A high-angle photograph of a person lying on their back on a light-colored tiled floor. The floor is covered in numerous dark, irregular splatters and smudges, resembling blood or paint. Several handprints are visible, some appearing to be made in the splatters. The person is wearing dark shorts and has their arms and legs spread out. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights.

Prune Nourry
Genesis

Prune Nourry presents her new project Genesis for the first time at the historic Casino Venier in conjunction with the 2013 Venice Biennale. For the occasion, the French, NYC based, multimedia artist explores the complicated themes of gender and sexual identity. Travelling through time, from the Myth of creation, to a permissive Classical antiquity, the Baroque libertines, and today's exploding porn industry, Prune collaborates with performers, animating sculpture and examining the relationship between religion and sexuality.

It is the site itself that actually inspired Prune's June 14th peculiar happening. The word "casino" describes a 17th century intimate house of games and pleasures, and is now also slang for brothel in Italian. Prune had been studying the question of sexuality and gender through science and our customs for some time now, thus the invitation of the Alliance Francaise to present her work in a venue with such a loaded history seemed like the perfect place to develop these themes. Italy being the land of the Pope - Catholicism embedded in the traditions - Prune decided to highlight the rapport between sexuality and religion.

Aiming to touch upon sensitive subjects without shocking, but inviting to question rather, Prune always tries to subtly infiltrate the local culture through a familiar symbolic and humor. Hence the focus on detail and the choice of offering the audience chocolate nipples, molded off the artist, in ciborium (Eucharist dishes). Holy Water blessed by the artist is also served throughout the evening, as well as the Italian version of "Eau de vie": Grappa. These texts are even presented in church-like booklets.

Prune explores a wide range of mediums, Genesis shows her interest in culinary, but also video and dance, though sculpture remains her "spine", as she describes it. The idea of merging dance and sculpture is reflected in the Adam and Eve videos that also delve into the concept of creation. Similarly to God giving life to Adam by a touch in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, Prune gives life to her sculptures and has Adam sculpting himself, and become alive.

Pushing the idea of sculpture explored through a 2D medium, Prune also plays with the technique of re-projection, creating a mystery image, only to be revealed at the end.

She wears the magician hat again in the Eve video where the dancer leaves intriguing body marks that reminisce Yves Klein's anthropometry. The female dancer is sensuous, yet her short hair and little breasts would almost make her seem androgynous. The idea that human gender and sexuality should be studied as a spectrum rather than a restrictive binary categorization has only began resurging in the 20th century after centuries of repressing humans' complex nature. In a society that is only beginning to accept homosexuality, today, the larger than expected, intersex population is still forced to make a choice between male and female.

In the same way our society has difficulty to accept "abnormal" traits, there is a clear contrast in sex between what "we want" and what is "allowed". Most of the movies watched in the US are porn, yet, it is forbidden to show nipples publically. For the church, sex is sacred creation, yet the act itself is frowned upon. Taking these aspects into consideration, Prune invited the ex porn star and aerial performer Katsuni for a live pole dance inspired by Baroque sculpture on classical music of the period. She mixes old and new, conservative and liberal, yet again, inviting to question our accepted customs.

« After biting the apple... »
Katsuni, aerialist performer

Is religion the antagonist of sexuality?

In what way does it operate in a society where the sexual act is celebrated more as a source of individual pleasure rather than as an act of procreation? Fear and respect of the « sacred act », of its mystery, have made way for fascination towards fame and name, brands and celebrities, and the power of religious institutions (whose vocation is «the good example»,) seems to now be in discordance with our contemporary values. The power of these establishments is now usurped by media idols and replaced by the cult of entertainment. Should this extreme slide be perceived as a sign of emancipation or as decadence? *(Western society)

Personally, it is not the relationship between religion and sex that preoccupies me the most. In my opinion, the core paradox resides in the opposition between the willingness to flourish freely, express oneself, adore freedom and our bodies (which I accomplished when I made the choice to work in the porn industry), and one's personal moral. I value not hurting those I love, being in harmony with my romantic partner, and envision having the joy of being a mother one day. However, aren't these same moral stems from religious principles that have forged my education and the values of the society in which I was raised? Thus, am I not, in my convictions, unconsciously guided by my religion, even though I do not consider myself a practitioner? Does this apply to all of us who are immersed in the cultural heritage that forges us?

In terms of pornography (whether it be through art or industry), is it solely defined through transgression? Is it purely revolt against the established order, or does it transcend the extreme expression of our individuality, until breaking the taboo? The interest we give to eroticism and pornography is tinted by desire, disgust, and fascination all at the same time. Where does this feeling of insecurity (which leads us to excitement and shame) come from? Was it not born from an unease, reflection of the crack singular to our duality, our need to quiet the appetite of flesh, while wanting to be free spirits? By freedom, I mean, the possibility of making choices without being dominated by our instincts, beyond our gender categorization (F, M, X...)

Religion offers some guidance in sexuality matters, although the field of interpretation often leaves us faced with doubts. Art and philosophy provoke, inviting to pursue reflection by inciting feelings or encouraging understanding, heart and mind reaching in the same direction. In both cases, the quest is universal and the path personal.

Spirituality (apart from religious dogmas) is, for me, the ally of all our actions, and I dare to hope that it can also be present within our sexuality. We «bit the apple », this is undeniable. What of it today and tomorrow ? Living in guilt doesn't help us grow, but growing with our weaknesses is what unites us and reconciles us with ourselves, with the world. We are absolutely perfect in our imperfection.

Sexual Identity

Ariane Giacobino, geneticist

Living organisms can have two types of sex determination regulation: environmental or genetic.

Indeed, turtles and alligators are determined male or female during pregnancy, depending on the environment and more specifically on temperature at which the egg is exposed.

In the marine mollusk *Crepidula fornicata*, many organisms undergo a sex change at some point of their life cycle. A sequential hermaphroditism linked to positional conditions within the stack these mollusks constitute with other members of their colony (lower position individuals are males, upper position are females, intermediate are hermaphrodites).

For humans, the mechanism is different: simply genetic. The X and Y chromosomes make the difference. XX for females and XY for males, and this is because gene-specific pathways for gonadal differentiation are followed, depending on the presence of the Y and its SRY gene at the position Yp11.31, or of the female sex-determination genes on the X chromosome. A cascade of gene activation triggering sexual differentiation and sex-specific hormones, androgens or oestrogens working on the phenotype, the aspect and reproductive functions.

However, once in approximately 2'500 births, some strange developmental problems occur, and the human newborn is neither completely a female, nor completely a male.. or is both together: this condition, or variation of sexual development is named intersexuality. Genetic analyses always performed and the causes are often identified, not always, because tens of different genes can be mutated or deleted, some of which are even not yet known.

But more than bringing stupor or anxiety, thinking on treatments and surgery, this type of disorder can lead to a simple question: what makes a male, or a female ? Is there a sort of gray zone, with gynoid male and android females, do we all have all the appropriate physical and reproductive parameters for being well classified, Male or Female ?

Infertility, subfertility, premature, ovarian failure, uro-genital malformation, abnormal testosterone dosage, low anti-mullerian hormone, gynecomastia, cryptorchidia, hypospadias,.. are they all imperfections or all variations ?

Adam and Eve, Y and X.

Less than 50 genes are located with the small Y chromosomes.. Compared to the 22'000 genes of the human genome, it is a gene content representing less than 0.3% of the genome necessary to make a male, and the Y gene content is becoming more and more poor over evolution, losing pieces of DNA. The X, encompasses more than 3'000 genes. What does this mean ? Is more better, in terms of genes ?

One out of 600 male births has a XXY chromosomal constitution. Sterility is the consequence of this excess of X. Many parents decide to abort when this chromosomal variation is discovered during pregnancy.

At the same time, preimplantation genetic diagnosis is used for sex selection of the embryos in several countries. Couples travel to get this "service". It is not labeled as sex selection but as "family balancing", meaning that nature does not balance enough but genetic technologies do ? If the technology exists, should we necessarily use it, or blame it ?

On the other hand, considering some families, with a severe X-linked genetic disease, where all males are at risk or a very severe health condition. Is it unfair to try to avoid having an affected male by preimplantation genetic diagnosis and therefore preferring a female ?

All is perhaps about this zone of thinking male and female. Social construction of sexual identity, representation of maleness and femaleness, sex chromosomes, genes, chromosomes, variations, genetic analysis, diagnosis, perfection and technology, abortion and pregnancy, dreams and identity.

Animate Sculpture

Kira d'Alburquerque, art historian

Modesty only seems to prevent her from moving: within this admirable piece of art, the real masterpiece is hidden! Pygmalion admires; he is entranced by the beauty he has created. Full of love, he kisses the statue and believes his love returned. He honors the Goddess Venus. His lips no longer kiss insensitive lips. The living statue blushes, opens her eyes, and sees at the same time, the sky and her lover.

Ovide, *Métamorphoses*, X, 243-297.

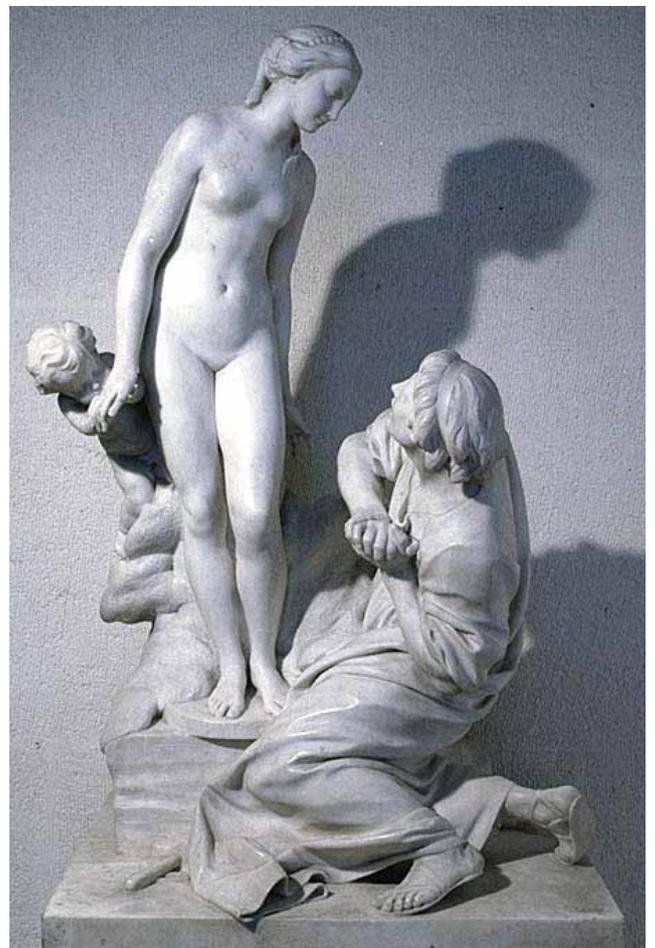
In her new project, *Genesis*, the sculptor Prune Nourry questions and reinterprets different themes linked to identity that have intrigued artists throughout time. She explores creation, eroticism and sexual ambiguity through mediums such as video, performance and dance, as if attempting to give life to her sculptures.

The mythological artist Pygmalion fell madly in love with a female ivory sculpture he had created, and obtained from Venus to give her life. The sculpture then took its first breath. Moving slowly, it opened its eyes....

This ancient myth never lost its power of fascination and magic. The dream of animating a sculpture is still alive today: the cold, delicate and sensual artwork comes alive under the eyes of its viewer thanks to the intervention of a god (or is it rather, thanks to the exceptional power of the artist creator?)

The story of Pygmalion has been explored through all the Arts, especially during the 18th century. It inspired the French sculptor Étienne-Maurice Falconet (1716-1797) who created a marble group representing Pygmalion and his sculpture at the exact moment at which it takes life. The sculpture displayed in the Louvre was very much admired by Diderot who sang its praise at the 1763 Salon: "Nature and Grace have affected the attitude of the statue (...) What supple flesh! No, this isn't marble; press your finger, and the medium that has lost its hardness will leave the mark of your touch. (...) O Falconet! How did you achieve to fuse surprise, joy and love all in one piece of white stone. Emule of the gods, if they gave life to the mythical sculpture, you have renewed the miracle in animating your statue. (..)". What audacity to represent in a block of marble a sculpture becoming flesh and bones under the eyes of its creator!

The legend also inspired composer Jean-Philippe Rameau to create a ballet at the same period. The 1748 piece, performed at the Chateau de Fontainebleau, was accompanied by an Ovide inspired text by Ballot de Sauvot.



How can one speak of animating sculpture, sensuality -if not sexuality - without bringing up the sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) The troubling religious ecstasy of Saint Theresa and Ludovico Albertoni provoked by divine love are indubitable references. The depiction of these reclining nuns, with their heads tilted back, eyes closed and lips slightly opened in such realistic manner one could feel their breath, convey a moving physical eroticism.

The harrowing sculpture of Apollon and Daphne in the Borghese Gallery is another example of Bernini's brilliance in transforming a block of marble into a delicate group in movement, where striking sensuality is rendered through the nude body shapes and the softness of the skin. The young woman, chased by the god, taken by fright and desperation, desperately trying to escape him, turns into a laurel tree in a last breath, recalling Saint Theresa's.



It is perhaps the antiquities 200 BC Hermaphrodite, currently shown in the Louvre, for which Bernini was commissioned by the cardinal Borghese to sculpt a voluptuous mattress on which the figure lasciviously sleeps, that fascinates most by its sexual ambivalence and eroticism. Son of Hermes and Aphrodite, Hermaphrodite inherits beauty from both parents. The naiad Salmacis is struck by the young boy who rejects her. Frustrated, Salmacis embraces him by force and obtains from Zeus to fuse both bodies into one. The resulting body displays both female and male attributes.

The dubious sexuality is highlighted by the circumvent pose of the reclining nude sculpture. The viewer is first drawn to the gracious and voluptuous curves, before walking around the work to be surprised by an abundant bosom and a male penis.

Prune Nourry meshes traditional mastery of sculptural matter with ephemeral arts of light and dance as an embodiment of her artistic message uniting universal sensitivities about social consciousness, and our personal gender and sexual identities.



Genesis by Prune Nourry

Pole Dance Performance

Katsuni

Video performance

Dancers: Claire Tran, Simon Courchel

Sound: Jean-Gabriel Becker, Mitchell Yoshida

Production

Gaëlle Porte, Mathieu Vernat, Carole Megevand, Nicolas Valains, Crescens Dupuis

Thank you

Angelique Morquin, Viziovirtú cioccolateria, Faenza, Adrien Bertolle, Elizabeth Herring, Takao Shiraishi, Paradoxal, JR, Philipp Engelhorn, Cameron Yates, Mac Premo, Sam Burbank, Micaela Shafer, Daniel Porte, Tatyana Franck, Noel Porte,

June 14th 2013
6-8pm
Alliance Française
Venise

San Marco 4939
30124 Venezia
www.afvenezia.it
eventi@afvenezia.it
+039 041 522707



Alliance Française
Venise

THE INVISIBLE DOG

51 Bergen St. - Brooklyn - New York - 11201

