

**Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL), Creative Conversation
Transcript for *Reframed: The Woman in the Window*. 19
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Discussing: Marina Abramović, *Role Exchange*, 1975

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Participants

Helen Mason

Rofiat Ganiyu

Fathiya Abdallah

Tamira Marecha

Tareeqe Abdallah

Rita

Shelle

Kaka

Isioma

Alice

Facilitator

(Facilitator)

So just a reminder, if you want to say something, just start with your name, and then you can share your thoughts or your comments. And the first question I have about this artwork is what do you think is going on in this picture?

(Rita)

My name is Rita. Is it both the pictures?

(Facilitator)

Yes. So, you can focus on one if you want or you can cover what you think is happening in both of them.

(Rita)

Oh, OK. I can talk about this. It's like she's smoking, she's sitting down quietly. Like thinking - is it the right life she's living? And maybe she might be there due to situation she find herself or there are some people put them there, like pimp, maybe she might be working for someone who put her there against her will. It is like she's just lost in her thoughts. Like, am I supposed to be here or not?

(Facilitator)

So, looking at the image on the right with the woman in the black dress. You're wondering what kind of thoughts she could be in. Is she there against her own will? Is it a life she kind of chose thanks to some

bad circumstances? What do you think she's thinking about? What makes you say she's lost in thought?

(Rita)

Because she's just stilling quiet, like she's smoking. Like she's holding the cigarette, but she's smoking and sitting down, but I think her thoughts are like... far away. It is like she's dead. She's not there.

(Facilitator)

So, even though she is a still image, you can see her standing there smoking cigarettes and nodding to herself in her own mind.

(Rita)

Yeah, in her own mind like "Is this the kind of life I am supposed to be living? Or is there a way out?" Because like when she's holding the cigarette, she's not smoking now. It's like she's lost her thoughts.

(Facilitator)

So, you notice again that she's smoking the cigarette, but that action doesn't seem complete. She is holding the cigarette and almost letting it burn away.

(Rita)

Yes. It's like it's burning away, yeah.

(Facilitator)

And meanwhile she is just thinking through her choices, including possibly an escape.

(Rita)

Yeah, if it's against her will.

(Facilitator)

Thank you for sharing. Is there anything else we can find? So, what else do you think is happening in this? In these images? Or that text?

(Fathiya)

I'm thinking...I don't know if this looks like a window? She's like sitting by the window. I think it is by the window, yeah.

(Fathiya)

You know like sometimes when you sit by the window and you just in your own space. I'm just thinking - calm - she's in her deep thoughts.

(Facilitator)

So, similar to what Rita was saying. It is Rita, isn't it? Sorry. The same figure in this black outfit. You're agreeing that she is sort of just sitting by the window lost in her own thoughts.

(Fathiya)

She's like somewhere... she's not in the room. She's somewhere far away. Not like, really in the room. But she's there in the room, but her thoughts are... you know.

(Facilitator)

So, physically she's in the room, but her mind is... up there. And what makes you say that?

(Fathiya)

Her eyes are closed and she's just like, she's just holding the cigarette with her eyes closed. She's not gonna do anything with it. In this one, she's like, kind of a bit happy and this one is a bit sad.

(Facilitator)

So, you're starting to compare the two images and similar to Rita you kind of see that she is smoking a cigarette, but not really smoking it. And this one, the woman with the white jacket, you kind of notice that she's got more of a happier face.

(Rita)

Happy face. Yeah.

(Facilitator)

And what do you see that makes you say that?

(Fathiya)

Her face is more like, she's not like that one... that one is a bit sad. In her face. In her facial expression. It's a bit like... she's not like sad, but

she is like a bit... you know... her face is not sad; she's not happy, but at least... yeah.

(Alice)

Yeah. I'm just talking about this lady. Holding the cigarette this way.

(Facilitator)

With the white jacket? Or the other one?

(Alice)

The other one.

(Facilitator)

In the black dress?

(Alice)

Yeah. Yeah.

(Alice)

Yeah. Yeah, that one. I think that she has something that has gone in her. You know? Sometimes you think of things, you know, when... I think she's lost. She's lost.

(Facilitator)

So similarly, to the rest of the conversation you're saying that she has a gaze that is kind of lost. And that she is kind of isolated?

(Alice)

Yes, isolated. She's lost, she's isolated, you know?... I don't know. What was I going to say? You know when someone is stressed. There is something in like the body that gives it away. You can see in the way... in the body language. The body language can say it, even the facial expression can say that she's not okay.

(Facilitator)

So, we've got a lot of comments on saying what she potentially could be thinking about - her thoughts are taking her somewhere else kind of an escape, but then she might also have thoughts of... you're sort of suggesting she could be stressed. And you're saying that due to her

body language, and that kind of stance? You were kind of saying that this woman - earlier with the white jacket - has a gaze that's sort of neither happy or sad. So, what potentially could you think she is thinking about?

(Unknown Speaker)

She is like comfortable with whatever she's doing. It's not like as if she's like thinking about things. She's a bit comfortable - too comfortable - with what she's doing.

(Facilitator)

What makes you say that she is "too comfortable"?

(Unknown Speaker)

Half like... how can I say it?... like her background is not as black as that one. Her background's a bit brighter. That one is a bit like you want to be in your own space and, you know? And that one seems to be like she's like comfortable being in the room where she is and happy.

(Facilitator)

So, this one has got like a more comfortable presence?

(Unknown Speaker)

Yeah, yeah.

(Facilitator)

So, the woman in the white jacket has got a more comfortable presence where she is whereas the woman in the black outfit is a bit more dark and generally isolated. I was gonna ask...

(Rita)

It's like the way she's sitting is like when you are mourning someone - when you have just lost someone - and you want to be in your own space. Yeah, that's the way she's like sitting down - when you are deep in thoughts.

(Facilitator)

So, you're thinking how her thoughts could be somewhere far away. You're thinking her thoughts could be related to a loss. That could also link maybe to the idea that her thoughts are quite stressful, and her body language is reflecting that. Is there – I suppose in either of the pictures, remembering the artwork as a whole – is either of the figures in the artwork... Actually, no, I'm going to come back to that question. I was gonna say actually, let's change that to what's your impression of these women in the artwork? So, you've kind of given the impression that their thoughts are somewhere else, but what was your initial impression of these women?

(Rita)

I think that, without looking at what they do.... like the way she is dressed, she's like, she is dressed like someone who is going out. They have somewhere that they are going to. That she is comfortable wherever she finds herself. She's well dressed with good looking... It doesn't mean that because she's smoking; she's bad. Anybody can smoke. It's a choice. Yeah, but when you look, the way she's dressed, it is like she's just normal. She's okay.

(Facilitator)

So, you've got the impression the woman in the white jacket, she's comfortable. She's getting ready for a night out.

(Rita)

Like for a night out, yeah.

(Facilitator)

Even though she's smoking, it doesn't degrade her image. She's just smoking, but she's quite relaxed in her surroundings, but reading the text it kind of gives a different impression.

(Unknown Speaker)

Yeah. So, she might be going out for her night job.

(Rita)

If maybe what she's doing, she's not happy about it, or it's not what she wants to do, but she's not showing it. She's just feels... with the

way she is dressed... she feels like comfortable dress. The dress might be covering what she's facing inside. But outside, she looks comfortable. But the other lady, everything from her face, the way she is sitting, shows that she's going through something that she's not happy about.

(Facilitator)

And this is based on the text provided? So, the impression is that one might not be.... the woman in a light jacket might not be happy about her profession, potentially as a professional prostitute, even though that's her role, she is sort of dressed powerfully and confidently, but the other woman feels lost and is showing signs that she feels lost.

(Rita)

Yeah.

(Facilitator)

So, this might be a question that's quite challenging or quite interesting. One way or the other. Can you relate to either of these figures?

(Unknown Speaker)

This? Yeah. Like being judged, like, probably like that she's a bit sad, but probably she's not. Probably, that's how she is. And we are judging her. Probably she is more depressed than she is so probably..

(Facilitator)

So, you can relate to that kind of - a snippet of information being cast and therefore being judged by our appearance.

(Unknown Speaker)

Being judged by appearance and probably being judged wrongly. Probably she's the one who's so depressed and she is comfortable.

(Facilitator)

So, you're wondering actually, if these images are showing polar opposites. So, currently the woman... your impression is that the woman in the black outfit is looking more sad and stressed possibly dealing with a loss and the woman in the white is a bit more confident,

but maybe we're getting the wrong idea and that's the thing that you can relate to.

(Rita)

Because people have different ways of showing how they feel inside. There's different ways of showing how we feel inside. Yeah.

(Facilitator)

So, that's something you can relate to, is that you can appear one way but feel another? Is there anything else within these pictures that you feel like you can relate to?

(Unknown Speaker)

Only the darkness of the room. She is like in a dark room. The lighting.

(Rita)

She might not be in a dark room because of where she's doing her job is like during the night. Because you can see the curtain is open. It's wide open. Maybe it's normally at night she goes out so it's already dark. And there's no one there, so she is just like lost in her thoughts. Like the other lady, you can see the room she is in. It's like she is dressed to go out. She's just finished dressing. Maybe it's where she's staying or where she normally dress or.... But, if you see the background, it is bright such like she is in a room. I don't know if it's a nice television...

(Facilitator)

Yeah. I was gonna ask my next question. What else can we find in this picture?

(Rita)

Television? Yeah.

(Facilitator)

The woman in the white jacket is in a brighter room.

(Rita)

Yeah, a brighter room.

(Facilitator)

With, potentially, a tele?

(Rita)

Yeah, and there's heating.

(Facilitator)

There's some radiators and therefore heating, but you were saying that it feels like a more empty room?

(Rita)

Yeah, a more empty room.

(Facilitator)

Whereas this one feels more like a person's room?

(Rita)

Yeah.

(Unknown Speaker)

Homely.

(Rita)

But looking at the flowers, it's like it is not being taken care of.

(Facilitator)

So, it's a home that isn't taking care of the flowers... the plants... and you are making that impression because of the flowers.

(Rita)

Yeah, because if sometimes you are lost in thoughts or you're not happy, things around you might still be going through that stress. She might forget to maybe water the flowers or take care of her plants because looking at the flower, it really doesn't look okay to me.

(Facilitator)

So, you picked up that flowers in the vase in the image with a black outfit are starting to look not cared for and potentially that could be a

reflection of her home because as you're struggling with your own mental health, that can have an impact on how...

(Rita)

The things around her consists of the same situation.

(Facilitator)

So, that all sounds like something we can relate to. I think most people can relate to the idea that if you're not in a good space that has an impact on your surroundings.

(Rita)

Surroundings, yeah. Because the woman in white, despite that there's not a lot of stuff in the room, you can see it looks clean. It looks well taken care of. It looks clean.

(Unknown Speaker)

This one, because it is dark...

(Facilitator)

I have just realised that for a while we've not been saying our names.

(Facilitator)

But please continue sharing your thoughts...

(Unknown Speaker)

I said, why you could not see the room very well is because the picture is not as clear as this. So obviously, you can see this one in front of her, the flowers, but you cannot see in the back, so we don't know what is there.

(Rita)

No, no. Why is that? This is window where she normally go for her job. She's doing prostitute.

(Unknown Speaker)

Yeah, I read it.

(Rita)

So, she's already in the room by the window and she may be doing her job. Yes, it maybe something like club...

(Unknown Speaker)

Or just waiting for the customer.

(Rita)

Then like this, she's dressed maybe to go out. That's what I think.

(Facilitator)

So, you are kind of looking at the... a little bit of what the windows tell us. We're looking in on potentially the women in white jacket getting ready to go out to work, or to enjoy her night out. And the woman in black, a reason she could be feeling sort of like these losses, is that she's waiting for a customer to arrive. And therefore, she's got no pride in how the space looks. Kind of cool. And I was gonna say... another question I have is what does the window tell us about the figure in this picture? So kind of that viewing? We're looking in on that one. And I suppose in a way we're looking in on this one as well.

(Rita)

The window? It's like darkness.

(Facilitator)

So, in particular, the woman in the black or the woman in white?

(Rita)

The woman in black - it's like dark. Everywhere is dark.

(Facilitator)

So, the window view is telling us that it's quite a dark situation. A dark experience?

(Rita)

Because it's a where she maybe go to look for money. Maybe it's night-time. And it's really dark. That's all life that she can see - maybe somebody turn up. If nobody turns up, it is like everywhere is dark.

(Facilitator)

The room is dark potentially because it's night-time. But there's also been a discussion as to when the curtains open, it could be daytime. But now I'm kind of wondering, is she shut in at night-time while she waits for a customer who's always at that bar. Is there anything else you can find in this picture?

(Unknown Speaker)

When you're looking at the picture, it is like the window is quite open is like, quite open. She is seated but I think somebody from outside can still see her. So, it's like it is open. Because the curtains are open, she's in an open space.

(Facilitator)

So, even though the background is darker and more cluttered, she is in an open space, in full view. And that's for the woman in the black outfit?

(Unknown Speaker)

Yeah.

(Rita)

It is an open place. To me, it looks like small compared to where the lady on the right is. She's got more space, and more clean. There's no... there's not a lot of stuff in the room, but it is spacious and is clean.

(Facilitator)

So, in comparison to how they potentially live, she's almost got like a cleaner, bigger space. And she's sort of in a dark, cramped area. So, kind of potentially how could that make them feel? We discussed a little bit about what was going to happen to the women in the black and a little bit about this kind of neither happy nor sad. Maybe how do these spaces make them feel?

(Rita)

Because if it's a place that she goes to look for money, it cannot be really that comfortable - a big place or maybe just a little room. Maybe just, yeah she can sit and the space, just for me, I think it might be small.

(Facilitator)

And would that make her feel small?

(Rita)

It depends on the situation that puts her there that she might think she's small, but what she's doing, it's not...I don't think that's what she wants. Maybe at her own will or maybe someone is putting her there to work for them so at the end of the day it is not something I think she's proud of.

(Facilitator)

So, she might not feel proud of herself at the moment, but it might be because someone else is pushing her or forcing her.

(Rita)

Forcing her in the situation, yeah.

(Facilitator)

And how do you think this woman fits in her space? Or how she feels?

(Unknown Speaker)

I think she's more comfortable in her space than her. I think she enjoys what she does - she doesn't.

(Facilitator)

What makes you say that she enjoys it?

(Helen / Rofiat?)

I think that without looking at what she does for her life, is like, she's like more relaxed, you know. Even though she's like doing whatever she does in her own sweet time, she doesn't look as safe. She's like thinking about what she's supposed to be going to do. She's like, I'm

thinking of what I am going to do. She's not. She's comfortable with what she does. She's not comfortable.

(Rita)

She's comfortable, but...

(Facilitator)

Sorry...

(Rita)

...the look. It's not like happy. She's fine... she's... her job is very good job, but she has been through some things so maybe that's why she's smoking. She's just getting out of her head.

(Facilitator)

You were saying the woman on the right is neither happy nor sad, kind of thing. Similarly, she's sort of pushing what she does aside and just seems sort of more confident...

(Rita)

Because of the reality of life. Because if you see where she's living there's not really much things to show that she's living comfortably because when you look at the room there's nothing much... yeah, there's nothing in it. It's like an empty space.

(Facilitator)

So, there's no home comforts. It's just like an empty space. Almost where she gets ready.

(Rita)

And she does go out and come back and have a place to lay her head.

(Facilitator)

Thank you so much for sharing. I realise we have only got a minute left. I understand that this might be a subject that you don't want the children to look at, but if they have any initial comments, they might want to make, we literally have a minute left, but then the kids might...? Do you have anything that you want to say about these pictures? No.

(Unknown speaker)

I like them.

(Facilitator)

Do you like them? Why do you like them? I was going to say one...what do you think the figures are doing in the pictures?

(Unknown Speaker)

What is she holding? What is she holding in her hand?

(Facilitator)

It's like you have been here, but not really here... which is fine. Do you like them? Or do you like the other picture? Do you like this one or both of them? Why do you like her?

(Unknown Speaker)

She looks okay.

(Facilitator)

She looks okay? I quite like her as well. Thank you for sharing. It's really great to hear your thoughts and you are right - she does look kinda cool.

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