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Visual arts communicates to the audience using a system of signs and symbols by incorporating visual messages ^{that are} encoded in the works. The limitations to this view of art, is in the knowledge and understanding of the viewer, and ability to comprehend the artists intended meaning. Meanings derived from the works are as multifaced as the minds who observe them.

A sign is a mark or token which represents something. A symbol is a type of sign whereby something is known or inferred. This 'thing' is generally an idea, emotion, quality or value.

When viewing the painting 'Judith Slaying Holofernes' by Artemesia Gentileschi from 1612, we can observe how her art uses a system of signs and symbols to communicate to the audience.

The painting depicts a Jewish heroine, Judith,

who is killing a man Holofernes, with the help of another woman Abra. At the time of the ~~the~~ painting's ~~the~~ making, this was a typical scene to be used, only it had never been attempted by a woman. This means that the artist identifies with the female heroine, rather than the victimized male, changing the intention of the work. This reveals a limitation to the system of signs and symbols, as the viewer may or may not understand the biblical narrative of the painting, the history of its production, or the position of women at the time.

The position of women was far from today's world, this heroic depiction was a first. The electric blue of Judith's dress is an example of how Gentileschi ~~signif~~ symbolises the decisive power of the feminine. She draws attention and drama to the act by using theatrical lighting, emphasising the glowing flesh which contrasts to a deep

black/brown background. A dramatic tension is also created by the strong diagonal positioning of the woman's arms, and the stern, determined facial expression of Judith. These techniques that Gentileschi uses, ~~rather than~~ incorporating signs and symbols visually, reveals the meaning in her work. She confronts the audience with a violent scene that shows the power of females, and the pain which they can inflict. Of course the limitations to this view of the work lie with the mind of the observer, and how they appreciate the different signs and symbols, how they relate to the visual language in their own individual way.

This can also be seen in the work 'The Suicide of Dorothy Hale' by Frida Kahlo, 1939. This painting depicts a high society woman who has ~~because of~~ been ~~conquered~~ conquered by her world, and throws herself

from a New York skyscraper. Both Two stages of the fall are shown, one where Dorothy Hale plummets down the centre of the painting with haunting eyes that ~~she~~ stare at the viewer. The other as a corpse, presented on a stage like platform at the bottom of the ~~post~~ frame. The skyscraper towers in the background, perhaps symbolising the city that saw her destruction. She wears a dress pinned with tiny red ~~corset~~ flowers, which may symbolize her position in society, a pretty spectacle for others to admire and nothing more. The background is filled with surrealist swirling white and blue clouds, which float over the boarder, along with blood from her body. This may signify the way that Hale's death surpasses the boarders of her own life and ~~is~~ ^{affects} others. The symbols and signs that Kahlo has used within her work

exemplifies the system of communicating that Gentileschi also used, ~~to~~ shocking the audience with a violent scene to capture their attention. The viewer once more derives meaning from the artwork due to their own individual response to the signs and symbols, thereby placing a limitation on the communication between the artist and the audience.

This is ~~again~~ ~~even~~ evident even in more recent works, like Cindy Sherman's 'X 188' in the Disaster Series from 1989.

This is a photograph which displays a plastic doll left in amongst a frame filled with human debris. The female doll's sexuality is revealed through its pointy breasts, and sexual activity is ~~shown~~ ~~then~~ signalled by smeared red lipstick.

The lighting used can be seen as symbolising the sexual abuse of females, and as ~~the~~ it peers from the background to highlight

the sexual sections of the doll's body, leaving it vulnerable. The contrast of smooth plastic to a jagged background may be symbolizing the harsh reality that has conquered a deflated doll, similar to the Dorothy Hale that Kahlo depicted. A ~~rough~~ turquoise wash covers the photograph, giving it a disquieting beauty. ~~the~~ '# 188' evokes a sense of the contradictory, ~~and~~ ~~is~~ as both a beautiful display and an outlandish scene of violence, which can be interpreted as commenting on the excess nature of contemporary society.

Sherman evidently uses a system of signs and symbols, but again the way in which they are interpreted depends of the individual viewer.

Art is communicated through a system of sign and symbols which are incorporated into ~~images~~ works.

This is proven by the works

'Judith Slaying Holofernes' by Artemisia
Gentileschi⁽¹⁶¹²⁾, 'The Suicide of Dorothy Hale' by
Frida Kahlo (1939) and '# 188' by Cindy
Sherman from her disaster series. However
this view of art ~~has~~ holds limitations,
due to the subjective nature of viewing
works. The signs and symbols used
are interpreted and understood by
individuals in the audience only as
far as their experiences of the world
allows them to. As different people
relate to images in various ways, the full
intentions ~~and~~ of the ~~artist~~ artist are
rarely fulfilled, and the gap in
certainty between artist and audience
will remain ever constant.