FIN4012W

Leah Mascher – MSCLEA001

“Forever Love” 2024 Catalogue is a physical product. It is a sticker packet of symbols and elements from the installation. The product comes with a sheet of stickers and a poster with text on it. The stickers are called “devotional stickers” made to take into the home to stick onto the wall or on personal belongings – they form a “domestic shrine”. At the back of the product is a typed ou document titled “devotional Instructions” – This is a poster on can hang up. On that poster is a QR-CODE to my esssy, where one can read about “forever love”.

FOREVER LOVE
Desire for everything

LAYOUT OF STICKERS ONTOP OF PLASTIC PACKADGING OF" DEVOTIONAL STICKERS"

-----$$$---DEVOTION instructions --------

A mountainous gold landslide. Горный золотой оползень. 山地黄金滑坡.

Light golden-brown sand – sunlight *shines* *through the trees. It is a lukewarm bath of sparkles.* A narrow gold panel staircase that leads up to a shallow cave.

Inside a portrait of golden Jesus.

裡面有金色的耶穌肖像。

"Darin ein Porträt des goldenen Jesus."

When you stare into it your

face merges with his.

You meet someone on a beach. He is

я рассказал ему все на пляже у меня были прямые волосы. от влажного тумана и моей честности мои волосы завились. Я больше никогда не показывала ему свои вьющиеся волосы.

beautiful, his age makes his face

мне показалось, что он выглядел красиво на диване. он так нежно меня гладил. он сказал, что ему холодно. мне хотелось его согреть. после этого я больше никогда не показывала ему свои вьющиеся волосы.

and gestures graceful like a *dancer*.

献身的な女

No dancer is ugly – *their dancing paints onto them soul, grace, free will...*

它总是很有吸引力。

就像性一样。

当你和他发生性关系时

You hold his

fingers to your lips.

I'm so lucky to be so open.

I am no prey.

Бесплатно?

He is beautiful you kiss him like **royalty**

***Go to church*, go to a place where people pray to an elusive above.**

In a tongue you don't understand.

Hear the vowels move you as they fire through the church

white doves.

这就是它听起来的样子

当鸽子哭泣时【休息】

当鸽子哭泣时（当鸽子哭泣时，当鸽子哭泣时）

当鸽子哭泣时（当鸽子哭泣时，它们会哭泣）

哦，不，哦

哦，不，是的

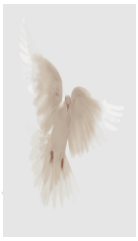
噢，噢，是啊

噢，噢，是啊

噢，噢，是啊

当鸽子哭泣时

当鸽子哭泣时（呼）



неприкосновенний

当鸽子哭泣时（呼）**When the world is sharp, and nothing is sacred.**

SPEAK TO THE DEAD

She will tell you to shower. She'll wash you while she listens to songs in your head.

She will tell you not to be so afraid of God.

QR -code found on “DEVOTIONAL POSTER”

Web-page when QR-code is scanned and followed:

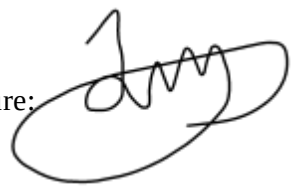
FOREVER LOVE
Desire for everything

Fine Art Department

COURSE CODE: FIN4012W
COURSE NAME: Proseminar: Theory and Practice of Art
LECTURER: Dr Kurt Campbell
ASSIGNMENT NAME: Final Essay
STUDENT NAME: Leah Laetitia Mascher
STUDENT NUMBER: MSCLEA001
YEAR: 2024

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and pretend that it is my own.
2. I have used the **UCT Author-Date** guide for citation and referencing. Each contribution to, and quotation in this essay from the work(s) of other people has been contributed and has been cited and referenced.
3. This essay is my own work.
4. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work.

Signature: 

FOREVER LOVE

"On Desire, Installation, Performance and things found"

By

Leah Mascher

Final Essay

BA(Hons) Fine Art

2024

Michaelis School of Fine Art

University of Cape Town

FOREWORD

Never let go of that fiery sadness called desire

- Patti Smith

Early 2000's: I was around the age of 6-9 when my parents took me to church for the first few times. It was the NG -Kerk in Melkbos, our hometown. The churches were always empty assembly halls with cold light grey brick walls. I have recollections of the bodily and mental sensations I felt being in the church, I wanted to leave, and I hated the feeling of being told what to do. I never prayed or spoke. I'd only shift uncomfortably in the dress I was told to wear.

2011: I was 9, in Germany, my father took me to see his godfather. He lived in a small bottom floor apartment in a town nearby a river and a forest. His walls were decorated with tokens of a rich life lived. He made a small shrine at the foot of his bed. A tiny rectangular space big enough for one person to kneel in. Small angels and a wooden framed Jesus.

2013: I was 11, in Vryburg in the Northwest province, we buried my grandmother. She died of Alzheimer's, a German woman whom I somewhat resemble. She was the wife of a German Missionary; they built a congregation in a rural town called Jericho – outside of Johannesburg. My grandfather was fluent in Tshwana. My grandmother's funeral consisted of multiple sermons – one I remember particularly well. It was warm the air thick and pressing, pregnant with rain and thunder. The red dust of Jericho creates a soft powder as the towns people gather in their best shoes, it is dusk, and the light is gold. The church is small and tightly packed. The sound of singing . Bursting open with power and life. Grief was unknown to me yet.

2018: I was 16, in Holland, my mother sneaked us on a business trip. The old cobblestone city held up with stilts on salt water. As I became familiar with the city, with its hanging brick buildings and tall narrow staircases, I realized there is no God. There was no God because beyond its grey winter sky there was no mountain. My mother city Cape Town's, glorious Table Mountain, was a beacon. A grand show of something bigger, God is nearby. The world won't tear. Table Mountain became a constant, a beacon, a staircase, a friend.

2019: Somerset West, I had sex for the first time, I was almost 17. I liked him so much. I would fantasize about him without the left side of his body – it was burnt or damaged or paralyzed or made abject and horrid. I would still love him. Here I experienced extreme devotion and grief. The grief lasted 2 years. I ended it with his initials inked in the soft flesh of my upper left arm.

FOREVER LOVE

"On desire, installation, performance and things found"

By Leah Mascher

Abstract

This essay will discuss my exhibition "*Forever Love"* (2024) an installation artwork. The building, layout and visual choices are made to resemble a space of worship. Iconographic compositions, colour, light and architecture are highlighted to create an immersive space to move around and engage in. Within the installation are smaller works – such as photographs, video works and small found items. As well as a videographic and photographic documentation of a performance work I enacted publicly, namely "*Necklace"* (2024). This exhibition highlights themes such as devotion, desire, love, consumption, the body, power, language and it's limitation, surface and performance.

Keywords: Love, Desire, Devotion, Consumption, The Body, Power, Shrine, Kitsch, Sacred, Language, Surface, Performance, Installation, Live Interactive performance, Spiritual Materials.

The moments I refer to in the foreword, are moments I often think about when I create art. I find that the emotions evoked by these events, replicate themselves into the present. Emotions can also make us transcend into other impossible realms – a lover can become such a provoker of devotion. I find that even grief and depression are constructive forces. *Forever Love*, drives in the point that *to feel* is a force and a tool to push you into living.

I offer interpretations of themes *Forever Love (2024)* grapples with, I divided the essay into parts such as ***The Tower of Babel*** – where I will offer my own interpretation of the myth wherein the construction of the tower was driven by desire. That this desire is a productive force. **Spiritual Materials** will investigate how cathedrals and churches are built to evoke affect; how kitsch religious consumables are curious holders of both the sacred and the profane; and lastly the value and function of domestic shrines. **Plastic, Doubt, Surface and Appearance** will unpack my artistic practice and process, as well as the use of plastic and it's conceptual value. **Found Text, The Limits of Language and Poetry** within this section I will analyse the use of text within *Forever Love*- how language and textual meaning is fluid, flexible, however I find that it is ultimately limiting when coming to express highly personal emotional states. Only poetics come close enough to express these subjectivities. The final section: **Performance Piece *Necklace*: on the body, power, connection, affect, community and risk,** will read as a reflection on a performance work, where I invited the public to place hickeys (love bites) on my neck. Finally, I propose that only the poetics of art can get us close enough to the highly individual, inexpressible and unknowable experiences of life, desire, devotion and grief.

The Tower of Babel

The Tower of Babel is a biblical story/myth, that accounts for the existence of multiple languages. It is a story of pride and arrogance, the inhabitants of a mythical town, wanted to build a tower "with its top in the sky". God believed their efforts were blasphemous. He cursed them and made each person speak a different language – they were unable to communicate in order to finish the tower and scattered to all corners of the earth. (Figure 1, pg. 5)

I would like to offer the interpretation that building the tower is a symbol of desire. The tower could have been an effort to become closer to God. God can symbolize whatever is desirable and conceivable of an individual or group's conception of ultimate value – being the meaning of life, escaping mortality, escaping pain, experiencing endless pleasure, the impossible.

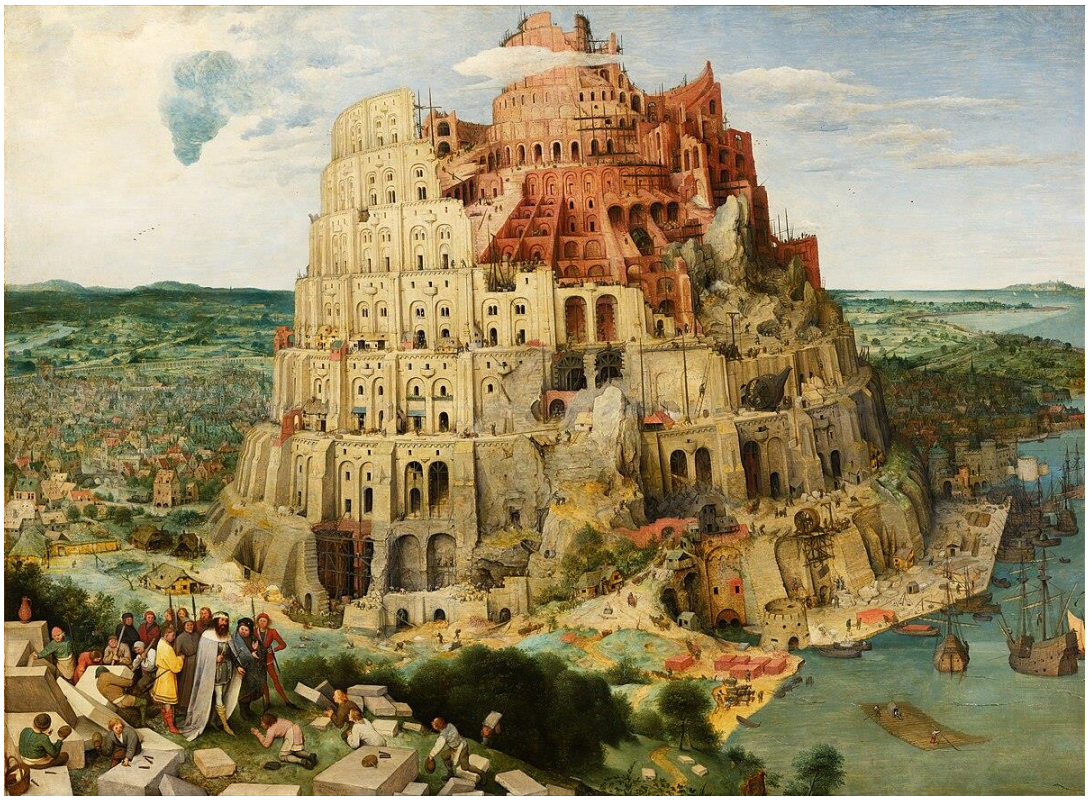


Figure 1: "*The Tower of Babel",* (1563) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. A painted representation from the 15th Century, inspired by the Biblical myth the Tower of Babel.

In *Deleuze's Conception of Desire* (2013), Jihai Gao writes of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's idea of desire. He compares and contrasts Deleuze's desire to that of Plato's - that desire is excessive, inherently about lack and the opposite of rationality. (Gao,2013:3) This view of Plato is consistent with Western Christian teachings of suppression of any desire that is not God-centred. Desire for Deleuze is a productive force, prevalent in not only humans but also animals, objects and social institutions. This productive force is something that is enacted and practiced like labour. (Gao,2013:3-4) In *The Tower of Babel,* the desire to be connected to the divine is inherent in the building of the tower, labour that ends in ultimate actualization of this Desire. Desire is a force that creates and connects. (Gao,2013:4) God destroys this productive force, and disperses everyone, creating disconnect and halting creation. He re-establishes himself as "the ultimate creator".

In "*Forever Love*" (2024), the shrine's main component is a big red tower covered in roses. The tower is thin like a beacon or a landmark. (Figure 2; pg.6) It is not to say that I have made a "Tower of Babel". Rather I took inspiration of my interpretation of the story – the desire to attain the impossible. I made a symbol that beckons you towards itself and ascends into a blue sky. The tower itself is an ambiguous symbol for "God", it is situated in the middle of the installation. It attempts in its's composition to be visually commanding. The function of the shrine is to replicate the language of iconographic devotional visuality. It is my own symbol for desire- desire to ascend into infinite blue sky – the heavens.

The tower is covered in roses. Red roses I found on the "*Five Roses"* tea brand packages. I cut each tiny flower out and pasted it onto the shape of a beacon / tower. Red roses are symbols of sentimentality, romance, romantic gesture, devotion, passion, love. They are clustered, tightly overlapping on the tower. Each rose no bigger than the tip of my finger. I stuck them, digitally enlarged them and printed them onto plastic.

On the left side television screens that display a poem that moves over a television screen. The poem is translated into each of the 11 official languages of South Africa and South African sign language. This references the story of *The Tower of Babel*, where the people who built in desire, were made strangers by the curse of a different spoken tongue. The translations attempt at providing cohesion. (Desire connects, pg. 5) Rolling text on the screen reference church songs to be sung following the words on the screens, to be a part of the sermon, it is a modern occurrence in mega churches. An outsider can come in and form part of the choir. It also replicates is televised news, with rolling text and a signer. My blurring and amalgamation of these formats is significant because I want to show how information and communication can be shared across cultural differences.

Figure 2: Image of the shrine in "*Forever Love*" (2024). Note that this version is outdated – the exhibition will evolve in form, the red tower and sky will remain in terms of motives

Figure 3: Image of the shrine in *"Forever Love" (2024*). Note that this version is outdated – the exhibition will evolve in form, the red tower and sky will remain in terms of motif.

Spiritual Materials

Affect in Cathedrals

Transmission of emotion requires the subject receiving to be affected, to have some sort of sensation. Simon O'Sullivan explores the notion of affect in *The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art beyond Representation*, (2010). Affect to O'Sullivan is extra-textual, it is moments of intensity experienced in the body. (O'Sullivan,2010:126) Synonyms of intensity are concentration, emotion, passion, energy, excitement, fire, among other. The word that stands out to me when I think about a cathedral is greatness (also a synonym for intensity). A cathedral is a large space with enormous architectural features – it draws the viewer's gaze up and into it, it demands a reverence because it is bigger than the onlooker, the organ is far greater than a piano. *Forever love* (2024) takes inspiration from the size of the devotional images and shapes within cathedrals. The space that holds the exhibition is an old massive building with white arches. (Figure 3, pg. 7)

Figures 4-5: Images of the interior of *St. George's Cathedral* in Cape Town, South Africa. The blue markings showcase the gaze lines that direct the gaze.

O' Sullivan establishes that affect in art produces a temporal experience of mutability (Something that is subject to change- the body changes.). (O'Sullivan,2010:126) Cathedrals and spaces of worship have physical effects on the body. The body is naturally made mutable – as the pupils dilate, as the nose smells, as the neck cranks upward. As one joins or decides not to join the choir. Your eyes must adjust to the dimmed lighting, created by stained glass windows. Attention is directed to the preacher in the pulpit, he is the vocal point, one looks up at him. Shrines or altars, and church interiors are made to direct the gaze in a usually upward ascending manner. The red lines (Figure 4-5; pg.8), showcase visually what I mean. One looks up at the highly evocative statue of Jesus on the cross, this forces the body into a kind of reverence.

Forever Love (2024) aims to act in the same way, changing light, offering rooms and stairs to ascend upward. The body must uncover, must gaze up, must walk upstairs, must listen, must read along. The body is put through temporal physical sensations, as one navigates the space.

O'Sullivan established that affect is a bodily sensation. Because each body is different, each bodily sensation is different, therefore affect allows for fluidity and variation. (O'Sullivan,2010:130) Fixed norms are instructions on how one should act and be within a space and in relation to others. Organized religion relies on strict teaching and censored /controlled behaviour to gain access to their conceptions of the divine.

Forever Love (2024), takes inspiration from devotional visuality in church/ cathedral spaces and transforms it into subject matter that is more fluid, by adding poetry and personal confessional instead of fixed Biblical interpretations. Affect is rendered more personal by physically and thematically including my body and musings on desire.

Kitsch Religious Consumables

Another form of "spiritual materials" are kitsch religious consumable goods. Elisha McIntyre writes on Christian and Islamic Kitsch in her essay titled *Rescuing God from Bad Taste: Religious Kitsch in Theory and Practice* (2014). Kitsch religious items are cheap, mass-produced, widely available. In products the sacred and profane are mixed. (McIntyre,2014:88) The kitsch object relies on mutual-deception, "re-mythicizes the de-mythification of its mass-production". (McIntyre,2014:90) Kitsch imitates an imitation of the divine. (McIntyre,2014:92) McIntyre states:

"Religious kitsch sits at the crossroads of these categories quite comfortably and smugly, meeting the desire for God, the desire for emotion and the desire for desire indiscriminately and in one convenient step" (McIntyre,2014:92)

This quote captures the essence of *Forever Love*, (2024) – *desire for God*, God being synonymous with a higher power, an ultimate answer or ultimate meaning. *Desire for emotion* – emotion being synonymous with a deep need to express and feel and connect with others through transmission. *Desire for desire* – desire is a force that is highly subjective, something I deeply feel and try to embed within my experiments with it – I try to answer it, but it is slippery and elusive.

Religious Kitsch is more concerned with affectivity than accuracy – it inspires religious devotion. "The object becomes activated when bought." (McIntyre,2014:102) Just like desire, it is a feeling, a bodily sensation. Feelings are rarely accurate, precise or without error. Desire arises from who you are, desire is acted on and becomes mutable – through a process of feeling, i.e. affect.

Figure 7: Lyla Catholic Plastic Virgin Mary Statue Figure Handmade Figurine 35x13cm A Decorative Showpiece - 10 cm (Plastic, Multicolour) Advertised on Flipkart an online retail platform. Small

Religious kitsch is meant for the humble domestic space – and serves the purpose of a reminder of faith commitment, protection, affirmation of God's gifts and teachings, God's divinity and character. (McIntyre,2014:93) (View Figure 7, pg. 9 and Figure 8 below.)

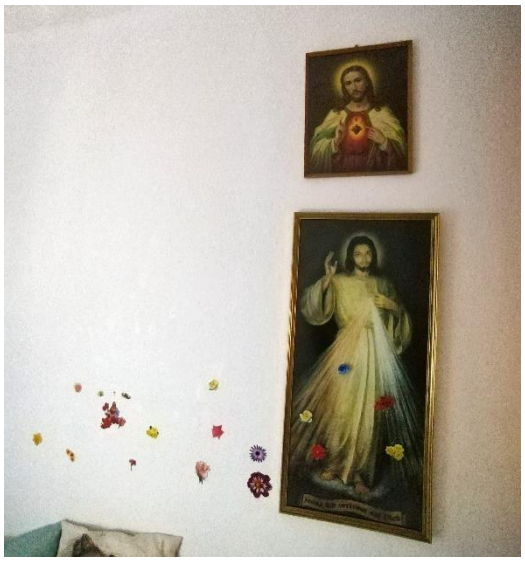
Figure 8: A Protection Poster available online for purchase, description: "Large poster with a prayer for the protection of the house addressed to the Virgin of Guadalupe and Jesus

Domestic Shrine

Forever Love (2024) includes a catalogue that takes the form of a large sticker packet (See Figure 9, below). It references the cheap and mass-produced consumable goods. Stickers are two-dimensional cellophane coated symbols and figurines (See Figure 10 below). It is made to be taken off the sheet and dispersed - stuck on walls or belongings or in books, anywhere. It encourages the viewer to interact with it – to touch and place it, to build with it. The stickers encourage the viewers that came to see *Forever Love* (2024) to hold onto the feelings they felt during their visit and take it into their own domestic spaces. And fashion their own domestic shrines with *Forever Love* devotional stickers.

Figure 9 - 10: Left: My own "Forever Love" sticker packet. Right: A cheap plastic sheet of Catholic devotional stickers.

Domestic shrines are discussed in the essay *Stories of Diaspora and Domestic Shrines*, by Diana Simpson Hernandez. Shrines offer cohesion spaces that can create new semiotic landscapes, as these shrine structures are made up of symbols with differentiating meanings and contexts. (Hernandez,2009:2) The domestic spaces and therefore domestic shrines become emotional constructions. (Hernandez,2009:5) The domestic shrine aids in grounding, as it creates cohesive narrative of identity. Shrines can have images that have deep personal emotional attachment to them. One's identity is reaffirmed in relation to that object. (Hernandez,2009:6) Objects sitting within the altar can have new/foreign/ traditional/old meanings and contexts, creating an aesthetic hybrid, transforming the gazer. (Hernandez,2009:7) The domestic space is an extension of the person that inhabits it – personality, interests, devotions.



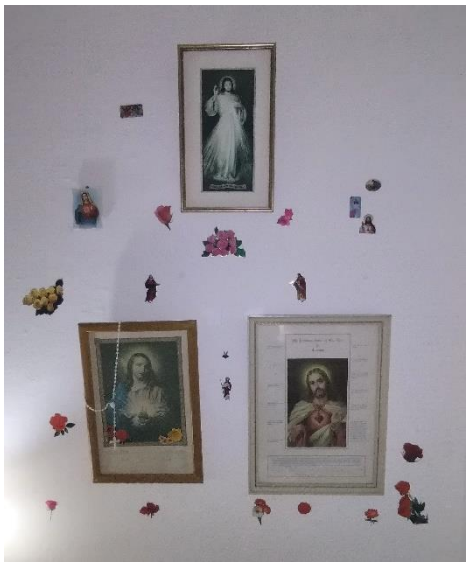


Figure 11-12: Images of a domestic shrine, made with cheap prints of Jesus and Biblical scripture and cheap stickers representing Jesus as well as flower stickers. It is my personal shrine, I sleep beneath it, for me it symbolizes beauty greatness serenity and peace.

Above are pictures of my own personal shrine or landscape, I have taken stickers representing flowers and Jesus and other religious figures and arranged it above my bed. They are symbols of beauty, serenity, life and protection. The cheap Jesus prints are symbols of greatness and reminders of a greater power that controls what I can't. It is a source of aid and comfort for me.

Plastic, Doubt, Surface and Appearance

In this section I want to focus on the materiality of *Forever Love* (2024), and along with it I'll speak about its's conceptual merit. I have chosen Hito Steyerl's essay *In Defence of The Poor Image*, because it is a contemplation not of content but of form – it is not about the content of the image, but how the image appears (its file size, quality, resolution) It is about the surface and the image as a body or a vessel. It is about its physical materiality and the conditions surrounding it.

In Defence of The Poor Image (2009) is an essay by Hito Steyerl, that defines and explores the notion of a "poor image". The poor image is distinguishable, by its bad quality, low resolution, abstraction of

its previous self, its defiance of copyright, it's accessibility and transmission in the digital realm. (Steyerl,2009:1) Commercialized imagery are not "poor images", but are deemed valuable and exclusive due to their high resolution and therefore impressive focus. "The poor image" is the opposite of commercialized imagery – it is a marginal, non-conformist entity. Therefore, undervalued and unimpactful. (Steyerl,2009:3) Within a commodified visual culture – images are privatized, "the poor image" alternatively becomes the pirated, the appropriated and the displaced. (Steyerl,2009:5) *Forever Love* (2024), shows massive blown-up images transferred onto plastic (Figure 1-2 are examples of what the plastic looks like, pg. 7) these images go through a process called a "Tape Transfer".[1]

This creative process extracts the surface of the image onto a durable, malleable, inexpensive, sterile surface that is plastic. There is a lot of hand to material contact – this sometimes results in the image becoming damaged – some of the surface is scraped away or dissolved in water. Making the already poor image, weaker. There are three enormous poor images – the sky forms part of the shrine. The curtain becomes an architectural component in the venue- it wraps around a small, darkened room, the viewer moves through it. The gold becomes a gigantic tarp that covers the windows. (See Figure 13-15 below)

Figure 13-15: Images used in the exhibition "Forever Love" (2024) found online

Steyerl's conception of "The poor image", also explores not only its qualities but also what it represents of its handlers, it's viewers and the space in which it is found, and the way it moves. "The poor image" survives in a context of dematerialization

"…*it thrives on compressed attention spans, chooses impression over immersion and intensity over contemplation*". (Steyerl,2009:7)

Forever Love (2024) relates with the latter quote. "*Impression over immersion*" the flat shrine – brings the viewer to the edge of what it represents an open sky – the shiny sterile plastic creates an impenetrable visual barrier – halting immersion. The size is enormous and the colour saturated – this heightens its intensity and it's visual attraction. The gold in front of the window changes the colour of the light that falls into the room. It warrants affectivity – as previously mentioned "affectivity is intensity in the body". (explored previously on page 8)

[1]) "Tape transfer "process - I find these images online then I cut them up into A3 pieces, digitally. I then print them onto regular cartridge paper and number them. I cover each individual A3 with sticky cellophane plastic. Then I soak them in lukewarm water. The water makes the paper soft, so it is easy to rub the paper fibres off the cellophane. Once the fibres are off, the image is left on the cellophane (tape). Hence the name "tape transfer" These A3 plastic sheets are then reassembled to resemble the original image.

Forever Love (2024) attempts to hold two contradicting themes. Desire for a deep intensity experienced within. A surface, an appearance that is just that, plastic and limited. Here is where doubt comes into play. It is a way in which to make art – teasing disbelief and impossibility. Doubt in religion – the reason I stopped praying is because I felt it wasn't working. Organized religion thrives on trust and devotion. Doubt breaks the magic.

The process however is a kind of devotion. The tape transfer process demands a lot of physical labour and time. It is literally scrubbing until my fingertips are raw and smooth. Not trusting any other tool to be delicate enough to not damage the thin ink layer of the image. I have made tape transfers of over 450 pages. Labour (desire- as established previously, pg.5) reignites the drive to live and create and express.

Figure 16: Close-up of texture and surface of the plastic tower within the shrine, "Forever Love", (2024).

Found Text, The Limits of Language and Poetry

Forever Love (2024) includes multiple text works. The title "Forever Love" is a piece of text I found on underwear in a Chinese shop that gets their stock from a fast fashion production company. This is a classic place to put an idea like "Love" or something romantic, as it is an intimate piece of clothing - its functionality extends to intimate sexual contexts. The shirt in "Body Script" is text-heavy, it says "You're so attracting", "Show me how much you love me", "Just need you", "Feel my desire". (View it below, Figure 18, pg. 15) This is not something new – it is a generic dialogue on desire, it is not original. There is no author – not even a brand responsible.

Lyn McCredden writes in their essay *Poetry and the Limits of Language (2015)* that human agents usually want more from language than what it can offer. Poetry, through metaphors and visual language, creates extra-textual meaning "where truths beyond language and symbol are operating" (McCredden,2015:101) McCredden references Jacques Derrida, French philosopher, who wrote that language is to be played with, teasing its boundaries, viewing language as always "becoming". This is "hopeful" he wrote "as it is the alternative to fixity that is often what the fascist/fundamentalist seek". (McCredden,2015:105)

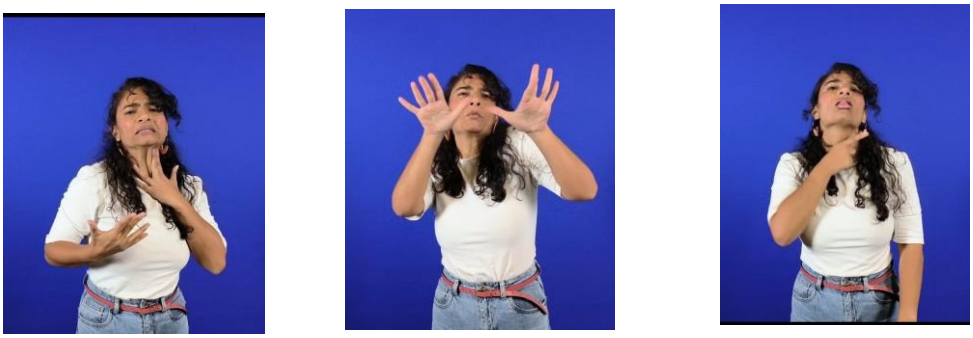


Figure 17: Video Stills from the poem performed by a signer in South African sign language

"Time Drags an Empty Cardboard Box on Gravel Road. No Prize. No Gold. No Sound of Water. I Pine Everywhere, It Fills Me Up and Splashes onto No-One Near. To Be Hollowed Is to Be Pierced. Pennies Fall. Rockets Ascend All Around. Your Penis Is in My Hair.

The only thing that makes me feel alive is the ability to pine for someone and to share an intimate connection with others. Love and sex are both creative and life-giving forces, however, hold destruction and dislocation within its manifestation. Pining is a lonely endeavour. And having a penis within my hair is ambiguous. For me it means remembrance of a lover can cling to your body.

This sentence is translated into the eleven national languages of South Africa as well as South African sign language. The signer "performs" the emotions within the text, for the viewer (the deaf person) to understand its context and its gravity. As one would verbally perform a poem with vocal techniques. The emotions and gestures add another layer within translation, to the hearing viewer. The signer serves to create inter-textual meaning; it is another layer of interpretation. (View Figure 17, above) I used Google Translate to translate the poem into the eleven languages. It translates coldly and mechanically – emotional affectivity might become lost in translation.

Figure 18: “Body Script”, image of myself, photographed by Leah Hawker. Displayed as part of “Forever Love”, (2024).

Performance piece about the body, power, connection, affect and community

NECKLACE is a live interactive performance piece and installation, held at Demo Projects, on the 6th of June 2024, at 79 Roeland Street, in Cape Town. The video-documentation, and a selection of photographs will be shown in *Forever Love* (2024). *Necklace* takes inspiration from Serbian conceptual and performance artist, Marina Abramovic's "*Rhythm 0*" (1974) – in which she presented the public with 72 objects and her body, they were free to do anything to her, using these objects of which one was a loaded gun Here is the text I made public after the performance, accompanied by images:

“I needed a necklace for a night out - and invited the public to place "hickeys" on my neck. Hickeys or "love bites" - are seen as a display of sexuality and promiscuity. Yet also a shameful mark to be hidden after a passionate act. It is a symbol of "cheap" lust, and usually on the neck of a woman.

Necklace is an experiment in permission and boundaries.

No text had preceded or been made available at the show. The only text was handwritten "instructions" on the wall.

"1. Sanitize an area on my neck

2. Place your lips

3. Give me a hickey "

The audience became part of the meaning-making process - by participating or not. Within thinking about boundaries, permission, conversations around desire, consent, connection, loneliness and gender followed.

I chose to avoid eye contact and verbal engagement with the audience. It was uncomfortable and meant to be so. The space was bare, most people avoided moving too close to where I was seated, and some avoided looking entirely - opted for peering in from outside.

Some hickeys felt forceful and rushed. It was a challenge, and they wanted to step up and display their courage. Others were awkward and doubted their performance. One became so flustered they littered the set with the alcohol swab and its wrapper, and one spilled beer. There were a few quiet ones, they felt soft, open and like a genuine exchange.

I've had a few conversations afterward. Some were quite vulgar and revealing. others were tearful and upset - they felt triggered by the performance and were reminded of times they felt taken advantage of. A woman felt that if their older male partner were to participate, she would view him as taking advantage of a younger woman. My mother said the performance exuded loneliness.

My ultimate takeaway was - I was reminded of my/ the art community, those who came to Demo, were people who loved and lived art. I felt supported and safe. I think if this performance was open to the broader public, things would have gone differently – and I could've been violated. "

Figure 19 -20: Images from the performance "Necklace", (2024)

In the book *No Innocent Bystanders: Performance Art and Audience* (2012), Frazer Ward writes an essay on the performance art of Marina Abramovic. Abramovic's *Rhythm series* is brought under discussion and analysed in terms of what it says about agency and subjectivity. In *Rhythm 0*, Abramovic gives her agency to the public, by being passive and inviting them to do anything to her body, using the 72 objects provided. These objects ranged from a rose to scissors to a loaded gun. Her passivity seemed to frustrate the audience, as it made her interchangeable between a subject and an object. She says: "The body is a process" (Ward,2012:122) *Necklace* makes the body a process. For a large part of the performance, I was still, awaiting a hickey from a willing viewer. You can see in the video how I am constantly shifting and moving in the chair- doing and undoing my hair or my jacket. After a hickey I would sometimes feel flustered, my cheeks would turn red. The show changes 1 hour and 45 minutes in, I become a subject again, I do my hair, my make-up, I drink beer and go into the bathroom to urinate. There is a shift within the audience- I am no longer passive, they are still and uncomfortable, I don't look anyone in the eye. When someone speaks too loudly – I walk into the group, ignoring them. The audience becomes the passive objects.

Whatever was done to Abramovic was done in public – therefore in the public eye. Participants were subject to judgement." It became an ethical testing zone". (Ward,2012:125) The room I performed *Necklace* in was well lit, I built a pedestal out of cinder blocks to sit on. It is a stage or a platform for a participant to walk onto – making them stand out above others. It created a sacred and uplifted space for me, a realm to enter.

Necklace shares certain similarities with *Rhythm 0*, I was in a position of passivity, the instructions were meant to be read as boundaries, but did not state itself as blatantly that, but there was only one "stated" requirement: Give me a hickey but nothing else. My body was the work. And it relied on participation. Affect becomes a physical manifestation- my neck forms physical bruises as a response to the audience's intervention. A hickey (love bite) is a tender and pleasurable thing turned quite painful and disfigured in *Necklace*, this resulted in the performance pointing conceptually to more than just "desire for desire/love/sex/promiscuity", and rather boundaries and respect and your own intention. Some hickeys were forceful and sore – a show of the participant.

I only realized after that what I had allowed was dangerous. The neck is one of the most fragile and vein-populated areas in the body. There is minimal protection from the skeleton, and vital veins that supply blood to and from the brain are close to the soft skin. Some people have had a stroke, or a brain clot due to being given a hickey. Actual risk is thrown into the scenario. Abramovic's performances also involves actual risk- losing consciousness in some of her works or supplying an audience member with a loaded gun.

I was asked "are you Jesus in this scenario?" – yes, I am sacrificing myself, people are taking me into their mouths, the body (bread) and blood (wine). This time the blood is being sucked into the bread. It is communion.

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In Conclusion, "*Forever Love" (2024)* immerses the viewer in my created world. It holds in it the themes: **The Tower of Babel** – I have offered my own interpretation of the myth that it was built out of desire, the labour that went into it is testament to this desire. In the exhibition I have constructed a tower that preaches a poem about desire, referencing The Tower of Babel "with its top in the heavens". Within **Spiritual Materials** I argue that cathedrals and churches are built to evoke affect – an intensity felt in the body. I explain how kitsch religious consumables are curious holders of both the sacred and the profane. That they are made to evoke emotion and inspire devotion. Just like *Forever Love,* the installation does. *Forever Love* has a catalogue in the shape of a sticker packet – this encourages the viewer to take it and build their own devotional "Domestic Shrine" with it. A domestic shrine is a culmination of objects that serve to locate its maker within time and place, affirming the identity of the maker within transient time and place. **Plastic, Doubt, Surface and Appearance** unpacked my creative process, with the tape transfer – transferring images onto plastic, how a flat plastic surface is sterile and contradicts its affective messaging. **Found Text, The Limits of Language and Poetry** within this section I will analyse the use of text within *Forever Love* - how language and textual meaning is fluid, flexible, however I found that only poetry can come close to express highly personal emotional states. The final section: **Performance piece *Necklace*- on the body, power, connection, affect, community and risk** is a reflection on a publicly enacted performance piece, where I invited viewers to place hickeys on my neck, it resulted in a multi-faceted experiment with power dynamics, permission, risk and desire.

Forever Love as a title implies infinite, indestructible, prevailing, unconditional love. Love, the word's definition, is vague as a universal term, it is present in almost every human who claims to feel it. We rely on our feelings, its affect, and our desire to push forward. To live.

Figure 21: Image from performance, “Necklace”, (2024).

WORD COUNT: 4000

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