

FRANKFURTER
KUNSTVEREIN

01.06.–27.08.2017

MELANIE BONAJO

SINGLE MOTHER SONGS
FROM THE END OF NATURE

PRESS RELEASE

Melanie Bonajo: Single Mother Songs from the End of Nature June 1 – August 27, 2017

Opening: Wednesday, May 31, 2017, 7 pm

Press Preview: Monday, May 29, 2017, 11 am

Frankfurter Kunstverein presents the first great institutional solo exhibition of Dutch artist Melanie Bonajo in Germany. The artist is shortlisted for the Dutch *Prix de Rome* 2017, the most generous prize for Visual Arts in the Netherlands.

Melanie Bonajo's (b. 1978) artistic practice is shaped by her critical stance towards the state of our world. Her works are created in the light of an explicitly critical attitude towards capitalism and an ambivalent view of the modern euphoria about progress. In her works the artist seeks to find alternative worldviews and ways of peaceful resistance within a world shaken by crises. With a political and activist approach, Bonajo focuses on urgent and persistent social issues of our time, like the dualism of humankind and nature, rapidly fading resources and the ramifications of climate change. Her videos, performances, photographs and installations are the results of longstanding processes. By means of close observation, collecting and categorising, she investigates the existential questions of humanity. Her reflection leads to powerful aesthetic works, which enable the viewer to explore and experience the issues of our times in sensual sceneries.

The exhibition at Frankfurter Kunstverein presents three of the artist's distinct work groups. The experimental, semi-fictional documentary trilogy *Night Soil* consists of the three autonomous films *Fake Paradise* (2014), *Economy of Love* (2015) and *Nocturnal Gardening* (2016) and was produced by the artist over several years. Based on own experiences, Bonajo documents subcultural communities and alternative societies. The artist searches the entire globe for

communities who chose alternative, liberated and sometimes illegal lifestyles to counteract the predominant social systems.

Against the backdrop of a growing sense of alienation, the characters in Bonajo's films seek to find an alternative existence and new rituals, which might facilitate an altered relationship with nature and community as well as a renewed approach to the body and socially defined gender expectations. Despite being documentaries, the films open up a fictional dimension, which emerges from the protagonists' imagination and expands into surreal visual worlds. For the presentation of her works, Bonajo allows the filmic space to protrude into the reality of the exhibition space and creates colourful, spatial installations. The artist constructs psychedelic worlds, which invite visitors to immerse into a contemplative space of experience, thus participating in the formation of short-lived communities.

In her film *Progress vs Regress* (2016) Melanie Bonajo examines the impact of modern inventions on social relations. She takes as a starting point the perspective of the elderly, who have witnessed some of the most extreme industrial, technological and digital revolutions. The film's protagonists talk about their growing sense of alienation and isolation from a society that is totally embedded in technology and digitalisation. Unlike the younger generation, the *Digital Natives*, who become integrated into global economies and social life, these seniors remain on the outside. Bonajo contrasts the protagonists' narratives with images and symbols of our affluent society and accompanies their accounts with emojis, commercial images and Google-searches. Her technique of digital collaging imitates the aesthetics of amateurish image editing.

In collaboration with the artist a new work is produced for the show at Frankfurter Kunstverein, entitled *Progress vs Sunsets*, the first spatial adaptation of her complex piece *Matrix Botanica – Non Human Persons*. For more than ten years, Melanie Bonajo has been working on a growing image archive, an atlas of found footage published by anonymous users on the Internet. The vast visual material includes amateur photographs of animals, plants and landscapes, orchestrated and photographed in absurd, unsettling or unnatural ways. The artist collects these digitally found images and adapts scientific approaches to classification, while using unusual categories. The images bear witness to the ambivalent relationship between human and nature. On the one hand, the photographs reveal the destructive behaviour of humankind, which is leading towards severe devastations of our natural environment. On the other hand, nature is being culturally reshaped and romanticised: animals, plants and landscapes are subjected to minimalisation and anthropomorphisation, which defy their intrinsic nature. By conglomerating these images, Bonajo creates a disturbing mirror of today's estrangement from the traditional concept of nature. Everything genuine is extinguished, the natural violated, the images of our own destruction shrivel into digital absurdity.

The exhibition design is realised in cooperation with Théo Demans. The exhibition design for *Night Soil* is a cooperation of Théo Demans and Clemence Seilles. The exhibition is curated by Franziska Nori, director of Frankfurter Kunstverein.

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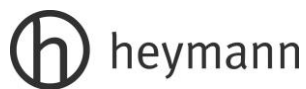


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