

The Roads Around

Isabel Miquel Arqués in dialogue with Karen Blixen

By Catherine Lefebvre

Recently, in a beautiful house in London, I encountered a carpet just the same as the one in Karen Blixen's living room, and my mind immediately travelled back in time. Abroad, I found myself in a space between London and Rungstedlund, Blixen's native home north of Copenhagen. In this *terrain vague*, I recalled that every object in the house calls your attention; every object becomes a *reference* for something different.

This carpet is only one of the *points de mire* in Isabel Miquel Arqués's conception of Blixen's space: a kaleidoscope through which a road map is revealing itself. A piece of contemporary art in any time. This carpet, although not original, plays an important role in telling the story of new horizons with references to a Persian voyage, to Scheherazade, to a tale by Blixen. To a tale within a tale.

Through Isabel Miquel Arqués's sensitive and apt photographs and poetry, a new story is told, a new dialogue opened. Every photograph points at a singular meaning and, taking its point of departure in the beautiful space of Rungstedlund, progresses in importance.

I attribute Blixen's openness of mind to her childhood there overlooking the sea at new horizons in the distance along the Swedish coastal line.

Very close to the carpet are two carved seashells incorporating layers of stories and sounds, adventures and craftsmanship. They have been there for ages. Only in 2018, sea shells, queen conchs, were found beneath the north terrace. Plants and roots had hidden these extraordinary *Lobatus Gigas* for more than a hundred years, probably brought back to Denmark from the Danish Virgin Islands. Englobing history.

With regard to geographies, cultures, art and identity, a key word is *intuition*.

Isabel Miquel Arqués must have been driven by intuition towards Blixen, towards this space linking it to her own past and to places and entities that *intuitively* are in the same league – Venice, nature, the weather, the moon, the atmosphere, chemistry, and African highlands. Intuition as the ability to acquire knowledge without proof, evidence, or conscious reasoning lets us experience how through this space, still and beyond time, Blixen points at the indefinable, the *feeling* of the place. This is exactly what Isabel Miquel Arqués captures in this moving book.