

VENICE INTERNATIONAL

# PERFORMANCE ART WEEK

## CO-CREATION LIVE FACTORY BACKGROUND and NOTES ON THE CO-CREATION PROCESS: FOR WHO IS AND WHAT IS

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VENICE INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE ART WEEK 2020

### CO-CREATION LIVE FACTORY *Dissenting Bodies Marking Time*

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The VENICE INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE ART WEEK is the independent live art exhibition project conceived, initiated and curated by artist duo VestAndPage. It is co-organized by Studio Contemporaneo non-profit cultural association, Live Arts Cultures, We Exhibit, Venice Open Gates and European Cultural Centre | GAA Foundation, which hosts the project in its premises in Venice. As a free admission, non-funded, non-profit, and non-commercial cultural project, it is sustained by the cultural contribution of prestigious institutions, event-associated curators, and the logistic in-kind support of donors, philanthropists and Venetian enterprises such as ConCAVe.

### INSIGHT: Background

In Spring 2012, when we conceived the VENICE INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE ART WEEK and its related Educational Learning Program, we didn't rely on arid schematisms of hypertrophic art platforms as there are so many in the world, nor common performance art festival formulas.

Since we live in a Social Age, a time that is all about *human connections, social relations, changes and innovations*, our urgency was to first realize a long-term art project that could connect artists and people, and where the expression of human values and social concerns is not second to the artistic proposition of the project itself.

We envisioned the overall project as a moment of gathering reunion among artists of different generations and cultures; a space of encounter and dialogue in which to share common interests, exchange ideas, plan future jointed activities, while spending qualitative time together. Eventually developing a common ground and an ideal territory where ethics and aesthetics converge.

Being performance artists ourselves, we chose performance art as the content and backbone to the project, because we consider performance art's multifaceted practices the most appropriate to let emerge vitally human values and social concerns that characterize the evolutionary and devolutionary processes of human civilization.

After the conclusion of the first edition of the VENICE INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE ART

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WEEK, late Singaporean artist Lee Wen portrayed the spirit of the project with these rewarding words: “This is not a circus, this not a show, this not a biennale, this is a meeting of artists and people who looked for the pearls in the rivers of human civilizations and came to share what they found.”

We continued on this same road with all respect for two other editions, remaining a priority to reinforce *the idea of an artist temporary community* that has been the cornerstone of the project’s foundation. However, veritably, for us it was not enough to display selected pioneer performance documentation alongside contemporary performances in line with our curatorial focus.

Our most profound wish was to lay the foundation for establishing a recognizable place emanating intellectual freedom and a pervasive noble sense of humanity. A place of magmatic creativity not institutionalized, inspiring, and capable of attracting new audience. For all this to happen, we found determinant to focus on *the exploration of performances’ making processes in a context of creative sharing*.

So, after the completion of the VENICE INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE ART WEEK trilogy on the body (*Hybrid Body - Poetic Body*, 2012; *Ritual Body - Political Body*, 2014; *Fragile Body - Material Body*, 2016) and four editions of the Educational Learning Program (2013 to 2017), together with our collaborators, friends and peers, we came to the conclusion that to keep the art we love flourishing and vital, it was right to insist and give importance to the investigation and development of the many creative processes that lead to performance. We decided to confront new challenges and headed into a new direction with the new project **CO-CREATION LIVE FACTORY**, which we conceived together with independent curator Francesca Carol Rolla, keeping at heart – as Marilyn Arsem noted – that the most crucial questions for a today performance artist should be: *How do we respond with art to a global state of emergency? And how do we perform in such a context?*

The concept of **CO-CREATION LIVE FACTORY** developed out of the VENICE INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE ART WEEK’s core mission and its Educational Learning Program. Born to be an **artistic experience of a different kind founded on the principles of artistic collaboration, cooperation and temporary artistic community**, the new course was inaugurated in December 2017 with its first edition entitled **CO-CREATION LIVE FACTORY Prologue 1**. It focused on the concepts of time and endurance and on the themes of sensorial processing and relational freedom related to performance art. The second chapter, held in December 2018, featured the instalment of the experimental collective performance opera **BODY MATTERS: Anam Cara - Dwelling Bodies** to explore the notions of companionship, intimacy, risk taking and abandonment.

Following these previous two experiences, **CO-CREATION LIVE FACTORY Dissenting Bodies Marking Time** consolidates the founding principles of the overall project, this time adding

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to the themes of the last editions, other specific ones such as such as dissent, identity, queer theory, concepts of time, transience and impermanence, aiming to empower participating artists to articulate and develop their individual praxis within an **independent temporary autonomous zone of co-creation**. Eventually, it is an artistic-pedagogical project for those artists who wish to articulate and refine their skills, offering them a rare opportunity to explore new territories of performance in an extended, intensive period of time with experienced practicing performance artists outside of an academic setting. It is both a learning path and a unique occasion to work and collaborate together, while strengthening the creative talent and intellectual freedom of each participant. It is a stepping-stone, as participants expand their practice, exploring new ideas and approaches, allowing their work to become more fully realized.

*VestAndPage*

## ON THE CO-CREATION PROCESS: FOR WHO IS AND WHAT IS

### **MARILYN ARSEM** *On Considering Time*

Our lives are ruled by time's inevitable, relentless passage. Always we have less of it than we had a moment ago. How do we move through time? How does time move through us? What is its effect on the actions and body of the artist? What is its impact on the audience? How might we more consciously use time as an element in performance?

Nothing exists outside of time. Time operates on multiple scales simultaneously, and is revealed through different manifestations. Everything around us has a life of its own, sometimes considerably shorter than ours, and sometimes much longer.

The presence of time becomes apparent through material and physical processes. What happens when we allow processes to unfold in the time that they need? What occurs when we impose different time frames on them? Is it possible to control time?

The Co-Creation process I will facilitate examines the significance of time in live performance.

We will explore a variety of ways in which we can use time as an active element in our work. Working with time, against time and through time, we will investigate how actions, sites, objects and ourselves are impacted and altered. Serving as witnesses to each other's work, we will also delve into the effects that consciously manipulating time has not only on ourselves as performers but on viewers as well.

We ask audiences to spend their time with us. What allows them to feel that it was worth

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giving a portion of their lives to the experience of the work? It is important to know why you want the presence of a witness when you perform, and what you want from them. What do you offer in return?

A significant component of this process will be private reflection and writing, as well as group discussions on questions related to the topic of time, not just in the context of creating performances but in our everyday lives as well. We cannot separate our performance art from our daily life. Our lives continue to proceed even as our performances unfold through time.

I envision **CO-CREATION LIVE FACTORY *Dissenting Bodies Marking Time*** as an opportunity to be part of a temporary community of artists who wish to focus deeply on their practice, delving to expose anew questions and connections, and learning from each other. It is a place of sharing, of respect, of trust. It operates as a respite from the distractions of daily life and the obligations of jobs and family, and sets aside the glamour of the art world and its promises of recognition and fortune. It is a temporary community whose main focus is to further the medium of performance cooperatively and communally, through practice and experimentation, as we challenge each other to articulate more clearly our approaches, goals, and methods. Acknowledging and respecting our differences encourages an expansion of the breadth and richness of this medium of performance art.

My role as co-creation process facilitator is to offer propositions to explore with artists who are at different stages in the development of their practice. It is my task to pose questions, design exercises, and help identify fresh possibilities so that participants can examine anew their methods, choices, assumptions, expectations, and reasons for making performances. Each person contributes a unique perspective and together we investigate the questions that arise.

*Boston-based artist Marilyn Arsem has been creating live events since 1975, from solo gallery performances to large-scale, site-specific works at festivals, conferences, alternative spaces, galleries, museums and universities worldwide. Most recently she has focused on creating site-specific performances that are not planned in advance, but made in response to a location that is selected on arrival. She is a member and founder of Mobius, Inc., a Boston-based collaborative of interdisciplinary artists. She taught at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston for 27 years, establishing one of the most extensive programs internationally in visually-based performance art.*

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## **ANDRIGO & ALIPRANDI *On the Perception of Self***

Our multidisciplinary collaborative practice focuses particularly on the perception of the Self to favour shifting from comfort zones to places unknown yet— those *invisible places* where the performer needs to stand on the alert to trigger the creative act. There where perceptual stimuli and physical activity lead to space transformation, we tune our body and its movement to sounds, so that it may generate actions, which in turn give rise to meaningful evocative images.

The body is a sparkling matter always ready to get through and react, sourcing from its biomechanical energy. The mind is the observer that interprets. The emotion is a vehicle of intuition.

In the dialectic between strength and lightness, consumption and recovery, surface and depth, synthesis and abundance, limit and possibility, our open invitation is to dive into visions and dreams, letting the body re-emerge as their signifier.

In the Co-Creation process that we will facilitate together with VestAndPage, we will share knowledges and experiences through physical and concrete practices to recognize the infinite ways to read origins and destinations that turn a gesture into a poetic act.

We will be dedicated to repetition, durability and real-time composition. We will accept the lightness and extravagance of the act so as not to fall into self-referentiality. We will allow intuition as a result of a receptive capacity facing outward.

We envision **CO-CREATION LIVE FACTORY *Dissenting Bodies Marking Time*** as an experience for those who belong to their artistic vocation and share the idea that the creative act is acceptance.

For those who doubt that they are always responsible, but still look for their own tools to not be subdued by themselves. For those who feel their identity always moving and becoming confused with matter and habits, human, urban and natural landscapes. For those who feel to be sensitive, swinging from the touch to an imperfect perception of the surrounding. For those who dedicate themselves to silence and slowly wait until the body adheres to the present. For those who indulge in the space where movement is a source that charges, preserves, and sets you free. For those who accept the emotion as a place of integrity and not of slippage.

It is an experience to reveal the musicality of the real, where sound is a sign of vitality that becomes a space of action. Speed, word, writing are organization tactics without premeditation to offer, to abstain, investigating the visible and the invisible.

*Dancer and performer Marianna Andriago and multimedia artist and sound performer Aldo Aliprandi have been collaborating since 2009. Their oeuvre and artistic research intertwine*

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*various performative languages, deepening the relationship between body movement and sound-motion. Andriago & Aliprandi's live performances are mainly conceived site-specific, often in places characterized by full verticality and the consequent shiver of vertigo that it produces. In their reference landscape, they move between philosophy, theatre, sound and movement experimentation by investigating an aesthetic that falls in love with detail and silence, as well with an entropic dynamic energy moved by emotions as enlightenment in the creative process. They are the directors of C32 performing artwork space at Forte Marghera, Venice, where the VENICE INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE ART WEEK Educational Learning Program has been taking place since 2013, and of which they are co-organizers.*

## **VESTANDPAGE *On the Poetics of Relations***

For us, to perform through a "Poetics of Relations" is a matter of existence. Our conceptual, situation-responsive and collaborative body-based performances are in the light of the creation of universal meanings and new imagery. Our laboratorial process revolves around a range of techniques reflecting our backgrounds along the interface of visual arts, performing arts, experimental and Social Theatre and creative writings.

Our approach to performance matters aims to empower emotional intelligence, readiness, responsiveness, empathy, awareness, notions of critical, creative and divergent thinking, including mindful risk assessment.

In the Co-Creation process that we will facilitate, together with Andriago & Aliprandi, we will work on the body as a poetic and imaginary landscape, using the three bodies (physical, mental and spiritual) as primary artistic tools. Notions of temporalities, memory strata, failure and fragility of the individual and the collective within social and environmental spheres serve to approach themes such as: trust in change, endurance, union, pain sublimation and risk-taking, in a poetic bodily approach to art practice with a focus on universal human experiences.

Verbal and nonverbal communication, the personal inner archive, emotional drive, ecological intelligence, the study of the archetypes and finding new ways of storytelling are to enforce endurance, presence, condition, the Self, independence, and trust.

For us, working and collaborating together with other artists, it is also to look for and offer insight into more practical subjects include the art of sustaining a life as an artist, and how to build temporary artistic communities to find innovative approaches for new modes of existence and art making.

*We invite you to be open, blind, silent, loud, quick, light, slow, humble, determined, collective, to inspire yourself and the others.*

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Since its inception, we have envisioned **CO-CREATION LIVE FACTORY** not only as the continuation and a new course of the VENICE INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE ART WEEK, but as an in-depth artistic experience for those who trust in change. For those who are ready to challenge their own practice. For the overstretched global bodies searching for a home or on pilgrimage. For those to whom the surreal is familiar, those who dance on the limits hand in hand. For those who go to spaces of hidden beauty and scan into the flesh of dream matter—visionary poets, artists and performers pushed by an urgency. For those who reconcile with the mystery to make and let things coexist, for anything that remains alone is just a nothing per se. For those who seek to express, not to impress, and take risks in the name of seeking new images. For those who are on a journey skittering through visible landscapes and invisible places, actual places and imaginary places.

This is a nomadism aiming to empower one's own art and openness, leaving subtle traces, structuring temporary autonomous zones. It is to take action, because each one of us has important stories to tell, for we are stories until we die. And then again, "remember all, forget all."

*Since 2006, German artist Verena Stenke and Venetian artist and writer Andrea Pagnes have been working together as VestAndPage, generating art in the mediums of live performance, filmmaking, writing and as independent curators. Their collaborative practice has roots in contemporary visual and conceptual art, classical, oriental and social theatre, martial arts, philosophy, anthropology, anthropoetics, political science, the study of rites, myths, religions, particularly Sufism, alchemy and iconology. Animated by a nomadic, confrontational spirit, they apply the themes of acceptance, resistance, endurance and union with a poetic bodily approach to art practice, examining notions of fragility, vulnerability and failure of the individual and the collective within different social and environmental spheres. Exploring what, as human beings, we still have to offer, VestAndPage question the boundaries between the interior and exterior aspects of our existence. They are the conceivers and the independent curatorial force behind projects such as the VENICE INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE ART WEEK. Their last performance-based movie "Plantain" won the best film award at the Berlin Independent Film Festival (2018).*

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## Notes on the Concept of Collective PERFORMANCE OPERA— What It Is

Our urgency as artists is also to define with exact words the activity we do, deepening “that which” that each chosen word properly means.

- The term *performance* derives from the verb *perform* (c. 1300), meaning: “to carry into effect, fulfil, discharge,” via Anglo-French *performer*, altered (by influence of Old French *forme* “form,” from Latin *forma*) from Old French *parfornir* “to do, carry out, finish, accomplish,” from *par-* “completely” (see *per-*) + *fornir* “to provide” (see *furnish*).
- The Latin preposition *per-* indicates, “passing through a space and extending or spreading over and around.” As a prefix to a word it works as a superlative, complement or continuation.
- The Latin noun *forma* derives from the Greek *phorēsis*, “the act of carrying”, from *pherein* “to carry, wear,” frequentative of *pherein* “the action to bring”, in the same way that it means: “bearing” and “posture” and seemingly “aspect”, “resemblance” and moreover “image.”
- The Latin *for-ma* connects also to the Sanskrit root DHAR, which has the meaning of “holding, supporting, containing,” and desinence Sanskrit MA. DHAR-MA means “stationary, fixed,” (in Hindu holy Scriptures, meaning: the eternal law of the cosmos, inherent in the very nature of things), however *for-ma* is a term that responds to the Sanskrit term DHAR-I-MAN, meaning “form, shape, figure and image,” and also “the choice and the way to dispose of matters, whatever they are, in the human labor.”
- Therefore, according to the etymological derivations, the meaning of the word “performance” can be said: *acting in support of the image*.
- The Latin noun *opera* means “labour, work.” It also implies the idea of *opus* in alchemy. In Italy, during the XVII century, the term *opera* was in use to define “the labour that a person accomplishes in a day,” at first just the “manual labour” then later also ethical and moral action, as well as intellectual, artistic, and scientific labour. The Italian, *lo opero* (literally translated as, “I operate” or “I work”) is a more refined expression than the simple *lo lavoro*, “I work.
- Eventually, according to the etymological definition of the two terms, performance opera can be said: *I work/operate (or, “a work”) acting in support of the image*. In fact, when we perform we actually create a work – even though ephemeral – consisting of live images, which in turn produce meanings.

With the expression *performance opera*, we don’t intend to define performances, which are mainly choreographed, or *a priori* structured in every part. Our stance is that a performance should always remain open to the unpredictability of process, even though methodologically

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well pondered and organized. As it was for the alchemists engaging in their philosophical quest, a *performance opera* is a vision and the result of a creative process, there where the space where it takes place, the laboratory to play out new challenges.

*VestAndPage*