

H-Art Magazine

About: art magazine made in Belgium

Levi van Veluw in Marres, Maastricht

An entirely different universe

In a sense art reviewers have it easier than film critics. At an art exhibition, the basis is familiar: there is a space, there is art on the wall or there are installations. Sketch these elements and you're already well on your way. Film critics have to be more careful: in a film, suspense and the unexpected can be so important, especially in art-house films that are not obliged to follow any known storyline, that sometimes even a single word is saying too much.

A first opening image that is trying to deceive the viewer makes writing a review about it almost impossible. Considering the exhibition of Levi van Veluw at Marres in Maastricht, it now appears that an art project can cause a similar dilemma. Yet let us get around this dilemma with some general information about the artist. A few years ago, he made portrait photos, covered in grass, in which for instance a landscape became visible. These pictures, not uninteresting but not startling either, are still regularly on view, such as for instance now in the self-portrait exhibition in the Arnhem Museum.

More often, however, we get to see his spatial installations: deep black environments, where time seems to stand still. His presentation at Marres, which he worked on for twelve months, is fully in line with these works. One does not need to know more when visiting Marres, where the visitor is rather left in limbo. Little information, lots of suspense. Spontaneous visits will not be possible: visitors must register in advance on the website. Those who do are given a date and time and must report at a special counter in the garden of the Marres centre. The receptionist hands out a key to a safe in a waiting room; taking bags and coats inside is not allowed. Then the waiting begins, in silence, in a booth. At some point the door opens and a volunteer guides you along towards another entrance. 'Be careful, let your eyes adapt to the darkness,' she says and bids goodbye.

Ritual

The sitting in the waiting room, being together, the silence, the guide picking you up: it all has something of a ritual. The less you know, the more significant the silence becomes: waiting for the unknown. Although you know that van Veluw ultimately likes to plunge you into a black hole. I will reveal this though: the volunteer says goodbye at the entrance of a black corridor. When you walk through it, and allow your eyes to get used to the darkness, you will see a faint point of light in the distance. It leads you around the corner, into an archive room similar to the archives van Veluw frequently uses in his installations. A deep, dark and soft carpeting muffles the sound, much like the black walls and ceiling that absorb the light and block the view.

There is a heaviness in the air without any sense of threat. Space and time seem to blend together in absolute silence. In the dim light stands a desk covered with balls and angular shapes. Lying in the surrounding cabinets are pieces of material with a dark bronze colour. They shine like stones, like meteorites. The dark paint that covers everything in this entirely deserted universe is dusty and dull as if moon dust had settled on everything. Even if it cannot be otherworldly, with the desk and the cupboards and all, this is a very different universe, far removed from any reality, time or space. It feels as if people never come here or have never been here – were it not that you yourself, as a person, are standing right there. And that is just the first room of this extraordinary exhibition. In the distance beckons the next light.

Sandra SMETS

Levi van Veluw, 'The Relativity of Matter' until 17 January 2016 at Marres, Capucijnenstraat 98, Maastricht, NL. Open Wed-Sun from 12-17 hrs. (reservation requested). www.marres.org