



Photo Martin van Welzen

CONNECTIONS, THE NEED FOR CONNECTIONS, AND THE NEED TO FIND COMMON GROUND

The AkzoNobel Art Foundation is an independent non-profit organization that collects contemporary art for AkzoNobel. Under the direction of Hester Alberdingk Thijm the foundation has amassed a collection of pieces that, like the company itself, operates at a world-class level. In all acquisitions, the intrinsic artistic quality of the works comes first. The Art Foundation is firmly rooted in the art world and in AkzoNobel itself, and there are close links between the company and the collection – between the global player in decorative paints and performance coatings and the artworks brought together by the Art Foundation. Hello Zuidas caught up with Hester to talk about the foundation’s latest exhibition, Common Ground.

WHAT DOES ‘COMMON GROUND’ MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS EXHIBITION?

Hester: ‘It’s about your place in this world – physical, spiritual, mental. The world is moving faster all the time, spurred along of

course by trends and unrest around the globe. Historically, whole populations have often had to seek refuge and images of refugees in boats are now unfortunately in the news every day. Now, in modern times, digitization and automation are having a massive impact on our ability to find common ground. It used to be the case that you were born in a place and at some point in life went off to visit some other place, but these days no one expects to stay in the place they were born. You can go anywhere in the world, with great affluence at one end of the spectrum and the immense threat of war, flooding and horrific regimes at the other. Finding common ground, and on all the different levels, is what this exhibition is about. It is like Thierry Vanlancker, new chairman of the board of the Art Foundation stated ‘At AkzoNobel we do not only have a passion for paint, we are also passionate about art. Art has the powerful ability to create a common ground and the AkzoNobel Art Space plays an important part in connecting the creative part and the business part of the company with society.’



Photo Annaleen Louwes



Photo Amaury Miller

WHICH WORKS IN THE SHOW STAND OUT MOST FOR YOU?

Hester: ‘Gijs Frieling’s mural, entitled Common Background, depicts a rather romantic view of the world. In the foreground a landscape reminding us of the Bosphorus; you see tulips, and of course those tulips brought about an efflorescence of painting in the Netherlands in the 17th century. What’s great about this work is that there’s a direct link to AkzoNobel. It’s essentially about painting a wall, colours, decoration and heritage. Another nice thing is that the artist painted it with his whole family. What he says is, “You know your family members very well, but it’s not until you paint with them that you get to see totally different sides of them”. To me, that makes it really relevant and lovely.’

WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO DISCOVER IN THE ART SPACE?

Hester: ‘It starts with a sculpture by Michael Jacklin resembling a kind of abstract globe and behind it a very large painting by Joris Geurts containing a massive sun, which actually spans the whole world and ties us all, wherever we are, together. We wanted both to present a realistic view, of people who are suffering and problems in the world, but also to convey positivity. Connections, the need for connections, and the need to find “common ground”. That’s the feeling we want to get across to everyone viewing the exhibition.’

YOUR FIRST EXHIBITION DREW 100,000 VISITORS. WHAT’S THE SECRET TO THAT SUCCESS?

Hester: ‘That was amazing, plus that was only counting so-called “dedicated visitors”, meaning the people who came here expressly to see the artworks. People in Zuidas are in search for engagement

and inspiration. Lots of teams from companies in Zuidas come to us looking for that, and they visit the Art Space and take a guided tour. For the guided tours we’ve put together a special programme booklet in which you can link aspects of your profession to a particular painting. Leadership, collaboration or ways things and people are connected, for example. We developed this programme in cooperation with our HR department and it has turned out to be incredibly successful. KLM ended up wanting to use it too, and that got the ball rolling. People feel a need for art and deeper meaning, so if you have a good location, there’s a lot you can achieve. I see that people in Zuidas work very hard, often burning the candle at both ends. They don’t have time any more to go out to Museumplein to visit a museum. So creating something within the work setting makes it more accessible. And that, I think, is the secret to our success: we’re accessible, we’re free and we’re easy to reach. We are THE charging point at Zuidas for new energy, inspiration and contacts.’

AKZONOBEL ART SPACE

Ground floor of the AkzoNobel Centre
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Follow the Art Space also on Instagram
or Facebook via @akzonobelartfoundation

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 10.00 to 17.00.