"Most of the blacks don't have health insurance and therefore can't afford AZT. They all died quickly, the blacks. If I go through my *Black Book,* half of them are dead. "

– Robert Mapplethorpe about his *Black Book*

when you look at me like that with those eyes
I feel dead too
and feel some pleasure about it too

In John Lindell's practice, the body is a sum of words – a list – or a cartography of forms or marks. Which creates a body that doesn't necessarily appears except in the video *Caress* where we attend to two men making out. But even in this one, the process is based on sequencing; John Lindell isolated scenes of tenderness extracted from a pornographic movie from the 60's where Joe Dallessandro plays. Even in this case, the body is divided, cut image by image to create a new narration. Indeed, John Lindell's work seems to talk about how you sexually narrate yourself as a gay man by using or dismantling categorization.

The rest of the work presented in this first solo exhibition in France is much more abstract and evocative. But this work doesn't necessarily enter in contradiction with the rest of the pieces. In *Caress,* Joe Dallessandro is an icon -a person being so represented that he has almost become *unreal-*. *How an existing body can be an abstraction too.*

Of course, there is something political about dividing a body and making it irrepresentable as John Lindell does. The refusal of being seen. In his photograms, the artist represents erogenous body parts through geometric symbols. A star is an anus. In *Put Your Lips around Yes* and *Sunray,* John gives us access to stereotypes by quoting titles from the porn industry. *Ass. Cum. Fuck. Fucker.* In *The Blue Hour*, we have access to voices of men on sex line who are looking for partners. The words they use to describe themselves seem to be directly taken from the titles mentioned above. As if categories had infused them and were used as a grid to read themselves. In a moving passage, a man describing himself stutters on the words "dominant top" as if he was not sure of who he was. *It doesn't fit. What do grammar and words offer to imagine yourself.* This is the definition of a stigma. There is passivity (= violence) about it but there is also the possibility to play with it (sexuality as a practice).

The "I" is definitely composed of what is said about it. The discourse we have about ourselves is always mediated by others. so sad I can't describe myself to you through my own words

But what remains sometimes from a moment or a person is just a mark (like the cumburst on the lightbox that looks like the Milky Way). Abstraction is not only a voluntary gesture; it is also the result of memory.

Through his work, John Lindell gives a form to what was mainly in someone's head; the remembering of touch, of kiss, underling how sex is as much composed of the realness of the body than the imagination that precedes the act of making love and what stays after.

Maybe this is the reason why we can detect a melancholic tone in John Lindell's work. *Caress* can be read as a moment of rest in an anxious and tragic time – the AIDS epidemic; *Put Your Lips around Yes* and *Sunray* too, evoking by their editing New York's nightlife, its clubs, its streets, that were also heterotopias in death time. And in *The Blue Hour,* there is something very moving in hearing those men looking for someone to bond with (the editing is done in such a way that we can't tell whether any reply was ever given, making those messages look like bottles thrown into the sea).

Quoting John Lindell himself quoting Andy Warhol: "Sex is always nostalgia about sex."

Thinking about Kobena Mercer in *Reading Racial Fetishism: the Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe,* where he admits he was sharing the same desire to look at those bodies Mapplethorpe photographed – but as a Black gay man there is identification (not distance) and even envy toward those models. Pleasure can be found in distancing -creating *otherness,* revealing a form of curiosity for the unknown (*such a thrill)*. However, it may also emerge through fusion, when a form of identification develops between the subject (or object) and the viewer, who comes to desire the reflected image of himself in a narcissistic gesture.

Me desring me through
you

- Camille Kingué

John Lindell, *Put Your Lips Around Yes,* curated by Alexis De Bonis, 11.06.26-25.07.26