

VAN GOGH'S ROOM IN THE AUBERGE RAVOUX

OR

THE SILENCE OF VAN GOGH

Ever since it reopened in September 1993, the Auberge Ravoux, known as the “House of Van Gogh”, has attracted nearly 1,300,000 visitors from all over the globe in search of Van Gogh's room. How do we explain such enthusiasm for visiting an empty room, where never a single event has been organized since it was opened up to the public?



PHOTO : ERIK HESMERG © INSTITUT VAN GOGH

In fact the people who visit the room are not tourists but ‘pilgrims’ who endorse the personal values of Van Gogh. The deep convictions of the artist were admirably expressed by the art historian Wouter van der Veen in his book *Van Gogh - dans la chambre de Vincent** (Van Gogh - In Vincent's Room):

“Van Gogh is the unequalled role-model for all those who are resentful of the authority, regulations, systems and injustices that surround and constrict them. His example has shown that rebellion and insubordination can be a mighty creative force; that it is right to hesitate and doubt and think twice about a decision, while at the same time remaining faithful to values such as simplicity, hard work and integrity.[...]”

[...] This is no doubt what is miraculous about Van Gogh. He somehow manages to convey a different personal message to each and every one of us. We are all entitled to see in his canvases what we want and what we need. We don't have to be art historians to appreciate Vincent's work. In fact perhaps the opposite is true – indeed it is perhaps indispensable not to be. The less you know about it the better. Then the imagination can take precedence over knowledge. Contrary to the normal academic process – but completely in harmony with the spirit of Van Gogh – the most ignorant of the uneducated can find in his work something that strikes an intimate cord. Deep down we all have something of Van Gogh inside us.”

In short, there is nothing to see in Van Gogh's room – but everything to feel. The room can easily be ‘furnished’ without any need for an event to be organized there.

Today the Auberge Ravoux is both a ‘place of memory’ and a place of life. As a site laden with history, it has accepted the challenge of combining its traditional activity, a restaurant and wine store, with the cultural role managed by the Institut Van Gogh.

The latter regards it as its mission to make the Auberge Ravoux the place where Van Gogh's modest dream can come true, as he expressed it on 10 June 1890:

“One day or another I believe I'll find a way to have an exhibition of my own in a café.”

* Edition Desmaret, collection les Insoumis (2004)