

EN

Laure Prouvost
GDM – Grand Dad's
Visitor Center



Pirelli HangarBicocca

Public Program

The exhibition is accompanied by a series of conferences, video screenings, concerts and guided tours that allow visitors to learn more about various aspects of the artist's work. Discover more on our website.

Cultural Mediation

To know more about the exhibition ask to our cultural mediators in the space.

Pirelli HangarBicocca

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Opening Hours

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FREE ENTRY

Cover: *Wantee*, 2013; video, color, sound, 14 mins 24 secs (video still)

Laure Prouvost

GDM – Grand Dad's Visitor Center

19 October 2016 – 9 April 2017

curated by Roberta Tenconi

Pirelli HangarBicocca

Laure Prouvost

Laure Prouvost's videos and installations upend the conventional forms of narration, blurring the confines between reality and fiction. Creating artworks in between art and cinema, the artist produces bizarre and mysterious situations in which what is real is increasingly uncertain. Her videos are a visual and sonorous cacophony of images at once attractive and disturbing, playful and irreverent.

Realized through drastic cuts and changes-of-scene, shot without the use of professional actors, and edited using the artist's voice as narration, Prouvost's works exasperate the techniques of amateur video making—immediate and captivating—detaching from a conventional narrative structure. These are short stories that come to life thanks to the interplay of visual and sonorous associations, and echo the incommunicability and incomprehension that derive from linguistic and media translation processes. The written text, which appears onscreen as the artist's spoken narrative—revealing a mellow French inflection—, gives shape to a direct, intuitive language that tries to get viewers actively involved. Viewers are encouraged to interact and sensorially experience the artworks reacting to their cues, and made accomplices in a sense of irony that combines fiction, reality and the contradictions inherent to a language at once seductive and estranging.

Monolog, 2009; video, color, sound, 9 mins (video still)



The artist's imaginative exploration draws on ad slogans, musical hits, TV series and web platforms like YouTube, reflecting global contemporary culture. For a number of years Laure Prouvost was assistant to conceptual artist John Latham, and in her practice she weds ordinary aspects of daily life with the experimentation of cinematic languages and the visual arts. Her work approaches both the practice of 1970s structuralist cinema, which called into question projection techniques and the role viewers play, and French *Nouvelle Vague*, the first cinematic movement to bear witness in real time to the immediacy of becoming, resulting in films that show the genuineness of an intimate diary produced by a new, uninhibited and unsettled generation.

Swallow, 2013; video, color, sound, 12 mins 7 secs (video still)



The exhibition

Hosting a selection of works comprising installations, video, sculptures, paintings and small objects, the exhibition assembles them together to create the *Visitor Center*, a museum dedicated to the artist's grandfather, a central figure in Laure Prouvost's artistic practice. As a total work of art, its structure is the result of an on-going process in which architecture and content integrate with one another, providing an ironic take on the sensational museum buildings. Even the title of the exhibition "GDM – Grand Dad's Visitor Center" recalls a sort of hybrid between institutional realities: the museum on one hand, and the more local, or artisanal version of the visitor center on the other (literally an information center for visitors).

Playing with female symbols and stereotypes, the exhibition extends along different visual and sound rhythms in which unsettling environments alternate with seductive atmospheres. Arrangement of the spaces is inspired by the artwork *Maquette for Grand Dad's Visitor Center* (2014), the first model Prouvost created of an ideal museum.

Always assigning visitors a central position, the construction of *Visitor Center* also inspires a broader reflection on the very meaning of museum as a place charged with the conservation of artworks and their future transmission.



Maquette For Grand Dad's Visitor Center, 2014; mixed media, 145 x 290 x 110 cm.
Installation view, Musée départemental d'art contemporain de Rochechouart, 2015
Photo: Musée départemental d'art contemporain de Rochechouart

1 *If It Was*, 2015

Projected in the entryway corridor of the *Visitor Center*, *If It Was* reflects on the identity of a museum, on its activities, and on that which it might become. In the video, the artist composes quasi-unreal narrations, speculating on what she might do with a museum. Images of texts written in white ink on a black background are paired with Prouvost's voice as she considers what might happen if the corners of the building were all a little softer, or if the roof were taken off so that people could plant palm trees inside. With the line "transported to the tunnel of history," a different chapter in this narration opens up, one set outside the museum spaces and in nature. Shots of fields, flowers and skies crisscrossed by flocks of birds take over, enveloping the inner and uncontainable power of nature in all its essential forms.

The video was realized for the Haus der Kunst in Munich, along with the carpet it is exhibited with, on which images inspired by the artist's oneiric imagination are portrayed, alongside archive photographs of exhibitions the German institution hosted in the past. The museum, its content and its history are thereby placed in direct relationship with the artist's subconscious, creating an imaginary overlapping of visions and suggestions.

2 *Before, Before*, 2011

As its title suggests, *Before Before* is the prologue of a story yet to come. The installation marks the first appearance of Betty and Gregor, protagonists of later *The Wanderer* (2013)—one of Prouvost's most ambitious projects. *The Wanderer* draws its

inspiration from a text of almost identical name, *The Wanderer* by Franz Kafka (2009), by the artist Rory Macbeth, who translated Franz Kafka's (1883–1924) *The Metamorphosis* (1915) into English without knowing German, and without using a dictionary.

Before Before is a maze stretching out between wood backdrops and disconcerting green lights. Set up as backstage, inside viewers find objects of all kinds, including beer cans, rolled cables, boards displaying what appear to be meaningless directions, and monitors broadcasting short videos. In the background we can hear the voice and desperate weeping of a drunken Betty. This fragmentary collection of objects, images and sounds immerses the viewer in an unlikely scenario, preluding a physical and psychological journey that is about to take place. In the artist's words, «The anxiety about what is going to happen; the characters not knowing what they will have to do; the objects ready to be activated; the anxiety about something that is yet to happen.»

3 *The Wanderer (God First Hairdresser/Gossip Sequence)*, 2013

4 *Upside Down (Shut Your Lips)*, 2012

Barber chairs, mirrors, wigs and posters portraying African hairdos give shape to an unusual beauty salon, a place where it's possible to take a seat and watch the video *God First Hairdresser/Gossip Sequence*, as well as the hypothetical set in which the video itself was shot. This installation is one of the six chapters of the feature-length film *The Wanderer*—one of Prouvost's most ambitious projects, including performances, videos, a series of installations and a feature-length film—each focused on a different theme connected with communication.



Just as Macbeth's translation of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* had very little real correspondence with the original text, in Laure Prouvost's version the story takes on even more improbable connotations. The protagonist is a white man whose mother is of Ghanaian origin and owns the London beauty salon "God First." The opening sequence of the video shows mother and son arguing over a client's pigtails, and is emblematic of the entire video, playfully based on the incomprehension deriving from mistaken translations and cultural misunderstandings in which the search for identity plays central role. Dialogue between the two characters is presented out of sync with the images, further emphasizing the difficulty they have in understanding one another.

In *God First Hairdresser/Gossip Sequence*, the artist creates her own specific interpretation of film language, using different means to reveal the fictional narrative to the viewer, for example adding the kind of a laugh track usually employed in sitcoms and other television programs to accompany gags and comical moments. Prouvost thus accentuates the hilariousness of the situation, creating a parallel between the story as a form of oral or written exposition of a series of events, and gossip, which plays out in beauty salons and talk shows, creating a reflection on different forms of communication and entertainment.

Upside Down Shut Your Lips is installed nearby, at the exit of the corridor. Composed of an office hung upside-down from the ceiling, the artwork is inspired by the set of a scene in *The Wanderer*, entitled *The Wanderer (Bunker)* (2012)—the fifth

chapter of the project—which takes place in an underground bunker where characters and the surrounding environment are literally turned upside-down. Completely eliminating the force of gravity, Prouvost projects the viewer into a world that’s estranging and devoid of rules.

5 **How to Make Money Religiously, 2014**

In this artwork the artist’s narrating voice and the titles running across the screen promise a bright, rosy future built of luxury and money: “If you do everything we tell you to do this film will make you richer.” The viewer is continuously assailed with promises and luxurious, gratifying images of exotic beaches and posh villas.

Adopting the seductive, captivating language of marketing and digital advertising, the work plays on a number of different levels that quickly follow one after the other: from situations and tensions characteristic of action films to documentary and amateur films, at once confounding and disorienting the viewer.

Asking “Do you recognize this building, was it there before?,” the narrator reminds us that the constant flow of images that we’re subjected to every day calls into question our surrounding reality, thereby reflecting on the distinction between some kind of hidden power and possession. Clips of strange masked people singing gospel, animal carcasses and festivities follow, as viewers become the first protagonists turning richer and richer in the action of looking. Finally we reach one of the key moments in the video, when a downpour of coins alternates with a cascade of images—almost suggesting that today there’s no distinction

between material wealth and the imaginative richness of memories. **How to Make Money Religiously** is also a cunning memory game: two versions of the same video are broadcast in succession, the second slightly different, producing a typical sensation of *déjà vu*.

6 **Going Higher, 2014**

The video—installed at the top of a spiral staircase—pushes the boundaries of viewers’ perception exemplifying a recurring characteristic in Prouvost’s practice: the use of a hybrid structure that weds technological aspects with human figures. **Going Higher** is also emblematic of the artist’s attention for an environment familiar to her, where the natural elements and the people close to her become raw materials for her work. Through a series of images that display blasts and explosions directed upwards, the artwork embodies Prouvost’s investigation into the unknown and the wilful loss of one’s self.

7 **We Know We Are Just Pixels, 2014**

We Know We Are Just Pixels is an ironic reflection on the power of images. Two plasma screens placed one alongside the other appear to have a life of their own and talk to one another, then address and provoke the viewer directly.

Images and phrases alternate quickly between one another as the soundtrack, characterized by a metallic, repetitive sound, stresses the “beats” of voiceless pixels, moving from interroga-

five tones like “Have we met before?” to other, more obliging tones like “I love the sound of your voice,” in an attempt to install a relationship with the viewing public. The fast pace of the video emphasizes the frenetic succession of images, testing our perceptive capabilities.

As in other works, the artist gives human characteristics to inanimate objects: they discuss their own existence, their powers—for example the ability to freeze time—but also their own vulnerability, like the fact that they exist only when a viewer watches them. Frustrated by the idea of being nothing more than pixels, they aspire to be something greater; they want to explore reality and exist above and beyond the black box hosting them. Once again Laure Prouvost invites us to reflect on the relationships and interactions between images (the artwork) and viewers (the audience).

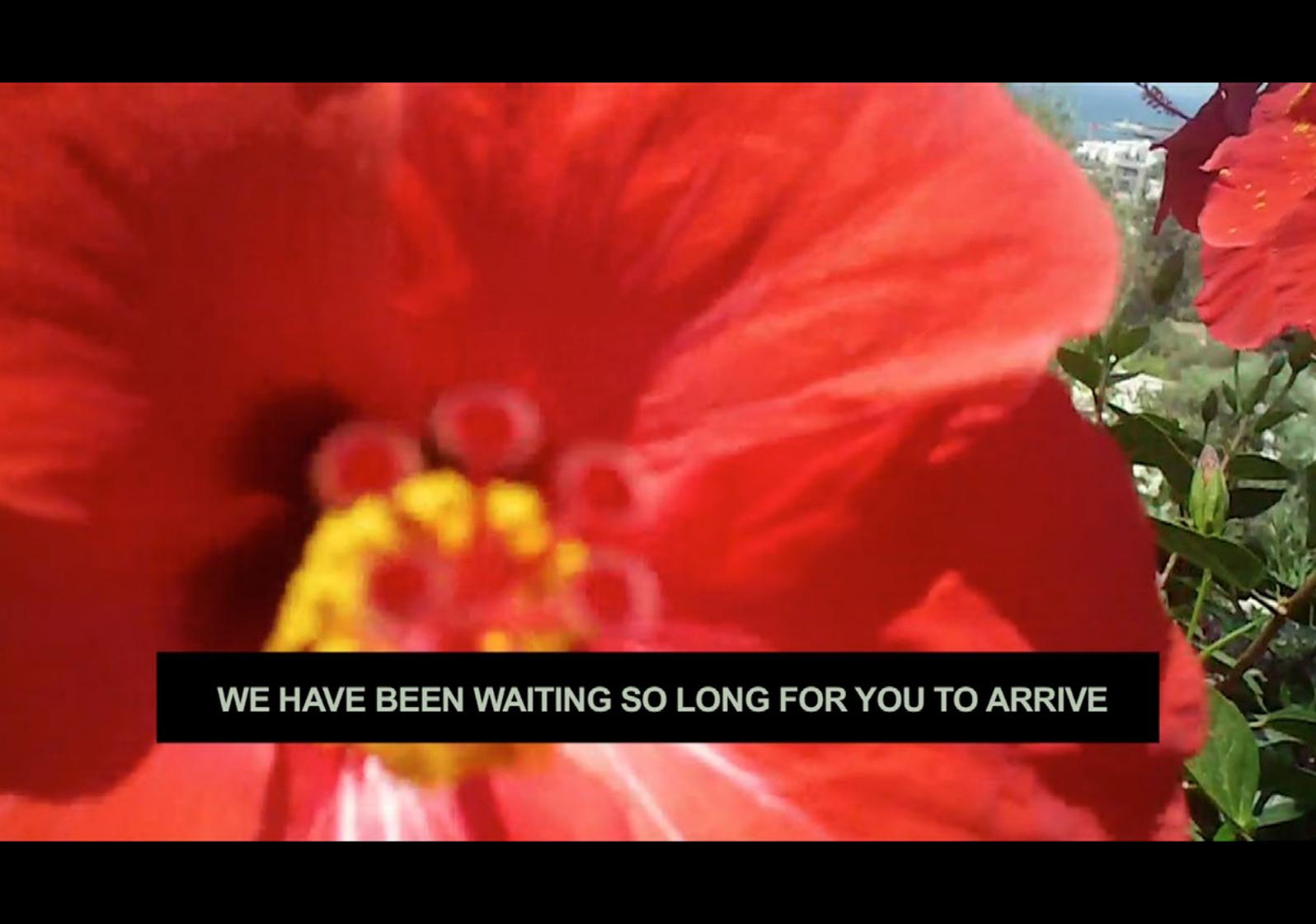
8 **Karaoke, 2014**

Notes from the famous Eurythmics song “Sweet Dreams,” one of the biggest hits of the 1980s, take center stage in the video **Karaoke**. As in a music video, the editing follows the song’s rhythmic soundtrack, inserting fragments and clips of scenes lifted from other videos by Laure Prouvost, including *Grandma’s Dream*, and building a collage of bizarre, eccentric representations and scenarios. Shots of animals and food are blended in with scenes of underwater seascapes and an image of the artist’s hand shown through the use of chroma key technique (a video effect that superimposes two different clips in a single image). In *Karaoke* short phrases narrating affairs connected with the



Karaoke, 2014; video, color, sound, 3 mins 34 secs (video still)

artist’s grandmother appear superimposed on one another like the notes of a web video, substituting Prouvost’s voice. Visitors are invited to take an active part in the artwork, using it as they might with a karaoke machine. As the artist recalls, «This video is the favorite song of my grandma, and I made this karaoke piece for her to sing aloud at the hospital (following an accident in the tunnel).»



WE HAVE BEEN WAITING SO LONG FOR YOU TO ARRIVE

9 *Grandma's Dream*, 2013

Grandma's Dream addresses themes connected with the role of the artist and viewers' expectations as they experience an artwork. Presented within a small, pink room, the video recounts the desires and pains experienced by Prouvost's grandmother, who was left alone when her companion artist did not come back one night as he was digging his last conceptual work.

Images of skies and fluctuating clouds are superimposed with renderings and digital animations of curiously manipulated objects, for example an airplane flying out of a teapot or an iPad transformed into a pan, on which an egg is frying. The video makes broad use of fades as an editing tool, suggesting a suspended, supernatural atmosphere through wide panoramas and the superimposition of disparate images. The fusion of images and sounds alternates moments of pure calm with dream-like sequences, where things appear and go. The artist's voiceover interprets the video in a sort of irreverent parody of a lost person, assuming the female point of view whilst focusing on the male figure.

10 *Wantee*, 2013

The installation *Wantee* narrates the disappearance of Laure Prouvost's grandfather, who, while digging a long tunnel between his studio and Africa, disappears one day and never

returns, leaving his wife the sole custodian of his works. From the story, we also learn that he is a conceptual artist and a dear friend of Kurt Schwitters' (1887–1948), a prominent figure in the twentieth-century European art scene. The artwork was realized for a major retrospective of Schwitters' work, held at the Tate Britain in London in 2013, and the title alludes to the artist as well: *Wantee* is a play on words that sounds like the abbreviation of "Would you like some tea?"—the question the video begins with—and refers to Schwitters' fiancé's nickname.

Set inside Prouvost's grandparents' living room, the video is an extravagant succession of anecdotes and stories of the artist's troubled adventures and that which can happen to a work of art. Her grandfather's sculptures and paintings have now been transformed into everyday objects: devoid of their status as works of art and essentially forgotten. The grandmother has brought them back to daily life and turned them into everyday objects like tea-cups and platters. Through *Wantee*, Prouvost reflects on commonplace concepts and clichés connected with the value system of contemporary art, as well as the museum as a place charged with the conservation of artworks and their fruition. As Prouvost says, «The work is somehow surreal and tends to play with plausibility, but also with the idea of missing information, being out of place and possibly getting it wrong. New meanings could appear just by not managing to make sense out of things. That's when you bring surreal elements to the point of being plausible again.»

For the exhibition at Pirelli HangarBicocca, the video is displayed together with a series of objects, ceramics and drawings in a never-before-seen presentation of the artwork with which Laure Prouvost won the Turner Prize, British art's most prestigious award, in 2013.



11 **The Artist, 2010**

With **The Artist**, Prouvost introduces the figure of the grandfather into her work, playing around with conventional forms of narration. The video moves along contrasting visual and sound rhythms, where the sound perceived does not correspond to the image on screen, or comes slightly late, even as it conserves a fascinating, seductive quality that enriches the narration.

Prouvost intersperses images of an artist's studio with a series of writings, turning directly to the viewer and inviting her/him to sit down ("Take a seat"), have a cup of tea ("That tea on the table is for you. I just made it"), or telling her/him which way to look ("Look this way"). A short-circuit is created between the space-time coordinates of the place in which the artwork is being projected and the images on the screen. The video focuses on the studio and on the production of the artist, on how to improve his work and to make it appear more popular; telling a little gossip: a story of how the artist worked, so fond of his wife to continuously draw her. But also on what is hidden behind every corner, the hidden histories of one room. By the point of view of a woman, if it would had been her work she would have made it differently.



Grandad's Desk, 2013; mixed media, 80 x 40 x 70 cm (detail)

12 **Grand dad where are you, 2014**

Prouvost is once again creating a perceptive subversion, achieved in this video by exchanging the role of images and that of the viewer's, who becomes protagonist of the artwork. **Grand dad where are you** features a crowded theatre audience looking at the video camera as the cameraman, whose presence is usually concealed and imperceptible, is set up on stage. The audience sings in unison, "Grandad, where are you?"; "We will buy all your sculptures"; "Come back, please"; then erupts in loud applause. The lens captures the spectators' reactions and their involvement in a declaredly ironic interplay of farce and reality.

13 ***I Need to Take Care of My Conceptual Grandad, 2010***

The video is made up of a single sequence showing Laure Prouvost's hands as they rub a book belonging to the artist John Latham (1921–2006) with cream. Prouvost worked for several years as a studio assistant for Latham, one of the leading conceptual artists of Great Britain, who included in his artworks destructive and parodying actions that targeted systems of knowledge, like the famous ceremony organized in 1966, during which he asked guests to chew up and spit out pages of the book *Art and Culture* (1961), by American critic Clement Greenberg.

14 ***Monolog, 2009***

The headless bust of a woman appears onscreen in ***Monolog***. A door closes and a voice exclaims, "I'm back, it wasn't very important," implying a pre-existing relationship with viewers. The woman thanks us for coming and gesticulates, directing the viewer's attention to all that's missing or that which should be improved in the projection "I wish the screen was a little bit bigger... It would be nice if you could see my head, my legs..." going on to wonder how she might make the experience better for viewers (a bigger screen, a more comfortable seat, beautiful music). Autobiographical notes appear in the video, suggesting that the protagonist is, in fact, the very author of the artwork, Laure Prouvost.

The video is a parody of both the artist as a director and of the audience's role, and focuses our attention on the space and inherent limits of a broadcast. *Monolog* also creates a temporal

blurring between the image and the viewer's experience: revealing how temporal reality—editing and broadcasting through video—does not correspond to that of the viewer, thereby destabilizing the concept of time. Citations from the field of quantum physics run across the screen, further exploring the theme.

15 ***Into All That Is Here, 2015***

In this video, Prouvost investigates themes connected with the presumed disappearance of her grandfather that she already addressed in *The Artist* (2010) and *Wantee* (2013). In particular, ***Into All That Is Here*** is a voyage into this character's subconscious and more remote fantasies, digging deeper further in the unconscious through images of warm, intimate environments, sensual atmospheres and scenes of combustion and ash. Text and voice appear to mutually question one another in an interplay of compensations. Unlike in the other artworks on display, here the written word is treated as a subtitle so that the viewer uses his/her voice and becomes the protagonist. The climax of the video is an explosion of forms and colors, as if an insect were desperately collecting as much pollen before all is consumed and the images are consumed.



16 **Magic Electronics, 2014**

The exhibition ends inside a dark corridor, where visitors will find themselves in **Magic Electronics**, where a moving light and sounds animate the space. Snapping fingers accompany the artist's narration as Prouvost tells visitors to follow a stroboscopic light, then abandons them in darkness. Here technology manipulates the audience till it becomes uncontrollable and drops the visitor in an empty room, while the voice of the artist says: «It's just pure magic electronics, you know. We could be much more than just voices and lights and pure electronics. We could be together and be stronger. You've just been used by this. They call it magic electronics.»

Exhibition History

Laure Prouvost (Yeovil, France, 1968) lives and works between Aruba and London. She earned degrees from the Central St Martins College of Art in 2002 and from Goldsmiths College in London in 2010. Starting in 2003, she ran tank.tv—an online platform for video art—for ten years. Winner of the Turner Prize and the Max Mara Art Prize for Women in 2013, she has exhibited in a number of different international institutions, including: Haus der Kunst, Munich (2015); Musée départemental d'art contemporain, Rochechouart (2015); Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin (2014); New Museum, New York (2014); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2013); Tate Britain, London (2013); Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia (2013); Fondazione Morra Greco, Naples (2012); The Hepworth, Wakefield, (2012). In addition to her solo show at Pirelli HangarBicocca, in 2016 Prouvost is presenting a touring exhibition at Le Consortium, Dijon (June – September 2016); MMK, Frankfurt (September – November 2016); and Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne (October 2016 – February 2017).

**This publication accompanies the exhibition
“GDM – Grand Dad’s Visitor Center” by Laure Prouvost**

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And all those who preferred to remain anonymous

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1 *If It Was*, 2015
HD video, color, sound, 8 mins 5 secs

2 *Before, Before*, 2011
mixed media installation, variable dimensions. Videos: *Hidden under fabric*, 2011, video, color, sound, 1 min 35 secs; *Hand in beer*, 2011, video, color, sound, 24 secs; *Don't look cat*, 2011, video, color, sound, 48 secs. Audio: *Before before final final*, 6 mins 15 secs

3 *The Wanderer (God First Hairdresser/Gossip Sequence)*, 2013
mixed media installation, variable dimensions. Video: *God First Hairdresser/Gossip Sequence*, 2013, HD video, color, sound, 12 mins 35 secs

4 *Upside Down (Shut Your Lips)*, 2012
mixed media installation, 300x77x163 cm

5 *How to Make Money Religiously*, 2014
HD video, color, sound, 8 mins 44 secs

6 *Going Higher*, 2014
mixed media installation, variable dimensions. Video: *Going Higher*, 2014, video, color, sound, 2 mins 35 secs
Collection Marcel Brient

7 *We Know We Are Just Pixels*, 2014
two channel HD video, color, sound, 4 mins 45 secs

8 *Karaoke*, 2014
video, color, sound, 3 mins 34 secs

9 *Grandma's Dream*, 2013
mixed media installation, variable dimensions. Video: *Grandma's Dream*, 2013, video, color, sound, 8 mins 55 secs

10 *Wantee*, 2013
HD video, color, sound, 14 mins 24 secs

11 *The Artist*, 2010
video, color, sound, 10 mins 10 secs

12 *Grand dad where are you*, 2014
video, color, sound, 1 min 9 secs

13 *I Need to Take Care of My Conceptual Grandad*, 2010
video, color, sound, 4 mins 3 secs

14 *Monolog*, 2009
video, color, sound, 9 mins

15 *Into All That Is Here*, 2015
mixed media installation, variable dimensions. Video: *Into All That Is Here*, 2015, HD video, color, sound, 9 mins 42 secs

16 *Magic Electronics*, 2014
programmed light sequence, sound, 1 min 13 secs

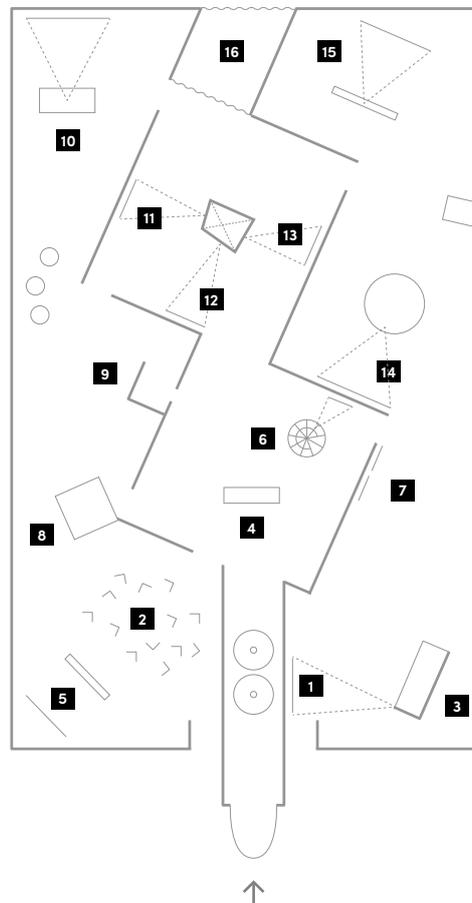
The Smoking Image, 2015
tapestry, 290 x 424 cm
Private collection

GDM – Grand Dad's Visitor Center, 1998–2016
(built by Grandma); mixed media installation, variable dimensions

Signs:

This Is the Sculpture of Grandma, 2016
varnish on wooden panel, 21 x 30 x 1 cm

Keep Left (to the right), 2011
oil, collage and varnish on wooden panel, 30 x 40 cm
carlier gebauer, Berlin



Entrance to the exhibition "GDM – Grand Dad's Visitor Center"

IDEALLY THIS
WALL WOULD NOT
BE HERE

IDEALLY THIS WALL WOULD NOT BE HERE, 2014; oil and varnish on board, 30 x 40 cm

Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation, established in 2004, which has converted a former industrial plant in Milan into an institution for producing and promoting contemporary art.

This dynamic center for experimentation and discovery covers 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest contiguous exhibition spaces in Europe. It presents major solo shows every year by Italian and international artists, with each project conceived to work in close relation to the architecture of the complex, and explored in depth through a calendar of parallel events. Admission to the space and the shows is completely free of charge, and facilitators are on hand to help the general public connect with the art. Since 2013, Vicente Todolí has been the foundation's Artistic Director.

The complex, which once housed a locomotive factory, includes an area for public services and educational activities, and three exhibition spaces whose original twentieth-century architectural features have been left clearly visible: Shed, Navate, and Cubo.

As well as its exhibitions program and cultural events, Pirelli HangarBicocca also permanently houses one of Anselm Kiefer's most important site specific works, *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015*, commissioned for the opening of Pirelli HangarBicocca.

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