

"HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOUR BODY SAYS YES?"

MELANIE BONAJO CLAIMS CONSENSUAL TOUCH AS A POWERFUL REMEDY FOR THE MODERN EPIDEMIC OF LONELINESS IN THE DUTCH PAVILION AT LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

The Dutch Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia was officially opened on Thursday 21 April by Director-General Barbera Wolfsenberger. The Dutch entry, 'When the body says Yes', is a new video installation by **melanie Bonajo** in which the artist, filmmaker, sexological bodyworker, somatic sex coach and educator, cuddle workshop facilitator and activist reflects on the meaning of touch and intimacy.

'When the body says Yes' follows a group of people as they share intimate stories and engage in workshops and social touch experiments in their journey towards their personal and collective harmony. The film is presented within an immersive soft sensual shaped and colour-filled landscape, designed by bonajo in collaboration with scenographer **Théo Demans**. Commissioned by the **Mondriaan Fund**, the Dutch public fund for visual arts and cultural heritage, and curated by **Orlando Maaïke Gouwenberg**, **Geir Haraldseth** and **Soraya Pol**, the installation is part of the artist's ongoing research into the status of intimacy in a world bonajo experiences as increasingly alienating and commodity-driven. For bonajo, consensual touch can be a powerful remedy for what the artist considers the modern epidemic of loneliness.

melanie bonajo: "To learn how to feel a 'Yes' and how to feel a 'No' in the body is one of the basics of somatics. Through trust-building, creating safe spaces, restoring dignity in oneself, and feeling our bodies, we can learn what embodied consent feels like. In 'When the body says Yes' a group of international gender queer people expand on sexuality beyond the western perspective on what our genitals mean to us and others and on self-expression as a healing modality. Do you know the sensational dimensions of your No? How do you feel when your body says Yes?"

Eelco van der Lingen, Director of the Mondriaan Fund: 'When the body says Yes' dates from before the Covid-19 pandemic, a mentally difficult period in which people were continuously told to keep their distance from each other. For many, this was a tough task in already anxious times. Now that we're starting to put the pandemic behind us, we have the opportunity to rethink how we want to deal with intimacy and interpersonal relationships. In the presentation bonajo offers us an alternative perspective on this in which mutual respect is at the core of an approach away from ingrained, obsolete, and increasingly dominant patterns.

One-off Location Dutch Pavilion

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

The exhibition is open to the public from 23 April - 27 November 2022.

Join the Dutch Pavilion on Instagram [@dutch.pavilion.venice](https://www.instagram.com/dutch.pavilion.venice) and find more information on the website www.dutch-pavilion.com.



Notes to editors

For information and images, please contact Emily Saunders:
emily.saunders@mondriaanfonds.nl / +44 (0) 7914 817 795 and Esther Schussler:
esther.schussler@mondriaanfonds.nl / +31 (0) 6 21 84 27 49.

More about the artist:

melanie bonajo (lower case, they/them) 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. The Artist says their works present anti-capitalist methods to reconnect and to explore sexualities, intimacies and feelings. bonajo's experimental documentaries often feature communities living or working on the margins of society, either through illegal means or cultural exclusion, and the paradoxes inherent to ideas of comfort with a strong sense for community, equality and body-politics.

bonajo's recent exhibitions include Shanghai Biennale, China (2020/21); Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Netherlands (2020); Palais de Tokyo, France (performance 2019); Haus der Kunst, Germany (2018); Manifesta 12, Palermo, Italy (2018); Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt (2017); Tate Modern, London, UK (2017); and Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht (2018).

More quotes from the artist:

"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."

"Let's move away from our disembodied zoom fatigue, this scenography is a sensual invitation to emerge our bodies into a fluffy 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 that centralises the clitoris as the epicentre of social design and a place for worship. Sponsored by consent and your own oxytocin."

More about the curators:



Orlando Maaike Gouwenberg (she/her) is a curator and initiator with extensive experience in curating and producing special projects that connect theatre, visual arts and film. She is currently artistic director of Jester in Genk, Belgium. Over the last years, she co-founded the multidisciplinary residency program Deltaworkers in New Orleans with Joris Lindhout, programmed short and mid length film at International Film Festival Rotterdam, and she worked with Performa in New York. Gouwenberg remains associated with them for future collaborations.

Soraya Pol (she/her) is a filmmaker and producer who mainly makes documentaries. She has worked on many television series and documentaries, both nationally and internationally, for a variety of clients. Pol manages to get close to the central characters in her projects to tackle important social themes. Pol holds an MA in Journalism, a BA in Philosophy and teaches at the Dutch Film Academy.

Geir Haraldseth (he/him) is co-curator of the inaugural exhibition for the new National Museum in Norway that will open in 2022. Past positions have included director of Rogaland Kunstsenter, where he initiated an experimental summer school program and library; Board member Arts Council Norway; and curator at the Academy of Fine Arts in Oslo. His work as an independent curator focuses on the links between art and the luxury goods market and he has curated exhibitions for many different institutions and contributed to several art and fashion journals.

Théo Demans (he/him) is a multidisciplinary artist working as a sculptor and scenographer, creating immersive installations for museums, theatres, artists and music venues. His practice comes from a collaborative approach of space making, based on the creation of landscape for rituals of togetherness and queer cultural activism. In 2018 he founded the studio touche-touche with Carolin Gieszner, represented by Everyday Gallery. Demans' installations and scenographies made for and in collaboration with melanie bonajo, have been shown in institutions such as Haus der Kunst, Stedelijk Museum, Frankfurter Kunstverein and the Bonnefanten Museum.

The Mondriaan Fund is the public fund for visual art and cultural heritage in the Netherlands. It enables the plans, projects and programmes of artists, exhibition makers and critics, museums and other art and heritage institutions, and publishers and commissioners. The Mondriaan Fund is responsible for commissioning the Dutch entry to the Venice Biennale. The presentation is financed from the international budget, which the fund receives from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.