



**Title**

The smoking mother

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**About the author(s)**

was born in Lille and is currently based in Brussels. She received her BA from Central St Martins, University of the Arts London, in 2002 and studied towards her MA at Goldsmiths College, London. She also took part in the LUX Associate Programme. Prouvost won the MaxMara Art Prize for Women in 2011 and was the recipient of the Turner Prize in 2013. Her recent solo exhibition *Stranded By Your Side* was on view at Lisson Gallery, New York, from 7th September to 14th October 2023.

Cover image:

# The smoking mother

by Laure Prouvost • November 2023 • Artist commission

*In Laure Prouvost's meticulously constructed 'legsicon', objects and symbols are given unfamiliar and varied meanings. Across installation, tapestry, text, sculpture and video, they reappear time and time again, each afforded definitions that defy expected associations – but none is more prevalent than the octopus. Its languid tentacles are crystalised in bronze and glass; they curve around items, embracing Prouvost's idiosyncratic vocabulary in their grasp. She often amalgamates the octopus with other creatures and objects, creating fantastical semantic hybrids. At times, they encroach across various surfaces, leaving their mark and infiltrating holes.*

*Prouvost's work revels in slips of language: the arbitrary nature of definition, modes of miscommunication and ideas lost in translation. The artist often invokes a process of de-learning and undoing, attempting the seemingly impossible: to return the viewer to a pre-verbal state. As a 'brain on the plate', for Prouvost, the octopus comes to symbolise the slippery nature of language itself. It both disrupts linguistic convention and holds things together. In this artist commission, Prouvost traces the role and significance of the octopus in her recent practice.*

## OCTOPUS

*feminine, noun.*

Many materialities, can be very beautiful.

Has many legs, can grab anything.

Feels through its leg (brain in the leg).

Can throw ink,  
for cooking and writing.

Humans enjoy eating it.

One of the oldest.

Transparent. Grey-brown. Very powerful. Brain on the plate.

In its environment.



## RELIQUES

*feminine.*

Being used to help.

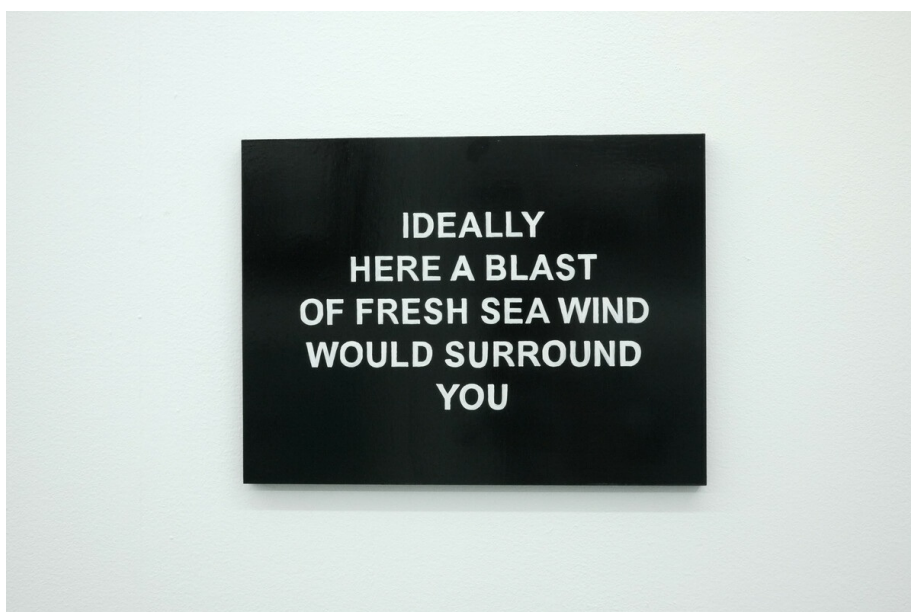
Believing in nature, in miracles.

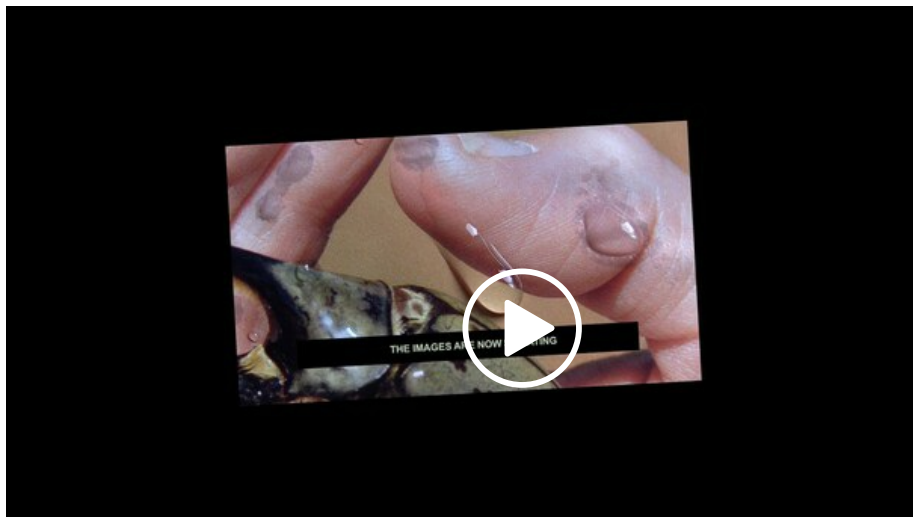
Used to prove something, get the imagination going.

Proof of a reality.

A small part of a bigger thing, often used by religions.

Example, this vegetable fell from the sky.





## LANGUAGE

*feminine. Hard to use well.*

Simplifying but also communicative. Spreading.

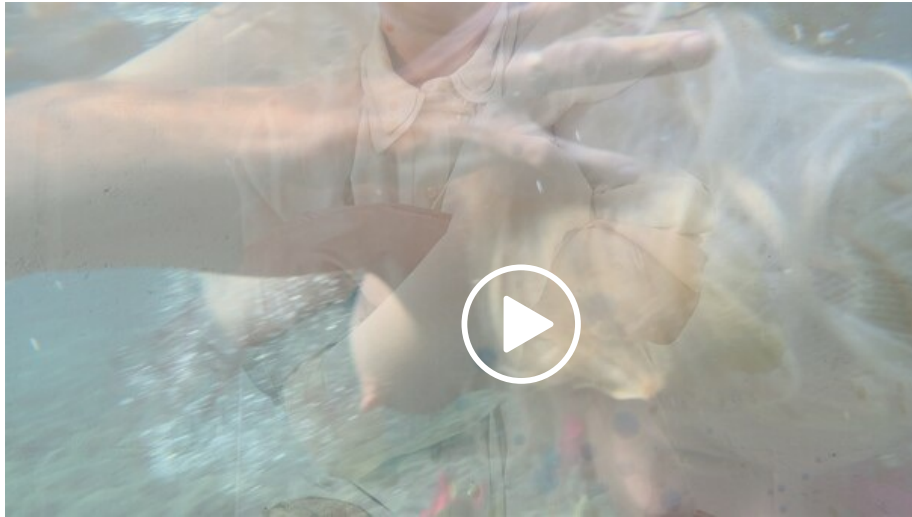
Hard to catch but once there, dominating.

Spoken and written. Structured.

Helps communication between humans but also misunderstanding.







## TRANSFORMATION

*feminine.*

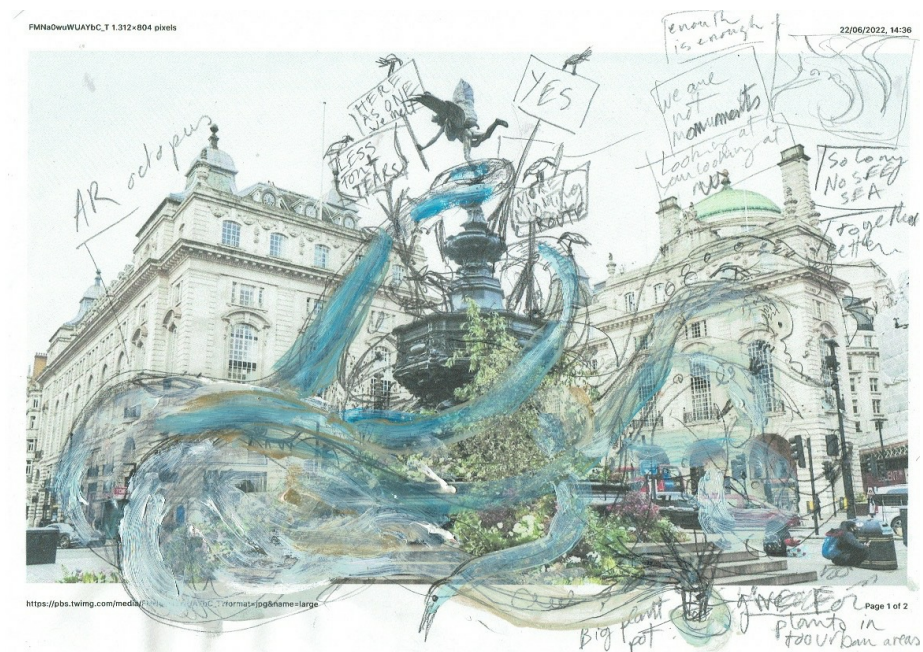
Legs into brains.

Walls into floor door here to get to lost hope.

Words into film, film into word.

Film into performance. Performance into painting. Improvement or not.

Grandma's desire to improve Grandad's art work.





## TRESPASSING

*masculine and feminine.*

Physical thing.

In language it can get you to a place you have dreamed of.

Usually out of law

but often comes with excitement.

Delineation of what belongs to what.

Ring, sing and drink

for trespassing.





MULTIMEDIA [https://burlington.qi-cms.com/media/\\_multimedia/bc\\_general/13%20\\_this%20voice-%20wale%20edited%20edited%20shorter.mp3](https://burlington.qi-cms.com/media/_multimedia/bc_general/13%20_this%20voice-%20wale%20edited%20edited%20shorter.mp3)



**YOU**  
*plural.*

The other.

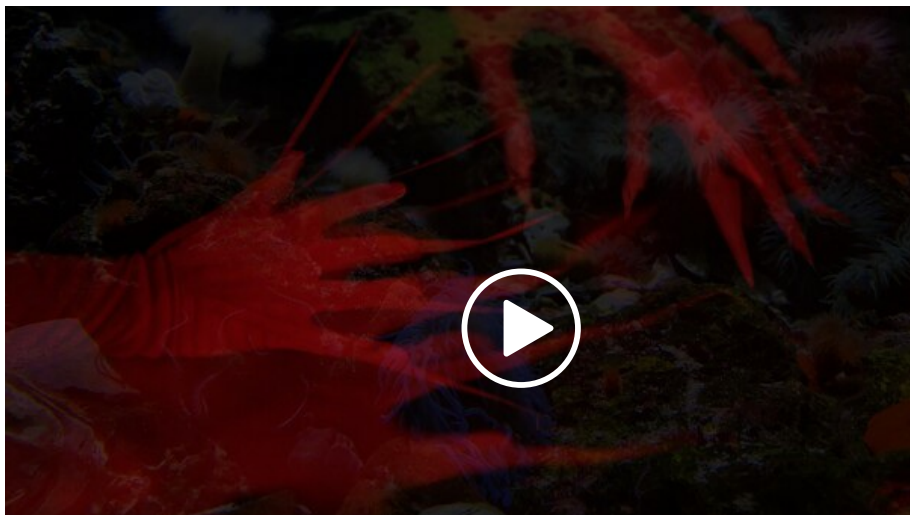
Un knowable.

Is why humans do things.

The reader or the looker of images.

Gatherer,  
just three letters.

Separate from me.



THE  
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