

MACS

Musée des Arts Contemporains
Grand-Hornu

Tamara Lai. *Silent Noise*

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PRESS RELEASE

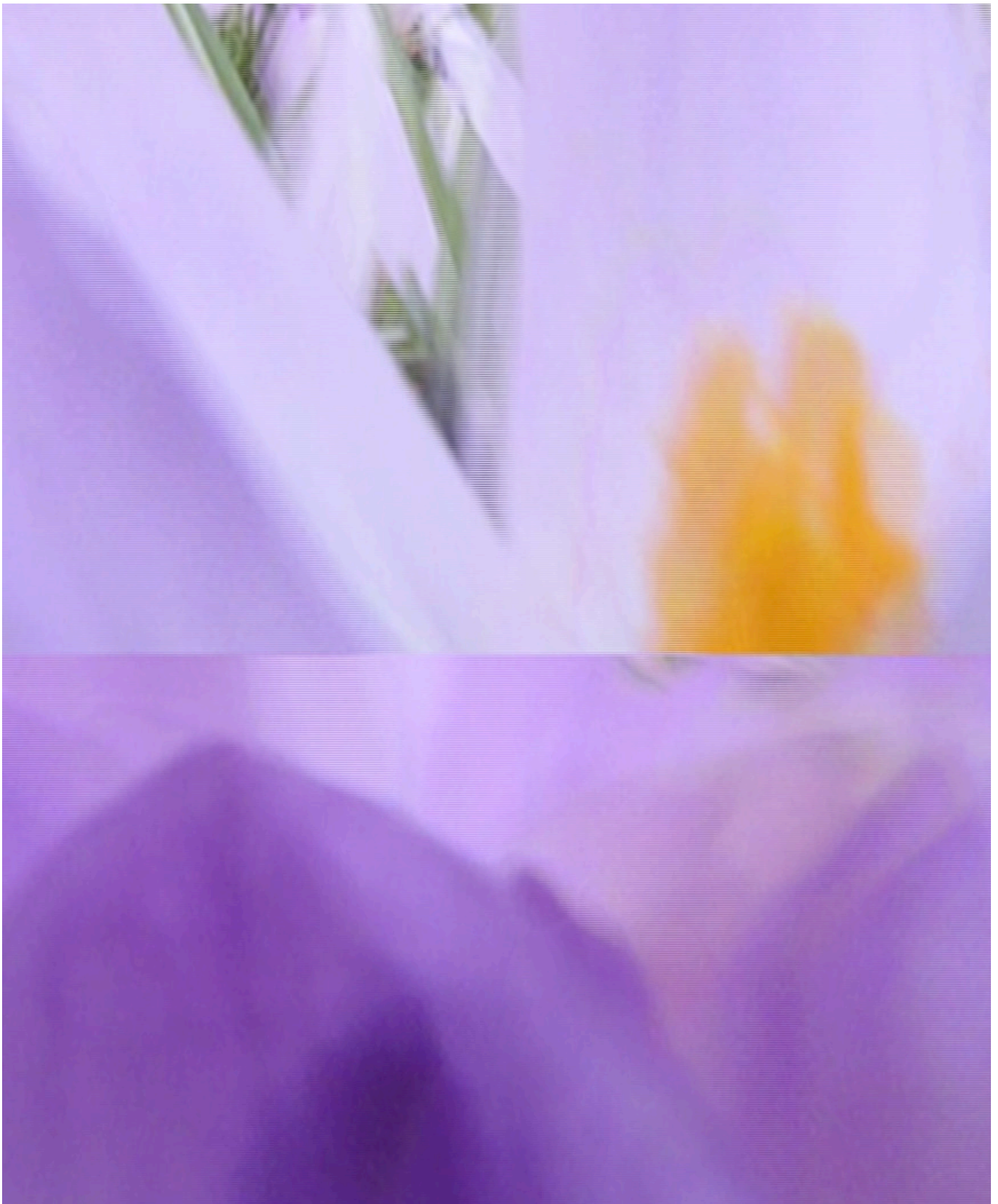


Image extracted from the video *Silent Noise (detail)*, 2020

The exhibition

Since the outset of her artistic activity (1985), Tamara Laï (born in Italy, lives and works in Liège) has produced a body of work in which the variety of multimedia supports has extended in pace with her development and discoveries, from video to website via cam & chat performance, video conference, poetry collection and CD-ROM. Although she first explored painting and photography at the Academy of Fine Arts in Liège, benefitting from the teaching of Jacques-Louis Nyst a pioneer of video art in Belgium, she remains little known in the field of contemporary visual arts. However her sensitivity to the poetic potential of image and sound, through fiction and narration, guided Tamara Laï in her discovery of a favorable context for her artistic development in the digital arts. In this field, her ephemeral, participatory works, especially Net Art, have been included in the official selections of many international festivals around the world.

A cinema and literature enthusiast, Tamara Laï began her artistic career in the mid-1980s as a videographer, notably for Créahm (Creativity and mental handicap) where she was working at the time. In 1992, Laï won first prize from the Center Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir in Paris for her video *Anatomica*, which focused on the work of a young Spanish choreographer, but intuitively perceived the imminent emergence of digital arts. After following a training course on interactive multimedia communication in 1995, Tamara Laï then became one of the first Belgian artists to use CD-ROM and web networks to develop multimedia, interactive works characterised by their hypertext poetics. Web Art, Net Art, participatory and collaborative projects, as well as the creation of interactive CD-ROMs actively occupied her until in 2012, when she produced the videos *Wandering* and *Sound Feelings*. Conceived as experimental road movies, these videos along with the ones that followed them consisted of images recorded during her travels, which she then reworked at home using relatively simple special effects, before sharing them internationally on the Web with the virtual communities she had belonged to for a long time.

Having thus ended her production of sites, cam & chat performances and video conferences, Tamara Laï has pursued her artistic journey «on the road» for ten years now, tirelessly filming the world around her to build up a reserve of images from which she is able to draw her “video-poems”. Philippe Franck, a keen observer of digital arts notably within Transcultures and the City Sonic festival, has nevertheless identified the hallmark of rhizomatic narration specific to the language developed by the

CD-ROM or Web Art. As he wrote in the exhibition catalogue: “The work of Tamara Lai is an infinite road movie, wandering with a thirst for otherness which evolves whilst tracing connections through various places, cities, landscapes, countries and more or less familiar cultures. She speaks to us of our diversity, its charms but also its concerns, its sensations and questions... like a logbook with numerous entries, a hypertextual story, with no beginning or end.”

Through a selection of six videos produced between 2012 and 2021, the MACS has chosen to present the eminently poetic work of this multimedia artist and early Web activist, which will be seen here for the first time outside festivals or digital arts networks. One of them, *Silent Noise* (2020), produced during the so-called “lock-down” gave its title to the exhibition at Grand-Hornu. The title, which immediately underlines the importance of the soundscape at the heart of the artist’s multimedia work, is taken from a poetic passage where the flow of her thoughts penetrates that of her cinematic images in an elegiac atmosphere. On the screen, an environment of cables and concrete is capsizing and breaking up, while a text emerges—like an e-mail—from the shipwreck: “Too much silent noise today in my virtual life, cannot listen to the words of truth.” During the lockdown, the oxymoronic formula of silent noise echoes our profound solitude, whilst the health crisis reduced social relations to distant exchanges. Consisting of images filmed in China, Scotland and Italy before the Covid-19 pandemic and others filmed during the lockdown in Liège, the work evokes loss, isolation, the infringement of freedom, the loss of joy, but also the need to breathe, to be in contact with nature and to seek out our lost insouciance. With *Silent Noise*, as in most of her video poems, Tamara Lai combines her images in order to weave an immense narration that can be interpreted in many ways.

Like *Silent Noise*, the videos *Sound Feelings* (2012) and *Ascent* (2013) are marked by nomadism and music. In the former, this poetic, sonorous wandering is guided by the filmed performance of the bewitching guitar-playing of Gérard Jouffroy (similar to American Primitivism). In the latter, the electro-cinematic music of Laurent Saiset preexists the visual material and the images flow through it like a throbbing, sensual choreography. For *WetWetWet* (2015), extrapolated from a poem created for a collaborative Net Art project in 2001, we again find the principle of sound travel with images shot in Ostend, La Rochelle and Antwerp, as well as in China, layered with sounds of Tibetan chants and acoustic guitars (Glenn Jones). In *Gaps* (2014), Tamara Lai highlights the discordances, fractures, contrasts and voids found in modern life, while with *@TENDRE* (2021), she draws on fragments of a text written in 2005 (*My Virtual Body*) and a soundtrack by Bruce Gremo, a composer and performer from New York working in Beijing, to express her private thoughts in the context of the health crisis. A sort of meditation in motion, this latest film evokes the current era and the events of the past year-and-a-half, with its forced virtuality and permanent threat, but also bursts of vitality and resistance, such as the *Still Standing* movement. In conclusion, images of nature reappear once again, directing our gaze to what is essential, this connection to the world around us. Yet this essential quality is but a “dream”, the artist tells us, since we can only imagine our future life. “We are here waiting... sad and tender, at the same time...”

Images extracted from the videos *Ascent*, 2013 (above) and *Sound Feelings*, 2012 (below)

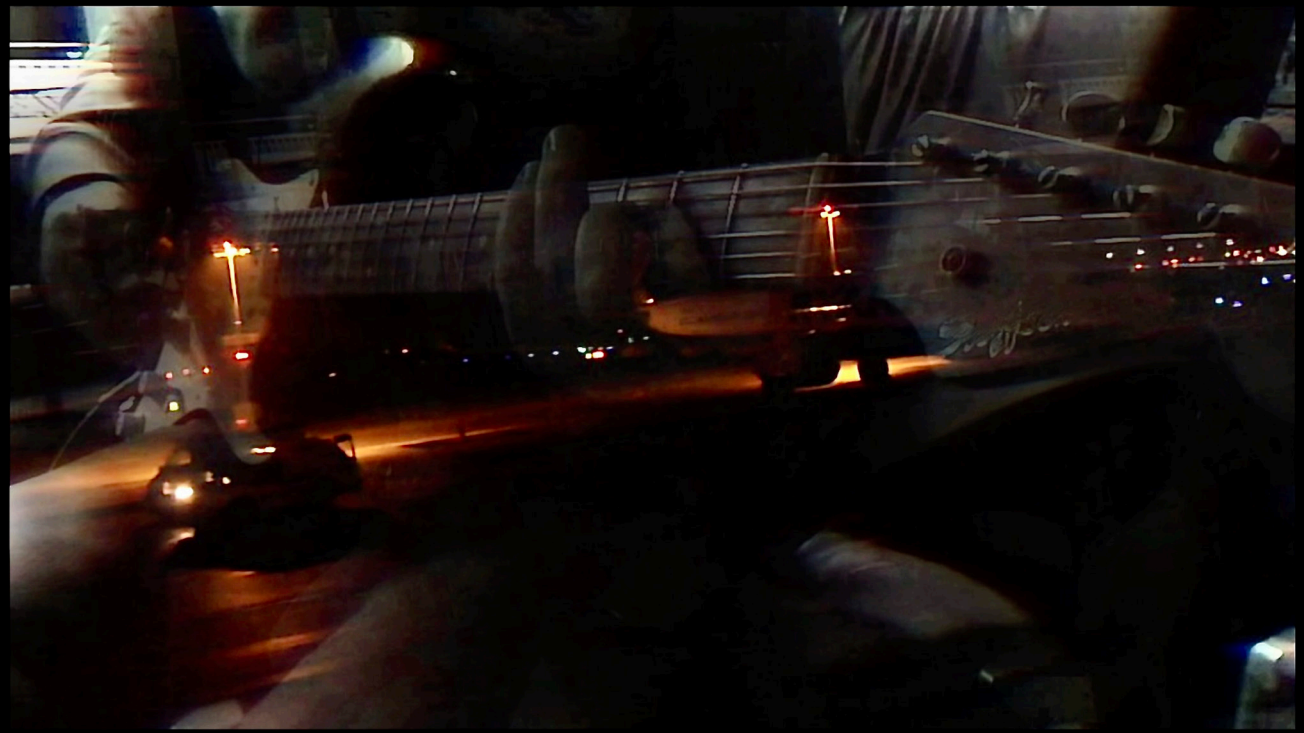




Image extracted from the video-poem *I & THEM*

The Artist

Belgian-Italian interdisciplinary artist and video director (1985), in 1993 Tamara Lai turned to digital techniques: interactive multimedia, computer graphics and special effects, and writing interactive short stories, tales and poetry (CD-ROMs). An early web activist and network artist (1997), her research focuses on Net Art / Web Art (including sites, cam & chat performances and video conferences), and in particular the creation of participatory digital spaces. In 2012, she returned to video, through a series of experimental road movies, video poems and portraits of artists. Tamara Lai creates videos and media works using a poetic and often metaphorical syntax. Her works appear as dreamlike images on the boundary between fiction and reality. Sound, rhythm and movement always play a crucial role. Her profoundly introspective poetry, close to automatic writing, often achieves a dangerous transition between the Self and the Other. Over more than 35 years of artistic activity, Tamara Lai has produced some forty videos, over twenty websites united in the *Tell A Mouse* web ring, around ten videos, cam & chats and multimedia shows / performances, four interactive works on CD-ROM and a collection *@TENDRE* (2006) bringing together twenty poems. She has also contributed to many collaborative / participatory Net Art projects of other artists from different countries. Her works “between happening and ephemeral art” have received awards and nominations several times, and have been included in the official selections of festivals and international events in more than thirty countries.

Image extracted from the video *WetWetWet*, 2015



Works

Sound Feelings

2012

11'35'', HD, PAL, 16:9, colour & sound

Production, image, montage, mixing and soundtrack: Tamara Lai

Music: Gérard Jouffroy

Ascent

2013

4', HD, PAL, 16:9, colour & sound

production, image, montage: Tamara Lai

Music: Laurent Saïet

Gaps

2014

4'39'', HD, PAL, 16:9, colour & sound

Production, image, montage, mixing and soundtrack: Tamara Lai

WetWetWet

2015

2'49'', HD, PAL, 16:9, colour & sound

Production, image, montage, mixing, soundtrack and poems: Tamara Lai

Silent Noise

2020

6'21'', HD, PAL, 16:9, colour & sound

Production, image, montage, mixing, soundtrack and poems: Tamara Lai

Music: Caroline Boë

@TENDRE

2021

5'29'', HD, PAL, 16:9, colour & sound

Production, image, montage, mixing, soundtrack and poems: Tamara Lai

Music: Bruce Gremo

All images : © Tamara Lai

Images extracted from the video *Gaps*, 2014 (above) et *@TENDRE*, 2021 (below)



Exhibition Catalogue

Tamara Lai. *Silent Noise*

Editor: MACS | Musée des Arts Contemporains au Grand-Hornu

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ON THE ROAD TO GRACELAND

Philippe Franck

There was nowhere to go but everywhere,
so just keep on rolling under the stars.

JACK KEROUAC, ON THE ROAD¹

Après avoir exploré la peinture et la photographie à l'Académie des Beaux-Arts de Liège, Tamara Lai réalise, en 1989, un documentaire de création, *Cheval Corps et Âme*, qu'elle prolonge d'un premier vidéo-poème, *Mouvement 5 – ps. À Cheval Corps et Âme* et ce quatre ans après avoir plongé dans ce médium, en totale autodidacte. On retrouve déjà dans le titre d'une œuvre débutante, sa passion pour le mouvement et le voyage qui perce dans l'ensemble de ses vidéos mais ici plus précisément sa passion équestre, quand elle pratiquait alors l'équitation de dressage.

C'est bien l'écriture qui est au centre de cette série, celle du fragment poétique, en français et en anglais (la langue du *trip*, dans tous les sens que peut prendre ce terme), une écriture trait d'union entre différents genres (vidéo, musique, documentaire, cinéma expérimental) ; la forme poétique exprime une certaine présence au monde mais aussi sa métamorphose permanente. Elle est une façon de (mieux) vivre le monde plutôt que de le poétiser pour s'en échapper. Tamara Lai traque cette « respiration de l'art dans les poumons de la révolte qui réinvente la vie »² que l'écrivain Serge Pey a nommée « poévie », à la fois pensée et action du poème. Elle est synonyme de liberté — de ton et de forme — que l'on retrouve dans les vidéo-poèmes et plus généralement dans une œuvre qui s'est construite en toute indépendance, et ce tant dans sa production qu'elle gère elle-même, en sus de la réalisation, du montage et du mix — si pas de la création — sonore, que dans des formes qui tournent le dos à tout formatage.

Sans doute, pourrait-elle souscrire au discours des pionniers de l'art vidéo à peine paraphrasé : « Si les systèmes traditionnels de production et de diffusion ne veulent pas de nous, nous nous organiserons sans eux, voire contre eux. »

De 1987 à 1994, Tamara Lai réalise des vidéos autour du mouvement, celui des corps dans l'espace et des gestes (en filmant principalement des danseurs et des performeurs), mais aussi de la

Agenda of Activities

Info and Reservations

Online: www.mac-s.be/fr/reservations

By telephone: +32 (0)65 613 902

By e-mail: reservations@grand-hornu.be

DAILY ENCOUNTERS

Free guided visits from Tuesday to Friday at 2pm and Sundays at 11am and 2pm. (in French)

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

PREVIEW

25th September - from 5 to 8pm

(4.30pm for children)

À perte de vue, a retrospective devoted to the Belgian artist Léon Wuidar, including many paintings, collages and sketchbooks created since 1962.

Silent Noise, an exhibition of videos by Tamara Laï, a digital arts pioneer, whose collected images explore our humanity and its defining characteristics.

Preview for children: 4.30pm
(Reservations by phone or e-mail)
Guided visits for adults: 6pm and 7pm

Free Day

Info and reservations: +32 (0)65 613 902 / reservations@grand-hornu.be

Concert

Vocal Emotion

Musiques Nouvelles

New Music 26th September - 11am

Vocal cords and sounded strings wonderfully combine to create profound emotions that are able to transport us through numerous journeys.

This New Music concert is organised as part of the Festival Musical du Hainaut.

Atelier Baz'art

3rd October, 7th November, 5th December
From 2pm to 4.30pm

Discover the work of the artist Léon Wuidar in a practical workshop and a visit of the exhibition.

03.10: collage workshop
07.11: graphics workshop
05.12: painting workshop

From 8 to 12 years
€5 / workshop

Family Thursdays

4th November, 30th December, 6th January
At 11am

Visit of the exhibitions followed by a monogram creation workshop.

Christmas at Grand-Hornu

○ Origami Workshop

Tuesdays 28.12.21 and 04.01.22 - 2pm

Taking inspiration from Léon Wuidar's geometric compositions, initiate yourself in the traditional Japanese art of paper folding. In the company of a professional origami artist, discover the endless possibilities offered by paper.

20 participants (adults + children)

Duration: 2h

○ Family Thursdays

Thursdays 30.12.21 and 06.01.22 - 11am

○ Storytelling Walks

Sundays 26.12.21 and 02.01.22 - 2pm

Accompanied by the storytellers Magali Mineur and Christine Andrien, let yourself be guided through a storytelling visit, in this alternative opportunity to discover the mischievous works of Léon Wuidar.

20 participants.

From age 6 years.

Video Workshop

3rd November

From 2pm to 4.30pm

From images to montage and the sound track, produce a short video on your smartphone inspired by Tamara Laï's universe.

In the company of the filmmaker Eddy Munyaneza.

Smartphone obligatory

12 adolescents (aged 12 to 15 years)

€10

SCHOOLS

Primary Schools Month

From 08.11 to 03.12.21

Make the most of the free entry and guided visit for your classes during the Primaries Month. The active visit led by the educational team will enable your

children to speak up and decipher the works of the Liège artist as a group. Adapted supports and a young people's guide will be provided to enable them to fully discover the paintings by the artist Léon Wuidar.

ENCOUNTERS

Guided visit with Jacques Charlier

17th October - 2pm

Guided visit of the exhibition *À perte de vue* by Jacques Charlier, a Liège artist and close friend of Léon Wuidar, who will offer his vision of the exhibition.

Conference by Philippe Franck

Hybrid videographic writings

(combination of video, poetry and sound creation)

9th December - 8pm

Through the work of Tamara Laï and other moving image artists who closely combine the visual, poetic and sound dimensions, Philippe Franck (director of Transcultures and culture critic) draws out the dynamic relations between these media and how these forms and inter-mediatic images are combined in unique works.

Guided visit with Denis Gielen

30th January - 2pm

On the occasion of the exhibitions devoted to the artists Léon Wuidar and Tamara Laï, join the guided visit with Denis Gielen, director of the MACS and curator of the exhibitions.

Upcoming Exhibitions

Aline Bouvy. Cruising Bye

27.02.22 > 18.09.22

Gaillard & Claude

27.02.22 > 18.09.22

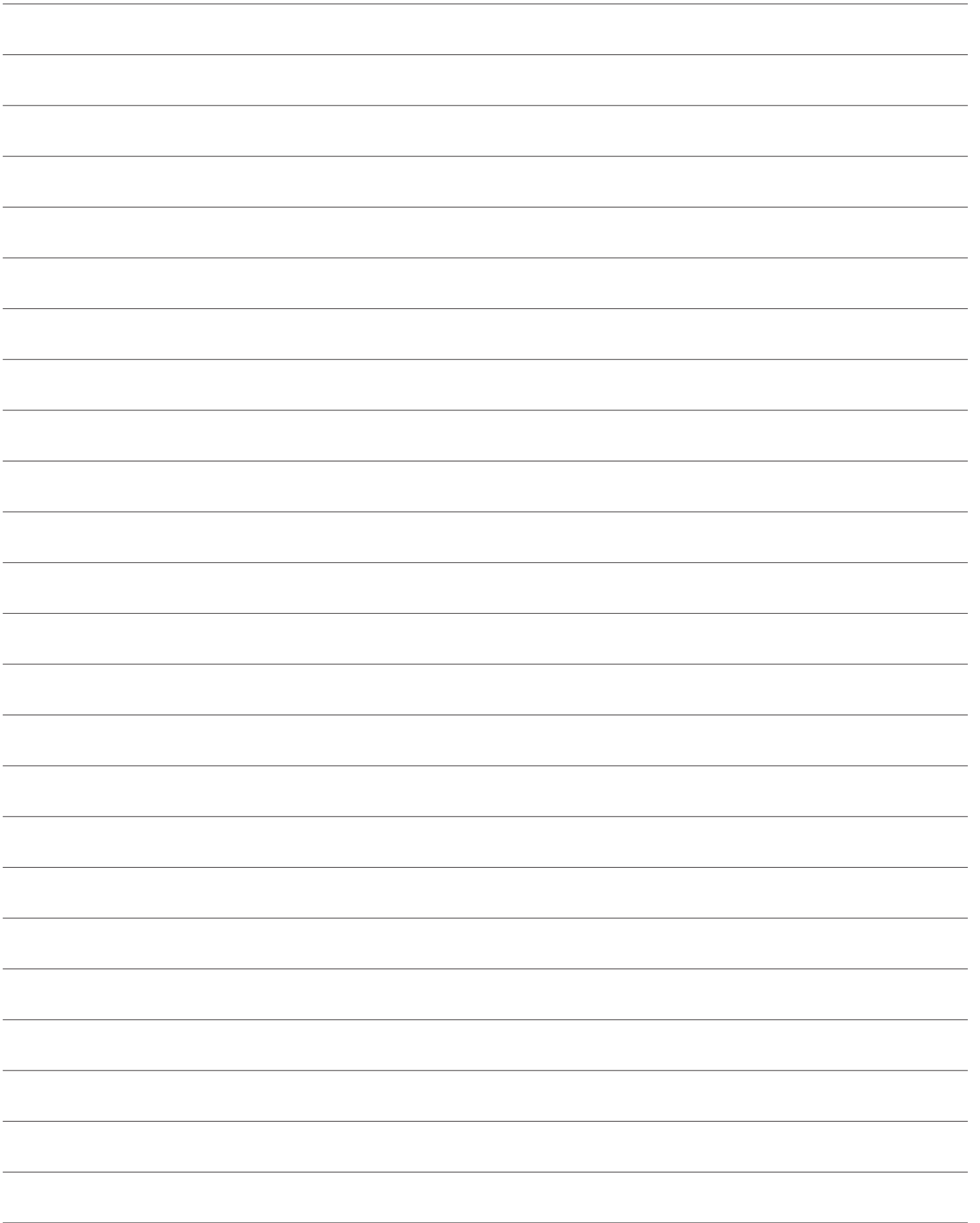
Les Fabriques du cœur et les Folies du monde

Contes

23.10.22 > 26.02.23

Angel Vergara

From April 2023



Practical Information

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