





Jean-Christophe Ammann

## *Manon: “Eroticism Was My Theme” — Memories*



Does Manon exist? Is she real or a phantom? Sculptor and Pygmalion in one? Can I touch her or does she slip away? Will my fingers burn or freeze? What does her skin taste like? Is it the stone cold of marble that I want to bring to life? Is punishment meted out to the tongue that follows her perfect forms and curves, that runs over the smoothness of her beautiful, shaven head? Do I want to submit myself to her as dominatrix? Or does she merely force me to imagine that which could be ecstasy? Is she the call girl that fills me with fatal desire who, at the moment of embrace, metamorphoses into a dowdy cleaning lady? Is she death, lurking over me? A zombie? A being from another world that catapults me into the maelstrom of a waking unconsciousness, with the aim of making me an addict by her constant withdrawal? Were Manon to have a voice, she would bewitch me, shock me to the marrow with a striking coldness; give me silent, detailed commands that abide no dissent.

Or am I in the midst of one of those complex situations as described by Hansjörg Schertenleib in his captivating novel *Das Zimmer der Signora* (Cologne 1996)? In the story, an anonymous man tells the Signora his exact desires:

At precisely 11:30 tomorrow morning I will be waiting for you patiently in the reading room on the ground floor of the state library. I will be sitting at the far end of the long reading table near the philosophy shelf, behind an opened copy of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Human, All too Human II*. You will sit down across from me.