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English

Quel Amour !?

Temporary exhibition

Floor -1 / Floor 0

11/10/2018 – 17/02/2019

Love, a gaze

"Where does the love of beginnings come from if not from the beginning of love? Of that with no continuity and thus with no end."¹
J.-B. Pontalis

"*Amour, amour...*" thus expresses Anne Germain's singing voice—in Jacques Demy's "Peau d'âne"—both the delusions and disillusion of such feeling. "*L'amour se porte autour du cou, le cœur est fou.*"² thus will resound the exploration of possibilities in this exhibition.

Love, sometimes felt as a worn out, vague concept, remains more than ever at the center of our incantations and vain or uncertain litanies. Love is the great matter, the only one that, according to Stendhal, can *reanimate* life... We all have a love "of..." kept away in our pockets, sometimes forgotten, abused, caressed or unexpected, *whose only measure is excessiveness*.

The exhibition *Quel Amour!?*, carrying in its very title an interrobang, tries to trace possibilities. Hence, the eye of the visitor will oscillate between exclamation and interrogation, absorbed by the question's imminence or passing from stupefaction to amazement. Real answers let themselves be found amidst abundance. Thus, this exhibition is rich in viewpoints, hues, vagrancies, atmospheres, irrational disturbances, and multiple perceptible, perfective, defective sensitivities: love, there is no way around it, even accepting its twists and turns. The exhibition does not claim to be a description or an unequivocal pictorial interpretation: works by historical artists or contemporary ones, of different cultures and generations, have been selected to create a living and mysterious alchemy, through their coexistence and coincidence, between pertinence and impertinence.

A few days before the assembly of the exhibition, I imagined, e.g., the proximity between Francis Bacon's *Oedipus Rex* and Antoine d'Agata's photographs, the display of Kiki Smith's sculptures and those of Germaine Richier and Mark Manders, the narratives of Pierre Klossowski's drawings and *Picture Emphasizing Stillness*, magical painting by David Hockney where the calmness of an encounter between two beings prefigures an underlying drama; or even the luminosity of the colours in two paintings of Adolphe Monticelli's compared to those of Eugène Leroy and their potential images.



Kiki Smith
Wild Woman (Maria Magdalena), 1994
Silicone-moulded bronze and forged steel
Photograph: Olaf Malhn

Indeed, to conceive an exhibition, *a fortiori* on love, compels us to operate the sensitive connections which occur between the works.

"The vagabond has two watches you can't buy in Tiffany's: On one wrist the sun, on the other the moon, both bands are made of sky."³ It was about putting love into a different planet's orbit to intimately, physically invite the visitor to take a different look at the works. Thus, this exhibition could only be conceived through a frictional relationship between love-related sources and motivations, without concealing love's natural antinomies. The real includes love. This is at least one of the issues that cannot be delivered by image, since our relationship with the former is never discerning. Image and love are united in the *phantasme* or the *phantasia* of an ever-presupposed reality.

Both exhibitions and philosophical conferences are returning more often to the subject of love.

¹ J.-B. Pontalis, *L'Amour des commencements*. Gallimard, coll. Folio, Paris, 1994, p. 70.

² "Love is worn around the neck, the heart is mad." [T.]

³ Jack Kerouac, *Le Vagabond américain en voie de disparition*. Gallimard, Paris, p. 240, 1969.

Is it in some way an attempt to respond to contemporary disenchantment?

Conservative discourses on love are only part of this despair and discouragement, justifying the refusal of all emancipation from the norms of sexuality. Love, however, as Rimbaud said, “is always up to be reinvented,” because it is placed in the grey area of our affections, our experience of happiness, freedom, emotion, pain—all wounds of the soul. The gracious, luminous films of Sébastien Lifschitz and Thomas Sipp, in addition to Rémi Lange’s filmed journal and the mimicked, whispered photographic storytellers by Duane Michals, are striking testimonies of it.

Our contemporaries have fallen in love with their own image: the selfie or photography’s recording and archiving of each second have become mantras of the passage of time, or at least of its acceleration, and can be perceived as dematerialisation of the Other, of its *unlovely* dissimilarity. A phenomenon that we cannot solely translate into a contemporary narcissism; it is the disengagement of the Other that which is at stake. The *Self* is definitely the Other.

“Humanity, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree, that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.”⁴

Artists like Helena Almeida, Francesca Woodman, Pilar Albarracín, Chantal Akerman, Nan Goldin, Sophie Calle, Antonie d’Agata, Jean-Luc Verna, as well as Michèle Sylvander, João Pedro Vale & Nuno Alexandre Ferreira, or Ernesto de Sousa, deliver this alienation through their photographic



Annette Messenger
Jalousie/Love, 2010
Wire, black nets, fabric, plush toys
Courtesy of Annette Messenger and the Marian Goodman Gallery,
New York, Paris, London

or audiovisual autofictions—or by means of an installation, as Cristina Ataíde does. Their discursive strategies are an experience of their presence in a world where they challenge the absence of the Other and force it to exist beyond fragmentation, polysemy, and ambiguity of meaning. What is at stake in the works goes much beyond an unequivocal, clear passage from sign to referent, from body (sensual or social, political or polymorphic) to image. “When Love itself on your loves you force.”⁵

La Mariée, by Niki de Saint-Phalle, with its outfit of frustrated free-falling objects, is emblematic of *Quel Amour!?*. Her work lashes at all social standards; her *married women* are heroes in the tragedy of forced marriages.

The purpose of these *loves!?*—translated, chanted, played, or replayed by the artists—is expressed in a safeguard, a resistance, a combativeness in face of the current state of disarray, and proceeds to offer a possible transgression by means of subverting limits and norms. Artists summon the language of desire, they liberate speech through a persistent language, one which is never foreign. This is one of the precious paradoxes which are issued in the exhibition. “For me the body is a sculpture, my body is my sculpture,” claims Louise Bourgeois. Around the same time, in 1969, Helena Almeida declared: “My work is my body; my body is my work.” Even if in her sculptures she looks for the metabody and its transcendence, its animal hybridisation, Kiki Smith’s work comes from an adjoining basic premise, as does Verna’s and Ana Mendieta’s.

The body of love, the love of the body (and bodies), and the love of art form a Gordian knot that drives the artists in the diversity of their daily practice. “Basically, I think art is just a way to think. It’s like standing in the wind and letting it pull you in whatever direction it wants to go.”⁶

Whether it evokes Agape or Eros, spiritual love or physical love—endured or liberating, sacred or profane—we have desired an invigorating exhibition for the visitors, where their intimate experiences of love can be projected (exposed) in view of the artists’ proposals: either with the photographic installation of Wolfgang Tillmans, or with those who decline cultural stereotypes, like Pilar Albarracín, with bullfighting—and others, such as Rosemarie Trockel or Annette Messenger, artists who

⁴ Walter Benjamin, “L’oeuvre d’art à l’époque de sa reproductibilité technique,” in *Écrits français*. Gallimard, Paris, p. 172, 1991.

⁵ Jodelle, preliminary sonnet in *Amours*, Ronsard, 1553.

⁶ Kiki Smith, 2003.

operate sensitive diversions from male or female archetypes. “Since love teaches all the arts, we shall follow him as a master.”⁷

Love, sometimes an explosion of senses in which feminine desire is liberated from all prohibitions, from all male norms or from the lascivious, recreational pose of muses, becomes a search for Eden or hell. In this sense, the paintings captured in the expressionist urgency of Raphaëlle Ricol, the love nocturnes of Adrian Narvaez Caicedo, the subtle phantasmagorias of Karine Rougier, the gashing inks on Tracey Emin’s canvases, the bright gouaches of Marlene Dumas, the filamentous or graphite leads of Élisabeth Garouste are rebellious flames against any foreclosure of desire and the feeling of love. Eden is contiguous to hell; sexual energy, to death. Contrary winds as such are also the subject of Annette Barcelo’s intense drawings or Chéri Samba’s painting. Likewise, there are the thirteen moons that illuminate Daphné Chevallereau’s narrative drawings and their disturbing strangeness, resonating

with this fragment of the *Letters of a Portuguese Nun*: “[...] one has to employ artifice to make one’s self loved. One should seek the means of skilfully exciting it, for love of itself does not engender love.”⁸ The moon is revisited as well by William Kentridge’s intense poetry in his short film *Journey to the Moon*, where he offers an intimate insight of his creative process—both physically and psychically.

The masculine desire and its scopophilic drive unveil the feminine or masculine body, desiring or desired, in the form of pictorial narratives by Bhupen Khakhar and Mohamed Ben Slama. Chiselled paintings between Eros and Agape are for Gérard Garouste, as for Omar Ba, colourful recitatives of their personal or African mythologies. Gérard Fromanger’s immense *Rouge, nus*

⁷ Marsiglio Ficino, *Commentaires sur le Banquet de Platon*. Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1956, p. 166.

⁸ Guilleragues, *Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, “Fifth Letter,” translated by Edgar Prestage. Balliol College, Oxford, 1893. [E.]



Paula Rego
Amor, 1995
Pastel paper mounted on aluminium
Casa das Histórias Paula Rego, Câmara Municipal de Cascais, D. Luís I Foundation; photograph: Carlos Pombo



G rard Fromanger
Rouge, nus, 1994
 Acrylic on canvas without frame
 Courtesy of the artist

(1994) plunges us into the desire of the painting and the bodies that mingle and mix in its scarlet apostasy.

The installation of drawings by Raymond Pettibon (LOVE), or those by Gonalo Pena, or those over Mattia Denisse’s table, or the small paintings by Jan de Maesschalck are mosaics of anxious urgency or desire of the alterity of bodies and sexes, their own law and mystery.

Eug ne Leroy’s wall paintings, where intertwined luminous bodies resist in the gangue of pictorial matter, near Pierre Klossowski’s drawings, which steal from mirrors the transparent lines of both profane and divine love’s riddles.

- The secret, enchanting, magical love of Claude L v que’s works, where under the installations’ apparent melancholy, a *theatre without theatre*, one always recognises a political manifesto.

- A love of wounded or triumphant bodies, sometimes soaked in blood, like a heart, beating and resisting the violence of intimate or warlike conflicts, in Miriam Cahn’s paintings.

- A tear-veiled ecstatic love, that underlies the immense works of Paula Rego and Francis Bacon, where tragedy does not exclude light.

- The defeated love suffered by women in the setting of the American peripheries staged by the photographer Todd Hido.

- A love that screams and, in a continuous motion, both releases and binds one, in the video *Turbulent* (1998), by Shirin Neshat.

- The sacrilegious love of the fiery photographs of bodies that  ric Rondepierre captures before light fades them.

- A hidden love, in James Rielly’s painting of a gay couple at their finally celebrated wedding.

- A love-assemblage, whose potential images are discovered in John Stezaker’s collages (marriages).

- Love and its wait (“to wait” translates into Portuguese as “*esperar*”) that Jerome Zonder’s meticulous pencil draws in his *Portrait de Garance*.

- A fragile love of the two bodies hugged for eternity in the resin—that does not open onto idealism—in the hyperrealistic sculpture *Arden Ardenson and Norma Murphy* (1972), by John De Andrea.

“For the loved one becomes a leaden figure, an unreal creature who does not speak, and in dreams silence is death.”⁹

- Epistolary love, in the love letters from Anne-Marie Springer’s collection.

In addition, there are also couples of artists—sometimes working together—at the heart of the exhibition. Marina Abramovi  and Ulay, G rard Garouste and  lisabeth Garouste, Axel Pahlavi and Florence Obrecht, Helena Almeida and Artur Rosa, Lourdes Castro and Manuel Zimbro, Vieira da Silva and  rp d Szenes. Collaboration or coexistence, they discover themselves through their works, either by a four-handed creation, or as first viewers, as intimate accomplices.

“In the beginning, there is relation,” said Martin Buber. Shared life insinuates, or even requires, communication—an exchange accomplished in dialogue.

“This is where we started from, from Love as god, namely as reality which reveals itself in the real, which manifests itself in the real [...]. [...] this hand which stretches towards the fruit, towards the rose, towards the log which suddenly bursts into flames, first of all to tell you that its gesture of reaching, of poking, is closely linked to the maturation of the fruit, to the beauty of the flower, to the flaming

⁹ Roland Barthes, *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*.  ditions du Seuil, p. 200, 1977.

of the log, but that, when in this movement of reaching, of drawing, of poking, the hand has gone far enough towards the object, if from the fruit, from the flower, from the log, a hand emerges which stretches out to meet your hand, and at that moment your hand is fixed in the closed fullness of the fruit, the open fullness of the flower, in the explosion of a hand which bursts into flame, what is produced at that point is love!"¹⁰

The selection of artists is international because, if the feeling of love is universal, its evocation must be diverse in its manifestations within cultures and civilizations. The perceptions of love are singular and different in the West, East, Asia, Northern or Sub-Saharan Africa...

Love, its sharing and its imagination are probably one of the foundations of our fruitful alterities. Another dissimilarity inherent in love and its understanding is whatever sensuous, intellectual perception that may be peculiar to women and men. Do we inhabit the same language of love according to our sex, to our sexuality? To respect the parity between artists, to work ambiguities of gender, as of political condition, and these mysteries of love enforced on the feminine-masculine, masculine-feminine, feminine-feminine, masculine-masculine... these were matters that could not be avoided.

Artworks and artists have their autonomy and should not be bound to a thesis. Rather than a thesis, what is at stake is the question of love's motive and its imminence. The distinction between love's theme and motive is indeed important: a theme presents a thesis, a content; while a motive uni-

fies—the starting point of a discursive strategy, of a survey conducted in collaboration with the artists, whose works resonate with a constellation of questions about the motive of love and its stealthy unpredictability.

The imminence of desire, any sort of it, is at the heart of the exhibition. How does artistic practice reveal itself in the motive of love, of intimacy and/or enjoyment (or repulsion) by means of artistic, poetic, iconic, plastic, cinematographic, expressive, discursive, performative, uttered, or vocal stances? All this questioning is made visible to the visitor through the agreements and disagreements brought about by the works.

Quel Amour!? has been envisioned as a grand panorama, as the experience of a vision to be appropriated as one's own, or as the opportunity for one to get lost in one's own thoughts—for love (union) and its counterpoint, discord (fragmentation), are precisely what goes beyond all definitive appropriation.

These gestures of love by the artists through their works, exhibited as a primary truth, do not erase other truths, namely that of the *arrangement* that roams between the apparent contradictions of desire and intimacy, life and death drive, sexual excitement and maternal or paternal love, grace and transgression. This is why the pictorial work of Albuquerque Mendes, exploring the *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* and its shrouds, seeks the enclosure between the loving self and the religious self. The void of God, whether occupied or not, remains unexpressed...

"It is solely for love of you that I regret the infinite pleasures you have lost. Why would you not enjoy them? Ah! if you only knew them you would doubtless find them much greater than that of having deceived me, and you would have experienced how much happier it is, and how much more poignant it is to love violently than to be loved."¹¹

Two randomly chosen entrances give access to the exhibition, in the image of the two doors in the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid*: that of delusions or that where dreams are to come true, through one of which Ulysses or Aeneas shall go to leave the Underworld. "Love is a Dog from Hell."¹²

Depending on what entrance one has chosen, one's route unfolds in view of different sensitive

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, Book VIII, "Le Transfert (1960–1961)," Éditions du Seuil, p. 67, 1991.

¹¹ Guilleragues, *Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, "Third Letter," translated by Edgar Prestage. Balliol College, Oxford, 1893. [E.]

¹² According to the title of Charles Bukowski's novel.



Jan De Maeschalck
Untitled, 2012
Acrylic on paper
Courtesy of the Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

the two entrances are, on the one hand, *Journey to the Moon*, by William Kentridge; on the other *Wild Woman (Maria Magdalena)*, by Kiki Smith, with its intense gravity and grace of a body at last freed. These two works are decisive for the meaning one will bestow on the visit; lovers and friends will perhaps follow opposite courses, they will cross paths, they will get lost while walking among the artworks of *Quel Amour!?*, and will converse as in a *symposium*...

In bringing together contemporary artists and older generations—Monticelli, from the nineteenth century; and Germaine Richier, Louise Bourgeois, Francis Bacon, David Hockney, from the twentieth century—the goal was to bring, to carry the past, light and shadow mixed up, to our common present. For the priestess and prophetess of Plato, Diotima, Love is intermediary, intermediate, and mediator.

The exhibition *Quel Amour!?* comes about in the image of the profuse, contrasting cities of Marseille and Lisbon, where it will continue: mythological love springs from poverty and opulence. On account of its *place* and its *formula*, *Quel Amour!?* was as well imagined in and for Marseille and Lisbon, two maritime cities.

If, as Pierre de Marbeuf wrote, "Love and the sea share their bitter taste,"¹³ these cities are ideal to moor these different sorts of love.

"And so in that moment I realized what a ridiculous fool I was to fall in with your proposal that I should take my turn in your eulogies of Love, and to call myself an expert in love-matters, when really I was ignorant of the method in which eulogies ought to be made at all."¹⁴

Éric Corne

Curator of the exhibition *Quel Amour!?*

Lisbon, Paris, Marseille

¹³ [E.] Pierre de Marbeuf (1596–1645):

Love and the sea share their bitter relish.
Bitter is the sea, and bitter is love.
We plunge in love as we plunge in the sea,
for the sea and love be naught with no gale. /
He who fears the waters shall bide ashore;
and he who fears the ill borne in loving
shall not ever let love inflame itself:
therefore, none will be fated to shipwreck... /
Love's mother had the sea as its cradle.
Fire comes of love; its mother, the waters;
yet to such fire water holds no weapon. /
Should water quench an amorous brazier,
then your love, painfully burning if strong,
would have been quenched in the sea of my tears.

¹⁴ Plato, *Symposium*, 198 d–e. In *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 9, translated by Harold N. Fowler. Harvard University Press, London, 1925. [E.]



Marina Abramović & Ulay
Breathing In, Breathing Out, 1978
Single-channel video, b&w, sound, 16' 58"
Amsterdam © Ulay / Marina Abramović
Courtesy of the artist Marina Abramović and LI-MA

Cover :
Helena Almeida. Untitled, 2010. Gelatin silver print.
Courtesy of the Filomena Soares Gallery

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192 pp.; 147 illustrations;
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