

Alice Sun

## I SEE YOU

In the Storytelling programme *hiStory*, *herStory*, *theirStory*, *myStory*, *ourStory* (shortened as *Stories*) hosted at Molen de Ster on September 2019, the producer and creator of the event – Joe Washington has stated his idea on what storytelling events can bring to the individuals: “... to help people help themselves and to let people know that I SEE YOU”.

It was the fourth storytelling event that has been held by the *Stories* ‘Stichting,’ in each event, several storytellers from different backgrounds tell their stories to the public. The storytellers’ backgrounds vary in many ways; people of different genders, ethnicities, and classes were all welcomed to share their experiences and insights.



Figure 1 "Stories" Storyteller's Portrait Sketch, Joe Washington in the middle - by Alice Sun

I like how he presented the idea, “I see you.” Because for people who suffer or for those who have been living in an unpleasant situation and think they are fighting all alone, it is essential to let them know that they have been seen, and their fights towards a better life

have been acknowledged by somebody else. Here, “see” does not only stand for “look at,” it is far more than a pitying gaze. It stands for the “care” among people in a society in its purest form. Not only that, I can “look at you,” but I am willing to spend time with you in the shared space and hear your story as I accompany you in your life journey. Your story does not have to have any distinctive traits that differentiate you from the rest of the group in order to be seen; you are seen because people genuinely care.

In the previous blog post, I have argued the danger of the marginalized artists treat themselves or being treated in a particular way that they embrace the idea of them being “different” than the others. In some cases, having a unique and, to some degree, the suppressed background may seem to be a golden ticket to the mainstream public for artists. But the attention artists gained by relying merely on their uniqueness brings the audience to a superficial level of who the artists are. An artist’s artworks may be composed of his or her background, even to a large scale, but the most heart-touching masterpieces are able to transfer the personal histories of the author into something that triggers more than sympathy. As the audience, our intention shall be SEEING the artist through his or her artworks as if we are in the shared space, but not to merely look at the artworks and detach our position from the artist’s.

I have participated in an unusual jam session event called “The Story Behind” initiated by an HKU student Gizem Ustuner and a musician Juan David Garzon. It was a jam session in which the audiences will be invited to contribute to the music piece together with musicians by making sounds with various objects. During the music-making process, people started sharing their personal stories from their memories, and as one-story ends, people would begin adding pieces of sounds from the story to the on-going rhythm. For instance, the violinist Anan al-Kadamanin shared his experience on his first impression on the Lombok district, Utrecht. He said that those grocery shops at the streets in Lombok reminded him of his hometown, Syria. He then imitated the chapmen’s phrase in Arabic that he used to hear back in Syria. Then everyone else started to repeat that phrase into the rhythm and created a harmonious sound piece, despite the fact that most of the audience do not even speak Arabic. As the event ends, everyone seemed to feel closer to each other from listening and sharing personal stories. It was one of the most magical experiences that I have had from an art event.



*Figure 2 "The Story Behind", Anan and Juan playing scene - live sketch, by Alice Sun*

The participatory experience that I have in events always brings me close to the others. In these events, my position allows me to engage with the artists as well as the audience on a personal level which is very different from the most traditional institutional exhibitions where not only that I was always in a position of a judge of an artwork, but I was also expected to be just a listener that passes-by.