

Alice Slyngstad 'Soothing Pants'

25.09 - 18.12.2022

Wed - Fri 13:00 - 17:00

Sat - Sun 11:00 - 17:00

Vleeshal Center for Contemporary Art, Middelburg (NL)

www.vleeshal.nl

The audio-visual installation 'Soothing Pants' by Alice Slyngstad, which you hear, see and feel in the Vleeshal, is based on the interaction with digital dating environments.

Alice Slyngstad refers to these spaces as infrastructures for distributing intimacy. The built-in coded language and the operation through algorithms have altered the way we communicate with one another in our search for (dis)connection. These systems have become a dominant mode of interaction in our urge for newness. They are defined by the cold operations of corporate endeavours.

Working with the language used on dating apps, Slyngstad's practice deals with the ongoing contemporary process in which the corporal is becoming corporate. Communication between its users has become so automated that it can be seen as a form of algorithmic writing ('hi what's up, hi what's up, hi what's up, good u good u good u'). The handling of dating app profiles has become more and more like a mechanical act. With every swipe another person is unboxed: displaying their social status, class and gender identity through cryptic phrasing and quotations fuelled with irony and practical concerns ('what kind of coffee'). Through being trained in mining human beings, we're reducing them to their lifestyle choices and geolocation ('less than three km away'). Like this, we're building a mental map of entities of the city through online interactions.

In these digital environments we exist through language, exaggerating our fantasies and fictions. But how does one navigate through these rigid dating structures, when identifying outside of gender binaries or sexual norms? And beyond the algorithm? How can these corporate entities predict one's preference, when we deal with fluid and complex existences? Or more broadly; where is the space for queer desire in a society built upon fixed structures?

For their installation in the Vleeshal, Slyngstad took text fragments from profiles they found and chats they were engaged in. Slyngstad projected them on electrochromic glass panels resembling folding screens. Through this visual analogy, Slyngstad stretches the operations of the digital environment to communal fitting rooms, in which clients are forced to show themselves outside of their secluded booth, where the mirror is hanging and where the salesperson is ready to close the deal. These structures are not in place to comfort. Instead, they thrive on insecurity and can even be inherently violent for people not fitting the norm.

Algorithms of dating apps, by extension, are not built to meet somebody you like but will make you feel endlessly trapped in a humid waiting room. Thus we soothe ourselves and pant.

In the present, intimacy seems to be under pressure, and bodily desires are mediated in the digital sphere more than ever. Alice Slyngstad contemplates and confuses the confined structures of intimacy currently in place – an undertaking we can all benefit from.