

melanie bonajo

UNSEEN 2022



melanie bonajo, Dutch entry for the Venice Biennale as commissioned by the Mondriaan Fund, photo by Peter Tjihuis

About

Digital eco-feminist, hyper elf, witch or devil, melanie bonajo challenges the traditional divisions between men and women, nature and technology. Through their videos, performances, photographs and installations, they study subjects related to how technological advances and commodity based pleasures increase feelings of alienation, removing a sense of belonging in an individual. Captivated by concepts of the divine, bonajo explores the spiritual emptiness of their generation, examines peoples' shifting relationship with nature and tries to understand existential questions by reflecting on our domestic situation, ideas around classification, concepts of home, gender and attitudes towards value.

Since 2015, melanie bonajo has been working on their monumental Night Soil Trilogy, consisting of Night Soil - Fake Paradise (2014), Night Soil—Economy of Love (2015) and Night Soil - Nocturnal Gardening (2016). Night Soil is a trilogy of short documentaries presenting progressive (sometimes illegal) approaches through the portraits of ayahwasca consumers, sex worker activists or women farmers. Progress vs Regress was released in 2016, followed by Progress vs Sunsets in 2017. This new Trilogy examines extinction or endangerment of vulnerable groups through techno-capital development, but also extinction in an abstract sense, extinction of feelings and thoughts. TouchMETell is bonajo's most recent film (2019). In collaboration with Michael Beharie, melanie bonajo released a music album called Single Mother Songs from the End of Nature (2019), produced by Bonnefantenmuseum.

melanie bonajo represents The Netherlands at the 59th Venice Biennale, 2022. They have been working with a curatorial team consisting of Maaïke Gouwenberg, Geir Haraldseth and Soraya Pol, and collaborate with designer Théo Demans for the installation. The work is presented at the Chiesetta della Misericordia in the Cannaregio neighbourhood in Venice.

melanie bonajo studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy and completed residencies at the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunst in Amsterdam (2009-10) and at ISCP in New York (2014). They had their first international solo exhibition in FOAM, The Netherlands (2016). The Frankfurter Kunstverein followed with a major solo exhibition in 2017: 'Single Mother Songs from the End of Nature'. In 2018, Bonnefantenmuseum Maastricht presented their solo exhibition 'The death of melanie bonajo: how to unmodernize yourself and become an elf in 12 steps'.

melanie bonajo's work has been shown in international exhibitions throughout Europe, a.o.; Kunsthau Hamburg (2020); Kunsthau Dresden (2020); Museum für Neue Kunst Freiburg, DE (2020); Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2019/20); Pori Museum (2019); Rencontres d'Arles, F (2019); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2019); Guangzhou Triennial (2018/19); Kunsthalle Lingen (2019); Design Museum, Ghent (2019); Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle (2018/19); Museum Marta Herford (2018); Haus der Kunst, München (2018), Manifesta 12, Palermo (2018), Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art (2018), Kunstsaele Berlin (2018); Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2018), Kunsthalle Basel (2016); Oude Kerk Amsterdam (2014/16) and numerous festivals such as Lowlands, Pinkpop, International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) and the Berlinale. melanie bonajo was nominated for the Nam June Paik Award (2018), the Prix de Rome (2017) and shortlisted for the 57th Venice Biennale (2016). The film Night Soil - Economy of Love, won an IFFR Tiger Award (2016). Their work is a.o. in institutional collections of Frac, Ile-de-France, Pori Museum, Kiasma - Finnish National Gallery and Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Museum of Modern art Arnhem and the Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht.



melanie bonajo, Dutch entry for the Venice Biennale as commissioned by the Mondriaan Fund, photo by Peter Tjihuis

When the body says Yes— Dutch Entry of the 59th Venice Biennale Arte

'When the body says Yes' is an immersive video installation by melanie bonajo, Dutch artist, filmmaker, sexological bodyworker and somatic sex coach and educator. The installation, commissioned by the Mondriaan Fund for the Biennale Arte 2022 (23 April - 17 November), is part of the artist's ongoing research into the current status of intimacy in our increasingly alienating, commodity-driven world. For bonajo, touch can be a powerful remedy for the modern epidemic of loneliness.

About the project, bonajo says: "Love is not learned in isolation and, if you have felt it, someone else has probably felt it too. We created a collective spell in the form of a pleasure positive camp, an eco-erotic queer eros, celebrating our kin through skinship. A place of productive chaos and care, where we practiced touch tutorials, set boundaries, gave and received consent, drank our own poison at the trigger bar, did weird therapies and acknowledged feelings as valid..."

"We brought together a group of international gender queer people, where many have a bicultural identity and we expanded on sexuality beyond the western discourse, what our genitals mean to us and others, self-expression as a healing modality, the way our body matrix sends and receives information about closeness and touch, and how that is embodied in different language structures. Do you know the sensational dimensions of your No. How do you feel when your body says Yes?"

"Let's move away from our disembodied zoom fatigue, this scenography is a sensual invitation to emerge our bodies into a pluffy pillow pleasure island. Embrace your inner sloth. We celebrate the beauty of our own softness, our senses, the portal to the present. Playing with the social conditioning of proximity and distance between bodies, the spaciousness allows for kindness, sensuality, surrender, and playfulness. It is essentially a cuddle space which centralizes the clitoris as the epicentre of social design and a place for worship. Sponsored by consent and your own oxytocin."

'When the body says Yes' is curated by Orlando Maaïke Gouwenberg, Geir Haraldseth and Soraya Pol. Scenography in collaboration with Théo Demans.

For this edition, the Mondriaan Fund has decided to break with tradition and present the Dutch entry at a new location, the Chiesetta della Misericordia of Art Events, a deconsecrated 13th-century church in Cannaregio. The Mondriaan Fund has meanwhile invited Estonia to make use of the Rietveld Pavilion for the 2022 Venice Biennale.

[Click here to watch *When the body says Yes* on Vimeo](#)

Password: Whenthebodysaysyes2022!



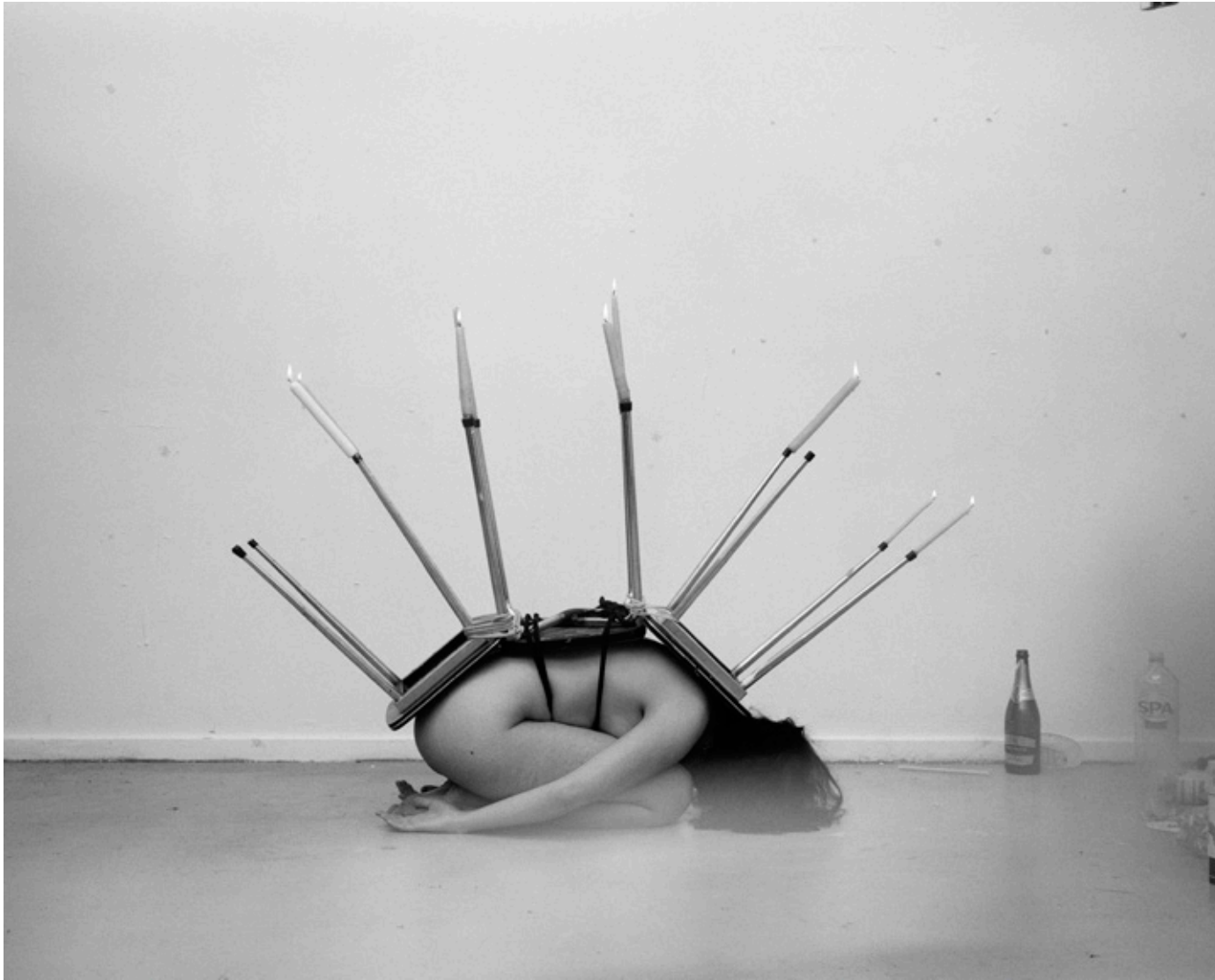
When the body says Yes (stack), 2022, Ultra chrome, canson Lustre, museum glass, 62 x 110 cm



When the body says Yes (Big Spoon), 2022, Ultra chrome, canson Lustre, museum glass, 62 x 110 cm



Rainbow, 2015, Luster, bubond, framed, museum glass, 54,5x97,5 cm



Furniture Bondage 2007-2009 (Özlem), Ultrachrome print, canson, bubond, museumglas, 120,8 x 151,8 cm



Progress vs Sunsets (Daisy), 2017, Photo Ultra chrome, canson Lustre, museum glass, 54,5x97,5 cm



Your Karma is Leaking, 2012, c-print framed, 29x39 cm