

Best wishes from Lucile Bertrand

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From 15 July to 25 August 2004 it was Lucile Bertrand's turn to yield to the fertile constraints of the Comptoir du Nylon. A French artist who lived in New York for several years, Lucile Bertrand has now settled in Brussels, where she continues her work which combines an airy lightness, through the use of the materials that she favours, and at the same time an equally subtle commitment in its intention, forcing the viewer to decode the threads of her message. These general tendencies are combined with an impressive mastery of drawing, which she uses as a basis for reflection in each of her works: here again, the fine point of the pencil glides over the paper and allows it to build up a design that is as light as its strokes. In 2002 she drew a bed, surrounded by a red frame, with a bare base on which some locks of hair were arranged... The idea was born, and Lucile can now show her project at the exhibition "When a hundred artists speak", held at the Petit Chateau (the centre for asylum seekers in Brussels) for the hundredth anniversary of the Human Rights League. In one of the rooms, she lines up wardrobes and beds, which she covers with locks of hair under the gaze of the refugees which is at first intrigued and then conniving. For Lucile the use of hair is symbolic, especially in the context of this exhibition, because it is at once personal and impersonal, because it is also one of the last traces of a person's passing, of their death, as she felt so strongly when she visited Auschwitz, where the hair of the deportees still remained, nearly sixty years after their disappearance.

The use of ethereal materials is found again in Bertrand's participation in the ISELP exhibition in June/July 2003 "Of the diaphanous and the illusion. A multiplicity of appearances". Here she appropriates Kosuth's work "A Map with 13 points", mainly visible from the outside, and reveals it inside the exhibition space. In response to the inexpressible aspect of the words, she chooses ephemeral materials: dust, feathers and hair are integrated into the closed frames of Kosuth's words to mingle and blend with one another. The other installation, "Without a word", is dedicated to silence, the silence that is both peaceful, like a lull, but also the sorrowful silence of things that could not be said, for lack of time or opportunity....

Behind so much lightness and subtlety, however, behind this ethereal side that favours elusive particles, Lucile Bertrand inevitably leads us into a much more hostile universe, often barely perceptible, through her technical choices. This danger is striking in her contribution to the exhibition held at the beginning of 2004 at the Archetype Gallery, which had invited its artists to explore the theme of Little Red Riding Hood. Her pencil drawings, with a strong predominance of red, show that the danger lies not outside where the wolf is but inside, near the grandmother, forcing Little Red Riding Hood to flee the uneasy cocoon of the house which is steeped in an atmosphere of incest. Again, however, the unspeakable horror seems barely perceptible through the charming book-objects that Lucile has composed for the occasion, accompanied by needlework, almost reminiscent of those evenings of old when embroidering and storytelling went together beside the fire.

In Lucile Bertrand's installation at the Comptoir du Nylon, one again finds that ethereal quality peculiar to her work, combined with a very fine sense of interactivity which she has already explored in 2003 in the exhibition "North Neon – Art and Prostitution" of which she was one of the main organisers. Here in rue Sainte Catherine, the residents are different, their everyday preoccupations are different, and Lucile has therefore reflected about the passers by, the shopkeepers and the residents, but also about the season, because working in the winter would have forced her to realise an installation more turned towards the indoors. Lucile has thought about holidays, and most of all about those who do not get to go on holiday. So how to proceed? By asking the lucky ones to spare a thought, send a brief word for those who pass, every day or occasionally, by the Comptoir du Nylon, which has become the area's Poste Restante. Lucile has been spreading the message since the end of June, and it has been passed from one person to the next, and gradually the postcards have started to flow in; just a couple of words, just "Best wishes from....", little scraps of life, like an intimate diary written by more than one person; some even

write directly to the residents of rue Sainte Catherine. Lucile has then stretched rows of fishing line right across the window of the Comptoir du Nylon and hung the cards on them with little clothes pegs, each with a copy of the reverse of the card alongside it. She has also conceived a sound installation, a recording of her asking the people of Brussels about the idea of holidays, about what they meant to them. There has been such an avalanche of cards that Lucile has had to make revolving holders for them!

Like a pause in their everyday lives, many people have stopped to read this mail which is addressed to each and everybody, and so to them too, like a ray of sunshine sent from far away or from close by; it makes them feel good and provides a pleasant change from our own letterboxes, which seem to draw in only bills.

Virginie Devillez & Thomas Perissino