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They filmed a world-famous author (68) having sex. Then he got furious.

Star author Michel Houellebecq wants to stop the sex film he participated in, but the project continues. Now, Aftenposten may also become part of the film.

"The man knows what he's doing, he's not an idiot," says Stefan Ruitenbeek. He adjusts the microphone for his girlfriend, Kate Sinha, checking if the sound works as it should.

In their Amsterdam studio, the interviewees have set up two cameras: one pointed at themselves and one at Aftenposten's journalist and photographer. The couple is behind the most talked-about pornographic film in the world over the past year. The still-unpublished film contains sex scenes with the French star author Michel Houellebecq (68). Houellebecq has gone to court to stop the film. In a book about the conflict, he even compared himself to a rape victim.

When Aftenposten meets Ruitenbeek and Sinha in Amsterdam, they demand to record our interview. Ruitenbeek and Sinha film everything. And the filming for the Houellebecq film is still not over.

A controversial couple. Twelve years ago, artist Ruitenbeek was captivated by how archaeologist Sinha talked about art. At that time, he made a film where porn actors pretended to be cavemen having sex. After getting to know Sinha, his artistic focus shifted. "I realized I had to film her while she talked. That was the erotic attraction she had on me." In 2016, they started the artist collective Kirac. They filmed themselves confronting other artists – who sometimes did not want to be filmed – with brutal criticism. The couple is particularly annoyed with those who adapt to get funding, for example by promoting diversity. Art should not be activist or useful, they believe.

"Wherever these art critics show up, people tremble in their pants," writes the Dutch Volkskrant. The films are released on YouTube, some only for subscribers via Patreon. Whether one truly meets Ruitenbeek and Sinha or characters they play is unclear. Ruitenbeek says he feels like lying when asked serious questions. He does not want to talk about upbringing and family. Some claims they make during the interview, they later say they lied about, and then admit they lied about lying. The couple is open about playing with the boundaries between fiction and fact, both in art and when dealing with journalists, which for them is one and the same.

This is the game Michel Houellebecq hoped to participate in. This later emerged in court. "He thought it was a good idea," Ruitenbeek says. Aftenposten has tried to reach Houellebecq for questions on this matter, but he has not responded. The author has done similar projects before, such as when he played himself in a film where he was kidnapped by Islamists. Houellebecq is controversial, particularly due to harsh statements about Islam. Criticism of feminism is a recurring theme in his books.

Houellebecq liked Kirac's controversial film "Honeypot" from 2021, according to Ruitenbeek. In it, the leftist philosophy student and OnlyFans content creator Jini van Rooijen goes to bed with the right-wing philosopher Sid Lukkassen. He regretted it, but the film was published.

How can they justify publishing against someone's consent? "What would you do if I said I no longer want this interview, and you can't use any of it?" Sinha asks back.

Houellebecq wanted to have sex. According to Kirac, Houellebecq wanted to participate in a project like that with Sid Lukkassen. In the fall of 2022, Kirac went to Paris with the same philosophy student from "Honeypot." "He thought it was a good idea for him to make an art film with this type of erotic idea," says Ruitenbeek. In the book "Some Months in My Life," Houellebecq claims Kirac baited him. He says he was told the student was a great admirer. The author says he wanted to have sex with her and agreed to be filmed. In the contract he signed, it stated that his face and genitals should not be shown simultaneously. This was to ensure a veil between fiction and reality.

The plan was for Houellebecq to have sex with several women. Kirac was supposed to follow the author and his wife over time. It fell apart, and the parties cut contact. It was only when the trailer was released at the beginning of 2023 that it exploded and led to a lawsuit.

Is everything still part of the art project? A planned performance? When asked if the whole thing is a planned performance, Ruitenbeek and Sinha answer affirmatively. “Yes, it absolutely is. There was a lot of fantasizing about the scandalous element while we were filming,” says Ruitenbeek. It is unclear if he means what he says or if he is now making things up.

“Did Houellebecq ever mention he would take you to court?” “Words about court were mentioned. And I will show you when the film is ready how exactly this unfolded.”

At the same time, Sinha says she believes the author has genuinely been angry with them. “I think he actually takes it all very seriously, but I think he has forgotten why he got so angry.”

Outwardly, Houellebecq has said that fiction was taken too far. He apparently reacted strongly to the trailer's claim that his wife ensures he has access to prostitutes. In lawsuits in France and the Netherlands, he claimed that Kirac broke the agreement to make art, as they referred to the film as a pornographic film in interviews. In "Some Months in My Life," Houellebecq describes Ruitenbeek as the Cockroach, and Sinha as the Poisonous Snake. This way, they become part of his fictional universe, where the Poisonous Snake is portrayed as the mastermind behind everything. “I like to see myself that way,” says Sinha. While she talks, Ruitenbeek gets up several times, either to check the sound or to fetch coffee.

The camera keeps rolling. Regardless of what was planned: The court did not stop the film. Kirac is still required to show Houellebecq the final result before publication. Meanwhile, it has developed into a larger art project. All the drama around – such as this interview – can become part of the film itself. They now also see the project as part of a battle between traditional novel art, which Houellebecq represents, and new art forms, which Kirac creates.

Fans are starting to get impatient, and Kirac is entirely dependent on subscribers and donors continuing to provide financial support. At home, they have two small children to feed.

“Do you know when the film will be finished?” “No,” says Ruitenbeek. “So, it could be in two years?” “Yes, but it could also be in two months.”