffiti, which is the subject of my little essay today.

My specialist area is purposely narrow. I am not examining here political graffiti, as carved by Greek mercenaries on the stones of Athens. I am not turning my gaze towards 'tagging' i.e. hip-hop graffiti as seen on the subways of New York and London. I am not referring to romantic graffiti as seen on lavatory walls and carved in the bark of trees. No, those categories of graffiti are dictated by a force of passion, which although impressive is not the subject of my specialism. The graffiti that captures my attention is that which makes you wonder why anybody ever bothered to write it. I call it:

Pathetic Graffiti!

My interest in pathetic graffiti dates back to a rainy bus shelter in Weymouth in the early 1980's. Scrawled on that desultory bus stop were the words that gave birth to my passion:

Fucking Buses Are Crap

There's a desperation implicit in that sentence that inspires the truly pathological response; a feeling of pity is invoked. What a melancholy place that West Dorset bus stop must have been.

The desolate urban wasteland is the natural habitat of pathetic graffiti, as evinced in this once seen, and never forgotten example, in a Bermondsey lift:

Hitler is a Scag-Head Cunt

During a staggeringly protracted road-widening exercise on a Ladbrooke Grove bridge, a piece of graffiti (singular) stood out for its simplicity and its hopelessness:

Why is this bridge taking so long?

...it pled to blind eyes. Over in Islington I often wondered who Sarah Tittle was. A block of flats named after her had been patheticised. The 'H' of the word 'House' on the sign outside the block had been graffitied to look like an 'W':

Sarah Tittle Mouse

That was a classically pointless and completely inoffensive act of graffitising and as such, one I admired very much.

Street and road signs offer a rich palette to the pathetic graffiti artist. One Devon example was so obvious that it became amusing just trying to imagine why anyone would stir themselves to climb up a signpost with a black marker pen and white paint to transform Buckfastleigh into a ruder but totally pathetic inversion of itself:

FUCKBASTLEIGH

Perhaps it was the same prankster who painted out the 'L' on 'Dogpool' turning Dogpool Lane into a far less pleasant place to live.

Just a short moped ride away from Fuckbastleigh (as it is now commonly known) lies my own alma mater. My years of toil there were overshadowed by a magnificent graffiti, painted in blood red on the wall outside the dance studio:

The Situation is Impossible

What could have provoked such despair? Running out of Rizla papers? Torn leggings? An increase in the price of scrumpy? Whatever the cause, we drama students weren't contesting such a perfectly pathetic statement.

The pathetic graffiti-ist is not always so nihilistic, or original of thought. A recurring piece of pathetic Graffiti can be found on any building site with a TO LET board. How many 'I's have been inserted into the space between the 'TO' and the 'LET'? Many thousands I should guess. Each 'I' planted as though for the first time in the pathetic belief of originality.

TOILET

Badly spelled graffiti has a charm all of its' own and a good helping of built-in pathos. A common example, which you may well have spotted for yourself is:

Piss Of

Where the second 'f' has been mislaid. Other variations of this carelessness include its' ruder relative:

Fuck Of

Slide1: Pamphlet: *Fucking Buses Are Crap* 2006

Anyway, my plan for Matt's Gallery is to turn Gallery 1 into The Museum of Patheticness. The intention of the museum is to explore the changed meaning of the word 'pathetic' and through that, the re-positioning of the idea of 'pathetic' in our minds.

My old Oxford English Dictionary defines 'pathetic' as: *Sensitive, liable to suffer, producing an effect on the emotions, moving, stirring, affecting. Exciting pity, sympathy or sadness. Full of pathos.*

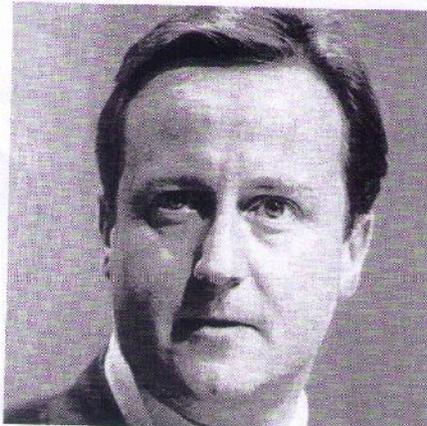
And for Pathos:

That quality in speech, writing, music or artistic representation which excites a feeling of pity or sadness.



The Pathetic Side of War

'Pathetic' Cameron attacked over Euro policy



From 'The Evening Standard' 2010

Slide.2: Changing use of the word 'Pathetic'

The Museum of Patheticness is dedicated to the abject, it celebrates losers, also-rans and incompetents. It's objects embody a want of ambition and a failure of realization. All the artefacts in the Museum of Patheticness are unheroic (though not anti- heroic, that would be too revolutionary for true patheticness). The Museum of Patheticness revels in the home-made, the ill-conceived and the forgotten. The balsa- wood sandals that my ex-husband made for his mum (when he was a boy) would find a home in the display cabinets of the Museum of Patheticness - (except of course, that they are no longer with us as they broke).

They might be joined by a string of limp bunting, ripped and torn by the wind some weeks after the village fete, or the football chant of Plymouth Argyle supporters when they sing 'We're so crap it's unbelievable'.

A Degraded Version of the Sublime



"When a thing that is sublime in an intellectual sense is alleged to tally with something familiar and inferior... then that abstract thing is itself unmasked as something equally inferior"

Sigmund Freud
'Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious'

Slide 3: A Degraded Version of the Sublime

My contextual starting point comes from a re-appraisal of an essay by Ralph Rugoff, which accompanied an exhibition that he curated in 1990, called 'Just Pathetic'. Twenty years ago, he saw the art that he identified as 'Pathetic Art' as an antidote to the pomp and grandiosity of the aspirational 80's.



"By making imperfection appear sympathetic and laughable, pathetic art also pokes fun at a key mechanism of social control: the social stigma and fear attached to the idea of failure"

Ralph Rugoff

Slide 4: *CottonBud Snowman*

I've made a list to help define what constitutes pathetic art – and by extension, the everyday articles that will be in the Museum of Patheticness:

Pathetic Vs Non-Pathetic Art

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Without aspiration• Anti-rhetorical• Unmonumental• Unpolitical• Mundane observations• Modest Materials• Little technique• Lacking in ambition• Inspiring pity• Often funny• Informal• Provisional• Of the moment• Amateurish• Self-derisory• Embracing failure | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aspirational• Rhetorical• Monumental (grandstanding)• Has agenda• Concerned with universal truths• Expensively produced• Well-crafted• Ambitious• Inspiring awe• Rarely funny• Formal• Enduring• Timeless• Professional• Self-respectful• Strives for success |
|---|--|

Slide 5: *List*

Examples of Pathetic Art



BLINKY



Jeffrey Vallance



Slide 6: *Some Pathetic Art*

As the so-called noughties draw to a close, with our financial institutions in meltdown and our planet choking to death on capitalism's farts, it seems to me to be a good time to re-embrace the lo-fi.

This 'time is right' feeling was reinforced for me by a trip to New York in 2008. I went to the newly opened New Museum, where their first show was entitled '*Unmonumental*'. It seemed ironic that they should be setting out their stall for 'a new modesty in the creation of art' (as they put it) in such a swanky new building – (but I'm guessing there isn't much call for 'Pathetic Architecture' ?) The New Museum's blurb stated the following:

“ *Unmonumental* is a show that is less interested in expanding the definitions of a particular medium or technique than it is on zeroing in on a way that visual art can help define the moment in which we are living”

It continues:

“The opening of this new century seems defined by the disappearance of monuments and the erasure of symbols, marked by indelible images of destruction and ruin, from the fall of the Twin Towers to the obliteration of the Bamayan Buddhas, and the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein. It comes as no surprise that this first decade of the 21st Century has produced an artistic language of fragments and of debased, precarious, and trembling forms, sounds and pictures. This millennium appears more concerned with iconoclasm than with creating new, empty and shiny icons.”

No self-respecting (or even self-abasing!) Museum of Patheticness could ignore John Ruskin's essay on the 'Pathetic Fallacy'. For those that don't know, this is the idea that inanimate objects are in possession of human feelings and this forms the basis of much romantic poetry. I suspect that many objects in the Museum of Patheticness will fall into that category. In the taxonomy of the Museum 'Object Plush' may well fill a large cabinet.

The Pathetic Fallacy



Slide 7: *Abject Plush*

It's hard to know how the rest of the Museum will be classified as the objects displayed there, are to be donated by invitation. I shall be canvassing a wide range of people, (in the months of pre-production before the museum is built) and inviting them to contribute items that embody, for them, the notion of patheticness. Often the patheticness is to be found in the enterprise or idea of the object, rather than the object itself. Items will be selected from the donations if the curator/s agree that they either capture an historical sense of patheticness or further our understanding of the shifting notion of it. Any items that are not selected will be put into a large pile, outside the entrance of the Museum.

Practically speaking, in order to turn Gallery 1 into a museum, I shall be filling all available wallspace with cabinets and shelves (materials to be decided depending on budget) – based on the interior of a small regional museum. A long glass topped table will run through the centre of the gallery. Under the glass there will be paper-based exhibits. It will also double up as a dining table for the Pathetic Symposium.

The Pathetic Symposium



- Ralph Rugoff on re-evaluating 'Just Pathetic'
- Jeremy Millar on 'Pathos Vs Bathos'
- Duncan McClaren on Ruskin's 'Pathetic Fallacy'
- Erwin Wurm on making Pathetic art
- Dr Nina Power on Julia Kristeva's writings on the abject
- Billie Whitelaw on Beckett and Pathos
- John Shuttleworth on the power of minor chords

Slide 8: Speakers at The Pathetic Symposium

Guest will be invited to speak at the symposium and their contributions will be published in the accompanying catalogue, which will also document some of the museum's most important exhibits. Apart from the guest speakers, the rest of the guests will be selected by lottery, from tickets that they receive on donating an item or items, to the museum.

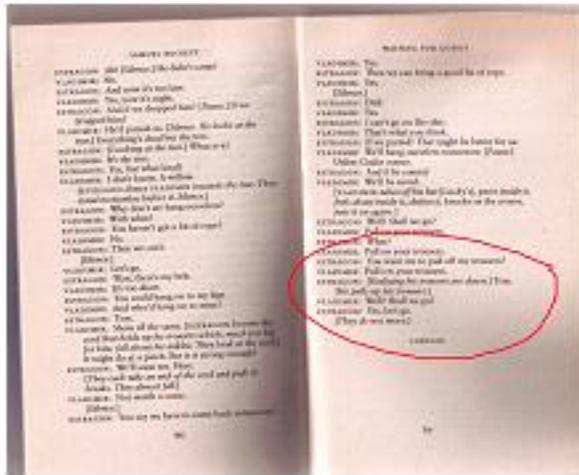
I shall end by showing you a few items that I think could make it into the museum. It's important to stress that this is not a celebration of kitsch or an exercise in sniggering at other people's poor taste, it is a genuine attempt to capture a mood of our times. A trip to the Museum of Patheticness will be a humanizing experience. To poach the words of one critic (writing about the 'Less is less' approach of Richard Tuttle): It'll be 'the liberating experience of zero expectations'

Why should we celebrate The Pathetic?

- Because the pathetic embraces failure, and the possibility of failure is good for art.
- Because patheticness touches our emotions and feeling things is good.

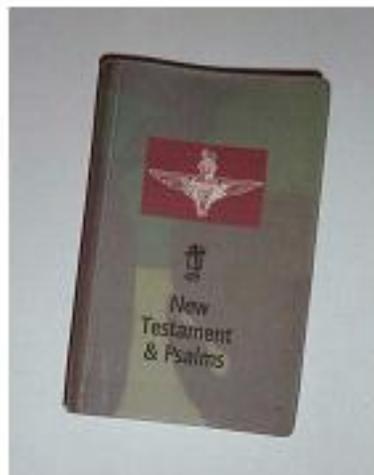


Samuel Beckett – Master of Pathos



Slide 10: Last page of *Waiting for Godot*

Camouflage Bible



Slide 11: *Army issue bible*

Fan Mail



Slide 12: *Half-hearted fan mail*
Slide 13: *Faded Photographs*

Faded photographs



Pet Heroics



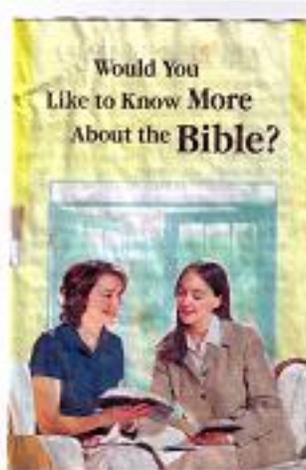
Slide 14: *Dog on treadmill*

Floral Tributes in Novelty Shapes



Slide 15: *Cigarette-shaped floral tribute*

The Eternal Optimism of the Jehovah's Witness



Slide 16: *Jehovah's Witness Pamphlet*

The Touching Pride of a Handsome Man for his Somewhat Plain Baby.



Slide 17: *Me and my Dad*

Bald Dolls



Slide 18: *Doll that has lost its hair*

Pig hair left on bacon rashers



Slide 19: *Hairy bacon*