

# Miranda Whall

## *You Staring at Me and An Oak Tree Staring at Each Other for 24 Hours*

A response, by Michaela Hollyfield

I was excited and also curious as to how I would engage with watching Miranda staring at an oak tree over a 24 hour period live streaming to the rest of us over that invisible intangible space called the internet.

I put 'Miranda' on when I came home from work whilst eating my dinner.

As the twitch stream opened up I had this magnificent visual composition on my computer screen. A bench, an empty chair, an Oak tree on the bench in a pot, the smoke from a fire going slightly left of centre behind the bench, and behind the empty chair, unobtrusively positioned, a tent, and after a long while, I realised that Miranda was in the tent.

My first reaction was to think, 'where is she?', but after looking more intently I found her tucked away in the little tent. It was very exciting for me to think I had spotted her, it brought up more questions about how this was going to work, what I was about to engage with, and what she was doing.

Whilst she was in the tent, there was no human subject in the centre of the composition, so I noticed the Oak Tree, I noticed the bench, I noticed the absence of Miranda and I noticed the smoke from the fire.... And I could hear the sounds of life although in this moment they all seemed to hold much more significance, the birds, a neighbour drilling, Miranda zipping and unzipping the tent door, I was there, in this scene set up so beautifully...which I could be part of as an observer miles away via my lap top screen.

So bizarre but so comforting to be able to be there it felt, with my friend, whilst she embarked on this 24 hour live stream.

As I was enjoying the lush green of the patio space, the leaves of the oak and this sense of watching a moving photo of moments in time, Miranda came out of the tent, fiddled with a few technical bits, put her go pro camera on, plugged in her head phones and began staring at the Oak tree.

Here I was, staring or maybe more like gazing, or viewing Miranda staring intently at an Oak tree in a pot on the bench opposite her.

Her cat Olive walked around under the bench, and crept into the tent at one point, like some small important detail in a symbolist painting, with a warning or message for us viewers, or just as some distraction for us as our observation was not just intent on the oak tree, but of the whole visually delicious scene.

Watching Miranda staring at an Oak tree, not just watching her alone but knowing that an unknown quantity of other people were also tuned in and watching her too, gave me a sense of being part of a community of 'watchers'.

Collectively becoming part of a piece of art by merely turning on a device, clicking a link and engaging with what Miranda had placed before us.

I could not help but marvel and the genius of creating such a perfect piece of art work which ( as a painter) engaged my need for aesthetic beauty whilst also presenting me with philosophical concepts of self, and other, of watching looking and staring, of a collective act and an individual act whilst simultaneously being alone at home engaging.

After this initial 30 minutes of 'Staring at Miranda Staring at an Oak Tree' I had to leave the stream to attend to something else. I couldn't get back to it until much later, and noticed that I really wanted to see what had changed. Was she in the tent? Was Olive under the tree? What would the scene look like now it was dark? What might have changed?

My anticipation was not disappointed. The night time scene was also stunning. The light on the oak tree; the dark and yet illuminated movement of the branches, the rustling of the wind in the leaves, the sounds of life that Miranda was making. Zips opening, the clunk click of technology go pros and timers, zip, a cough, a rustle.

I took my lap top upstairs and decided to go to sleep with 'Miranda' on, just so I felt I was with her.

I went to sleep watching the scene.

One of my cats woke me at 3 so instead of checking my phone, I checked into 'Miranda', and lay watching the light on the oak, in the dark, whilst the leaves rustled and moved, and felt a massive sense of comfort, belonging and togetherness at tuning into something which was happening now. It felt very magical. I just lay down and watched until my eyes shut and my computer shut down....

I woke at about 8.30am and quickly realised my computer had run out of charge and frantically logged in on my phone to catch 'Miranda' and her last moments of her last Stare.

It was very important for me to see her finish this marathon even though I had only participated at irregular intervals, I wanted to watch her finish, hear her say her finishing words, admire the absolute commitment and focus Miranda gives to her art and all of us viewers. I was struck at the utter enormity of this project, how it had affected me in my desire to connect to it and just keep watching this scene. Like characters in the film *The Truman show* (directed by Peter Weir, featuring Jim Carey, 1998) normal people tuning in to watch Truman sleeping in the familiar setting of his home and life (although unknown to Truman himself) and finding comfort in watching him, I too felt comfort from tuning in and watching my friend creating an art piece which so cleverly and profoundly expounded the concepts of looking and staring.

Michaela Hollyfield.