

Hoge Fronten, Lieke Benders

Museum of Stillness

SLOW ART IN MUSEUM OF STILLNESS IS DEEPLY AFFECTING

Viewed on 24 August 2019, Cultura Nova, SCHUNCK Museum, Heerlen

We have to hand in our smartphones, watches and other distracting baggage before we can descend in groups to the basement of the huge SCHUNCK Museum, where we can wander around big white cubes and rooms. 'Do not enter', 'Do not open' it says on the sliding doors. After a while, the placards are removed and the rooms reveal their secrets.

We tread softly through boxes full of surprises, ending up in a pitch-dark room. I feel like I'm trapped in a cave with all the torches switched off. You really cannot see a thing; its pitch black. You concentrate fully on the sounds around you. It's pretty oppressive. There's the soft sound of clicking tongues and shuffling. One of the 'spectators' - a rather odd word given the circumstances - is finding it all too much and leaves the room. All awareness of time is lost.

The quest upon which we have embarked in this museum performance is a journey to stillness. Not just the stillness that is the absence of sound, but also standing still in time; leaving behind clock time, as embodied by Chronos, to experience Kairos time, the quiet hour, the moment that matters. You never hear total silence, because there are always the sounds

of your own body (and, at the première, a few distracting noises from outside the black room) but, when time stands still, its impact is profound.

A little later – how much later is impossible to tell – there's a dance performance by Bart Bijmens and Leroy de Böck in an open space. Leroy is blind. They touch each other, show each other the way, find the audience and themselves. In an open area, we hear through the headphones the amplified sounds of brush strokes being applied to a wall by Romanian illustrator Livia Coloji. The painting will be finished over the course of the week, its theme 'A quiet house is one with no door'. The artist has based the painting on stories of residents of Heerlen with whom she spoke. In the *Museum of Stillness* you seek stillness and discover its beauty. All the senses are stimulated and this slow art leads you to wonderful moments of quietude. It's quite special.

This installation is part of the 'STIL.het lab' project, which was launched by Lieke Benders together with her team at the monastery in Wittem. They have spent four years exploring the importance of stillness and standing still in a society that is becoming more turbulent, faster moving, and noisier. Previously, they created *STIL.de natuur*, a major exhibition, and *STIL.zwijgen*, a journey through a sculpture garden.

The project is also part of the European Centriphery project, a partner network of festivals and institutions from nine European countries. The Cultura Nova festival is the Dutch partner. 'Every periphery is its own centre and every centre its periphery.' Lieke Benders (Hoge Fronten) and Bart Bijmens (Maastricht Theatre Company) are the core members, assisted

by French choreographer Eric Minh Cuong Castaing and the
aforementioned Romanian artist Livia Coloji.

This stroll through the rooms with performances on the theme of stillness evokes aphorisms and reflections on silence. So many thoughts come to mind. One example, which we read on a Hoge Fronten postcard: 'Silence is the possibility to listen.' Other postcards refer to the Japanese character 'Ma,' which describes an interval in space and time, such as the silence between two musical notes or between two words. There's much to say about stillness, and the discussions in *Stil.het auditorium* next week in Heerlen are sure to be a rich source of quotes.

Photos: Hoge Fronten/Lieke Benders