**Exploration Document**

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**Cultural Artifacts**

The works I have chosen are "The Wounded Deer", an oil on Masonite painting from 1946 by Frida Kahlo is a self-made surrealism piece, depicting herself as a deer with her own head wounded by arrows, a background featuring broken branches expressing the pain of her divorce. In my second choice " Addio del Passto" from " La Traviata" opera written by Giuseppe Verdi in 1856 in Venice, Italy the soprano Violetta is reviewing her life as she is close to death and reflecting on the love, she sacrificed contemplating the human experience of lost love and heartache at the end of our days and accepting the knowledge of her fate.

**Common Theme**

The theme of "love lost" is a moving exploration of the pain and longing that follows the end of a relationship or unattainability of one. In Frida Kahlo's "The Wounded Deer", this theme is symbolically embodied via the image of a deer pierced by multiple arrows, embodying Kahlo's own emotional pain and feelings of hopelessness. The deer's tearful eyes and bitter background accentuate the sense of loss and suffering. In Verdi’s ”Addio del Passato” from “ La Traviata”, the theme is expressed through an aria of the dying main character, Violetta.In her soprano voice she performs a farewell to her lost love and reflects on her life as a women of ill repute and the happiness she once found with Alfredo. Acceptance of her fate and request for no pity as she embraces the emotions of profound sorrow associated with lost love. Both works poignantly depict the universal human experience of love lost, each in their unique artistic language.

**Personal Experience**

The theme of “love lost” resonates deeply with my personal life journey. From an early age, I was taught to suppress my emotions, which I was deemed as overly sensitive and thus, learned through pain to be kept private. This belief significantly affected a cherished love I found in my early adulthood. The arrows that pierced the deer’s flesh in my experience were self-inflicted, as I accepted pain over the belief that I was worthy of love. At the age of 25, I was faced with a choice to defy societal norms and prioritize my feelings, or to sacrifice my desires for what I believed was best for my beloved and his young son that my fears of love brought into existence with another. This decision added another wound, leading to countless tears and periods of emptiness in the ensuing decades often describing that period of my life as "The Living Dead Girl" years. Despite the pain, I gave to those around me as much as I could bear often from an empty cup, learning slowly to love myself and coming back to life. Those experiences and sacrifices have shaped me and continue to influence my journey through life as without it I never would have had to face my own darkness and traumas. The very things that make us human.

**Profession**

The profession of psychotherapy is deeply impacted by the theme of “love lost”. Psychotherapists often encounter clients who are dealing with the pain and aftermath of lost love, whether it the end of a romantic relationship or unrequited love.Understanding this theme helps psychotherapist empathize with their clients’ experiences and provide effective therapeutic interventions. A general understanding of the humanities, including literature, art, and music, can enrich a psychotherapist’s practice by providing diverse perspectives on human emotions and experiences, thereby enhancing their ability to connect with and support their clients.

**Humanities Resources**

The first resource, “The Wounded Deer” by Frida Kahlo - A Comprehensive Study, provides an in-depth analysis of Kahlo’s painting, which is crucial for understanding the artist’s expression of lost love in the artwork. The second resource, “Genre and content in mid-century Verdi: ‘Addio, del Passato’ (La traviata, Act III)” by J.A. Hepokoski, offers a scholarly examination of Verdi’s opera, specifically the aria that encapsulates the theme of lost love. The third resource, “La Traviata - A complete guide. The story, the good, the bad,” provides a comprehensive overview of the opera, which aids in understanding its narrative and themes. In terms of finding and choosing these resources, I sought out authoritative and detailed sources that provide both a specific understanding of the works I am studying and a broader context for the theme of lost love. I evaluated the credibility of the sources, the depth of the information provided, and their relevance to my project’s focus on the theme of “love lost”.

**Historical Context**

Both “The Wounded Deer” by Frida Kahlo and “La Traviata” by Giuseppe Verdi are historical pieces that mirror the artists’ individual experiences with lost love. They artistically express the profound pain of heartbreak in distinct ways. Kahlo’s painting vividly depicts a deer, pierced by arrows, bearing her own face, symbolizing her anguish and vulnerability following the end of her marriage.On the other hand, “La Traviata”, which translates to “the fallen woman”, narrates the story of a woman sacrificing her joy for love to conform to societal expectations. Despite the differences in their circumstances - one being a choice and the other imposed - both reflect the immense fear and pain that surpasses the sorrowful song of the soprano at the end of her life.These intense emotions, along with their courage to confront their pain and invite us into their mental turmoil, are common to both. Even in the face of adversity, the deer stands unbroken, and the music remains powerful, symbolizing the resilience of giving our hearts to another, even when we may feel weak.Through these experiences and the use of their voices, they show us that despite the tragedy, love was present, feelings were felt, and memories were lived. As my mother once said, a woman’s tears are silent prayers, so we should never be ashamed of what brings tears to our eyes, as it might just be our hearts’ way of making room for something greater.So, while the context is similar and seen as a loss of love and human suffering, it is the artists’ way of clearing the space and offering us all a masterpiece to feel and understand in the context of our own stories.

**Similarities and Differences**

 Spanning a century, the artistic expressions of Frida Kahlo’s “The Wounded Deer” and Giuseppe Verdi’s “La Traviata” both resonate with the universal theme of lost love. The emotional intensity is palpable in both works, revealing the vulnerability and heartbreak that many of us have experienced at some point in our lives (Artincontext, 2022; Simpleopera, 2020). Through the artists’ eyes, we see their firsthand experiences that inspired them to create as a means of expressing their inner turmoil. While Kahlo uses symbolism requiring viewer interpretation, Verdi’s music touches the soul with the soprano’s voice modulating between octaves as she laments her loss one last time using her vibrato to pulsate the tone to create both warmth and despair. Despite their unique artistic lenses and mediums, both are storytellers dissecting the emotional experience of being human and falling in love. They explore the theme of lost love, and despite their differences, they share a common thread - the human experience of love and loss (Artincontext, 2022; Simpleopera, 2020).

**Medium**

In “The Wounded Deer,” Frida Kahlo employs oil on Masonite to bring her image to life. With a paintbrush in hand, she uses shading and depth to create an emotional intensity that seems to leap from the artwork. The cool tones reflect her pain and sadness. The fusion of the deer’s body with the symbolism of her own head brings the artist into the artwork, a technique for which Kahlo is renowned. The viewer is offered a glimpse into her pain and resilience in facing it through her art (Artincontext, 2022; Simpleopera, 2020). Similarly, in “Addio del Passato” from “La Traviata,” the soprano’s vocal range and dynamics convey turmoil as the character recalls memories at the end of her life. While the two mediums are vastly different, both artists use their unique touch to express poignant emotions. Whether it is the harmonious swells of a string section accompanying the singer or the strokes of oil on canvas created by a paintbrush, the artist’s presence is evident. Despite the differences, both artists use their respective mediums to dissect the emotional experience of being human and falling in love.

**Thesis Statement**

 In both cultural works, the theme of lost love is powerfully conveyed through distinct mediums, eliciting emotions, exposing vulnerability, and encapsulating the human experience. This theme serves as a universal thread that binds humanity together, regardless of the medium of expression.

**Audience**

The ideal audience for this presentation would be individuals who value emotional depth and have an open-minded approach to reflecting on their own experiences. This audience was chosen because their willingness to connect emotionally, regardless of the medium, would allow them to fully engage with and appreciate the exploration of the theme of lost love in both cultural works. As Maya Angelou said, " The mirror is a silent observer, reflecting the true emotions we often hide from the world." Therefore, an audience who is willing to view their own pain and the humanity that lies in the mirror will see beyond the medium to the beauty of the experience.

**Message**

While it is true that an artist should not compromise their work to cater to an audience, it is also important to consider the audience’s perspective when presenting. Rather than altering the art itself, adjustments can be made to the way it is presented or explained. Providing historical context or personal anecdotes can help the audience connect with the work on a deeper level. This does not change the art, but rather enhances the audience’s understanding and appreciation of it. By sharing your authentic truth and inviting the audience to relate it to their own experiences, you can bring the art to life in unexpected ways.

**References**

*La Traviata - A complete guide. The story, the good, the bad*. (2020, November 23). https://simpleopera.com/la-traviata/‌knowledge.net/. https://historyofknowledge.net/2017/05/16/rodins-thinker-the-new-deal-and-libraries-as-spaces-of-knowledge/‌

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