

Anima/Animus at ITC Osek by Nelli Alexia.

Osek is a small town, in middle of a picturesque landscape with the romantic title 'North of Bohemia'. Just before the interview, when we met, we were welcome by coming and going sunshine, a flock of sparrows flew over the wheat fields and the summer rain. Osek, where the interview and exhibition took place, was helped by the atmosphere, its laconic beauty, the smell of freshly cut grass and shiny wet stones in the yard of the Cistercian Monastery.

The Anima/Animus project was originally created for Winchester cathedral, England in 2013 as part of the 10 Days arts festival. Artist duo WE (Kye Wilson and Helena Eflerová) use a rare combination of live performance and video art, each medium close to both individual artists hearts.

The filmed performances are directed by both artists coming from their collective thinking and emotions. In their collaborations Kye sees Helena as embodiment of himself. This aspect of their relationship is a strong element in their collective practice. This event leaves you with a pleasant feeling of happiness, concentration and complete honesty. The performances including the concepts represent the views of both artists. Helena and Kye also answer other interesting questions about their collaboration which we discussed during the interview, prior to their private view of this exhibition.

What is artist collective WE and how does it connect your projects? What techniques do you use in the production?

Helena: WE stand's for Wilson-Eflerová our collective established in 2008. Our first collaborative project was an underwater live performance and video installation Trimester that was presented in Brazil and England. I then got involved in Kye's solo work the Unified Spaces trilogy in which I was the main protagonist in two of the pieces. Other collaborative works followed including Hunter/Hunted (Mottisfont), Anima/Animus (Winchester Cathedral), Faces (Portsmouth Historic Dockyard) and Embodied Vistas (Deptford Creek). In all of our projects we use combination of live performance and video art, in order to push video/performance into different dimensions beyond conventional performative/cinematographic techniques. We experiment a lot with time, one film take can be as long as 15 minutes (as apposed to short 10-15 second takes usually undertaken on a film shoot). Thanks to a durational approach we have found innovative and different ways of working together.

Is this way of expression similar to the Japanese Butoh? Is for you to dance in a Butoh style anyway inspirational?

Helena: I would say that Butoh is my personal element of the WE collaboration that I have chosen as an artistic expression. I've been interested in Butoh since 2009 when I was trained by Marie-Gabriele Roti and Atsuko Takenouchi. My latest experience was participating in a workshop by Tadashi Endo. I wouldn't say I'm a Japanese dancer, but I'm definitely use some of the non-verbal and expressive elements of Butoh in combination with other visual art forms. In fact, I see myself like sculptor that uses the human body as a material for communication, sometimes incorporating a dance technique called Contact Improvisation, a subtle method of expressive dance for non-dancers. In general anyone can practice this type of dance essentially it has an element of improvisation and direct contact with other person (the same as my live performances with the public). I'm also particularly interested in contact with environmental objects, for example with earth or water and in relation to this exhibition with a sacred site.

Why have you chosen Osek for your exhibition?

Helena: This exhibition is here because I come from Teplice, in the North of Czech Republic and I wanted to exhibit at least one of art pieces that we have created since 2008 to engage with family, friends and the art networks of the Czech Republic.

Kye: Osek was chosen so we could exhibit Anima/Animus in another sacred site similar to Winchester Cathedral and at a gallery space as well, enabling us to see how audiences reacted to the work in both types of places. As the artwork uses universal language and is open to interpretation we hoped that people would slow down, spend time in front of the projected image, and take something personal from it in the process.

Who initiated this exhibition? What ideas do you place upon your performance Anima/Animus?

Helena: Initially this work was created in response to Winchester Cathedral, for the 10 Days contemporary arts festival. This happened in the autumn of 2013 in Winchester and from more than 200 artists we received a small bursary to help towards us get some more funding to realise this project. We decided to make a new site-specific video installation with an element of live performance. We wanted to create something that would speak to today's visitors and make them think of the past. We researched Winchester Cathedral in great detail and in the end we found inspiration in a headless statue, which has survived from 13 century (according to Professor Herbert Read, thought to be Ecclesia who symbolises the Church).

Usually the statue of Ecclesia is found alongside another female statue Synagoga who embodies Judaism. The windows in the Cathedral were also symbolic for us, which is why we chose to represent it in the arch shaped video projection construction. We believe the Gothic arch invites people look up towards God, but the Roman arch seems to force people to view their inner self and contemplate. The exhibition title Anima/Animus arrives from theories on personality traits by Carl Jung, where anima and animus are female and male characters, women and men having both archetypes within themselves. We wanted Anima/Animus to help people to self-reflect, temporarily giving people a moment away from their usual consumerist life style. The aim of this exhibition was to create space where one can spend time for introspection, and to find something personal, different and new within their selves.

Kye: What can I add to that, what Helena just said (laugh)? I think for me personally a very specific element of this artwork is filming using single durational takes. This is a different approach than you would view your TV at home.

What difficulties have you encountered during realisation of this project? How have you managed to bring an image to life?

Kye: Technically it was very difficult to make the projection screen in the form of a Roman arch. To bring the image to life we used advanced filming techniques that required more concentration from Helena in front of a camera. This included making the projected figures life size in scale. The dark background of the image also helped create the illusion that the characters could almost seem to walk out from screen into the surrounding space. The mutual interaction of the viewer with the video installation was more powerful, much more than if the work was just being screened as a film.

So are you trying to capture a given moment of interaction?

Kye: Yes. We tried to evoke the experience of the characters standing directly in front of you, focusing the attention of the viewer. This was achieved in numerous ways including long durational takes, Helena positioned within the tight parameters of the construction screen, and trying a variety of make-up and costume designs that would not disturb the interface with the viewer.

Helena: We didn't want the projection screen to have corners like a conventional framed painting. Thanks to the arch shape construction and the high quality resolution projected image it makes a deep impression on the audience that goes beyond a simple screening that they are normally used to. It is more live, emotive and offers a spiritual experience that allows each individual viewer to contemplate.

Are you trying to maintain and use empowerment through gaze? Are you interested in a specific type of gaze, like for example the gaze theories by Laura Mulvey?

Kye: I feel we are subverting Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" as the female characters in the artwork are not passive and I don't feel they are objectified.

Helena: To directly engage audiences experiencing the work, when filming we manipulated the camera angle so my eyes (the eyes of the characters) in the videoed performances gazed directly into those of the viewer. Conventionally an actor doesn't look directly into the camera. Kye helped me achieve this effect during the film shoot by staying close to the camera so I could look into his eyes. I spent about one year developing the slow movements and gaze used in the performances as it required a high level of concentration. Sometimes these new approaches help to enrich and develop our art practice.

How would audience read the projected image? What emotions should it evoke according to you? Do you have concrete vision or is your work based here on a free exchange of experiences?

Kye: the audience can connect with the two embodied female figures, by following their movement and gaze and reading their emotions. The sacred site also gives the audience an emotive experience. Working with this particular space was very important as it also effected how the work is viewed and experienced.

Helena: From it we take away thoughts that are not tangible, but for us it can represent certain types of experiences, that differ with each person viewing the artwork.

Kye: I'm interested, that the work is open to interpretation and the viewer of the work is given lots of time and space to reflect.

In discussion about the concept of the exhibition, questions are raised about how we should try to grasp different opinions and emotions, positive and negative. Helena and Kye are honest and brave, because for them it is important to get a reaction from others. Helena told me that during her annual training of movement techniques she also fasted, in order to detox her body and help her concentrate on her inner self. For her Anima/Animus, was an example of dedication

and personal effort, which transforms her and also gives her something else to offer as part of her work in collaboration with Kye.

According to Kye the symbolic/religious connotations of the statues are not that important, just a conceptual point of departure for the project. The most important things for Kye are the processes used by WE here and now, in particular the embodiment between humans and creative technologies, which can transcend current ideas and meanings.

In today's society people's lifestyles can appear truthful, but on the inside they don't necessarily feel that way, even when they live according to their own vision and illusions. There is an opportunity for open interpretation of what people wish to take from the work by WE. There are many ways an audience can connect and embody both female characters from a spiritual perspective or from personal memories or thoughts. It's important to endeavour that WE maintain a non-oppressive creative process, and their interpretation of Anima/Animus isn't the only one, but on the contrary the importance is in making of small changes in the audience – that's there in every one of us.