

Hairpin Turn

LAURE PROUVOST
"OUR ELASTIC ARM HOLD IN TIGHT THROUGH THE CLOUDS"
KUNSTHAL CHARLOTTENBORG
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Laure Prouvost's (*1978) videos are so overflowing with signifiers of eroticism that they are almost parodic: joyfully embracing filmic and cultural representations of women's sexuality, including so many metaphors for desire simultaneously that they all blur together. There are scenes of gushing fruit, wet flowers, waterfalls, and moist lips, all overlaid with breathy voices, whispering and panting. The effect is both jubilant and funny, suggesting that any celebration of the erotic must be accompanied by a decent sense of humour.

The exhibition features a new video that expands on these themes. Projected on a large screen made of

bedsheets that curves halfway through the room, *Could Cool Claoud* (2021) is set in a peaceful blue sky where soft white clouds are gently floating by. Superimposed on this sky, naked or nearly naked women are dancing,

playing with a large glass sculpture of a bee, and sitting at a table with fake food and a real octopus. Occasionally a nun rides by on a scooter. All this is again accompanied by the sounds of breathing (connoting both sex and sleep),



Could Cool Claoud, 2021
 Installation view, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, 2021



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Courtesy: Laure Prouvost, Galerie Nathalie Obadia (Paris, Brussels), carlier | gebauer (Berlin, Madrid), Lisson Gallery (London, New York, Shanghai); Photos: David Stjernholm

along with drifting, ambient synth music.

Like much of Prouvost's work, *Could Cool Claoud* takes eroticism seriously, precisely by playing with its modes of representation. It's not titillating or pornographic, and it doesn't reduce the women to sexual objects. Rather than depicting a world in which women are relentlessly sexualised, it shows a world in which everything – human flesh as well as all matter – is sensualised. The women in the films, as bodies and voices, take part in this process: they fondle, observe, and have fun with the objects that surround them, making no distinction between natural and artificial things. The video is a dreamscape, or a utopian pleasure garden in the heavens, where sensuality is free, uncoupled from the cultural mechanisms that constrain it. Freedom is depicted as both personal agency and silliness as the women in the video realise their desires: an anti-heroic embrace of pleasure and frivolity. To this end, Prouvost includes elements that are hard to take seriously; it's difficult, for example, not to associate the synth music with new-age spirituality (whether intentionally ironic or not), leaving the images saturated with a sense of wishful unreality.

The entire exhibition courts this confusion between the politics of ludic sensuality and those of escapism. The walls between galleries are adorned with a patterned carpet and twigs. One room hosts the installation *end ber Is story* (2017), which, in complete darkness, is lit only by sporadic spotlights synced to piano music, shining on mysterious glass objects on pedestals. These are illuminated so briefly that it's difficult to determine what they are; the effects are like afterimages of sculptures.

The two earlier works in the show are less prodigious than *Could Cool Claoud*, and their humour is easier to read. Both are shot on handheld digital video cameras, edited at a rapid clip, with each shot colliding into the next. In



View of "Our Elastic Arm Hold In ..."



end ber Is story, 2017 (detail)
 Installation view, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, 2021

Swallow (2013), images of bathing women jumping into lakes and splashing around in the water are juxtaposed with shots of hands squishing juicy fruit, mouths gasping, and squirming organic life. A voice-over breathily implores the viewer to partake in the pleasures of the outdoors: "Feel the sun in your mouth, it's so hot. The rocks are naked. It's so nice, it feels so good."

Into All That Is Here (2015) is also structured as an imperative, directing the audience to eroticise flowers. As the video quickly cuts from one flower to another, subtitles call on viewers to

find the imagery "hot and sexy". Eventually, the metaphorical heat is turned up when images of fire and burning suddenly fill the screen, and the subtitles switch to appeals to the viewer to "feel pain". The hairpin turn from flower to fire invokes the reality of a climate in crisis, haunting the video's otherwise idyllic representation of the natural world. It's also darkly droll: these brief moments of unease serve to temporarily undercut the utopic premises of the videos, anchoring them once again in a deeply troubled present.

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