ALMINE RECH

Sur tes lèvres

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Le Lieu Unique and the Frac des Pays de la Loire present 'Sur tes lèvres', an exhibition on the theme of kissing.

A powerful vector of emotions and alliances across centuries and cultures, the kiss changes its meaning depending on the era and context. Through the filter of the kiss, we are presented with a multifaceted vision of the body, desire, ritual, courtship and care.

But what about the younger generation? In a post-covid world, can we still kiss? How enduring and contemporary is this gesture, whose representation seems as old as art itself? Taking as its starting point the collection of the Fonds régional d'art contemporain (Frac) des Pays de la Loire, supplemented by loans and new productions, this exhibition offers the public a free wander through a range of videos, photos, sculptures and installations.

In the age of social networking, ‘Sur tes lèvres’ explores contemporary love and intimate interactions. It opens with the film *A Truly Shared Love*, an autofiction in love by artists Emilie Brout and Maxime Marion, which mimics the aesthetics of image banks and stock videos.
From Jean Claracq to HaYoung, who translates our internet surfing into smells, the artists explore new affective palettes, virtualised, sanitised or not, where desire bumps up against the Metaverse. The exhibition closes with Ben Elliot's work, an XXL kiss between two avatars from his video *Metaone*, a virtual paradise where history, nature, technology and science intertwine.

Between these two points, it's lip to lip, tongue to tongue, cheek to cheek, nose to nose, eyelash to eyelash that the kiss takes shape: these cultural and social practices are infinite and have evolved over the centuries. The exhibition looks at certain aspects of this intimate geopolitics: Léuli Eshrāghi films the practice of sogi in the Blackfoot, Stoney Nakota and Tsuu T'ina territories; Oliver Beer composes for the oral space created by two singers joining lips; and Patty Chang applies herself to kissing and drinking her own image reflected in a mirror covered in water.

As for Claude Cahun, the first artist to define herself as gender-neutral from 1930, she dramatised the question of kissing and seduction, with her stylised mouth, large heart drawn on her cheeks and nipples painted on her leotard, with the injunction *I AM IN TRAINING / DON'T KISS ME*: for this new body, the era had to invent new kisses.

Another section of the exhibition is devoted to works that convey a sensuality mixed with spleen. Nan Goldin's tight framing draws us closer to the bodies of those close to her, in the swirling underworld of 90s New York, while Nanténé Traoré photographs the diversity of today's trans bodies, and shares the tender chords of fluid, de-normed beings. Laurence Rasti protects the embraces of gay Iranian refugees; and Laura Bottereau and Marine Fiquet leaf through a philatelic collection of homoerotic iconography, conducive to salivary fictions.

A more cinematic side to kissing runs through the exhibition: from the embraces of Captain Kirk in Star Trek, sampled and slowed down by Douglas Gordon, to paintings bathed in Jacques Monory's characteristic midnight blue. The expression of mutuality finds its way elsewhere: Adam Cole invents an interactive device to stage the sexual metaphor of the clash between two bodies, human and machine; just as Alexandra Bircken highlights an emblem of powerful masculinity, the motorbike, which she transforms into an anthropomorphic machine reminiscent of the world of David Cronenberg's film *Crash*.

In 1977, at the Grand Palais in Paris, a female voice harangued the crowd: 'A real artist's kiss for 5 francs! Ladies and gentlemen, it's not expensive!' The installation was by ORLAN, a young unknown artist who had installed her work without permission. The exhibition places this feminist work - a landmark in the Frac's collection - at the centre of an agora, where the kiss struts and waves like a manifesto, putting itself to the test in the public space. The second part of the exhibition is presented on the same dates, on the Frac site in Nantes. Taking a close look at skin surfaces and the textures of cosmetics and make-up, this opus explores notions of identity, fragility, beauty and sensuality.

Bodies invent new proportions and twists, mingle with minerals and plants, hide and rise.

The perpetually producing foam of David Medalla's *Bubble Machine* evokes the bath, and creates an unexpected connection with Karla Black's 'shower curtain'. Giorgio Griffa's subtle colours evoke the delicate blushes with which Jean-Luc Verna enhances his drawings.

Provocative or touching, ambivalent or more optimistic, the works brought together at Le Lieu Unique and on the Frac's Nantes site trace an intimate or societal journey from the 1970s to the present day.