

## PRESS RELEASE

### AUGUST art presents "Noisome Fly" With Raaf van der Sman

Raaf van der Sman's painting "Double Rorschach" is a diptych that prominently features one of the shapes from Rorschach's inkblot test<sup>i</sup>. That most viewers could probably identify the inkblots points to their pervasiveness into everyday culture. In the work, one of the inkblots is repeated. Whilst they seem identical at first, subtle variations point to a conscious decision to set them apart - which one is the "correct" one? Van der Sman's painting wonders about the ubiquity of the inkblot test and what it might really be testing?

Since interpretation of the form of the inkblots is the substance of the test, the forms' origins, and whether they are arbitrary or the result of a subjective decision is of interest. Most assume the forms are arbitrary<sup>ii</sup>. But the prototypes in the archive are less detailed, suggesting that Rorschach might have modified their composition. The forms were also changed by the publishing printers, made smaller, and some colors and degrees of shadings of gray changed. These plates have been used to print all subsequent inkblots. Van der Sman's painting of 2 inkblots, similar but different, might be taken to ask the question: how does the form matter?

The test's usage has changed over time. Rorschach originally conceived it to test the differences of visual perception between different groups of people; he also stressed the need for more research into the validity of his findings (which he could not carry out, passing away 4 months after publication). His study languished in obscurity until 30-40 years later, when their use shifted to personality assessment. "Rorschach experts" performed blind analysis on people's personalities based on the test results, although arguably these performances had more in common with horoscope assessments than scientific analysis. By the 1990s, its use grew wider<sup>iii</sup> and the test is taught in 80% of psychology graduate programmes in the USA<sup>iv</sup>. There have been academic revisions and growing criticism along the way, but the history of the test raises the question of whether it is a valid scientific tool or an example of conventional wisdom?

Van der Sman's painting's response may be found in its quiet build-up of colour and textures, in its "found object" quality. The image seems to merge into our vision until it feels like we've always seen it.

Perhaps van der Sman's painting can be read as a test? One of what we might want such tests to answer for us? An exhibition of "Double Rorschach" and Raaf van der Sman's other paintings runs from 14 Jun to 7 July.

#### "Noisome Fly"

14 Jun to 7 Jul

Th to Sa, 1 to 6 pm, or by appointment

**Opening drinks: 13 Jun, 6-9pm**

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<sup>i</sup> The Rorschach test is named after its author, Hermann Rorschach a Swiss psychologist, and consists of 10 inkblots, printed on a white background. Subjects are shown the inkblots, and asked what s/he sees, and the specific features of the image that made him/her draw the conclusion. Assessment is based on how the subject's response compares to a database of others' responses. H. Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostik*, Bern, Switzerland: Hans Huber, translated, 1942 (original 1921)

<sup>ii</sup> Rorschach wrote very little about the production and seems to suggest the process is arbitrary: "production of the arbitrary forms is very simple: a few large ink blots are thrown on a piece of paper, the paper is folded, and the ink spread between the two halves of the sheet". H. Rorschach

<sup>iii</sup> The Rorschach test ranks 8th in outpatient mental health facilities, is the 2nd most used test by Members of the Society for Personality Assessment, and is requested by psychiatrists in 25% of forensic assessment cases. C.B. Gacano & J. Reid Meloy, "The Internal World of the Psychopath" in *Psychology: Antisocial, Criminal, and Violent Behaviour*, edited by T. Millon, E. Simonsen, M. Birket-Smith, and R.D. Davis 95-109. New York: Guildford Press, 1998

<sup>iv</sup> I. B. Weiner & R. L. Greene, *Handbook of Personality Assessment*, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2007