“intimacy-in-distance and distance-in-intimacy as a conjoined dynamic.” * Because it is also about this, in the double movement between here and there, between an anonymous formal address, plural, social, and the proximity of familiar address. To help mark this swing, sometimes the initials R.H. or F.G.-T., at times a simple first name, suffice. To mark the bond: “My Felix”, as the artist Glenn Ligon writes. * Or at the antipodes to unfasten one’s grip. “The androgyny of my name had a deep influence on me,” writes Roni Horn. “I understood from when I was young that my gender was nobody’s business.” *

So then, let’s you and me call them Roni and Felix.

Roni is an epicene name. You and me are neutral pronouns. The dynamic of the you and the me suggests an “admirable theatricalization of the mystery of interlocutory pronouns”. * It produces no particular information as to gender, race, class, ability (even, with the English “you”, regarding number). No social identity. These are positions of discourse which, in a sense, are face-to-face, and in an incessant exchange, as though their lifelines met, crossed, inverted. This is how Gertrude Stein and her companion Alice B. Toklas played with them – their common grave at the Père-Lachaise cemetery is in fact the subject of a framed photograph by Felix. When the former writes The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (1933), she changes places, the space of writing, with her partner (which allows her to claim without jabbering that she is a genius).
of which Felix and Roni construct the golden legend of their gifts and counter-gifts, there is one that was activated for the first time in Paris, in 1993, at Galerie Ghislaine Hussenot.

Roni remembers the first encounter with Felix’s work “Untitled” (1991) on 7th Avenue in New York, in the Village. Enlarged to the panoramic dimensions of urban billboards, repeated and disseminated along several of the city’s horizons, a photograph is presented in black and white of an unmade bed, whose pillows carry the hollow imprint, one imagines, of two heads having rested there. Marked, and nonetheless vacant. Roni sees there “a clearing”, a clarifying, a big sweep. We are made to revise even what is understood by the notion of intimacy, its relationship to the interior, to domestic space, with what remains of the heat secreted by the double bed. But heat has given way to cold. The bed is at a public distance, emptied of inhabitants, expelled towards the exterior, towards uncomfortable urban outsides, an inhospitable homelessness, perhaps. All simplistic content, every given hypothesis has been cleared out. The billboard is rid of its visually hegemonic discourse, not only the one that promotes capitalism through publicity, but also the protocols of additional metres. Nonhuman, the bulbs nonetheless have a limited life span which is renewed each time a display is required and the lender has temporarily ceded

just as the writer Hélène Cixous continues to speak with Jacques Derrida after the death of the philosopher. For decades Derrida read Cixous who read Derrida, exchanging literature and dreams, text by text. Cixous continues to read and to write in him the present. The conversation is infinite. It neither denies nor defeats death. It thwarts the terminal version, that of effacement. To hold on. To hold tight. “You are my insiṣer, he says to me. […] I can likewise turn it round on you. You too you are my insiṣer. My insiṣing,” Roni Horn’s pieces partake of the same insiṣing, of a same insistent politics of friendship beyond linear chronology; Felix Gonzalez-Torres, especially in his portraits composed of significant words and dates (but still open to being exchanged in each of their presentations), always insisted upon overthrowing this timeline. Let’s set the record straight: there is no world after, no world beyond HIV/AIDS. The pandemic isn’t over, as poet, artist and activist Gregg Bordowitz writes, “the crisis is still beginning”; it is but one of the links in a chain of zoonotic illnesses, including Covid-19, which have managed to cross the biological barrier between species, the one separating humans from nonhumans. The attacks against biodiversity, the intensification of human and commercial travel, the aggravation of climate change, the structural violence inherent in neoliberalism, comprise the conditions of the apparition of such pandemics.

The “total social facts” of the Anthropocene affect not only our social organisation, but also our lives at their most intimate, in their relationship to others and to themselves as well.

“At first, the world is around me, not in front of me.” It’s this approach that the exhibition touches phenomenologically, while it infiltrates the solid architecture of the Bourse de Commerce. It depicts an emotional and political urgency towards which the rooms are not only, and rather almost never, “before” you. This point of view, which philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty qualified as “monarchic”, is circumvented by the display of the pieces. Not without some mean humour, they overturn a straight view, as does Double Mobius v.2 (2009/2018), a lure to the eye that is made to make a U-turn in order to discover a gold strip revolving on itself indefinitely; or they drag it to the margins, as in “Untitled” (Loverboy) (1989), in which pairs of light blue curtains drape a window and an emergency exit. Or else they intimate a twist at the sovereign point of view, a torsion. Take for example these two pieces from the White Dickinson series (2006–2007). The two grey aluminium bars leaning against the wall, intimating an oblique, warped, disoriented perception of “letters, words, then a full sentence in white capitals, deciphered painstakingly rather than read smoothly.” Excerpts from letters by the poet Emily Dickinson, another “phantasmatic collaborator” of Roni Horn, the lines are: “I GIVE YOU A PEAR THAT WAS GIVEN ME – WOULD THAT IT WERE A PAIR, BUT NATURE IS PENURIOUS” (White Dickinson, 2007) and “HE INHERITS HIS UNCLE EMILY’S ARBOR FOR THE LIE” (White Dickinson, 2006–2007). Clearly, such lines inscribe in their snare homophonic and gender play. Transferred into monumental letters in moulded plasticslowings the pace of reading, miniscule fragments of the everyday thus capture “Dickinson’s lyric, her syntax, her metaphorical force, the visible and hidden and metaphoric of a Weltanschauung in their transmutations that the pieces find, let’s say it, their marvellous dimension.

This sense of wonder comes with the emancipation of any full and unique identity – the piece’s, and the one to whom the work is addressed. It leads to a renewed experience that Roni describes as an “accumulation”, far from a notion of series, multiples, or repetition. Well and Truly (2009–2010) composed with ten moulded blocks of glass set down on the floor, exacerbates contradictory sensations. The distinct hardness and weight of all these masses of glass come with the vulnerability and dependence induced by each of the same glass blocks, which appear bare, solitary, base-less, statue-less, with no cover to warm them. “Surrounded by Stockholm”, as Roni puts it, the exhibition also presents a cumulative experience, with twelve rows of 42 electric bulbs traversing each room of “Untitled” (For Stockholm) (1992). These are very simple elements: each bulb is screwed into a socket mounted at regular intervals on a wire, equipped with a “tail” of several additional metres. Nonhuman, the bulbs nonetheless have a limited life span which is renewed each time a display is required and the lender has temporarily ceded
their rights – in other words, the installation parameters. This form of circulation indexes the bulbs firmly to the routine task implicated in their use value towards that of the exhibition. And, all of a sudden, the insistent glow of the lit bulbs forever the same time than the magical or transcendental phenomena and to encounter characters with clinging skeletons. “Untitled” (Blood) (1992) stands as a necessary passage to proceed along your path. Of course, as the title parenthesis suggests, the crossing helps perceive “the attraction of and subsequent exposure to a shower of crystallized liquids symbolic of sex and death.” Concretely, the red- and white-bead curtain engages a body in performance, the moulding of a character or maybe better, of a way to walk. Like the swishing and dry bony gait of La Calavera Catrina from Mexico, a skeleton vested in rich clothes. This is how you hear, or better listen to Dogs’ Chorus – Let Slip Until the Cows Come Home (2016). The work on paper disseminates the silent concert of barking dogs: “Let slip the dogs of war”: the phrase, borrowed from Shakespeare, from Julius Caesar (Act 3, Scene 1) has been decapitated and shredded with a scalpel into an innumerable plurality of fine strips. Some pieces were assembled with others, coming from other “plates”, or have been similarly disfigured from other idiomatic expressions, having risen to the surface from the collective memory of clichés and commonplace: “Until the cows come home” is such a one. Cut up again and reconfigured, these language ruses produce a deluge of information, illegible for the most part. It is their colliding dance that expresses itself loudly at an inaudible frequency that marks our flesh.

To my mind, this marking is what the theoretician Raymond Williams calls “structure of feeling.” What does this signify: how do you give a “structure of feeling” to a configuration that is also indefinite and limitless? Where are the boundaries of Well and Truly? that Roni placed on the ground? Do they not integrate the spaces that enter into it, the surroundings, the breaths that enveloped them, as well as their dulness or their brilliance? Especially given that the mass of glass, an amorphous substance, has received its liquid form from a mould, a container, and the cooled blocks that result from it are therefore negative forms. Volumes replace a void, in a sense calling to the incompleteness in their form which retains the process of leading their liquid state to solid. Immediately it is understood that nothing in the installation can be approached in a blink of an eye, in other words, in the unicity of a sovereign instant. This is exemplified in the vision of Dead Owl: two dead stuffed owls, reified, identical and yet the movement from one to the other dissolves their identity, which becomes “de-naturalised”. To qualify this moment, without conceptualising it as a fissure or break in, Derrida offers the word “difference”. Not a difference that establishes a hierarchy, an order of precedence; just a desynchronisation, an interval that is the very fact of similarity and repetition. The two contiguous identical clocks of Untitled (Perfect Lovers) (1987–1990) have been set at the same hour, minute, second even, but their synchronisation ensured at the beginning of the presentation will gradually become dislocated – and perhaps one of them will stop – opening a time between them. There is no privileged instant, something will always be missed. “The time is out of joint”, says Hamlet in the formulation lent to him by Shakespeare (Act 1, Scene 5). He is designating that disarticulating force of a time that undoes every possibility of a simple identity of one’s own. a.k.a. (2008–2009). The thirty paired self-portraits undo the bind that operates in photography between the visible and the legible: cropped of all context, and the decontextualised photographs have removed the social language that enveloped them, as well as their story encapsulated in the caption. Which face precedes the other? Which is the most “resembling”? The dimension of loss is opened by this gapping. As with the two mirrors embedded in the wall. “Untitled” (Orpheus, Twice) (1991). Two times
warmth and health, the encounter between Roni and Felix unfolds its motions. They each stand as countermovers to the array of bio-political control on bodies, subjectivities and representations. The central, sovereign point of view has thus been replaced by matters of orientation.

It is an orientation that the exhibition gives to my head turning towards light blue, or turning around towards the golden flow of the Double Mobius v2, both double and inseparable.

The poet Anne Carson writes to Roni. 20 “With regard to Double Mobius she is reminded of the myth of Castor and Pollux: twin brothers, one of whom, an immortal, was so sad that the other was mortal that he bargained with Destiny such that alternatively both would be one and the other. ‘Of course,’ adds Carson, ‘it is mathematically and metaphysically daft: you can’t divide an absolute thing in half.’” 21 And yet what fascinates me in this exhibition, with my head turned towards it, is the temporal horizon that the myth fashions for two bodies – Castor and Pollux – and for two discursive positions – Felix and Roni. You and me, perhaps. Impossible? Idiotic? No doubt. It is this horizon that I want nonetheless to cruise in this exhibition. Following the theoretician José Esteban Muñoz. Cruising utopia, for him, is to dream of other spaciotemporal coordinates, “to step out of the here and now”, to strain our vision and force it to see otherwise, beyond the limited vista of the here and now,” 22 including the text you just read now.


2  “The two uncounted men are for us. It was impossible, yet it was so, we see the landscape.”


6  “Castor and Pollux: twin brothers, one of whom, an immortal, was so sad that the other was mortal that he bargained with Destiny such that alternatively both would be one and the other. ‘Of course,’ adds Carson, ‘it is mathematically and metaphysically daft: you can’t divide an absolute thing in half.’”

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