

DAD IN CONVERSATION with

Isabelle Froment

Lives and works in Lille

“How have you interpreted/responded to the project title transmettre/transmit?”

To transmit ... a huge and ambitious programme! And above all, essential act. Because this is without doubt the ultimate aim of every creative practitioner, every artist, every person even. At heart, consciously or unconsciously, who has not wanted to leave behind a trace of their existence, their passing through this world? A key question, no doubt more acute than ever, for a society which is focused on the ego, a society in which the desire for that “15 minutes of fame” has reached its height. But let us leave aside this ephemeral trace, this superficial version of transmission. There is a nobler side to this, a deep trace, a self-questioning about the substance of the values to be “passed on”. Which takes us back to the pure etymological origins of the word transmission, or the Latin “transmittere”.

In this sense, the question of heritage is part and parcel of the idea of transmission. What shall we leave of ourselves? What shall we give to share out, what shall we offer? What culture, what world, what feelings do we want to pass on to our children, to future generations, to the audience? In answer to this, the most beautiful example of transmission is without doubt that of procreation, this unfailing link between a mother and her child. Giving life is to transmit a heritage, a culture, an identity, ideas... it is to confer an asset and to nurture its growth.

For this project, what I wanted to do was to ask women, mothers, to write a message or messages, on their stomach, which they wanted to make known, to send out. The first piece of work “Mots de ventres” is a video piece showing a series of mini performances in real time. I extracted photographic images from this video, which I used to create place mats, in order to adapt the work to the

site in which it was presented.

In an earlier piece, I also considered another form of transmission, that of the feeling of happiness. This video consists of a series of video portraits of people forcing themselves to laugh. Transmitting a false happiness, a semblance of joy ... Implicit in this work is an ever present question: what is it that's so funny, since there's nothing to see? The ridiculousness of the situation, an excess of derision... true! But we laugh ...and feel embarrassed, because we're both annoyed by and attracted to the repeated expressions that we see in their faces; we freeze before these people at play. But who are they making fun of ...?

In addition to your references to Transmettre/Transmit, how has the project's location in heritage sites impacted conceptually on your practice?

The first site given to us was religious in nature: the chapel of the Jesuits in Saint-Omer – a monumental place, laden with history. My initial idea was clearly quite naturally influenced by this history. It was to photograph young mothers with their child, posed as Madonna and child. Like an echo of the magical grandeur of this place, I wanted to make monumental photos and site them in the chapel's huge niches, where once there would have been large-scale paintings. However, this project turned out to be far too ambitious and difficult to realize for financial reasons.

So I continued my research, holding on to the idea of maternity, give too that I was also pregnant at the time. As my ideas developed, my work became a bit more “political”, or rather social. My ideas regarding the site-specific nature of the work, pr rather the integration of the work within the place, turned around how to present it, how to install it. I chose a cloister in an alcove of the chapel, a small, less spectacular space and decided to use the floor as a projection screen in such a way that the viewer almost cannot avoid walking on the image or pinning themselves against the walls in order to see it. In this way, the video,

the space, the viewer, melt or merge into each other and become one. And just as the texture of the stones are an intimate part of the image, the materiality of the space becomes (con)fused with it too, forming a second skin, with the skin of the tummies.

Finally, in the centre of the cloister, I decided to show a triptych called "Renaissance". These were photographic self portraits shown in metal crates. This work refers to the idea of life in the womb and the pain of coming into the world. Here, the alliance between the place with imprints of the past (fragments, vestiges and ruins around the foot of the work) and the triptych helped to create a dramatic scene, Christlike even, intensified by the play of light.

The two pieces, "Mots de ventres" and "Renaissance", matched each other. Through them was created a resonance between contents of my proposal and the site of presentation.

For the second exhibition in England, I again wanted to inscribe my work in a way that was relevant to the site by playing with presentational questions. However, my main desire was also to prompt a dialogue between the site and the work shown.

I was immediately attracted to one of the rooms in Deal castle ... even before finding out that it had been the kitchen! This is why I thought of presenting my work on a table, changing media and producing image-objects. However, the rooms that I finally had for showing my work in meant I had to rethink my initial idea. These two identical opposing rooms allowed me to play with their symmetry. The table has been sawn in half - the two sections abutting the walls in the opposing rooms thus implying an invisible extension through the space. In this way, my work really does include the site - it becomes a link between the two rooms. I was also interested in juxtaposing a historic monument with a contemporary method of presentation.

Regarding the other piece I am showing, the dialogue instigated with the chosen space is at the very least slightly bizarre ... since the gunpowder room now

finds itself filled with the explosion of laughter. The tension set up by placing this work in this particular space is the height of absurdity!

When all is said and done, the only major problem with these heritage sites is that they are untouchable and have such a powerful presence that you can quickly get lost in there.