

WELCOME

The Adventure of Looking**Gerdien Verschoor**

Paintings “are not fully ours,” writes T.J. Clark in *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing*. They live their own lives with their dark and light, their stillness and movement, their rough and smooth surfaces, their stories and inventions. Even so, we want to appropriate paintings, to make them “our own.” And that applies not only to us museum curators, but also to a wider us: the community of art-loving viewers. How can you present an artwork to the public in such a way that the viewer feels that it is also his or her own? How can you take a museum visitor with you on the adventure of looking?

T.J. Clark devised a brilliant method for doing this in his book *The Sight of Death*. Every morning for four months, he looked at two works by Poussin: *Landscape with a Calm* and *Landscape with a Man killed by a Snake*. Each time afresh he looked at the paintings as if he was going on walk through a landscape. He kept a journal in which he described what he saw every morning. In these entries, a very free form in which he jumps from one association to another and which resound with the sheer joy of writing, Clark searches, experiments, enters into a debate with himself. But most of all, he looks, and writes down what he sees. And we look with him: at the light and the countless shades of blue, at the reflections of the buildings and the animals in the water.



We look at some trees as “things,” and others as “meditation.” Clark also shows us what Poussin did not paint (the reflection of the bull in the water) and the mistakes he made (the perspective of a small roof is wrong). We look at the terror of a man who is running away, the dark rings under a woman’s eyes, and a “comma of light” on a big toe.

Where does all this take us? Everywhere. It transports us ever closer into the paintings, since with Clark’s eyes we walk along the zigzagging paths, look at the galloping horse, discover the tiny human figures that turn out to be dashes of paint. Clark takes us towards light and brushstrokes, to rhythm and color, to death and destruction. He takes us to the philosophers of the 18th century, to Poussin as a visual thinker, to the music of Bach. How to look attentively: that is what T.J. Clark teaches us masterfully in this book.

Five CODART members also show us different ways of looking in this issue of the eZine. *The Low Countries* (TLC), the English-language yearbook covering culture and society in Flanders and the Netherlands, produced an issue focusing on the Old Masters to mark CODART’s twentieth anniversary. The book gave five of our curators an opportunity to place one of the “gems” from their collection in the spotlight. Courtesy of TLC, we are able to reproduce their contributions in this issue of the eZine. Other articles from this CODART-special can be read on the website of the [TLC](#) – they are warmly recommended!



How you can look at artworks is something that the members of CODART have also taught me over the past thirteen years. I was fortunate enough to stand alongside the connoisseurs among you to study paintings from close by, I have been initiated into the mysteries of technical research on materials by scientific experts, and *aficionados* expressed their emotions when we gazed at altarpieces in Swedish churches or were allowed to enter the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg in the early morning, before any other visitors arrived. You have taken me along on your own personal adventures of looking. I have been inspired by your love of the Old Masters, and your enthusiasm has become my own. I will take all this with me, when I move on from CODART, in March of next year. Many, many thanks for all you have given me!

T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing*, Yale University Press, 2006