

Dear visitor,

Crying at art. Crying at contemporary art. It probably rarely or never happened to you, but the confrontation with an artwork can liquefy the emotions and greatly move you. In rare cases, the viewer can be so overwhelmed by the sight of an image that it can lead to ecstasy, hysteria, dizziness, palpitations and fainting; the so-called Stendhal syndrome. In exceptional circumstances artistic rapture can lead to tears. When reading a gripping book or watching a movie, we allow ourselves to snivel. When viewing an exceptional painting, video or installation, we usually keep it dry. In 2002 American art historian James Elkins investigated this apparent contradiction. In his study *Pictures & Tears*, he claims that the museum visitor lacks the peace and receptive attitude that are so necessary for gathering tears. Moreover, according to Elkins, knowledge stands in the way of sentimental experience. Knowing less is better.

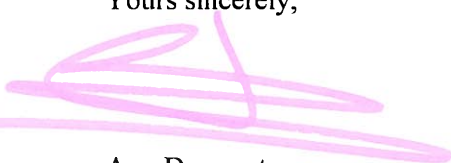
This exhibition does not concern itself so much with sentimental emotions, but more with positive commotion. As the two curators of this exhibition (director Ann Demeester and Xander Karskens), we would like to test whether and how 'affect' plays a role within contemporary art. Affect means so much as being moved emotionally. This can prove to be very small and minimal, but it can also prove to be an intense experience. Our research is performed experimentally, based on a subjective selection of artworks. We are particularly interested in 'affect', because it is a phenomenon that is recently being investigated by various artists and curators. Affect is a term used to refer to a stage preceding emotion, or feeling. Emotion is usually expressed through language. Affect is what is called 'pre-verbal' – it comes before language. It is direct and physical, primary and intuitive. It is a moment when we break loose from thoughts and words. Affect is therefore very sensory, physical and intimate.

In the exhibitions in De Hallen you will find works of art that will touch you and works that thematise this 'affect'. Thus, in her solo project *The Common Sense* (Verweyhal), Melanie Gilligan explores which essential role compassion and empathy play in human relationships and Sven Augustijnen (Collection Cabinet) shows the frustration of aphasia patients, who are unable to make a connection between thinking and speaking. In the Vleeshal you can experience how Eamonn Harnett's rituals evoke stillness, how George Minne's cool marble statue can bring about a profound endearment and how Hassan Khan conjures up a spell.

With every exhibited work you will find 'two voices' with which we formulate why that specific artwork fascinates us, or does something to us that is hard to denominate. We indicate that our responses indeed have something to do with the nature of the work, and are not solely determined by our personal taste or state of mind. Perhaps you can recognize yourself in our descriptions; perhaps you shy away from them. James Elkins might come in handy here. He concludes his book with eight tips for the museum visitor. Go to the museum alone, not in a group. Choose a quiet room and try to limit any distractions. Take your time. Try to do nothing else than concentrate on what you see. Maybe Elkins is exaggerating and it is sufficient to consider that art is a matter of the head, the body and the heart. *Up Close and Personal*. It is up to you!

PS The Frans Hals Museum, which is intimately connected to De Hallen Haarlem, is currently showing the exhibition *Emotions: pain and pleasure in Dutch painting of the Golden Age*, curated by Gary Schwartz and thematically closely related to the exhibition *Up Close and Personal*. A double bill well worth visiting!

Yours sincerely,



Ann Demeester



Xander Karskens