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Contemporary Art Magazine

Kunststhalie Lissabon, R, José Serralde Cid 96, 1990-92a Lisboa, Portugal

Laure Prouvost: Melting into one another ho hot chaud it heating dip



Title : Laure Prouvost: Melting into one another ho hot chaud it heating dip. General views of the exhibition. Kunststhalie Lissabon. Photos:

Bruno Lopes. Courtesy of the artist and Kunststhalie Lissabon.

Website : <https://www.kunststhalie-lissabon.org/en/exhibitions/now>



Laure Prouvost: Melting into one another ho hot chaud it heating dip

Kunststhalie Lissabon, Lisbon

20 February 2020 – 30 May 2020

Review by Inês Geraldine Cardoso

To go in is to deep-dive, to move down, to curve the body and bow the head; you have been made permeable by a dark, whispering underworld that slackens and contracts around you. That I am experiencing Laure Prouvost's immersive 'Melting into one another ho hot chaud it heating dip' at Kunststhalie Lissabon from behind my laptop screen is an irony not lost. And yet, it is little wonder that I gravitate towards exhibitions that cast phenomenological spells at a time when space has become excruciatingly prescriptive in the landscape of a pandemic. I love the way it always begins with Prouvost: a startling threshold, a burrowing passageway, a journey of some kind. At Collezione Maramotti, Emilia Romagna, it was an oval space with its back turned to you (2013); at Project 1049, Gstaad, an alpine cabin (2016); and at the French pavilion of the Venice Biennale, a tunnel via the back door (2019). Now, at Kunststhalie Lissabon, the height of the staircase is artificially lowered to make you stoop; know your place (what surrounds you), Prouvost's choreographing intimates.

Even before you make your way down, there are markers of her singular scenography: a rosemary bush dangles over stacked teacups, alien-looking glass vessels, and a kettle sitting atop a table. Adjacent to them is a shelf of tentacular instruments wrapping around stones; below is a neat array of rubber boots. Something is about to happen, but first have a cup of tea. Prouvost's trademark insistence on rituals of hospitality resonates at Kunststhalie Lissabon, an institution where the solo exhibition has become a "tool in the process of proposing an institutional model based on ideas of generosity, solidarity and sociability," as outlined by its founding co-directors Luís Silva and João Mourão. Prouvost's is the first exhibition following Kunststhalie Lissabon's year-long hiatus, in which it celebrated its ten-year anniversary by hosting, handing over the space for programming to other institutions. "We disappeared for a year," Luís tells me. It is fitting that Prouvost's is the return show - her exhibitions recurrently make spaces for others, their titles frequently phrased as dedications: 'a New Museum for Grand dad in Milano,' 'A tearoom for grand ma in Derry,' 'a new octopus ink vodka bar for Gregor in Rotterdam.'

Where were we? Heading down. It is dark, the air is humid, curtains segment the space into a labyrinth dripping with moisture. "Sometimes, touching a curtain, you happen upon a glass tentacle," Luís recounts. Then there is the smell, emanating from a floor covered in squid ink and water. Tentatively feeling your way, you eventually come to a kind of matrix: a grid projected onto the floor at the centre of which gyrates a macabre assemblage of tentacles, hands and fruits, whispering all kinds of sweet nothings. The exhibition is revealed as a sub-aquatic grotto, home to a "polva," which Luís explains is a cigarette-smoking female cephalopod - an octopus's garden in the shade. You must navigate gently, moving through ramshackle detritus including branches, scaffolding, iPhones, tangerines, piles of bricks, books, stones and glass sculptures. There is a vape somewhere, and if you find it, you can use it. It occurs to me that the curtains make less for divisions and more for gills filtering moisture and smoke in a symbiotic body that invites you to partake: have a smoke, melt into me.

Dead ends abound. Little flickering lights signal a storage room with a haunted iPad going "BOOI," or a voice from an iPhone next to a tangerine offering you the fruit. Prouvost delights in the cul-de-sac and its potential for unforeseen encounters. This is evident in her use of language, riddled with puns and bilingual double-entendres: the show is "chaud," and we are invited to "immerse ourselves in a liquid reality to investigate the origin of our planet end of or selves." In Prouvost's hands, time is liquefied (according to Kunststhalie Lissabon's website the show opened on February 20 at 6:30 p.m. 2063) and even her identity (her name is purposefully misspelled as "Laure Provourst" in the exhibition handout) is fluid. The performative typos, errors and slips of the tongue make for a deeply personal syntax - a kind of writing that is designed to undo, dissolve and melt into a perspiring semantics. As the octopus in the centre of the room expands and a nightmarish, aural storm takes over, sentences appear on the floor: "There is no escape. The images are sweating." And the ink runs. Sepia, used widely in the past as a writing tool and artists' ink, is the polva's embodied fluid, at once connecting everything and fixing nothing. There is no red thread in this labyrinth - in the octopus's sodden, lyrical garden, the thread is the body.

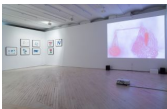
And unspool it does. The body is always extending, distributing - at the opening, Luís tells me, Prouvost handed out cigarettes to everyone, and made a special cocktail of squid ink and vodka to be sipped out of tentacle-vessels. The installation is a panoply of limbs, where prosthetics proliferate: hands accrete branches and fruits, sculptures that are stones are also breasts, tentacles are both musical instruments and cups. Things overlap, they are cumulative, they become each other. Like the octopus, Prouvost's is a distributed body. The cigarette, the tangerine, the vodka, the ink, the glass instruments, the breast: these protrusions are constant exercises in reaching further, distributing the self, and communing with the other. Tentacle comes from the New Latin "tentaculum," derived from the Latin "temptare" and "tentare," meaning to feel, test, examine. The tentacular is both tempting and tentative, it is out on a limb. "Down there," Luís says, "you are bodily. It is easy to forget." Here is Prouvost, reaching out in a contactless age, in the time of "noli me tangere". I am grateful for her, for this work that reminds me even through the surfaced experience of the screen that I am a body equipped to feel, test and examine. I retract from the keyboard. My palms are moist.

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