

Art experience and *The little prince*

What is an art experience, and how can we prepare for art experiences? I see the meeting with a work of art in the same way as a meeting with a person. You may wish a personal encounter with another person and prepare yourself for it, but there is no guaranty that it will occur. A personal meeting is always somewhat risky.

The fine little book *Le petit prince*, *The little prince* (Saint-Exupéry, 1946), describes in chapter 21 how the little prince meets the fox. Two states of character and two forms of practice prepare for a real meeting. The two important states are: Openness for establishment of ties with the other, and Will to exclusive concern. The two important practises are: to Establish a ritual, and to See with your heart. This is a process that nobody controls or OWES.

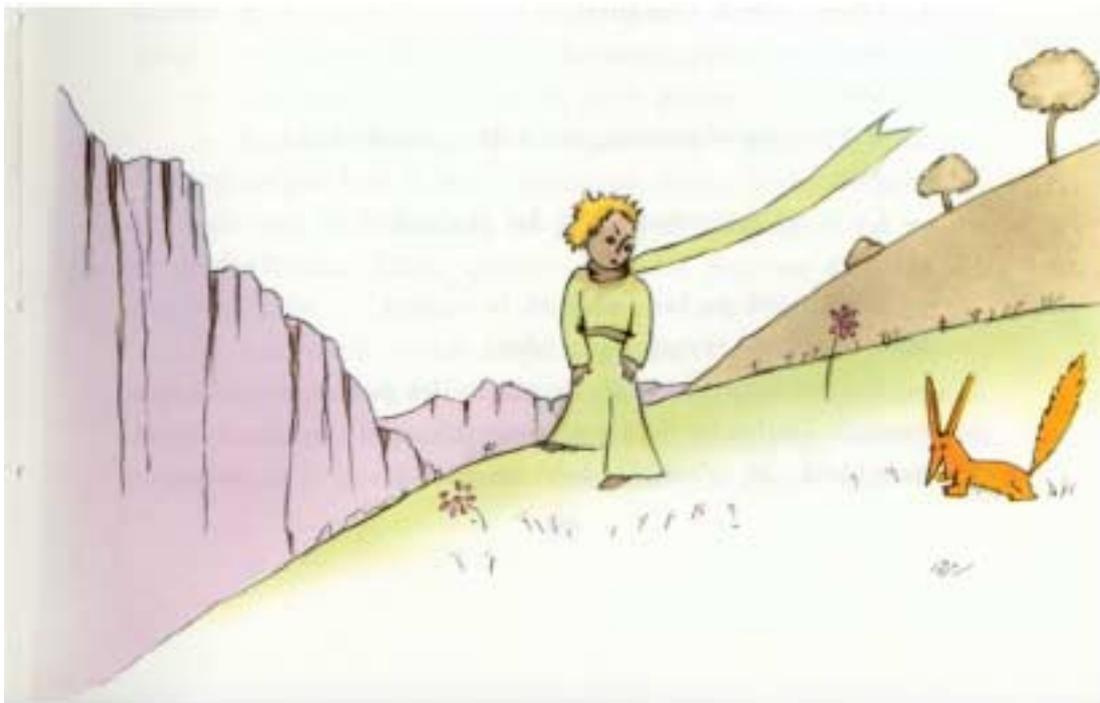
Openness for establishment of ties

Will to exclusive concern

Establish a ritual

See with your heart

Preparing yourself for a meeting means to **O**pen up for the establishment of ties with something wild or foreign.



The fox says that he can't play with the prince before he is tamed. The prince asks: "What does that mean-- 'tame'?" "It is an act too often neglected," said the fox. It means to establish ties." In fundamental matters I can't understand the other from a detached position. Art experience presupposes openness for taming, openness for the establishment of emotional ties with the work. The process may change my life.

Will to exclusive concern means to really say yes to something (or somebody), and exclude other possibilities.

The fox says: "if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world...". The prince looks on a field of roses and compares them to the one rose that he earlier has watered and protected on his little planet.



"You are not at all like my rose," he said. "As yet you are nothing. No one has tamed you, and you have tamed no one. You are like my fox when I first knew him. He was only a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But I have made him my friend, and now he is unique in all the world." Art experience presupposes a willingness to become acquainted with particular works. Art experience is a personal encounter with a foreign work, knowing *it* like you know him or her. Both in the relation to a person and to a work of art it is indispensable to be together regularly to get acquainted.

Establishing a ritual means to have some order in the approach to the foreign person or work of art. "What must I do, to tame you?" asked the little prince. "You must be very patient," replied the fox. "First you will sit down at a little distance from me-- like that-- in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. Words are the source of misunderstandings. But you will sit a little closer to me, every day..."



Art experience is a risky affair demanding self-discipline and time, without a guaranty of success. Seeing with your heart means that a loving relationship is necessary to see the most relevant nuances in a situation. "Goodbye," said the fox. "And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

Otto Friedrich Bollnow (1959/1984, p. 106) has formulated the same principle in this way: "Der Liebende liebt nicht, weil er zuvor die Werte des andern Menschen erkannt hätte, sondern umgekehrt, nur weil er liebt, ist er imstande, diejenigen wertvollen Eigenschaften des andern Menschen zu entdecken, die einer gefühlsmäßig neutralen, rein theoretischen Betrachtung unerkennbar bleiben müßten". My translation: "The loving person doesn't love the other because he earlier has recognised the value of the other person. Contrary to that, it is only *because* he loves that he is able to discover those valuable characteristics of the other person, characteristics that to an emotionally neutral, purely theoretical observation, would have to remain unrecognisable." Loving is as necessary in experiencing *art* as in doing philosophy – loving *wisdom*, as in gardening – loving the particular rose.

Bollnow, O. F. (1959/1984). *Existenzphilosophie und Pädagogik : Versuch über unstetige Formen der Erziehung*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
Saint-Exupéry, A. de (1946). *Le petit prince*. Paris: Gallimard.

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