

JESUS IS A PEARL AND A PEARL IS A BASTARD

Revisiting Fittings, a dialogue exhibition between
Kinke Kooi and Tenant of Culture
By Jacqueline Grassmann

The absence of touch is clumsily and pitifully hovering between the well-kept distances amongst the people in the exhibition space. It dates March 12 – the day the virus left the dressing room and entered the world stage as elusive, potentially backstabbing, aggressively attention grabbing, (hu)man-made, home-grown, not-immortal-but-impossible-to-kill Medusa. I am at the opening of Fittings, an exhibition combining the works of Kinke Kooi and Hendrickje Schimmel aka Tenant of Culture – except it isn't an opening but rather a sneak peek afternoon with awkward social-distancing rules we obey to. We linger amongst the works and try to secretly fill our bags with the exuberance they so sumptuously radiate and we're going to miss for a while.

I could swear the light that afternoon was somehow eerily dim with unusual pink-purple colours, but maybe my subconscious mixed up the colours of Kinke Kooi's drawings with that of the sky. It felt like the last day of something. Apprehending the apocalypse. Possibly exaggerated, yet life is too short not to be too dramatic about it. Ever since that day, time stands rapidly still, space curves, gravitation emerges. Matter attracts. The couch and I grow closer every day, my thoughts recurring to that afternoon, like they do to your last ample meal when starting a new diet.

TOUCH is abundant between the works that the artists themselves placed carefully into dialog in their first ever collaboration. Even more so against the backdrop of dispersing bodies. A warm chatter emitted by the objects is lingering in the air, not quite audible but unmistakably tangible in its presence. One cause of this charged frequency might derive from the fact that Kinke Kooi is the mother of Tenant of Culture. Another one is the work's consequent trespassing of norms and definitions.

KINKE KOOI's traversing is based on the abandonment of the traditionally over-dominant (male connoted) stroke or line for the (feminine connoted) curve, the voluptuous, the vulgar, the too much – oversharing, of which women* are so often accused of. The unexpected, that what makes you stumble, in the sexually charged drawings of Kinke Kooi with their promiscuous flesh, fingerings, flowerings, penetrations, revelations, illuminations is, that they are placed adjacent to representations of motherhood, responsibility, needs and emotionality, a vicinity that is usually absent in depictions of female desire compliant to the male gaze.

The drawings are full of holes, tunnels, pores, unlocked entrances and exits. They are sprawling permeating ecosystems. With casual conviviality they let us know that we are touched constantly, inside and outside, from the present, future, past: haunted by ghosts, ideas. There is nothing we have nothing to do with. We stand no chance as demarcated entities. The house is always already open. And there's always something behind or under.

TENANT OF CULTURE annexes fashion for art. Irreverent to the trope of the inscrutable artistic genius the artist shares her artistic practice in communal workshops where old

garments are reused and upcycled. Possibly the only answer to an accelerating fashion industry that has everyone – especially women – working like hamsters in wheels to produce standardized, disposable, low cost items. Whereas art stands in for limitless depth of intention and exegesis, fashion satisfies the surface, follows the mainstream, the trend, performs fugitive identity.

The sculptural patchwork-like garments by Tenant of Culture fit both, as fashion, and art, refusing monogamy. Layers of fragmented surfaces are reworked relentlessly. This obsession with the interface renders the artist's creations a testament to the digital era; an armour almost to a world that demands boundless adaptability and ultimate individuality – bought off-the-rack of course. The trick of the garment arrangements being overloaded with fabrics and layers, repeating elements like lugs and buckles, is then, that they distort physiognomy, identity, codes.

The armour's sleight seems borrowed from the digital: like a Tor – also called onion router – it re-connects your IP address so many times you appear in the web without attribution. The fittings are extended skin that fringes and frazzles.

MOTHERS' often unpaid and invisible labour is resembled in the time-intensive drawings of Kinke Kooi. Proliferating fragments of lace-like patterns, pearls, fabric, threads, buttons constantly multiply, morph, devour, unveil, befriend. A democracy of human body parts, organisms, plants, words and an-organic matter. However, motherhood is not a one-sided process of giving. Mothers give birth to daughters. But daughters also give birth to mothers, eternally alter their DNA, make them what they are. And therefore become mothers themselves, long before they have daughters. A lifelong fitting. The maternal is independent from genealogical descent and gender. Everyone's a mom. In this intra-material family making, all bodies are kin, even the deserted, contagious and hungry visitors we are.

In the 2013/2020 work Hold me the two artists finally meet, literally touch for the very first time. A perforated fabric, maybe organza, a porous skin if you like, gently veils a pinkish blue pastel coloured drawing. It's outrageous how effortlessly the two elements embrace each other. Like Eve in front of the apple tree I want to intervene, steal this dirty touch, the intimacy, copy it and paste it again between the separated bodies in the exhibition space, as the social glue we usually live of.

"I will always be around" promises one of the delicate small-scale inscriptions in Kinke Kooi's work. It is the exquisite care, the mutual devouring in this artistic-parental relation that queers the traditional artistic family tree in an intra-apocalyptic camp-like manner. A motherhood that holds space for thieves, bastards, orphans and even Jesus. We could read that dialogue as a suggestion to bury the patrilineage and welcome the matrilineage. Unhugged, ready to return, with loaded pockets and a smudgy mouth, I slowly walk home in pastel.

EXILE