

A letter from Gavin van Winsen to Ernst in 2012 about Ernst's painting entitled 'I Just Love This Painting.' Gavin is the MD of Winsen canvasses and frame makers.

HOW TO CHOOSE FRIENDS

They say you can judge a man's character by the company he keeps – well I have come to believe a more accurate assessment is to judge a man by the art he keeps. But what about a man who chooses his company by the art he keeps? Let me attempt to explain.

It is a rather soft approach to say that art is subjective and even though it is true that people's tastes differ - good art is good art, and bad art is bad art. Period. I pride myself in having good art, even if the collection is modest at best.

But getting back to choosing friends, I have one particular abstract work by Ernst de Jong. That piece in particular, has become a litmus test of sorts to see if the person viewing that work could be a potential friend or not. So far it has been astoundingly accurate ... but let me go back a step.

The work is a pure abstract; an exercise in design, in lines and circles and in somewhat tribal shapes. There is an air of sophistication about the work that is hard to describe, other than to say I feel more intelligent when I stare at it. It was clearly done with purpose and thought, and I suspect much time. Like any good work it demands exploration to be fully appreciated, and as I follow the lines it just seems to make sense. On occasion, as I explore different sections of the piece, new details come to view, almost as if my mind needed time to assimilate the work - a curved row of dots reminds me of tribal face markings, a clean curve leading to near perfect (near madness) circle that is alien-like but at the same time reminiscent of a beautiful flower stamen.

Simply, the painting is visually appealing and I would be bold enough to say a work of character, a true reflection of the artist himself.

So back to choosing friends ... of course I love to show everyone the piece, and am always amazed by the range of mixed reactions. From "I don't understand" to "mmm" to "nice frame" to "Who is this guy?". The people who don't understand I suspect don't understand why they don't understand and the world must be a dark place for them indeed. But those who take the time to step back and consider the complexity of thought that created the work, is surely someone I can happily keep company with.

Call it a harsh, over-simplistic judgement of character; but in a world full of pretences and facade and niceties, I have come to rely on that painting ... for inspiration, for twisting my mind, and of course for deciding who to share the expensive wine with.

Gavin van Winsen. 2012.