Madame B.
Explorations in Emotional Capitalism

A VIDEO PROJECT BY
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exhibition proposal

CINEMA SUITCASE 2012-2014
The Project

What we present here is a collaborative, experimental series of video works. The series of video installation pieces together constitute an immersive exhibition, a concept explained below. The project also comprises a series of photographs and a feature film, to be screened separately.

Ten years ago, we began to make videos together. At first, we made experimental documentaries to get a grip on contemporary culture “in becoming”. The result was a range of films on questions of migration that have been widely exhibited. From there, we began to examine the question of madness in the social domain, which has yielded a feature film, A Long History of Madness (2012), and several video installation pieces (21 screens), exhibited nine times in just one year. This was made as a fiction using documentary elements; we call it a “theoretical fiction”.

Our current project addresses a kind of collective madness we call “emotional capitalism”: the intertwined

1. On the documentaries, please consult the website, where each thumbnail clicks through to a subsequent page with a clip and photographs: http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films/. On the madness project, see www.crazymothermovie.com; on the exhibitions derived from it as well as exhibitions of the documentaries, http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/exhibitions/.
Long Live Anachronism

Our project is not a “faithful adaptation” of Flaubert’s novel. Its contemporariness is our starting point. We make this work for our present. This entails a necessary “betrayal” of the novel as story, its anecdotes, language, environmental descriptions, and many events. Instead, we start from the premise that anachronism is indispensable if we want to understand how an artwork can be durably contemporary. The image, remade every time someone sees it, is in constant transformation, and at the same time it stands outside of standard time. It unfolds in the tempo of those who see it. Hence, anachronism is the only way the past can stay, or even become, alive.

Two aspects make for this aliveness of Flaubert’s novel: its theme and its visuality. Its theme is the intricacies between the combined lures of capitalism and romantic love. A product of the second half of the nineteenth century steeped in late Victorian culture, Madame Bovary can be seen in relation to books such as Effie Briest (Germany), Anna Karenina (Russia), and La Regenta (Spain). These “novels of adultery”, written by male authors, tell of ambitious and dejected women often deemed “hysterical”, and who invariably end badly. Because those novels gave a glimmer of women’s desire and the horror it inspired in men, they nourished the emerging Freudian thought. The question “What does woman want?” was in the air, and if Freud became its spokesman, he did not invent it. In Madame Bovary, Flaubert combined identification with such unhappy wives with a fierce critique of capitalism. The novel’s visuality shows in its excep-
tionally visual, sometimes even cinematic prose, so that, even today, we visually see and witness the content of the novel. Casting the novel in the past goes against its most characteristic feature, which is its rigorous contemporaneity. In this case, avoiding anachronism is an anachronism. Hence, we intend to make an audio-visual work that both actualises the novel and releases its political thrust.

There are many films based on Madame Bovary. Since most are historical costume dramas, these films are more faithful to the story than to the way it is told – they disregard the storytelling and its specific dynamic. Never has there been an attempt to dig into Emma Bovary’s life, picturing moments of it rather than simply representing its story. Instead of a narrative, we aim to create an immersive exhibition. Loyalty to cinema as an art form releases in our images a supremely cinematic political potential.
**Immersive Exhibition**

We propose a series of eight video installations, with a total of 19 screens. The nature of installation prevents us from leaping to narration. Our installation pieces vary from single screens to four screens disposed in a cube, to facing or juxtaposed dual screens, ending in a row of five screens. The term *immersive exhibition* refers to an artistic form in which form, meaning, technique, and ambiance collaborate to solicit the participatory presence of the spectator. The exhibition may be staged in a number of different ways, for example in different rooms, corridors, or on the corners of hallways. We have had a variety of experiences with different sites, including an “interventionist” exhibition in a museum of old-master art, and find the challenge of installing in “site-responsive” ways very productive. For now, we can only present an imaginary version.

We take “immersive” to mean the creation of a fictional environment in which visitors can be steeped for the duration of their visit. Here, visitors can walk around in a world of images and construct for themselves the content they prefer. Importantly, however, they are not alone. This is a space to play in: “an arena where the great issues ... of values, of ethics, of courage, of integrity and of humanism are encountered and wrestled with” (Ming Cho Lee, 1990). To facilitate this encounter we stage a site where visitors can both immerse themselves “with” (rather than “in”) the images and be aware of the presence of others. The primary distinction of installation in comparison with movie theatre projection is the concrete and material space in which it is presented, in which the images move, and in which the viewer can move around.

Films such as ours use cinematic techniques and aesthetics to displace the primary characteristic of cinema, its temporality, and turn it into a primarily spatial feature.

The exhibition is a *social* space where viewers are bodily present and participate in the emotions of capitalism and romance combined they witness. This re-engages the recent experiences of the strain of capitalism on individuals on a global scale. Our images activate a bodily relation to these issues. The duration of each act of viewing is the viewer’s decision. The same holds for the relationships among the pieces themselves. Each one of them functions on its own, as a “scene”, while the sequence of pieces, suggested but not imposed, can function as a narrative framework, or an atmospheric, philosophical, or artistic one. Visitors can watch them all, select a few, or focus on just one.

Most likely, in what visitors take away from the experience, media and life experiences mingle to constitute their story, always new, always different, unpredictable but not without impact from what they see in the present of the visit. Those “after-stories” include choices of duration and concentration, the intellectual and affective baggage, as well as their mood of the moment. Beyond the events, after all of great banality, the aim of the pieces is to achieve *performativity*: to *do* something to their viewers – but without machine-driven manipulation.
The Installation Pieces

In our imaginary floor plan, we seek to encourage wandering. Although there is an order going from 1 to 8, as the floor plan shows, it is entirely possible to watch the “Ending” first, since the entrance and exit are one. When the visitors enter, the videos of the final pieces are not totally out of sight. Although the first installation is the first thing they see, the second one is more open and thus might attract them first. Each work is both connected to the others and autonomous – quite like people.

1. Everyday Life

We have staged the look of the man (Charles) that awakens the interest of the woman (Emma) and vice versa on two opposing screens. The seven-minute piece consists of two parts of 3.30 minutes. One presents a routine without events, the other initiates a change. The distance between the screens will be calculated to make it impossible to see both sides at the same time. Moreover, in order to hamper looking from a distance, the screens will be so close as to make the viewing experience slightly uncomfortable.

On one screen we see Charles taking his morning coffee and preparing for his daily tour to visit the sick. During those first minutes, on the opposite screen, Emma tends to the farm animals. After a little while, her facial expression changes ever so subtly, and her actions become more futile. Two opposed images, then, that both express stagnation; states that, while announcing
the need for things to happen, foreground visuality.

At the moment when Charles looks up and out of the window again, Emma walks through the meadows towards the house of the doctor. We don’t see her but we see what she sees, and the movement of the hand-held camera makes the visitors feel her walking. She ends up looking furtively at the house with flirtatious interest, at the phantom-like apparition of a man at the upper floor window where he watches her in a somewhat voyeuristic manner. He sees more of the young woman than he can logically (physically) see; the imagination kicks in. Two looks that are socially ambiguous begin to have consequences when they cross. Since the two screens are disposed face-to-face so that visitors cannot, physically, see them at the same time, they will be inclined to follow the incipient action, thus exercising some form of activity.

This activity — which the visitors can notice in their own body but also in that of others — makes them aware of the dynamic and bodily nature of looking. The activity thus stimulated comprises an awareness of the nature of the two looks as different and perhaps complementary, and possibly a partial identification with either one; or with the difficulty of choosing. The essence is the slow awakening of the performative look: a look that acts. Everything emerges from that look. This “explains”, in visual-immersive form, the social functioning of looking itself. That the performative efficacy of an image depends on the look one casts on the other means that the ontology of the visual is fundamentally dialogic.

Where a touch of voyeurism and a touch of flirting meet, change can happen. The two kinds of looks
are socially active, and subject to judgment as well. But the combination of performativity and immersion makes such judgments uncomfortable and instead stimulates reflection on the social importance of looking – its decisive dialogic performativity.

2. Emma’s Education

Next to the somewhat confining opposed screens we present the various forms of education in two juxtaposed screens, thus facilitating a more open (literally) viewing situation where the narrative-ideological question of “nature versus nurture” can be contemplated. These images can be characterised as “thought-images”. In all likelihood, visitors will stand together watching these screens. It is even possible that they engage in a discussion with one another. We see the girl at home, but no parent is in sight; father is at work, mother is deceased. She reads and writes, watches television, and cuts out fancy clothes from magazines. We see her at school and in tutorials, under the influence of impressive mature women, who put their best benevolent effort into turning her into a proper, marketable young woman.

The perennial question of nature versus nurture – whether people are born the way they turn out or become what they are under the influence of the outside world – is no longer clear-cut. At home, Emma is culturally and intellectually active; yet, her activities are heavily indebted to the world that feeds them. Cutting out clothes from fashion magazine indicates that already before leaving the farm, the lures of the world have her in their grip. Conversely, the tutors who teach her see
her talent and attempt to nurture it; they don’t simply train her in girlhood. But the line between the two remains a fine one. Art classes bring in contested subjects when gender is concerned; and Emma’s beautiful singing voice will not lead to a musical career but to domestic use, ultimately leading to more boredom.

Visually, we juxtapose shots of the girl alone to shots of her in interaction with others. Instead of staging oppressive teachers, we merge such socially contestable events as a hygiene inspection with acts of confirmation of the girl’s worth. The idea is that most teachers are, hopefully, well-meaning people who are sincerely attempting to help their charges. It is precisely because they do that the socially shaping effect of teaching becomes so ambiguous: both wholesome and oppressive, between shaping and moulding.

3. Wedding

The wedding of the couple is presented on a single screen. This is an event both public and private: the outcome of the two previous scenes combined, but at the same time, an event we all recognise and consider to be a moment of happiness. The single screen expresses this generally recognised feature. It is also a day of rituals, of pre-scripted behaviour; in that sense, it is relentlessly impersonal. This is one reason to present the wedding on an open single screen. The settings vary from the somewhat shabby room at the farm, where Emma is being dolled up by a friend, to a gorgeous old church and a home environment where the reception and the party take place.

These spaces are either private ones that are invaded by others, or public settings for private commitment. Small incidents enhance the ambivalence of weddings. A Stranger, an uninvited guest behaving like a social outcast – our equivalent of Flaubert’s “blind beggar” – makes a disturbing appearance, both in the church and at the party. Dressed in white, she appears like an abject double of the bride, making Emma insecure enough to stumble and fall over her high heels. At the party, the Stranger sings a mocking song, and thus embarrasses everyone once more. She will appear again on several occasions, including Emma’s death.

Emma is lonely at her own party. Her girlhood dreams begin to waver. We see her being shy, not knowing quite how to behave, and trying her best to do what is expected of her. A Priest talks to the couple about the problems of marriage, and tells especially Emma
she can always turn to him when trouble arises. Emma tries so hard to be nice that it is painful to watch. This piece, then, concerns a number of ambiguities. It raises questions of social behaviour along with questions of private and public, spontaneous and ritualised behaviour. The beauty of the images belies the painfulness of the events, and vice versa. What makes an event festive; what makes it sad?
4. Boredom Sets In

In a corner, at a right or slightly dull angle, two screens present a contrast. One of them shows the endless reiteration of the same small, meaningless acts that constitute domestic life when the husband goes out to work and the wife stays at home with little to do. The other screen is devoted to the hope that can be inspired when something exceptional happens. The installation Boredom Sets In presents this contrast, which is also one between description and event, or between passivity and agency. But again, the contrasts we expect, trained as we all are in thinking in binary oppositions, is challenged. On the left screen, the unbearable boredom is interrupted when a neighbour appears. After stalking Emma’s house for a while, the young man comes forward and invites her for a walk. What happens next?

Meanwhile, on the other screen, the exceptional event occurs. Charles has been invited to a reception in Paris; Emma is excited and buys a new dress. Misunderstanding the phase “tenue de ville” on the invitation card, she over-dresses. For her, “city” means glamour. Thus the dreamt-of event in the Glamorous World turns into a nightmare. The other guests freeze when they see her. They do not admit either Charles or Emma into the small circles of their conversations, and everything Emma does in seeking the limelight is slightly out of place. She has an awkward conversation with a man, then dances with him, and that’s it: more loneliness, isolation, and shame.

This work concerns moods. In this case, visitors sitting in the corner of the space can easily move from one screen to the other, according to their mood. How-
ever, the contrast to be expected, between the tedium at home and the whirlwind of excitement at the reception, is again deceptive. Hence, even if the two screens are open to quick or slow viewing, to narrative coherence or rapid change, it is not so easy to develop and maintain a particular mood. The visual beauty of the images enhances this uncertainty. Moments of painful awkwardness cut through the lush colours of the images like a hot knife through cold butter.

5. Trying to Love
Another piece of two juxtaposed screens stages the tension between event and routine in two attempts to break the latter, once through romance and once through ambition. The men in Emma’s life — her husband and her two lovers — are too alike. The mediocrity so frequently assigned to Charles but also to the other two men is one aspect of the link between them. On the other hand, the problem also lies with Emma herself, whose education into being a good-enough woman stunted her capacity to act. Indeed, Emma’s drama is her passivity and impotence. She lacks dialogic performativity.

How to render a resemblance among three men if they are all, a priori, on a mission to save Emma from boredom by promising a break with routine? The rescue attempts fail precisely because the men are too alike. We have staged this by means of two casting decisions. First, the three men are played by the same actor, Thomas Germaine; then, Emma and her men don’t speak the same language. The former decision was motivated by the obvious but unexpressed fact that the young woman is not in love with anyone in particular but with Love — its lures, its illusions, its push to become passive and dependent. The latter decision does justice to the undeniable fact that Emma and her men don’t understand each other.

In this scene, the visitor is confronted with two of these men at the same time. Both do their best: Rodolphe tries to seduce her, whereas Charles takes a shot at fame in an attempt to satisfy her (and not his) ambition. Here, an open presentation of the two alternatives — the
loving, reliable, but ultimately boring Charles versus the cynical, opportunistic, but initially exciting Rodolphe – is confusing because we see the same man twice – or do we? Rodolphe stages his attraction, dressing it up as love and commitment. Charles is being staged, brought in to appear on television as an expert, and utterly fails. For the visitor, a dilemma comparable to Emma's unfolds. The installation piece challenges our contemporary wish to avoid being judgmental about adultery, ambition, and failure precisely by showing the tenacity of our condemnatory urges.
6. Passion and Disappointment

In proximity to the open presentation of the dilemma without solution, another installation piece locks the visitor inside the harrowing world of romance and its wear-and-tear, of capitalism and its lures, and the disastrous course of action they set in motion together. The boredom at home continues, not helped by the useless input from the outside world. The four screens, arranged in a cube, each have an attractive and a disillusioning side. They are presented with “sound showers” focusing sound from above that allow shifting on continuous benches from one to the other and back again, entering and exiting these four strange yet familiar worlds. Clockwise, the first screen presents the routine of Emma’s affair with Rodolphe. The second screen shows Homais’ meddling with the B. couple as intrusive and futile. The third, opposing the first, shows the exasperating boredom of domestic time. And opposite Homais’s meddling, the fourth screen shows Emma’s increasingly mad shopping sprees.

In the routine of the affair with Rodolphe, Emma slowly understands that the man is not interested in the long-term commitment she sees as an escape from her exasperating marriage. Moments of passion alternate with unease and dawning understanding. After receiving Rodolphe’s rejection letter, Emma faints. On this second screen, Homais, the character who, in Flaubert, is a caricature of the snob, parading the superficiality of allegedly rational knowledge, comes in to offer his platitudes to a worried Charles. Our actor Mathieu Montanier gives the character more depth, more malignancy, and
a good dose of hysteria. On the third screen, on which more below, we witness the dinner conversation of the couple at home.

Homais’ hysteria becomes something to ponder, for when on the fourth screen we see Emma on her different shopping sprees, a certain madness is undeniable. In her increasing shopping craze, she ruins herself and her family. She incurs excessive debts when she falls for the advertisements and the implicit promise that acquiring commodities is a source of happiness. But since this is a social issue – the lure of capitalism investing commodities with sentiment – we make this a collective madness. The shopkeepers, real estate agent, and the mother-in-law who becomes decidedly paranoid when she starts to follow Emma like an all-seeing, omniscient goddess: everyone contributes to the madness of this reversal of values.

The third of these screens deserves special attention as what we can call a series of sonic images. Our example is a transmutation or “imaging” of the famous sentence: “Sa conversation était plate comme un trottoir de rue” (His conversation was flat like a side walk). This sentence is a representation of the boredom that will kill Emma. But we also wanted to make this work on the visitor, both performatively and visually. We edited the video almost exclusively with Emma’s face. That is where the boredom inscribes itself with more and more exasperation. Instead of his face we see Charles’ shoulder, blurred and dark, as if looming over Emma like a shadow. Like the emerging contact out of two socially dubious looks in the first installation, the two figures
produce the boredom that ends in horror together. As Charles drones on about relentlessly tedious subjects, it is the spectator who, seeing and feeling the horror, reads the face and, in a certain sense, allows the boredom to become visible. The image that sticks to Emma’s face as its visual counterpart is in fact the product of the sonic image. In this scene, Charles and Emma are more united than ever: by boredom, nervousness, and anxiety.

The fourth screen almost turns capitalism itself into a character. In one shopping scene, Emma enters a fantastic designer palace in Paris. Here, the emphasis is on the emotional, affective quality of the interaction between salesman and customer. Emma, slightly insecure and desirous, is affectively surrounded and reassured by a skilled salesman, who knows how to make her feel admired, beautiful, and loved – on the condition that she buy the expensive clothes. The dreamy quality emanates from the interior decoration of the shop, as well as the affectionate behaviour of the salesman.

In another excursion into capitalism, Emma looks for a new, more stylish house. The palatial house she visits is so over-the-top that associations with the hyperbolic are inevitable. In a dreamy sequence, Emma runs up the stairs, visits the roof garden, and has a vision of the hated mother-in-law in the attic, visualising the pull of caution to which Emma is not indifferent. Yet, whereas in these sequences a certain happiness, however precarious and fleeting, accompanies the dreaminess, reality hits back in a harsh way. The clothing expenses will run up to such an amount that Charles becomes wise of Emma’s deception, and a new house is, of course, out of
the question.

Together, these images are confrontational. They show the unsustainability of the excitement, and the ease with which boredom sets in again. Emma's facial expressions say it all. On the fourth screen where hardly any dialogue occurs, we give shape to these contrasts through silent confrontations. Emma's mother-in-law looks so disapprovingly at Emma in her new clothes that Emma shouts at her to leave. The silent confrontation is rather long, and confronts the spectator with a need to take sides as well as the impossibility of doing so. And then, Charles finds the bank statements that Emma has hidden behind a painting and confronts her.

This installation offers freedom of movement within a confining space. Sitting on benches without backs, one can turn around in, but not escape, the intricacies between episodes that unfold simultaneously. And wherever one turns, the attempts at achieving happiness and their respective failures confront visitors with a profound unease. In the space itself, the four screens surround the visitor, which is confrontational. Because the visitor is confined inside the space where these lures and their disappointing counterparts are played out, reflection, immersion, and absorption are equally solicited. This does not only confront the visitor with the choices and their devastating consequences, but also with the inevitable yet pernicious (co-)operations of our social systems.

The juxtaposition and sometimes confusion of the domestic, urban, dreamy, and escapist spheres is harrowing. This is compounded by the logical consequence of a four-screen cube: while all fours screens are around us, we cannot see all four at the same time. In this sense, this piece incarnates the essential feature of installation: the limitations of seeing, integrated with the inside-ness that confines.
7. Loving Léon

The single-screen scene *Loving Léon* constitutes Emma’s final attempt to escape the tedium of her life and leads straight to her demise. In this scene, the dilemmas around nature and culture resurface and are constantly present, recalling the second scene of *Emma’s Education*. The story is simple: during an opera performance – our video substitutes William Kentridge’s *Refuse the Hour* (2011) to Gaetana Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1831), which is used in the novel – Emma meets the young Léon again. They engage in an affair, under the pretext of singing lessons. The affair ends when Emma asks Léon for money and he refuses to steal for her. The romantic and capitalist lures merge here more intensely than ever.

Meanwhile, both Kentridge’s opera and the museum filled with stuffed wild animals where the seduction scene is set confront us with audio-visual metaphors, primarily of clocks for conquest and trade and hunt for seduction. The connections between the opera and the love affair dawn on visitors, we expect, when they realise that these motives de-naturalise even the most ingrained social structures we take for granted.

The space where this video is screened is semi-closed off from the rest of the gallery, like a small cinema theatre. It is important to realise that this single-screen open piece can be viewed after – according to narrative logic – but also before the visitor enters the cube. The effect will be different, but no less compelling. When one visits the cube first, the mood is likely to turn a bit gloomy; in the other order, one enters the cube with a renewed sense of disappointment.
8. The End

Walking towards the entrance-cum-exit of this imaginary version of the exhibition, we encounter a long wall with five screens that present us with moments of reckoning. The financial ruination of the family becomes the primary site where the no-exit occurs. Emma tries to find money, but when even the wealthy Rodolphe refuses and her debtor tries to abuse her despair sexually, she has to face the seizure of her house and furnishings.

On the next screen we see one of the possible outcomes of such a situation. Emma swallows arsenic. This suicide leads to a gruesome and poignant death scene on the third screen. This scene sums up what is at stake in aesthetic experience. Ming Cho Lee saw in the space of the stage an arena to encounter, and wrestle with, issues of “values, of ethics, of courage”. These issues, for us, are inherent in the aesthetic; they are the point of aesthetic work. In the end, it is the ethical question and the way it intersects with aesthetic, narrative, and broadly cultural questions that lies at the heart of our project. This is where all the issues mentioned so far – voyeurism, (dis)empowerment, performativity, irony, ridicule, identification, and sentimentalism – join.

The death scene is an inquiry into ethically responsible visual storytelling. Four issues form the background of our conception of the scene of Emma’s death. They concern ethics, morality, knowledge, and emotion. Together, these issues form the substance of cultural life; hence, they are the substance of the social domain in which culture functions.
Death poses an ethical dilemma. Is our act of looking at death supportive or exploitative of the dying or dead? On the one hand, sufferers need witnesses, to not be alone in this ultimate moment; to keep knowledge of what happened to them alive, perhaps to benefit others. This is the more urgent when the death is violent, or invisibly triggered by what we can call vehemence, such as Homais’ hysterical fit somewhat coquettishly and self-indulgently acted out. The young boy Justin should be the witness but is the target; Emma is a witness turned victim. And Homais himself, who never touches the poison that kills Emma, is nevertheless still a perpetrator of sorts. What is lacking is an uninvolved witness whose aim is to get involved. So, the slot for witnessing remains the reserve of the viewer.

On the other hand, watching the suffering of others from a safe distance risks producing voyeuristic pleasure – of the kind Adorno was so agitated about that for a brief moment he condemned making art “after Auschwitz”. The philosopher withdrew the statement when he saw how it was misused to promote either indifference or self-indulgence. This ethical dilemma is over-determined by a moral one. Figurations of death raise the question if making art out of death is exploitative. Is it a kind of abuse? Or is it, in contrast, able to help learning, as was thought in the Baroque era, and thus be used to improve life in the future? This, in turn, involves knowledge. How can we know what it is to die?

To put it succinctly, it was crucial to us to give Emma her own focalisation, even when she is no longer able to see. Focalisation is an issue of the ethical distribution of (audio-visual) power. The scene takes place in a vibrant, moving space where alternating sharpness and blur move from one figure to another in rapid succession, giving the witnesses each their brief moment of focalisation, while the ultimate moment yields focalisation to the dying Emma. The camera stays with the spatial point of view of Emma, who is filmed in extreme close-up and cropped in the lower left edge of the image. As a result, a hierarchy of sorts emerges. Charles, who is at this moment closer to Emma than she has ever allowed before, is only semi-blurred, his head is close to hers. The other witnesses, to her, have become ghosts, or spectres. Their shapes are blurred, their limbs reduced to sticks. Not only their bodies but also their images flit around, sometimes in but mainly out of focus, remaining ungraspable.
To avoid the triggering of unfocussed emotion – let’s call it sentimental feel-good triggering – we sought to make Emma a focalisor of the image, while visitors were there to see; to give her the power to counter voyeurism. Hence, her position in the frame ties the focalisation tightly to her. The scenography, however, implicates the viewer, who looks “with” or “for” Emma, or “alongside” her. With this reversal of the question who is the ghost and who is the focalisor in the death scene, we aimed to address the four issues mentioned above: of ethics, morality, epistemology, and emotion, all at once. This is how the scene carves out a space for an immersed spectator.

Not all unhappy people end up committing suicide. Other endings are, of course, possible, and we offer the following dilemma: how to end a no-exit situation such as this? We imagined a kind of 1950s ending, with the protagonist being confined to a psychiatric hospital. When Emma, in despair, throws herself into a lake, Ho-mais is quick to call an ambulance. In our time, this can still happen, although an ending in divorce is more likely. But then, how likely would divorce be in the case of a woman who has never learned to support herself? The two final screens of this row of possible endings suggest that, in spite of a certain historical “progress”, we are still not free from the constraints of the combined lure of capitalism and romantic love where the operative word, “possession”, is the common ground, and the promise of that contradiction, “enduring excitement”, continues to mislead.
**Immersion in Reality**

Through this exhibition, we suggest that in the contemporary world, the ways we look are as important as the ways we behave socially. The economic and amorous adventures that lead to Emma’s demise are largely triggered by the audio-visual stimuli that surround her. Fragmented into the 19 screens of this exhibition, visitors can confront the fact that the life of a woman of 150 years ago can as well happen today. Shunning moralism or propaganda, the works engage visitors critically and artistically at the same time. Because of the immersive nature of the exhibition, this realisation can dawn on each visitor in relation to his or her own life, environment, situation, and desires. A plea for attention to the audio-visual, rather than the linguistic-only, and to a multi-sensuous understanding of the world rather than an intellectual-only one, the exhibition presents the first of its kind inspired by the novel so frequently filmed but never engaged in this updating manner.

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**Cast & Crew**

**Cast Main roles**
- Marja Skaffari as Emma
- Thomas Germaine as Charles, Rodolphe and Léon
- Mathieu Montanier as Homais

**Supporting cast**
- Helinä Hukkataival as Charles’ Mother
- Astrid Törneroos as Berthe
- Julia Gamaker as Emma’s dream boy
- Matts Stenlund as priest
- William Stenius as Justin
- Göran Stenius as bailiff
- Marjo Vuorela as health inspector and 2nd doctor
- Olli Heinola as assistant bailiff
- Lila Köngäs-Saarikko as singing tramp
- Mia Hannula as music teacher
- Lena Nordman as social science teacher
- Tarek Mehdi as guest at reception (Viscount)
- Deyna Mehdi as Viscount’s daughter
- Malene Nielsen as waitress
- Françoise Davoine as art teacher (Marquise)
- Jacqueline Duval as psychologist
- Elan Gamaker as talk show host
- Michiel Engel as Binet/Lheureux/Guillaumin
- Berta Roth as deportment teacher
- Pierre Lassovski as designer salesman
- Samantha Bergman, Elin Biskop Lydia Eriksson, Francine Eriksson, Frida Liewendahl, Malene Nielssen, Mimmi Nordberg, Maria Snellman, Bianca Söderlund and Isabelle Törneroos as Emma’s classmates
Crew
Christopher Wessels: director of cinematography
Sara Pinheiro: sound recording and design
Milja Korpela: hair and make-up artist
Mervi Appel, co-producer (Åland)
Danie Gailliot, co-producer (Paris)
Marta Dopieralski: first AD (Paris) and clapper loader
Thijs Vissia: set photographer and video documentation
Margreet Vermeulen: coordinator, video documentation and catering
Helinä Hukkataival, wardrobe & props consultant and set photographer
Marjo Vuorela: consultant for psychology (Åland)
Françoise Davoine: consultant for psychology (Paris)
Elan Gamaker: body double for Thomas Germaine
Damar Hoogland: clapper loader and assistant on set
Malene Nielsen: assistant on set
Clarinde Wesselink: assistant on set

Technical Information

Scene 1
Duration 07'20
2 floating screens back projection, about 2m apart.
Sound, 2 sets of stereo speakers
2 HD video projectors
2 media players
Synchronisation machine

Scene 2
Duration 14'38
2 juxtaposed wall projections
Sound, 2 sets of stereo speakers
2 HD video projectors
2 media players
Synchronisation machine

Scene 3
Duration 22'36
1 floating screen projection
Sound shower
1 HD video projector
1 media player

Scene 4
Duration 11'55
2 Right-angled wall projections
Sound, 2 sets of stereo speakers, sound dependent on space
2 HD video projectors
2 media players
Synchronisation machine
Scene 7
Duration 28'53
A 3-screen wall projection
1 set of stereo speakers
1 HD video projector
1 media player
seating (cinematic setting)

Scene 5
Duration 14'55
2 wall projections, juxtaposed
Sound: 2 sets of stereo speakers, sound dependent on space
2 HD video projectors
2 media players
Synchronisation machine

Scene 6
Duration A: 19'50, B: 20'5, C: 15'18, D: 8'27
4 back projections forming a cube
Sound: 4 sound showers over benches
4 HD video projectors
4 media players

Scene 8
Duration A: 10'02, B: 07'47, C: 6'38, D: 06:27, E: 05'56
5 back projections forming 1 seamless row
Sound: 5 sound showers over benches
5 HD video projectors
5 media players

**KEY**
- floating screen
- wall projection
- back projection
- wall for back projection
- photographs
- seating
- bench
- curtain
- sound shower
MIEKE BAL
(Heemstede, 1946), a cultural theorist and critic, has been Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences Professor. She is the author of over thirty books. As a video artist, she makes experimental documentaries on migration and recently has begun exploring fiction. The project A Long History of Madness, with Michelle Williams Gamaker, has yielded a 120’ feature film and a series of video installation pieces. These have been exhibited nine times in one year, among other places in the Aboa Vetus – Ars Nova Museum in Turku, and in the Freud Museum London. Occasionally she acts as an independent curator.

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MICHELLE WILLIAMS GAMAKER
(London, 1979) is a video and performance artist. Her work varies from single-frame portraits and installations to complex renderings of reality via documentary and fiction. The subtle and sublime potential of storytelling is at the root of her work. Since 2001, she has exhibited internationally, also as part of the collective Cinema Suitcase. She has taught on the MFA Fine Art programme at Goldsmiths, University of London, where she completed her PhD in Fine Art, Immersion and Reciprocity, Art Experience in Live Space. In addition to Madame B., she is working on a series of performance-based videos exploring the connections between human and animal life. She currently teaches part-time as a Performance tutor at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam.

www.michellewilliamsgamaker.com
Madame B. is an exhibition proposal by
Mieke Bal & Michelle Williams Gamaker
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