

Face to face with Orlan

Artist's interactive experience

NANTES. French performance artist Orlan, who has had tiny horns inserted on her forehead by a plastic surgeon, brings her brand of interactive art to Nantes with a site-specific project at the Musée des Beaux-Arts, which aims to get the public speaking aloud. Visitors will be encouraged to discuss subjects suggested by her in the museum's Chapelle de l'Oratoire as part of the "Ox on the Tongue" site-specific work (the term, used by sociologist Bruno Latour, refers to the inability to express oneself and the issue of clamming up). "Orlan has created an installation based on a certain number of words ["sensuality", "responsibility" and "radioactivity"], which incite debate on the theme

of ethics, biological sciences and multiculturalism," said Blandine Chavanne, the museum's director and co-curator of the show. "This piece invites people to be actors in an open forum located in the choir of the chapel." The space houses chairs designed by Orlan.

The centrepiece of the display is a menacing figure, set on a raised sloping platform and wrapped in a black shroud. "The black fabric can be seen as the weight of a veil blanketing the whole of humanity," said a museum spokeswoman. The sides of the dais are covered with a specially designed, garish Harlequin-esque cloth printed with images of bacteria and cells; while 12

life-size playful sculptures encircle the ominous central effigy.

Meanwhile, a permanent display of digital photography by Orlan, who has undergone many operations to modify parts of her body, opened at the University of Nantes Medicine and Pharmacy Faculty in 2009. The works, "Radiographies des Temps", are an extension of her "Self Hybridisations" series (begun in 1998), which shows the artist's face merged with the facial features of Pre-Colombian, African and American-Indian figures. The piece has been funded by a 1% tax on new buildings. ■

Gareth Harris

Orlan: An Ox on the Tongue
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