

INTERVIEW WITH ANNA MARZONA AND MONIKA BRANICKA
OF THE ASSOCIAZIONE AMARIANA
ABOUT MY 5 DAYS DURATIONAL PERFORMANCE SUNGATE
WITHIN AND AROUND THE STONE CIRCLE OF RICHARD LONG
IN ART PARK MARZONA
13-17. JULY 2020

Anna: You will be performing in a public art park without further announcements. What is your relation to the audience ? And what role plays making a video of the performance? If there was no video would it still be a performance?

Yama: performance is a creative investigation and process- whether there is audience or not video or not. The Video has nothing to do with it. I just like to experiment with the material. Taking intervall shots with fixed cameras of this 5 days process. I will edit it at some point to make it a video work. But this is another work. It is not the performance or a documentation of a performance. There is no documentation of a performance. A performance is only what happens in the moment of a performance. It happens on an energetic level mostly. It happens for everybody passing by or not passing by. It happened for the bees and bugs in the grass. It happens for the understanding of the artist itself.

Monika: You use symbols of many different cultural and spiritual backgrounds - why?

Yama: we live in a globalized world. We get the news from all around the globe. We profit or suffer from global markets. So obviously we also know about the different cultural backgrounds, which is the different spiritual and religious beliefs and symbols that form our perceptions on subconscious and conscious levels. Art as well as religion is using symbols and In the end I believe it is all coming from the same source: our consciousness itself that might be a consciousness beyond the individual as well. Blinding all these different sources out, would look like dogma to me in a globalized world.

I was always fascinated to see the similarities in different beliefs that have developed themselves centuries ago on totally different places on this planet. So I believe it is really just one expression with many different voices. When I work in public space and site specific I take in the cultural backgrounds of the place. In an italian village for instance, it made sense for me to work with the very christian symbolism of bread and wine (or flour and wine) in the first act (CREATION AND DESTRUCTION) of the performance, when I created 12 landscapes with it to destroy it again with my own body and crawl around the circle backwards before I started again. Also the sign I made over the five days in total: a sun with 12 beams and a moon inside, is a christian symbol of the apocalypse: it represents the apocalyptic woman who brings the 3 emanations of light (the sun for radiant light, the moon for reflected light, and the 12 beams for the 12 star signs that represent the possible Durchdringung of tight even from beyond -as the starlight is usually reaching us when the star itself is already gone) Maria-Sophia appears in the apocalypsis to reunite the father, the son and the holy spirit, with the mother, the daughter and the holy soul. This figure has always fascinated me.

Actually she appeared already in the old Jewish apocalypse. And there you go: all the religious symbols and stories are interlaced anyhow! For instance all the monotheistic religions grew from the same roots- before they decided to fight each other.

Another deep inspiration for me is the tantric mandala...a figure to walk in, like labyrinth, but not to get lost on the contrary: you walk in to find yourself.

Emerging from the center. Spreading out and returning to the center with an understanding of how the inner universe mirrors the outer. A figure that is created by the own movement and path and vanishing as the path is vanishing.

These different cultural worlds are emerging naturally within my own self. As I grew up in a culture that is more or less coined by Christianity- even though I never got baptised by the church- while the central European Tibetan Buddhist gompa opened on the mountain of the village of my family house, where I stay now to support my mom, in Austria. So I believe the new age is not just a modernist term for cultural fusion, but a reality. For myself and most other people who are not blinding out certain things because of dogma.

Anna: Are you familiar with Richard Long's Opera? It seems quite opposing to your work in many ways, why did you interact with this work in particular?

Yama: Sure I am familiar with Richard Long's work. I love it.

Otherwise I would not work with it. Why would I work with anything that does not speak to me? When I come to perform in a sculpture park, obviously I investigate the friction between work that is quite momentary and work that is quite lasting.

Specially in a performance, that belongs to a cycle of works investigating time.

The STONE CIRCLE itself is working with a timespan larger than us, as the stones were there long before they were put into this arrangement. In the end me and the stones and even the whole planet will be gone again.

There are other works in the park I like. The work of Carl André for instance, its aesthetic and idea. But when I say: "I love this work!" I am speaking of something really essential.

A substance of a work that is perceivable for me beyond all concepts, philosophies or spiritual backgrounds. All these are very important tools for an artist. The intention plays a major role in artmaking, but after all: if the concepts would really transport anything, nobody needed to make the art.

So the substance of an artwork goes way beyond his intentions and concepts.

As such, an artwork has a life of its own. And it is an attempt to communicate something beyond words. Communication starts when someone who is perceiving something from an artwork is giving something back, is reacting in some way.

This is what I do with my performance.

And anyway: everybody who perceives an artwork is leaving something. This is what I find so genius about Richard Long's LINEWALKING performances: we can not help it!

Just walking on earth, we leave a trace. We are doing so anyway. We can be aware of it or not this is the only difference. And obviously: the more someone gives of his or her attention and life energy, the more someone takes away also.

Someone who is going around in circles for 5 days leaves a more obvious trace, than someone who is doing so for 5 min.

I feel very inspired by the LINEWALKING performance and I also feel a great familiarity to this work as my first ever durational performance TIMESIGN consisted of unrolling 200m of fabrics very slowly with my feet, four times to mark a spot as a 400m cross within eternity,

when I was 17 years old (some time ago hahaha).

This performance has a lot in common with the primal idea of Long's LINE WALKING: as we pass our time, we leave a mark. So I feel there is a substantial connection. I do not have a better word for feeling a substantial connection than love. And for this it does not matter, that I never met Richard Long, or that I might not interpret his work right.

As I said: an artwork has a life of its own and his intentions were just a tool for his creations. In the end the essence and the substance of an artwork speaks for itself.

And art should be open for interaction. In general but in particular in public space.

This is the life of a substantial artwork. I don't destroy his work, it is not possible anyway, it is too strong and substantial. When I think of the art park Marzona I think of the STONE CIRCLE

I just go through the work for 5 days.

Also I do not see how my work could be opposing anything, as I am not making any statements. I do not see it as my obligation to make statements as an artist. I am just making investigations. I am asking questions with the full of my being: with my thinking, sensing and feeling and with the space in between.

I set up a clear framework to investigate quite existential and universal questions. How can that be in opposition to anything? I see that the forms of my expression might be very different to Long's. I see and admire his amazing simplicity and purity of expression.

He is surely an artist I can learn of. And my way to learn is: making a performance.

And since I was inspired by a tantric mandala as well as Maria- Sophia who appears to reunite father son and holy spirit with mother, daughter and holy soul, it felt right to interact with an artwork of a man that I can love, being a female artist

Monika: You might as well call it a ritual or a meditation and you say, it is no audience needed to turn your work into a performance, why do you call it art?

Yama: Well, you don't have to call it art.

Actually there are many things about this term and the field of art (artscene, art market) that I do not find very appealing. But I just do not find a better word for what I do.

It is a meditation or a ritual as well, but it is as such my own creation and it does not follow any religious dogma. The religious realm is not the field in which I like to express myself.

The whole religious topic is in my perception so very individual and personal- whether someone finds god or not and if so in which form - I do not like to touch that .

I am investigating, exploring and questioning the different aspects of human consciousness in my work, from purely existential to philosophical, and this is already so overwhelming as a topic that ideas of the divine or a comic order are never far. And if you are breaking down artistic expressions, I see it is coming from the human consciousness and aiming there in general. As a totally human self realisation- process. So I believe this is the purest root and fruit of art anyhow.

But if you ask me now "why is that art?" I must tell you: I am so used to the question.Hahaha!

And when I saw Marina in an interview for "The artist is present" saying: "I am waiting for the question: `Why is that art?` I used to hear it all my life, now it is not coming and I kind of miss it!" I was getting ready to hear this question all my life actually, because I am not aiming for the MOMA, which seems to be the only way for a performance artist to get rid of this question. The central aspect of performance art: it is immaterial and not about presenting some skills or some preconceptions but offering only the participation in someone's

individual investigations, this goes so much against our value system and likewise against our ideas of art (that are obviously connected to our ideas of value) that I am getting ready to hear this question all my life. And when I will not hear it anymore, it is probably a hint that I betrayed this central aspect of performance art or life art.

Anyway I am not very fond of being an Artist. Where I lived most of my life, in Berlin, it feels more or less embarrassing to answer the question "What do you do?" with: "I am an artist", like every second person you might meet at a party or in a bar.

But I feel strongly, that it is a term that has first of all something to do with taking responsibility for the creative being every human is by nature: being bold enough to follow one's own ideas, feelings and values instead of the given ones within this competitive, materialist world, means being bold enough to be weird and take the consequences of a life without much securities.

For the very large majority of artists this has indeed very little to do with a hip and luxurious lifestyle, but who takes the decision to live as an artist, is really choosing a particular way of life, that is self responsible and quite rocky. This is the only reason why I tend to handle my embarrassment and answer: "I am an artist".

And as all communication is a social form in the end, how we call something is totally and only depending on the cultural background we are communicating with.

Now: In other cultures I would probably not feel the need to call my work art, as for instance so many of the exercises that tibetan buddhists do, are so very similar to a repetitive or a durational performance.

But in our culture, we have really no other word, for something that is done without any practical use than calling it art. Our culture became so very materialist.

In India, if someone decides to focus fully on consciousness he or she can just become a sadhu and will get fed. There is a natural understanding for the idea that immaterial work has value. Our culture lost that.

Even if we speak of mental work, we speak of thinking, and thinking is always linked to some object..it is materialism in the end science is materialism.

After the age of clarification, we lost completely any understanding of a spiritual realm beyond matter. And the only possibility to work in this realm, free of religious dogma is art.

2007 and 2008 I initiated an art project in Mali, with european and african artists communicating only in the language of art. It was very fascinating to see how our academic conception of the artists played absolutely no role in West Africa. Instead everybody is seen as an individual creative voice within a culture that is very artistic in all aspects of everyday life. What I try to say here is: they do not need no Joseph Beuys to tell them "every human is an artist"- it is understood.

But we need Beuys! In the same way the culture I am coming from needs me to say: "Our attempt to become present in tune with life as the individuals we are, is the most important work of art" because I have to communicate with the culture I am coming from, and I have to be aware of my roots. My father was an art historian, my mom a photographer, my grandma a poet my grandpa a philosopher... so what can I do?

If I would be more precise and go beyond the small talk of the question "What do you do?", I would say: "In relativity I am a performance artist and a life artist, but in reality I am not"

Anna: I'd like to investigate the space of the social context in which action is performed. There has not been any local communication about your performance, so your respectful but unusual presence may rise unpredictable reactions in people

that meet you performing by chance. What is your perception of the life going on outside your strict connection with the stone ring? Are you aware of it and, if so, how does it influence your work or your attitude? How is the place meaningful for your acts of art?

Yama: the unexpected and strange is always something I love. And it is quite usual for life-art- performance to intentionally break all preconceptions and expectations. Just to make clear that the unknown is always overproportional to the known - no matter how much we may believe in science, or our senses, or just anything: what we do not know is immense, as the creation and the universe is in the end just: overwhelming.

Now, looking at the condition humaine: being a creature that is able to develop ideas about quiet mind blowing things like: time, cosmos, light and the way it moves AND still we are lascivious, silly, hungry and forced to react to all these impulses.

This is moving me deeply, and I enjoyed so much to feel all the people who were interacting in their own ways with the performance throughout the 5 days...as all of them are just mirrors of myself.

I have experienced many times before, how complicated it is for people of our cultural upbringing, to react to anything that is not immediately, and easily understood on the mental level. Because we are told that it is in some ways embarrassing to not understand something. We tend to think something is wrong with us or with the one that we do not understand. We are afraid it might be "crazy", but in my perspective the real craziness is to believe we would understand all the things we believe to understand, and I think what keeps humanity mostly from going deeper into the unknown capacities of consciousness is the idea to have understood already.

But since the categories of mental understanding are often very narrow, I tend to get the strongest reactions from kids, animals and crazy people... people who are not so shy and full of preconception, but open to pick up what is happening on an energetic level.

In the park, in this little village it was often the same ones coming back so I felt like a real relation was established and the people were really becoming part of this performance.

That is why it is very important for me to be in the place where I want to perform some time before. To feel the place and the life that is happening there.

And obviously it was a wonderful synchronicity, to see in the week before the performance , that the yoga "sun namaskar" is done in the park where I want to perform a SUNGATE which is inspired by the tantric Mandalas of Yogic traditions. This moment to bring the performance and the Yoga-class together, was a real magic moment to me

Such a beautiful gift to the work. I felt that suddenly we were all putting our energies together creating in the space within. Very lovely

Anna: I know, I was part of it. I felt like I was in a different reality. But I'd like to connect traces to go deeper, beyond fascination. You said it is a continuation of your prior works COSMIC GRAVITY and TIME SIGN: can you tell us something more about these two performances and their connections to Sungate? They seem very different – the first very based on skin and kinesthetic perception, the second on making impermanent and sequential signs in space and time. Of course I can see them in SUNGATE (the first in "CREATION AND DESTRUCTION", the second in the following acts), but I miss traits d'union...

Yama: TIME SIGN and COSMIC GRAVITY both investigate the topic time - concepts of time - time passing, by moving very slowly through space (in a time-space continuum) and leaving a trace (TIME SIGN left a trace of unrolled fabrics and in COSMIC GRAVITY I left a slimy trace of soap and wine) both works (as well as SUNGATE) investigate the friction between human ideas of time and eternity on the other hand, in different ways: in TIME SIGN I first connected the linearity of time (slowly but continuously unrolling of my own path) with the idea of an eternal time-space: a cross that would only be seen when all different times (past/present/future) could be seen as one, because in linearity there was no moment in which the cross could be seen in total, just through anticipating the missing links or by remembering the paths I unrolled before the cross was there as an idea in the eternal space.

The same I did again now with the SUNGATE: all the 12 sunbeams were never seen at once, - just connected through anticipation or memory - or in an eternal space the full sun with 12 beams was there.

In COSMIC GRAVITY I explored the friction of continuity and eternity more on a psycho-physiological level and less conceptual I would say.

Experiencing infinity as pure intensity. Sliding for hours wet on a cold stone floor, getting cold soap and wine poured on my head repeatedly, was maybe like a form of torture (some visitors were reminded on the drowning of witches) and the intensity of this experience did catapult me for some moments into a timeless realm.

The microclimate of the art park Marzona with its changing weather from sunrise to sunset and elementary intensity offered some similar experiences of this eternal space of pure intensity..

The unrolling of my path while walking is the parallelity I feel to the LINEWALKING performance of Richard Long. This inspired me to walk a circle in this way: leaving a mark in the grass and to investigate the difference between walking in circles or walking in spirals- also as an investigation of different concepts about time passing:

Is it passing in circles? As an eternal return of the same?

Or is it passing in the form of a spiral? As an evolutionary process? Our calendar is suggesting the circle, while the maya calendar for instance is suggesting a spiral.

When I was working with the spiral (sadly I did not receive any pictures from that 3rd day) I felt the spiral as the pure expression of a creative movement: going in (contemplating) and out (expressing) at the same time. And the trace I left (from the flour and wine of day 1) looked like a galaxie... this was a very surprising day full of possibilities to make creative Ideas. And I felt like the spiral is the perfect form for the creative path: autistic with a sense of mission. And the buns I made of flour wine and red wine became like stones as well after some days of burning sun. Like more stones spreading out from the STONE CIRCLE in the form of a Galaxie. One of the beautiful surprises for me.

EXPERIENCING SUNGATE

I wanted to stay silent during all the five days, but when Egidio Marzona showed me his 3 big fish on the end of day 3, I was thinking only about them.

I wanted to celebrate his catch with Monika In the wonderful Stella d'Oro Restaurant as I knew they would bring the fish there. And then the kids in the park started to tease me and play their games with me.

I cheated myself and thought of my moms very dry humor, when she says things like:

"well... if you hear the grass grow all day, you might as well hang out in the evening" so this

was good enough of an excuse for me to go with Egidio and Monica to have a delicious dinner and a lovely evening. But the next morning when I got up at 5 o'clock to catch the sunrise and go on with the performance to unroll the 12 sunbeams before the thunderstorm appeared I had to pay hard for this decision: it was suddenly cold and windy and I felt the cold creeping up my naked back, feeling how I was just shivering and catching a cold, being not meditative at all, as I was fighting with the wind that would carry away the fabrics to mark the 12 sunbeams, and the girls obviously played their games with me again.

I did one round in less than 3 hours and then immediately the other way around to finish before the thunderstorm that was announced for the afternoon and then I was absolutely finished and sick.

Coughing with pain in my chest, asking myself: 'what is the use of doing a ritual process in this way?' it was a teaching. And a teaching is what I am looking for in my work.

I understood that the silence and focus is not only some optional rule for a work like SUNGATE but a necessity. And that my mom picked up something, when she said I would "hear the grass grow", but without understanding what I actually do.

One might ask: why trying to hear the grass grow? It grows anyhow!

The focus and sensitivity I mobilise for a ritual like SUNGATE to hear the grass grow, is a particular state of consciousness that takes a lot of energy to establish, but it generates energy as well, as long as I stay in it.

This energy is noticeable for everyone also for people who are close to me but not in space and everyone responds to it in their own way. As soon as I can not hold the focus, the kids or just anyone starts to play their games with me.

It is impossible to step in and out of this silent contentment and keep the energy. Because this energy is depending a lot on its direction: it is important to want all for the performance, as something to give and to express, and nothing for oneself.

A very particular form of artistic altruism that has a backslash of tremendous fulfillment of an impersonal kind. For this it is totally necessary to forget the person (who would like to eat fish and celebrate) this universal fulfillment I know as well from buddhist retreats, where one is focusing all the time on the liberation of all scented beings.

It is similar, but when I perform I feel it even deeper. The happiness to get up, to not lose time but doing something totally focused on something bigger than myself.

I guess that devotion to something much bigger than myself is more noticeable for me, when what I do is my creation. The Creature getting aware of the creation by being a fully devoted creator. I believe it is actually this energy itself, that is the artwork I create.

When it is there, it is as substantial as a sculpture or a stone.

It took me a full day of performing to come back to the energy level.

After feeling so sick, I decided to do some whirling in the center of the circle for three hours until I was in this untouchable high energy state and healthy again.

The kids were there again also, but they would not tease me.

And the next morning, with some beautiful Yogis doing Sun Namaskar facing the central void, everything fell into place and the energy field was pure magic.

I did everything as slow as possible on this last day, and people who had been there before, came back, super cautious to not disturb the concentration, actually being part of the concentrated field. At the very end of the performance, the girl who was teasing me came to apologize for her disturbance. That was sweet, but not necessary, I know it was not her but myself and she was just my mirror.

When I look at the movement of this 5 days, how the SUNGATE was unfolding and coming back to the center over time and the moments when time disappeared.

I can see this movement as a figure in space (as I took the intervall pictures during all the process) as well as the energetic movement within and how the energy was interacting. It is quite fascinating for me to see these perspectives both together, looking back now.

Day one was all about smells and taste. The wine and flour and the grass. Starting from the center and the ground it was energetically quite central in my body as well very linked to my primal life force and senses. Destroying felt as creative and sensual as creating.

On day two, walking around the circle for 3-4 hours in the morning and then again in the afternoon in the other direction, until my walking left a mark in the grass, was all about hearing...I was really hearing the grass grow at some point. I heard the time pass and in that moment it was gone. This energy I felt much higher in my body, feeling compassionate also for the work of Richard Long as I was feeling to walk a Line in my own way. Learning a lot about the power of focus, as I noticed that I would walk through a totally different reality whether I was focusing on the steps, or focusing on lifting the feet.

On day 3 I was spreading out from the central point in a spiral with rolls from the flour and wine. This felt very tactile and creative. I felt the performance taking over, as the material was behaving in unexpected ways, but every time better than what I had planned. So there were decisions to take in every moment of the action, while at the same time, I was not the one making them but the performance always showed the way. Very fascinating Moment. Then I pulled the pool from the center to the outer WALKING IN CIRCLES line (with the help of some friendly man) and formed the spiral going in. This Day felt so creative, euphoric energy was rising. This is always dangerous to handle. Then Egidio came with the fish and you know what happened.

The 4th day then started very difficult. Unrolling the fabrics to mark the 12 Sunbeams each by each, the wind taking it away and making me shiver. At this point a man who watched me before, took the opportunity to even touch me and the cheeky girls would not stop trying to chitchat. I knew my energy was low, just when I unfolded the SUNGATE itself, so the first important thing to do in this situation was: I had to forgive myself. And then I gathered my energy back simply by focusing. In the very sense of this word: this day was all about seeing. I love to think of the artist Nan Hoover, who was my mentor and great inspiration. She was present when I did my first durational performance TIME SIGN over all the 5 hours. And she always used to remind me to stay focused in my work. I noticed that taking this advice very literally is actually creating a very strong and self secure energy. And it was so beautiful to take the environment in to the fullest. At some point I took so much of the stone circles perspective in, that I even identified with it. And when I did the whirling for 3 hours in the evening in the center of the circle, the stones flying around me were like a galaxie, a gravity point that kept me in place. And who ever was teasing me in the morning stayed respectful out of my way.

The energy of day 5 is hard to describe. So very high and otherworldly time stood still. The SUNGATE into infinity was open wide and the energy filled my whole body but was mostly above and around me. This Image was about the emptiness, the slowness, the field of possibilities, the reflection.

