

Excerpt from: "Sophie Calle: Word, Image and the End of Ekphrasis"  
Linda Nochlin

Here is what Calle has to tell us about the origin of this piece:

In June 1989 I was invited to participate in an exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris. The Bonnard painting *Nude in the Bath* was out on temporary loan. I asked the curators, guards, and other staff members to describe and draw the painting that once filled the empty space. I replaced the missing painting with these memories.

Bearing this in mind, we might ask ourselves several questions: how is Sophie Calle's project in this piece different from previous word/image relationships? Are there still traces of these? What is she foregrounding, what is she obliterating? In other words, what either connects Calle's work to, or sharply differentiates it from, the ekphrastic tradition?

And here is the group-text substitute for the painting out on loan: a text dispersed, fragmentary, often flat and boring, extremely repetitious, with some people really trying to remember the painting, some vaunting opinions, even negative ones, some showing a bit of erudition, some clearly out of touch with this sort of thing, drawing on faulty memory, trying to make present through words what is materially absent; not exactly a group ekphrasis but close to it: a rejection, on Calle's part, of the premises of the old, subject-centered ways of writing about art in certain terms.