

Under 30s Creative Conversation, Transcript for *Reframed: The Woman in the Window*. 28 October 2021



Discussing: Isabel Codrington, *The Kitchen*, 1927

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Participants

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Facilitator

Discussion

(Adejoke)

Thank you. Okay, I think, the lady, the woman, is probably... I'm having two thoughts... like she probably could be a farmer and she's got a farm because of the dead chicken. The woman looking out of the window, she is probably a farmer because of the dead chicken on the table. She doesn't know what to do. She's not happy. Probably she's been using [inaudible] of late. Because she's sad. That's why she's fed up. She is just looking out of the window.

(Facilitator)

Adejoke, what do you see that makes you say that you think she's sad? So what is it about the figure that is making you think that?

(Adejoke)

Because I think because of that... I don't know. Because she is... I think she's been using the animals. I don't know and as I said, I think she might be a farmer. So that's why she's fed up. She doesn't want to have anything to do with the look of the animal, so she's just looking out the window. Probably, maybe for help or expecting someone in connection with... to do with it. I don't know. But my ... the one I would go more with is she's a... because she's putting on an apron. She's a

cook. And women, no money, you take your house, hoard stuff, you do the cooking. But maybe this time she's fed up. Because sometimes I often am fed up with housework or cooking. I don't want to do this! So maybe on this day, she's like, she's just feeling like that. So she's just fed up. She's just, you know, she's just prefers to look out the window and have some break.

(Facilitator)

Okay. Thank you. Okay, so you've touched on lots of things here. So you are kind of wondering who this woman might be and you're thinking that, that she might be a farmer, or that she lives on a farm. And you've drawn attention to this, in particular, this, as you said a dead chicken, and you think that maybe that's kind of representing something that's happening? That things maybe are going wrong on the farm, things are not working out? And that you feel that this woman is feeling sad? She's fed up? Is that what you were saying? Yeah. And you feel that it might be related to kind of what this chicken is telling us? That it's something to do with this. And she's kind of... you said that she might be looking out the window, because she's feeling sort of down or that she might be looking outside for help. Okay, thank you

(Verity)

Yeah, so I think the woman's looking out the window seems more of a seeking stance. She's moved the curtain, hand on hip. It's sort of like...viewing outside of the window. But I think also even though she might be looking for someone I think the painting more signifies a loss or death relating to like the dead animal on the table. Sort of signifying potential happenings. And also, the table only has one chair around it. And no more are seen in the painting so that is also sort of like signifying a future narrative that will happen.

(Facilitator)

Yeah, okay. Thank you. Alright, so we having a sort of a...what was the word you used in terms of her stance? You said it you felt that it was indicating what kind of mood she was in... something about was it "expectant" that you said?

(Verity)

She is "seeking".

(Facilitator)

Seeking? So her hand on hip and the fact that she's drawing the curtain to one side, giving this sense that you're sort of feeling that she's looking for something / seeking something. You've kind of also picked up on this, this image of the chicken... the dead chicken feeling that it might be representative of a death and, and also, you mentioned the absence of any other kind of furniture and there being one chair. And that all might also fit in with the idea that there's an absence or a death. And did you say something about, in terms of looking out, about the reason for looking out?

(Verity)

She is sort of expecting.

(Facilitator)

Expecting, okay.

(Verity)

Someone may be coming. Something like that.

(Facilitator)

Okay. Lovely, thank you.

(Becky)

Her body language for me is like the hand on the hip and the kind of tilt of her head out the window, kind of like what was said first feels like she's fed up. It kind of feels like to me when either my mum and I are cooking, and we're kind of waiting to hear from my dad like and everyone else, when are they going to be home and when to start cooking. And if you think at that time, there wasn't phones or anything, it kind of looks like she's gazing onto this pebble drive waiting for someone to arrive to kind of start with what's on the table and the chicken and everything. But, yeah.

(Facilitator)

Thank you. So we've got a kind of, sort of connections here. So, there's this sense of sort of, you were saying about waiting. And you talked a

lot about her kind of body language, which you sort of said you recognized. It was something you recognize the sort of feeling of waiting for somebody when you talked about being with your mum at home waiting for your father, in terms of what might then happen within the domestic space, and you were sort of talking about that too. Kind of waiting to speak to this person before you can begin. Yeah, and again, you're talking about her body language. Kind of "fed up", was that the word?

(Becky)

Yeah.

(Facilitator)

Alright, lovely. Okay. So, what more can we find?

(Verity)

I think you can say from the hour of the day... because she's obviously got bread on the table, and that's gonna be made in the morning and the sunlight's quite orange, so you could assume that it's sort of sunset, late in the day. Maybe summer because there's leaves on the trees out of the window so it would suggest that she's waiting for someone to return to her as well.

(Facilitator)

So you're kind of looking at the light and trying to place it in terms of time of day and the season and you talked about this bread representing kind of something that people would usually making the morning and if you're connecting that with the sort of golden light or the yellow light coming through and yeah, and the season because there's leaves on the trees like sort of tried to place it in terms of time. What more can we find?

(Becky)

Sorry, I was trying when I was looking closely to see what the glass bottle was saying. It looks kind of like alcohol, but I couldn't really make out what it is exactly, but the fact it's almost empty and then it's next to this kind of washing jug or water jug (I would presume). Kind of, if it is alcohol and it's that much empty and it's on the table in the

middle of the day paired with her body language - it kind of gives like another layer of like despair to it. So why is this alcohol bottle out in the middle of the day? Why is it almost empty? Does it have a connection to why she's, like, gazing longingly out the window?

(Facilitator)

Thank you. So, you're making kind of further connections between what's on the table and how she's feeling. You've identified this and feel that, because of the way it looks, it is possibly a bottle of alcohol and you've noticed that a quite a lot of it's been drunk and you're linking this - the presence of this - with possibly answering why she's feeling the way that she is?

(Adejoke)

I also want to talk about the bottle and the spirits. I am wondering why it is there. Possibly she's had some of it. She's drunk it up to where it is and so it might be indicative of what you're saying - that there is probably death in the family. So, she is sad. She is missing the person. So it could be why, maybe, she's drinking. And probably this is around the time of day that the person comes back home. That's why she is looking out of the window - expecting.

(Facilitator)

Okay, so it's going along with this the sense that this woman is feeling sad. You've also identified this bottle and wondering why, sort of, it's been drunk and thinking that possibly it is this figure and linking it to, sort of, how she's feeling. And you were talking about - imagining, possibly - who might have been coming. And that that person that possibly she's waiting for, might have arrived at this time of the day, usually, and, sort of, linking what might be happening outside to, sort of, her mood now. Is that what you said?

(Verity)

I think also if you look at the size of the objects on the table, compared to the woman, like the chicken's pretty much the same size as the woman, because obviously, she's quite far away. I think that sort of like puts more emphasis on the objects because they're so in, sort of, in your front vision, that you kind of focus on them first and then relate

them to the woman. She's kind of adjacent from the entire scene. Not sure.

(Facilitator)

So, you're talking about the kind of placement of these objects and how they're kind of at the forefront of this painting. It's sort of the first thing you see before you... well, then your eyes are taken to the woman in the background. And sort of indicating that maybe there's an importance to these objects to sort of explaining, maybe, this woman - why she's standing there, her posture, and kind of what's going on?... What more can we find?...

So, we've talked about, kind of, what your thoughts are about what this woman might be thinking about. What do you think that this? What do we think the woman is looking at? We've had some sort of ideas. Do you think there is anything specific she's looking at, or we have touched on the idea that she is waiting for somebody? Do you think that she is looking at anything out of the window?

(Verity)

The kind of grass next to the gravel, and then the brick wall like accompanying it - it feels to me more that's like the front of a home as opposed to the back where it would probably just be grass going out beyond. But that's kind of why it makes me think she's like, could be just looking at people passing the house or like gazing into the distance onto the road or the trail. That's kind of why it feels like someone or something is coming towards her. So, at the entrance of the home.

(Facilitator)

So, you're kind of like looking at the details outside the window. Feeling that because there seems to be sort of like a pathway, because there's a separation between the gravel and the grass, this might be the front of the house and that there might be people beyond this. So, out of the picture where we can't see. And, kind of, there might be a roadway. Thinking this is the road or that there's a road beyond?

(Verity)

Beyond.

(Facilitator)

Okay. But there's a sense that there's some activity possibly going on. Yeah?

(Verity)

Or even lack of activity.

(Facilitator)

Okay.

(Becky)

I feel like it started quite... static. And so it kind of gives an indication that there isn't anything really going on because surely if there was movement or people arriving she would be sort of moving to greet them? But she's quite, sort of, seems still almost. With her hand on her hip specially. I just feel like she's not moving anywhere, anytime soon. So...

(Facilitator)

So, you're feeling that possibly, if there were people outside the window, that there would be more activity in her posture? You feel that maybe she's been still for quite some time because of the position of her hand. So, you're sensing that, that maybe there isn't a huge amount going on? Thank you.

(Adejoke)

I'm thinking, and because there's a fence that separates the side of the grass to outside it, so it looks like it's a compound. Because there's a fence. Also the lack of activity to be done is what she is used to seeing. That the activity that she is used to seeing is not there. Like she is looking to see somebody driving with the car and they would normally drive on the gravel, but the car is not there. That sense of "Oh, this person would normally be here", but they are not here. That kind of, I don't know...loss. Yeah, a sense of loss.

(Facilitator)

So, you were talking about, kind of, the fact that this is, possibly, sort of a compound that this wall maybe stretches around. That, usually, this

would be a place where some driving vehicle would come up. And you've mentioned, and you did as well, about the, you know, this possibility that there might normally be activity going on beyond this wall or outside of this window - out of view shot. But maybe there is no activity happening. And you're talking about kind of actions. And you've mentioned the word "loss"... What do you think the relationship is between the figure and the window? Why do we think, maybe, that the artist has put a window in that painting?

(Adejoke)

Oh, I am sorry. I feel that there was something we were dreaming one group, one time. Okay. It's the action like this. They had a slogan like "notice us", hashtag beauties viewed through the window. So like, I am thinking maybe our relationship to the window... it gives you that, I mean like opportunity to see what is going on inside. Yeah, and like, even if you're outside, you can observe for who something is doing. It's like a TV or like something to observe more into. To zoom into our hearts, where she's at, what she is going through - the emotions. So down window gives us an opportunity to observe her more.

(Facilitator)

So, you are talking about the fact that a window is a way to see in - inside. So and you mentioned sort of an opportunity sort of for us to have a look at her, but also kind of do you feel that there's a desire for her to want to be seen? And to be noticed? And to know what's going on for her?

(Adejoke)

Maybe - because she's looking in the window herself.

(Facilitator)

Okay. So, the idea that the window might be an opportunity to look inwards, okay. And that kind of fits in maybe with kind of that we are wondering, what is going on for this woman? What is going on inside - in terms of her feeling feelings and emotions and we're kind of looking at clues. So you know, we're looking at the objects and then you've mentioned the window as a kind of symbol of that.

(Verity)

I think if you look at the perspective of the woman and the window, she's... she's quite short, or the artist is placed at a sort of a reduced height and the window is quite high up on the wall. It's not just the usual height that you would see in that sort of a house, especially in that period. I just think that it sort of makes her look slightly less significant. Compared to the outside, it sort of seems like to her the outside slightly ajar from her. She sort of has to reach through to look into it.

(Facilitator)

So, you've identified (and you were saying that it's quite unusual), the position of the window. And you've talked sort of in terms of when this was painted. The idea that, maybe, the outside is sort of elevated on a higher level to the woman and making her, kind of, less significant, and maybe feeling apart from what's going on outside. And that's also kind of what people were saying in terms of the sizes of the objects on the table. They're at the forefront, and very large in comparison to the figure.

(Verity)

I think that if the window wasn't there, if that whole wall was just plain wall, and her body language was the same, it almost looks as if you know, she could be resting her head on her arm against the wall, like, it would be a lot darker, like more despair. But with the window there, it's then more like hopeful for her. Like she has something to look out onto or to yearn for through the window, as opposed to if it was just a plain wall, in this domestic setting, with her, like leaning against it or resting on it.

(Facilitator)

Okay, so you've mentioned, you know, if that window was taken away, and it was a wall, and the woman's posture was the same, that it would be "darker". That was the word you used. And that you feel that the presence of the window is sort of and the fact that she's looking outwards, there's a sense of hope, a sense of possibility. Thank you.

Can you relate to the figure in any way?

(Becky)

I think like after the past year of being inside, I think there's definitely ways to relate to the woman on the inside. Where you, you know, there was days where you just stand at your window and look out at people going on walks and stuff. It's just things like that, like it's almost, I guess, it's reminiscent of that in a way - like she is confined to the inside.

(Facilitator)

Okay, so you're kind of bringing it into the present, sort of, current experiences of being confined, yeah, within a space, a domestic space, a home space. And that's something that you sort of...I guess it's quite current.

(Becky)

Yeah. And it's like, you know, if you think back to those days, where you were looking out the window, it's like, you know, nothing amazing is gonna be out there, you might see one or two people walking down your street, but you're still looking because it's something to do.

(Facilitator)

And, so kind, of this idea of sort of knowing that possibly the rest of the world is inside too so that there won't be much to see outside. Kind of wondering also, if there is anything in this painting outside for this woman to look at. And kind of recognizing that feeling, but you still look anyway.

(Verity)

I feel like I relate to her in the sense that you're sort of waiting on someone's arrival. So if you're waiting on family or friends to visit you in your home, I often look out the window to see if they arrive in their cars, or if they're walking down. I think that sort of sense of just keeping an eye out. That's how I can relate.

(Adejoke)

I also want to say like you said before - hope. Because no matter how we may feel that she might be sad or that she's feeling despair or losses, the moment she opens the windows is a kind of symbol because light comes in. So even if it's dark in the room, in a moment

there will be some light. She will be able to probably hear birds from outside and one or two people passing by. So, hopefully, to see the moment as a contrast from what she is feeling to what is going on outside.

(Facilitator)

As you were mentioning, sort of recognizing that kind of kind of what was the word you used? Not vigilance, but kind of waiting for family or people to come to visit - that you're standing and looking out the window expecting?

(Verity)

Observing, expecting someone to arrive. Yeah.

(Facilitator)

Okay, so recognizing that this sort of sense of waiting inside - waiting for maybe something to happen outside, expecting something, a sense of some sort of expectance. And then you were talking about kind of coming back to this idea of window representing an element of hope that when, with a window, light can come in. And sense of light possibly coming in into this woman?

(Adejoke)

A contrast with what she is feeling.

(Facilitator)

Yeah, a contrast. That's right. Yeah. Okay. Okay, wow, thank you. That was really good stuff came out of that conversation. I've never actually seen this painting before. So I feel like I know it really well now. So yeah, I mean, we've kind of covered quite a lot of the things sort of internally, maybe what this woman's feeling, what's going on for her, the significance of the window, what that might mean, to the figure herself, and maybe the sort of narrative and the connection between the objects in the room - not only the window to the figure - and helping us sort of get a sense of kind of what's going on for her. Yeah, that was great. So what do you guys feel and think about this painting? What do you feel when you kind of look at this work or you're looking at the woman?

(Becky)

I think, like one of the interesting things is we're... from like questioning our perspective, that we're viewing her from inside her home, as opposed to outside through the window. We're watching her look out, but from behind, as opposed to outside the house. And why that is like it is voyeuristic. But it's not as voyeuristic and creepy as it would be if we were watching her through her window. There's kind of a comfort and safety that we are inside the house. And there is like the tonal colours - from this very, this very brown to this kind of beige sort of thing. It's very comforting colours. The only kind of cooler colours are actually going in a triangle from her apron, the bottle, down to the knife in the corner, and then back up to her again. So it's that triangle of cool in the middle of all of these warm ones. But yeah, it's like comforting anyway.

(Facilitator)

Thank you. Okay, so you picked up on the warm colours and the sense of us being in the space. Sort of as voyeurs, potentially, but it would be a very different feeling if it was looking...

(Becky)

Yeah. it's almost like we're welcome. I don't know. I wouldn't say like she's definitely aware of our presence, but it's more welcome than being outside the window, I think.

(Facilitator)

Thank you. Any other feelings about the work? If you feel anything about the work. You may not.

(Verity)

I do think it's one of those paintings that, sort of, on the first glance, you kind of easily establish a scene, but I think the more you analyse it, the more you're more intrigued by the setting and you can really question certain elements of it, but visually, it's not very exciting.

(Facilitator)

Thank you.

(Adejoke)

Well, it really talks about life. Like what we go through sometimes, I think, because we have identified the theme of death. So she is going through, probably, this. This kind of highlights that the way she has lost interest in anything around her - even the bread is for her an expression of losses. Like sometimes, we go through losses and it depicts that.

(Facilitator)

So for you kind of recognizing a sense of it talking about the sort of general themes that a lot, many of us, experience and loss being one of them and, sort of, linking the objects and what's happening with the objects to that - like the untouched bread, the half drink bottle. Thank you. Lovely. Thank you very much.

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