

Interview

Vincent Dunoyer - *Pairforming*

When did you meet Lucas Devriendt and when did you decide to collaborate?

Vincent Dunoyer: I have known Lucas for quite a while, because I have worked with his sister Myriam, who is a photographer. We met more personally in 2003. Lucas wanted to paint my portrait. As he works from photographs, we organized a Polaroid photo session in his studio. He selected an image from which he painted a few portraits. But he wasn't really satisfied with them so he took the same photo in 2009 and painted a life-size portrait. This one was really good. It was exhibited in a gallery and sold to a private collector. From the same picture he did a second portrait for the Broelmuseum in Kortrijk, which has a collection of early art but also purchases works from contemporary Belgian artists. Last July we also gave a performance in that museum, called 'Performance of a Portrait'.

What was your inspiration for that piece, apart from your collaboration?

Dunoyer: In fact, the greatest source of inspiration is a piece of music by John Cage, called *Cheap Imitation*. I had actually started to work on that piece in 2008, proceeding bit by bit, or unit by unit, for more than two years. I began with part one of the music, then part three. Part two is a dialogue. *Cheap Imitation* is inspired by Erik Satie's symphonic drama *Socrate*, itself based on three texts by Plato. I had to find a creative process that would somehow resemble the production method of *Cheap Imitation*. Making *Performance of a Portrait* with Lucas gave me the feeling I was rounding off our collaboration, by analogy with the second part of *Socrate*, which comprises a dialogue between two men. *Performance of a Portrait* isn't really a performance, it is more a collection of things linked together by stories, connections or echoes. I do insist on this idea of collection, of various media, because there is drawing, dancing and words.

You mention painting and drawing. Do you think this festival, which includes visual arts alongside theatre and dance, is the ideal place to perform this piece?

Dunoyer: I think it fits in well. I have often worked with images, photographs as well as moving images. The visual aspect is very important to me. But this time, the variety of media makes it a nearly hybrid piece. What seems so interesting to me in *Cheap Imitation* is the fact that Merce Cunningham used it for one of his performances, *Second-Hand*, in 1970. In those days, performing artists used to collaborate a lot with visual artists, just as in the period in which Erik Satie composed *Socrate* (1917), when many painters worked closely with the Ballets Russes. It seems to me those two periods are emblematic of bridges built between dance and visual arts. I also think one can sense its echo in the form I have been trying to give the piece.

Have you always looked for links throughout your career?

Dunoyer: I think I associate the idea of links with history, with the way the footnotes of history overlap with history. I think the concept of links appeared more vividly in *Sister*, a performance created with Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, which referred to family ties. Since then, something has emerged around the idea of links. It even includes an erotic dimension, with respect to relationships.

You have worked with choreographers like Wim Vandekeybus, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and others. How have they influenced you?

Dunoyer: They have inevitably influenced me, but the decisive encounter has been the one with Steve Paxton, who made a solo called *Carbon* for me in 1997, in which I tried to re-enact one of his improvisations. Another bridge with history: Steve belongs to another generation, to American post-modern dance. He worked with Merce Cunningham. Through him, I linked up with another history, another country, another culture, another temporality. Through my body, which has its own history, I have tried to incorporate this part of history into dance. The idea of links, of encounters between different eras, different bodies, the idea of re-enactment of the past and of its continuity into the present, is essential to me.

What part does the text play in the performance?

Dunoyer: This is quite new for me, as until now I haven't used much text in my performances. Not being on stage but in a studio around which the audience sits, the demarcation of the stage space and the audience space is totally different. Thus it is more like a collection of videos, furnishing dance, photographs, drawings, texts, etc., or like a guided tour in which I am simultaneously the object – the one who is observed – and the guide – the one who talks. I think *Pairforming* contains the synthesis of what is looked at and produced immediately. It is not a comment, but is made up of historical references and personal anecdotes. Once more, the two dimensions are interwoven.

Were you seeking intimacy when making *Pairforming*?

Dunoyer: I do react intensely to the space I am given, so it is more a practical aspect. But there might be an intimate dimension that is likely to express itself in this context, which is relevant to *Pairforming*. I think the intimacy can occur in the setting, given the fact I am not on a stage and the audience is not seated frontally facing the stage. I can't anticipate the way the bodies will take up their stance in space in relation to my body. There might be a game of proximity. I must admit I am very curious how it will unfold.

Interview by Elke de Preter