

## On Okki Poortvliet's 'Doden in Rood'

*Tangents x SYB: Artists & Writers in Dialogue*

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Yesterday, after taking almost a week to give form to my feelings, I sent a letter to Louwrien Wijers explaining to her how it has been a while now, I have been busy with a word *listen(ing)*. This word has gotten a fellow after the opening of Louwrien's first solo exhibition at the Fries Museum. Now *listening* is with *friends*. *Listening friends*. *Friends listening*. *Listen friends!*

I had to share this with Louwrien since our last letter exchange ended with my sharing of feeling absolutely lost, sick to the bone by the unnatural habitat I live in, and my slowly collapsing body.

It has been better now. It has been better since I started to *listen* to my body. Today is well. Today I am in Beetsterzwaag.

In the SYB's bar, Okki Poortvliet's work is now on show. She just gave a brief presentation stating her interest in people she cannot understand. How she goes around this is by interviewing them, a form of constructed *listening*. Okki is a filmmaker, making documentaries. The work that is currently presented shows a typically looking, grey-haired Dutch man in his natural habitat – wild hunting. Okki follows what appears to be his hunting routine, from holding a large gun in Drenth's fields to skinning his trophies back in his barn.

I wonder if Okki judges him. I ask Okki whether she judges this hunter's actions, of killing, skinning, caderizing, and eating other-than-human entities. Okki answers in philosophical terms; it is neither judging, nor correcting, nor simply observing. It is about digging deeper, to the roots, to the familiar landscapes, and to different connections with these (non-)humanscapes. It is about *listening* and *befriending* that which we cannot understand.

*Listen, friend*. I could have just made up the answer of Okki, speculated, and shaped it to fit my idea of this text. I could have also started to write by giving a philosophical inquiry into the life of other-than-humans. The meat industry that is complicating living and dying conditions on Earth, and so on and so on. I could question the moral stance on the aforementioned points. There are only infinite prompts to start writing.

There are also infinite ways to go around the people we find hard to *befriend*, hard to *listen* to. Okki uses the color red, which is the color of the drawings that hang next to the projected film; it appears in the drawings hanging beside the film and in the painted cows on the wall behind the projection. I cannot say whether red indicates Okki's way of going around to place a feeling, to translate the experience of *listening* to this hunter's story. The question of red is one I forgot to ask.

For me, red has become an intimate companion, returning each time I must listen to doctors *listening* to my body based on blood test results. There must be a great deal of blood after the cadaverizing of a hunted animal. Yet in Okki's film, the hunters' hands remain clean. Red returns only through paint. What is red asking from us?

And here, at the end, I return to the beginning: writing to Louwrien, I celebrate using language to translate what was *listened* to. What happens when you *listen* while writing. *Listening* while still

digesting what perception witnessed, what emotions arose, what memories came back. *Listening*, again and again, comes full circle.