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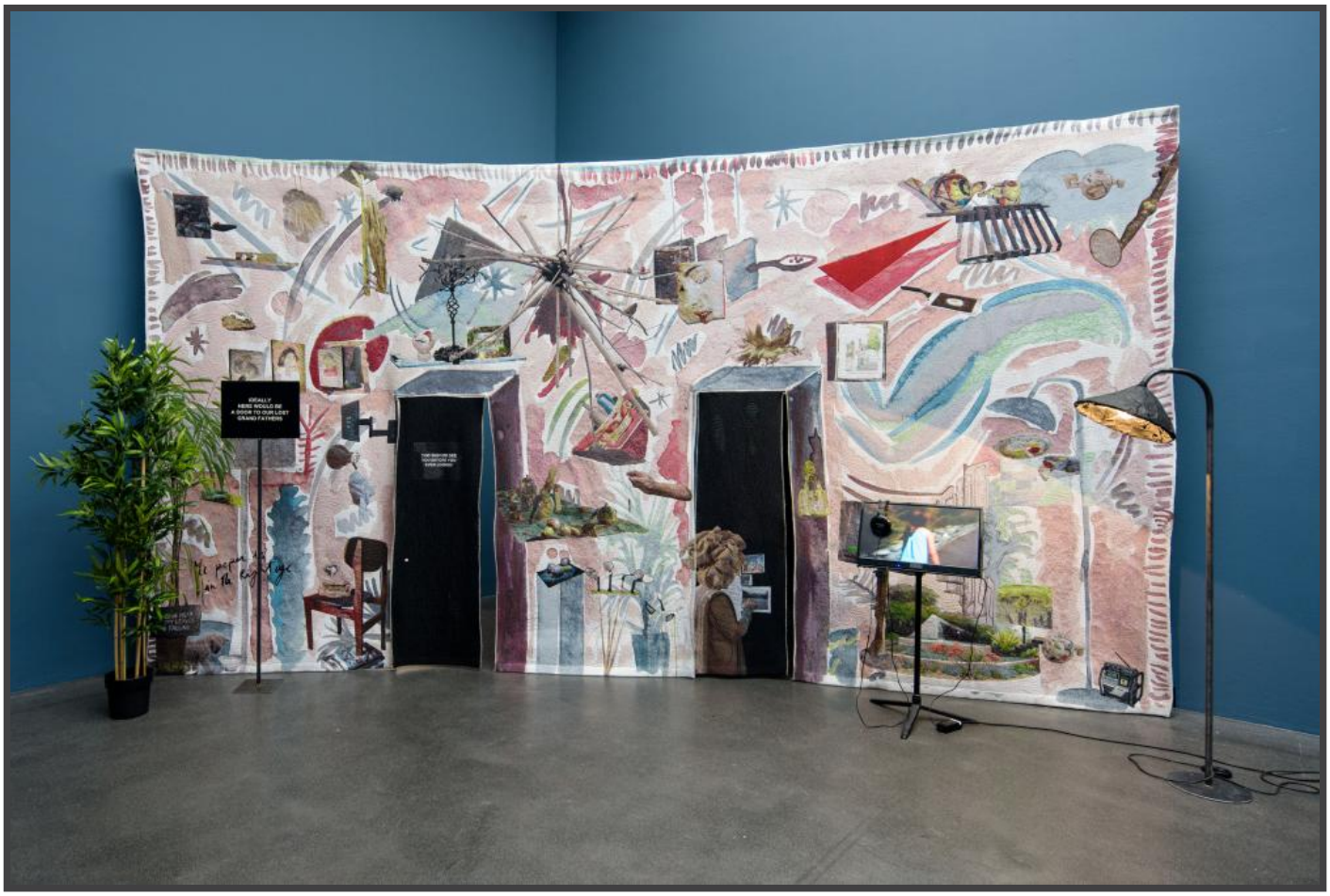
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Laure Prouvost: Trying

Kunstmuseum Luzern

Aoife Rosenmeyer

Walking into Laure Prouvost's exhibition I nearly missed a note she had dropped. She had written it for the moment I moved through the liminal glass passage where you can see galleries in front and behind, yet below lies the water of Lake Lucerne. It read «…look iam waving but maybe you cant see me I can see you, you look great today…» in sloping cursive, though nobody down there seemed to be looking up.





Laure Prouvost, *Ideally This Sign Would be the Taste of Escape*, 2016

There had been a split second in which the note seemed credible. It could have been a mislaid shopping list; when the letter was revealed it sustained that brief charge, a moment in which artist and visitor approached one another directly. The awkwardness in the first gallery of «And she will say: hi her, ailleurs, to higher grounds …», in comparison, has staying power. A water cooler and bench in one corner say anteroom, and a long, straight, powder-blue platform, marginally above the ground, leads from the exterior window across the room and into the next. Its surface shines with a layer of varnish or clear resin in which dust, dirt, leaves, rubbish, book pages and images are preserved. Around here, according to the exhibition guide, tea is served to the visitor, but this has translated into the help-yourself dispenser. Now, alone on a quiet day, while birds, shrieks and other voices could be heard from the adjoining spaces, I was hobbled by ingrained museum-visiting habits and the ambiguity of the arrangement: was this plank a stage I should observe from afar, or a boardwalk from which to survey the space? After debating whether I ought to take that step some ten centimeters or so off the ground, I accepted the role of wandering visitor into the Prouvost experience.



Laure Prouvost, *Wantee*, 2013, Installation view, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Photo: Marc Latzel

First there is a collection of *Shovels* (2015 onwards) from branches tied together with sisal that sprout extensions such as wing mirrors, a basin with accompanying scrubbing brush, a light fitting or a video screen, variously painted, coated and covered so they become vaguely exotic, though they mix natural and artificial elements. In the next gallery comes the installation *Wantee* (2013), a low-lit arrangement of a table piled with crude ceramics surrounded by chairs, kitchen dressers and pictures, with a few museum-like display elements too, all relating to the film projected in the same space. In this Prouvost narrates a visit to what she would have us understand is her grandfather's abandoned studio. A conceptual artist, he has disappeared making his last, most daring, work, a hidden tunnel to Africa. She tells us that her grandparents were friends of Kurt Schwitters (or «KS») and talks of the tea-making and drinking habits of her grandmother and (Schwitters' partner) Wantee. She has only been invited to participate in this exhibition, she confides, because of her grandfather's connection to Schwitters, and it is true that the work was first shown in the exhibition «Schwitters in Britain» at Tate Britain in 2013. There it earned Prouvost nomination for the Turner Prize, which she won, and its narrative carries through into several subsequent works.



Laure Prouvost, Maquette for Grand Dad’s Visitor Center, 2014, Installation view, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Photo: Marc Latzel

This narrative repeatedly intertwines reality and fiction, though the latter prevails. The following installation is a *Maquette for Grand Dad’s Visitor Center* (2014), a spindly Gehry-like form as supposedly envisaged by her grandmother. The gallery adopts the appearance and method of a museum’s education space, employing what looks like the outcome of a schools’ workshop, filmed footage in which children lobby for the building, while visitors are invited to contribute ideas or build models. By now the exhibition’s mode of fiction is established. Moving along the blue conveyor belt through the middle of the show, the viewer can take the elaborate staging at face value or explore behind the scenes. As the route continues past the video work *Grand Ma’s Dream* (2013), for example, there is the option to move in front of the work presented in a box within the gallery or by-pass it entirely. That chapter recounts dreams of fast cars and handsome actors in the third person, the corpulent, rankled grandmother remaining an unseen and unheard off-screen presence.



Laure Prouvost, *Behind the lobby doors, the pepper is in the right eye*, 2016, Installation view, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Photo: Marc Latzel

Off to one side comes *Love among the Artists* (2016), a room full of works by other artists – David Raymond Conroy, Juliette Blightman, Dana Munro and Sophio Medoidze among others – the title taken from a novel of which a page is sealed into the gangway near the exhibition entrance. The guide says these are works for the collection of Grand Dad's museum, but without that explanation it looks collegiate, or like some artists' studio show space, especially as Giles Round's contribution *15.04.10* (2010/2015) is playing a recording from BBC Radio 3. Also here is Prouvost's *behind the lobby doors, the pepper is in the right eye* (2016),a beautifully fabricated tapestry repeating motifs occurring in other films and installations, with the absurd suggestion that Prouvost's grandmother wove it. And there are five more rooms filled with large works yet to come. Nearing the end, the screen for *If It Was* (2015) stands in isolation but for the continuing blue path. The video argues for Prouvost's ideal museum, where there would be less art and more space for dancing and Zumba sessions. The finale is a printed screen shaped like an inverted crater, *Volcano Paradise* (2016), within which the visitor can stand or sit beside a palm tree, encountering yet more of the artist's thoughts and instructions on screen («PAM TREE», or «GO TO A HIGHER GROUND»,) birdsong in our ears.

Arriving at this conclusion, the delicacy of the dropped note is long forgotten. The exhibition, which starts coyly, ends up burying the viewer under a relentless stream of the artist's images and voice, as well as texts in block capitals in video works and handwritten instructions elsewhere. The installation is punctuated throughout with signs in white capitals on black, like On Kawara bumper stickers. «THERE IS NOTHING TO SEE HERE» says one. The experience is polymorphous, but we are always in Prouvost's territory, her world. You can note precursors – Prouvost indulges in Pipilotti Rist's kind of unrestrained corporeal sensuality, while exploring her own penchant for bottoms and milk-spurting breasts. When her staging is finely tuned, she has much in common with Mike Nelson, with a keen sense for what is read and responded to in a space. Yet her voice is continually in our ear, insisting on communicating personally and resolutely imperfectly in text. Misspellings, misinterpretation,

mess. To what end this deliberate amateurishness? It has been three years since that Turner Prize victory, and Prouvost's current output is extraordinary. This is one of a trio of complementary exhibitions that started with «Dropped here and then, to live, leave it all behind» at Le Consortium in Dijon and continued with «All behind, we'll go deeper, deep down and she will say:» at MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, a route that notionally started underground in Dijon and reached to the skies in Lucerne. Prouvost has also held solo exhibitions this year alone at Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Milan, Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing, State of Concept, Athens, and Fahrenheit, Los Angeles, while contributing to more than a dozen other group shows. Now the artist's naivety looks less endearing and more strategic.

It must have been remarked before that Prouvost's work is like Marmite, which you love or hate. Does the total experience mesh into a rich palimpsest or become intensely irritating? Her persistent use of a kooky signature style starts to obscure engaging ideas, which have to fight through their presentation. The grandfather fantasy of *Wantee* leads to reflections on the nature of fiction, and from there to the sincerity of lies. (One of Prouvost's contributions to *Love Among the Artists* is the 2016 work Credits which lists the contributors, but also includes a text beginning «Dear Visitor, I am not a professional liar…».) Her use of artifice within presentation (in *Wantee* she tells us she «Wanted to make it real for the film» while she smears clay over walls,) takes off on a riff on institutional critique, specifically the artificiality of the institution ‹per se›. Her visitor center thus raises the question of why an art gallery is intrinsically a good or desirable thing, and this idea carries through to the newest works. But by then the anti-establishment mirage she presents, complete with palm, is so densely populated with her idiosyncratic talismans that I longed for the anonymity of those more familiar institutions.

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