The presenter

**Anne-Catherine Berrut** was born in Switzerland in 1987. She practiced the violin intensively from the age of 7 and was trained as a professional, but an arm injury forced her to stop playing when she was 19. Then she moved to Geneva where she graduated in history of art, English and French literature. She began a master in French in Geneva university last year, and is currently in a year abroad at Smith College on the Diploma of American studies program. Her thesis consists of a chapbook of poetry that she’s writing under the guidance of Susan Van Dyne, entitled « looking for the body music » - the one she’ll be presenting on Collaboration day. She resumed playing music last year and at Smith, she took music as her main discipline with poetry.

The project

My thesis towards the AMS diploma consists of a chapbook of poems, that I’m writing under the guidance of Susan Van Dyne, professor of the study of women and gender. I chose “The Self and the Feminine Within the Poetical Text” as a label of my presentation as it roughly describes one of the main theme of my chapbook, namely the question of womanhood, and more specifically, how women are constructed by society. As a main study case, I chose Marylin Monroe about whom I wrote a series of poems interspersed in the collection. The second part of my chapbook is devoted to music as an intimate, physical experience, and as a way to communicate with beloved people.

The title of my chapbook will be **Looking for the body music**, phrasing which I borrowed from a poem by Michael Klein.

The project originated in a seminar given by Susan Van Dyne, “American women poets”, in which we read and analysed poems by contemporary women writers, and we were encouraged to pastiche them as an exercise. As I grew fond the exercise, I wanted to discover what would be my voice like in English – which is something new for me. I used to write in French, but being for one year immersed in an English-speaking environment I felt I had to switch the language of my intimate thoughts as well. Moreover, as a non-native speaker, each word in English still creates surprise within me, and I assume I could use this as a poetical booster.
Parker meridien, late in a cold winter night

I’m back from the opera, hair tightly pulled up, mouth dramatically red and eyes lined with kohl. My elegant coat, everything about me says: “somebody pays”, as I am smoking a cigarette in front of the hotel, under the arcade. Heavy bright spotlights diffuse a slow penetrating warmth, like a hot bath, or a spell. I’m a princess it seems, but my heart longs for cheap. A homeless man strolls by, an unlit cigarette sticking out of his mouth, shiny clever eyes. A glance, he stops, asks for a light. He blinks and steps back

Holy shit! You’re getting suntanned under these spots!, I light him up, as his fingers, wounded and dirty, close firmly around my delicate hands. At least it’s warm, I say, looking into his eyes, and he answers with a grin:

It’s not too cold.
Marilyn

Hungry  
As you love  
The men’s gobbledegook masters you  
They like to terrify you  
- And you get numb  
Poor thing, you were shy and look at you

Grown up child with a strawberry mouth  
- Speck of wine  
On a white tablecloth -  
That blows vowels and sucks the air  
Your eye peers around,  
Looking for its own anguish

Flashes wink  
Your lashes flap

Renaissance flesh in silver dress  
Your sturdy body drifts in busy places  
Photographers like flies  
Follow your sugary scent

You glitter and burn in the light  
Like a moth
The day I was Marilyn Monroe

“I’ve never fooled anyone. I’ve let people fool themselves. They would invent a character for me and they were obviously loving somebody I wasn't.” - Marilyn Monroe

This morning I was Marilyn Monroe for a friend of mine who's shooting a film, and I had to stand in front of a mirror,

staring
at myself: mole (scratch that: the beauty spot), butterfly lashes, half-closed mouth, red opera, line of the cheeks, the whole glamour blur…

Next shot:
smearing make-up all over my face, in a gigantic, theatrical sob.

Too much hoarding.

You want to get rid of things: those things that made you and that got to define you, by progressively erasing you. And you became a thing – for wanting to be perfect.

Last shot: shining in the dark, a teardrop you blink away, before discarding the clown in the mirror.
**Looking for the body music**

Don’t listen to the ache. Don’t listen to the yelling
sore shoulders and gritting muscles, stiff as wood.
I am the body instrument that sings *dolor -*
you extract a mellow resonance from my belly,
modulate and shape it with a clever bow drawn across my chords.
you curl, furl and swallow yourself
In a big cramp (take the pain, shove it down the throat, bite hard,
swallow and forget).
Once the melody has been pulled out of me, once the world has been taken out of me,
then I can see beyond myself and
get my oblivion.

**Remember**

when our minds would converge on the notes
and our hands on the fingerboard The sight of us two
would have them come Would have them come and pay

But the salability of our duo was not the point dear
O dear sister your soul was mine and mine was yours
Who told you you had to break my back to get your way
Couldn’t we stand on the same line?
O Cain O Abel the old history repeats

I want you to learn the word *sorority*
Let us move forward hand in hand you are my soul and I am yours The
Bond is sealed we were shaped in the same woman’s womb and
We sucked the same nipples
Practice tenderness instead of scales and I will love you
I will love you
To the scroll

West pole of my bearings
flinched like a beak at the extremity
of the fingerboard, you’re the only
sharp angle
of my oh so well-rounded singing companion.
On top of the ageless
carmine body,
there you lie, mimicking its curves,
mesmerizing loop that shrinks to
nothing – or just a little dot,
so compressed,
heavy as the universe.

Curl following curl,
I lay my palm on your bump,
that jogs back gently
to my clutch, like a nod,
and teaches me not to possess

Let me nest in your furling, let me
be trapped a life long in the tightness
of your coil, kissed, pressed,
smashed,
by the sweetness of your embrace,
like a snail in its shell