

Zwarte Ibis, Already and Forthcoming

A Visitor report

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Zwart Ibis, *film still*, Black Speaks Back, 2024.

On the 12th of January 2024, Black Speaks Back's short film *Zwart Ibis* premiered in the Melkweg in Amsterdam. Six weeks prior, on the 22nd of November the right wing populist party Partij Van de Vrijheid (PVV) secured the highest number of seats in Dutch Parliament. I went up a maze of confusing stairs to find a not too small theater filled with black people, they all seemed to know each other. The atmosphere is positive but weary, like it is good that we are here, but what a strange time and place to be.

The director and film crew are moving between the theater and the dressing room, nerves are up in the air, but there is a meticulous order to things too. Something great is about to happen. Something freakishly well thought through. Shug is DJ-ing, everyone knows Shug, I know Shug. She plays Fela Kuti's *Sorrow Tears and Blood*. Fela wrote *Sorrow Tears And Blood* in response to the South African regime's crushing of the Soweto uprising in June 1976. I feel or rather need that from this scene, a revolution to erupt.

Baldwin's bursts of momentous monologues in the second scene of Terence Dixon's 1970 portrait documentary, *Meeting the Man: James Baldwin in Paris* are the mantra that I want to activate this scene.

“The world will change, because it has to change. The Pope will die, because the church is criminal. The party is over. That is what is going to happen.” James Baldwin 1970

This second scene takes place in James Baldwin's friend's apartments, a colorful space in which Black intellectuals young and old, male and female, commingle and discuss many wonderful subjects. There is a sense that the outside world is cruel, but for this small moment the cutting intellect of black people in exile: black people in Europe, can manifest in all its glory.

In the world of the *Zwart Ibis* premier, beloved MC Jennifer Muntslag is the speaker of the momentous monologues. She teases the crowd and they love her for it. She asks the audience to turn off their phones by singling out and roasting the director's father. *Dunglish* is the language of the night (a mix of Dutch and English). The energy is high, it feels as though this might turn into a ball.

Jennifer invites *The House of Vibration*'s Miyuko Zoldyck to the stage. Zoldyck soaks and momentarily drowns us (me) in a sound bath. Like a mother, trained in the magical impossibility of putting restless children to sleep, Miyuko bathes and wrings all revolutionary riotousness out of the room. A quiet and slow burning intimacy develops. This is a room full of black people. After the recent elections, Amsterdam as we knew it is gone, our home is in the mouth of a shark. But for this small moment we shall be wrapped in sonic intimacy.

The perspectives in *Zwarte Ibis* are shifty. The cuts are fast. We swing back and forth in time, the music has hints of birds, black bodies everywhere are colliding, moving through mazes on a convoluted hero's journey. *Zwart Ibis* is not a revolution, it is not didactic, it is *dis-interested*: *it doesn't want to make you feel, it rather wants to feel with you*. *Zwarte Ibis* is the gentle unassuming friend who, with the right amount of courage, will reveal themselves to be strange and deep and wondrous, and mythical, and fleeting, and alien and allegorical.

We are still in a haze when the speeches commence, the curators and directors of *If I Can't Dance* take to stage, one by one they give well considered thank you's and offer up the institutional affiliations that have made *Zwarte Ibis* possible. It occurs to me that the project has been at least a year in the making. Paradise. Already and forthcoming. A communioning of three black queer women making a short film with what seems like enough institutional support warms my heart. In collaboration with more than 80 people from the black community!

The director and crew make it to the stage. Jennifer comes back, this time her energy is tentative, it seems as though she has spoken to the crew and they have put rules around the type of questions that should be asked. She is curious still and she opens up interesting avenues that the conversations venture in and out of. We learn that the filmmaking process was horizontally collaborative. We learn that the name of the film, *Zwarte Ibis*, comes partly from a bird that was screaming outside of a window on a far away holiday. It dawns on me that most of the people in the room have played some part in the making of the film. This warms my heart once more. The speeches end and the audience moves to the front and hugging, and loud clapping, and celebration ensues. I sneak out.

