ENG

melanie bonajo

Thinking through Touch

21 May - 12 July, 2025

melanie bonajo, School of Lovers, 2024, full HD single channel video film with sound, 38:45 min, commissioned by HORA Theater, Zurich, scenography made in collaboration with Theo Démans (film still)

AKINCI is proud to present the solo exhibition *Thinking through Touch* by melanie bonajo. The exhibition provides a small overview of bonajo's oeuvre with three recent video works and an all-immersive scenography that was realised in collaboration with Théo Demans, especially realised for AKINCI. *TouchMETell* (2019), shows children exploring the meaning of boundaries and relational safety, and can be seen as a prelude to *When the body says Yes* (2022), with which bonajo represented the Netherlands at the 59th Venice Biennale. The most recent work, *School of Lovers* (2024), a collaboration with performers with cognitive disabilities, will be shown for the first time in the Netherlands.

The three video works are rooted in queer, feminist, anti-ableist, and anti-racist perspectives on the body, sex, and intimacy—arising from movements that center embodied knowledge, radical softness, and the right to pleasure beyond normativity.

The works respond to a world shaped by control, extraction, and exclusion—where power determines whose bodies are heard, held, or denied. They expose how systems condition our capacity for connection, and offer alternatives built on consent, care, and bodily autonomy. They ask what happens when we reclaim intimacy from systems that disconnect us—and decide who is protected, and who is not.

Across these works, intimacy is not privatized or pathologized.
Touch is resilience.
It's a collective practice. It's political.

TouchMETell engages children in conversations about physical autonomy, consent, and emotional awareness. In a culture that often avoids these topics or treats kids as passive, this work asserts

that young people are fully capable of setting boundaries and understanding relational safety—if we take them seriously.

When the body says Yes explores the intelligence of feelings and the healing potential of touch in a society marked by loneliness and performance. Through queer rituals of consent and pleasure, it creates space for softness, slowness, embodied listening, and mutual respect—especially for those pushed to the margins.

School of Lovers is a bold collaboration with performers with cognitive disabilities, reframing sex education as a shared, inclusive space. It questions who gets access to knowledge, whose desires are legitimized, and how we learn about bodies, gender, and boundaries when systems fail us.

This show invites you to question what you've been taught about touch and intimacy, to unlearn shame, and to reclaim your body, boundaries, voice, and needs on your own terms. It centers the clitoris, the cuddle, the awkward question, and the honest no—as acts of resistance and transformation.

Touch is resilience.
Trust is a praxis.

This is a space to reimagine equality—not through sameness, but through embodied difference. Not something to witness, but something to practice, carry, and continue.

- text by melanie bonajo

Biography

melanie bonajo (they/them/theirs) is an artist, filmmaker, sexological bodyworker, somatic sex coach and educator, cuddle workshop facilitator and activist. Through their videos, performances, photographs and installations, they examine current conundrums of co-existence in a crippling capitalist system, and address themes of eroding intimacy and isolation in an increasingly sterile, technological world. They research how technological advances and commodity-based pleasures increase feelings of alienation, removing an individual's sense of belonging. bonajo's experimental documentaries often feature communities living or working on the margins of society and the paradoxes inherent to ideas of comfort with a strong sense for community, equality and body-politics. They initiated the collective Skinship- A touch based place for Kinship-, an all bodies inclusive queer space to learn somatically about touch and intimacy.

In 2014 melanie bonajo started 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 documentaries presenting progressive (sometimes illegal) approaches through the portraits of ayahuasca consumers, sex worker activists or women farmers. In 2016 Progress vs Regress was released, 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. In TouchMETell (2019) bonajo invites children (and adults) to think and talk about intimacy. In 2022 When the body says Yes was presented as the Dutch Entry at the Venice Biennial. The most recent film School of Lovers (2024) was produced in collaboration with HORA theatre in Zurich, Switzerland.

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).

melanie bonajo was nominated for the Nam June Paik Award (2018) and the Prix de Rome (2017) and won the IFFR Tiger Award (2016).