

Walking with Rothko.

10 March 2020, before the outbreak and its consequences.

The Stedelijk Museum Schiedam held an interesting opportunity for guests. "Een uur met Rothko", or an Hour with Rothko. I was one of the lucky ones to get a ticket. This was in October, the ticket for March 2020, half a year before the actual event. That's how wanted this experience was.

Who knew that I would be one of the last people to be able to enjoy it for the time being...

10<sup>th</sup> of March----- The journey to the museum-----

On my way to the museum I have time to create some expectations for myself. What do I think I will see? How will I think of it? Will I be bored, or will the time fly by?

All of these questions are playing in my head as I have no real idea of what will happen. I've never done this before. I have never travelled so far to see one thing. 4 hours of travelling, just to see one painting. Will it even be that special? Will I gain anything from the experience or will I lose some hope in my profession?

I feel my feet finding the way on the pavement. Rain and wind are pulling at my hair, knotting it in a way that will make me regret not pulling it in a ponytail. I should have grabbed the jacket with a zip, it would have saved me from the irritation I now feel.

It's still too early to show up at the entrance like arranged in the email exchange. I decide to have a walk. Just to see what Schiedam is like. I have never been there before today.

I feel distracted. My anxiety always plays up when unfamiliar circumstances happen. Today is one of those days, but it doesn't seem to be bothering me, which is new. I don't know what to expect and that is okay. For the next hour I am just wandering in circles around the museum until it is time to enter. I don't feel the rain on my face or the wind in my hair.

My phone tells me it's half past nine in the morning. Half an hour to go, 5 hours I have already been awake. I don't feel tired though, I feel invigorated, excited even.

I begin to feel the nerves building. Maybe it is because, for the first time this morning, I am standing still.

I really don't know what to expect from today. What if I hate it? I've never stared at a painting long enough (although I have tried) to really delve deep into its workings. Or rather how it works on me.

I have walked miles in my own paintings and writings, I know the parts that make them tick. It is what keeps me going, but can I see it in that of somebody else? A foreign hand guiding my thoughts.

These thoughts are keeping me from seeing what it is I am walking past. I feel my legs moving, my feet finding the cracks between the stones, my arms keeping my jacket closed so it forms a wind barrier, but I don't care about any of this. Those actions are done with intention, with a goal of keeping me on the right path. My thoughts are a different story. They don't know which way they are going. And I feel myself getting lost.

I check my phone, the time is 9:45, time to find my way to the museum entrance.

Once there I only have minutes before I can expect the guide to open the door.

The entrance itself is impressive, the columns surrounding the patio I stand on, are astounding. I feel small as a mouse underneath them. It's a relatively small courtyard, right on the shopping street, so it doesn't evoke any sense of grandeur, but that has its own value.

The door opens, startling me out of my reverie. A friendly looking woman, my height, smiles at me.

We don't shake hands, due to that being the new norm, so we wave at each other and introduce ourselves. She leads me to the entrance hall. Whatever I was expecting, it wasn't this. In the middle of the hall there is a banquet, with the museum shop around it in a very wide U. The reception desk feels like those stages catholic priests use for a lecture. Together with the high ceiling and stone walls, that's exactly what it feels like.

The guide's name is Genevieve, later I would do some research and discover that she is actually part of a creative duo that operates in Schiedam and the surrounding areas. But this is something I don't know yet, so Genevieve is just a friendly face at this point.

I follow her into a 'waiting room'. I am here before opening hours, therefore, the 'waiting room' has no meaning yet. We joke about this as we walk there.

We sit on a bench and she asks me why I am here, why did this interest me?

I can't remember the answers I gave, but they must have been the standard 'I study at an Art Academy spiel'. She nods, and then she asks me something I did not expect... "Do you want to do some breathing exercises to help you get centred in your body before you go in?" This is where I realise there is more to her than just being a guide. She's actually invested in this experience as well. That may sound a bit callous, but I have found that museum guides are often just puppets leading a herd through a space, reciting everything. Rarely have I been inspired by one, so I wrongfully assumed this would be the same.

After a puzzled moment, I nod. That actually sounds pretty good right now. Given the fact that my body feels like somebody else's at the moment.

The walk to the museum didn't help with that feeling, I think I described it as 'getting lost'. Genevieve is now showing me how to find the right path again. She guides me through a couple of breathing, stretching and grounding exercises. And low and behold, they begin to work. She explains that I can use this in the hour I am about to face. When you get so lost in the painting or your thoughts about it and you need a moment to gather yourself again. (In the time that has passed since I stood before this work, I have used these exercises on several occasions without fail.)

It's now time for me to actually do what I came here for. An hour with Rothko. I feel ready, Genevieve made sure of that. She tells me that she'll knock on the door when there are 5 minutes left of the allotted time. I nod again, take a deep breath and walk through the door.

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The next page are my notes, my unedited notes. I feel that I can't mess with the dialogue I had with myself in front of the Rothko work, without losing part of what I experienced.

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Here I am sitting in front of you.

After months of waiting and building expectations.

I'm trying not to think about time... or the space I'm inhabiting.

My body feels anxious, as if a thousand people are staring at me.

I feel as if I'm on a stage. A platform I don't want to be on.

You are much larger than I thought. Or the expectation of you. More colours look at me than I was expecting.

I'm trying to get out of my head. Writing to you as if you are an actual being, helps. It helps clear my mind and gain a focus.

The longer I look at the orange beam, the brighter it gets. The cobalt green I see, shifts from blue to grey.

It seems as if the bright orange is hiding a previous thought on the canvas. That thought has been pushed into a shadow.

A shadow of a thought/an idea that wasn't good enough to stay.

As I step closer I realise I'm getting emotional.

I recognise the choices that have been made and I can't help, but to connect them to my own.

I see that the bright orange was a third choice. Two more lie underneath it. Same with the field above it. The blue is much brighter at the faded edges. Almost hidden.

I covered the shadow with my hand. The lower field coloured so orange (I can not begin to describe it.) It suddenly felt alone. As if it had no one to talk to. The "shadow" is needed to create a harmony, only those who want to hear it experience.

The top field is clamped between two patches of dark grey.

It has nowhere to run.

I hold a lot of tension in my body. It is weighing me down. My shoulders, my legs, my back.. all tense. A spring that never lets loose.

The floor that extends to my peripheral vision is well matched to the painting. It doesn't take anything away from my field of vision. There is nothing holding the painting back from its potential.

When I take a peek from out my eyelashes the orange only gets brighter, it dominates everything. You almost forget the subtle purple that encompasses the whole painting.

The very edges of the work however remain clear, free of the paint and colour that tinges the canvas. A respite.

The painting feels alive

The colours bleed downwards

There are grey areas where there shouldn't be, an afterthought or part of the process?

Technique maybe

The colours play off each other .

How come the blue is blue again? How did that happen. I was just writing about how it was grey?

When I first walked in the purple looked dead. It has come alive. It wraps its arms around the room.

I lost track of time, the knock happened moments ago. How did that hour go by so fast?

ONE MONTH LATER. 10-4-2020

It has now been exactly a month since the museum visit. I have had enough time to let the experience sink in and I think I can share a few thoughts.

I have a new appreciation for my own work and process. The effort and time it takes to get a canvas to a painting is exhausting, but yet again it is what I love doing most. All the struggling and fighting with myself is worth it at the end of the day. There are plenty of faults to be found, but that is just part of the struggle I experience with my work. All the emotion I felt with this exhibition, before getting into the museum, after coming out, it was a rollercoaster. Romy Finke, said I should do this with my own work (this was the day after) and that it could lead to a deeper understanding of what I am doing.

Since that day I have been trying to reflect longer on the work. "what is the next step?" over and over and over again. Creating a mind space that requires me to let go of everything around me. Grounding myself, using the exercises Genevieve taught me. It's surprisingly helpful. I allow myself to take my time with the work. I don't 'finish' painting until I am sure it can be taken to the next step, or it is done. That is the steepest learning curve I have had since the beginning of this year. Taking the time needed. For writing, for painting, for getting my answers straight before I say something or try to explain something that I regret later.

I can't dodge the fact that the time we live in now is strange, the crisis has effected all aspects of life. That this coincided with the learning curve I just mentioned, is just pure coincidence. I wanted to take see what happened when taking time, now however it is the only thing we can do. At home I made a studio, in my bedroom. It has allowed me to continue working, for which I am grateful. Even though I can use writing as a creative outlet, nothing compares to what I am able to do in a separate work environment. One that I have to travel to. It is not ideal, but it will work for the time being and I can't overlook the fact that I am extremely lucky I can work from home.

I'm going to stop writing here, because I find myself trying to look for more words for what I felt and learnt from this Rothko experience, but I can't. It is not worth tearing my hair out for something that can't be properly explained in any way. I have done my best with the words above.