

Flowers in Hotel Rooms

I always make sure I have a book with me when travelling, and have spent many hours reading in hotel rooms good and bad whilst working in Europe or further afield. I never paid much attention to what I was reading in relation to where I was staying, until, in 2002 whilst at the Frans Masereel Centrum in Belgium, I started to read Richard Brautigan's novel, *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* (published 1971), which includes a character who has written a book on growing flowers in hotel rooms by candlelight (as she has no electricity). The image this conjured up in my mind was so intriguing that I stopped reading and got to work straight away on assembling candles and flowers to photograph in my room. Over the next year, I took photographs of flowers I found or placed (with a literary reference) in hotel rooms I occupied, and *Flowers in Hotel Rooms Volume I* emerged in 2003. The series has continued to evolve ever since that moment in Belgium.

For *Volume II*, (completed 2005) after I began to consider what I was actually reading in rooms I stayed in, and where those rooms were, the series subsequently developed into personal tributes to writers whose novels I am reading, or the characters within, in relation to where I am geographically. In 2004, I had to stay in The Dolphin Hotel with the same name as the hotel central to Haruki Murakami's *Dance, Dance, Dance* – with the brass plaque at the entrance and the possibly the same musty smell, but I was disappointed to find that there were only 2 floors rather than 16, and no elevator with which to enter Sheep Man's world.

In tribute to Colin Dexter's novel, *The Way Through the Woods*, where Inspector Morse stayed in Room 27 of The Bay Hotel, Lyme Regis, I booked the same room, and took the book with me. The room was as described, except for the broken window and lack of hot water. In the morning, I decided to play out Morse's movements; I got up at 6.45 am and made coffee, I did the crossword whilst looking at the view of the bay, as he had done. The evening proved more difficult though - I could not follow his footsteps in the hotel restaurant, as dinner was not served 'out of season'.

By *Volume III*, I was eagerly anticipating my next destinations, with tributes made over the next two years in Australia, UK, Japan, The Netherlands, Estonia and USA, for books by: Haruki Murakami, Ray Bradbury, Iain Sinclair, Tim Gautreaux, Robert Bloch, Agatha Christie, Edgar Allen Poe and Ed Ruscha.

In Lismore, NSW, Australia for an artist's residency, I was staying alone in a 1900s tree-cutter's cabin, which had been transported and secured high up in the trees, safely above the regular floodwater levels of the marshy ground below. Having packed a stash of books to read, I couldn't believe my luck when I opened *The Clearing* by Tim Gautreaux; a novel set in a logging mill, in swampy Louisiana, USA, 1923. In Tokyo, I wrote a better postcard to send to the character Midori in Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*, from my hotel room in Shinjuku. Working in Enschede in The Netherlands I asked to stay in room 451, so I could make my complicated tribute to Ray Bradbury; burning a paper flower for Guy Montag (whilst reading Edgar Allen Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*). Robert Bloch's *Psycho* got wet as I dropped it in the shower of the Hotel Durant, in the USA. Three days previously, in a crossover tale with Tom Sowden's artists' books in this exhibition; I had driven Tom up Sunset Boulevard and back, in Los Angeles, so he could take photographs for his artist's book *Some of the Buildings on the Sunset Strip* (2008). My book tribute later that day was a glass of milk and a white rose in my room, for Ed Ruscha's *various small fires*, after Tom's own inspirations.

Flowers in Hotel Rooms Volume IV, 2009 was made with this exhibition in mind. The series has become a set of journals, documenting my own actions as well as those of characters in novels, or writers whose work I admire. Working in Poland, meant a stay near the home of the writer and artist Radoslaw Nowakowski so we could interview him and film his books. He lives in Dabrowa Dolna, a tiny hamlet, and as I sat outside at dusk with the dogs barking (reading *Ethan Frome* by Edith Warton) I noticed the garlic that had been nailed up for protection outside the front door by the wonderful B&B owner. In Minneapolis last winter, with long, cold corridors but no snow, I'm reading *The Shining* by Stephen King, and set about typing "all work and no play" on a portable plastic typewriter. In Glasgow, reading Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor* I amuse myself in Palahniuk fashion by asking Tom if he can write "kill yourself" in the steam on the bathroom mirror of the hotel room he is sharing with a friend of ours, who is never fully awake in the mornings, and of course he doesn't even notice it. In Frankfurt, reading Haruki Murakami's *After Dark*, I can create my own night-time take on the novel with the ink stamped on my arm from visiting Takashi Murakami's ©*Murakami* exhibition that afternoon. In Whitby, England as the mist rolls in from the sea, I willingly watch it envelop the window as I read *Nosferatu In Love* by Jim Shepard.

Thanks to Richard Brautigan, I think it is possible that the *Flowers in Hotel Rooms* series has become a bit of an obsession, but I can't think of anything I would rather do now when I have to travel. I always look forward with anticipation to occupying my room, whether dull hotel or shabby motel - I just know that something will happen to contribute to this series. Having been inspired to read books by Gogol, Solzhenitsyn, Kharms, and Zamyatin after interviewing the Russian artist Dmitry Sayenko earlier this year, I now just need to get to St. Petersburg somehow...

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