

MATERIALS

Performers: Portraits of Performance Artists

Patrick Morarescu

Performers is an archive collating portraits of performance artists active worldwide. Over the last three years I visited as many festivals and performance art venues as possible, with the intention of photographing participants. My aim is not to document art actions, but to capture the personalities that are behind those actions. Usually I take the photo right after a performance with the purpose of retaining the energy that a live presentation imbues in the artist.

Moreover, I aim to situate the figure in a specific setting or against a relevant background. In this way additional meanings come across, suggesting associations between the corporeal expression and the intensity of the surrounding space.

Performance and its Historical Heritage

In recent years Live Art has gained a more ascendant position in the contemporary art scene and more artists are experimenting with this medium. I understand performance art to be an expression of our eclectic historical moment, produced at the crossroads of many different disciplines (body art, movement, installation, sound, etcetera). It is a language that allows interdisciplinarity and interactivity to an extremely large extent.

As Peggy Phelan has famously stated, a performance art piece only exists in the present, and once presented it changes into another new form and stops being what it was. To quote Phelan: “To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance” (1993, 146).

The present, which leads the performance to its deeper question, is rarely valued in our culture. Performance is generated during a certain period that cannot be repeated. The repetition can be pursued, but this reproduction already marks something new. The document of a performance is only a recollective gesture, a stimulus of the memory to remember something transient.

However, art history and the politics of cultural management demand documentation and constrain artists and institutions to list, conserve, and archive artworks. That is why it is necessary to reflect on how these magic and unique moments can be frozen and preserved for the future.

My Personal Relationship to Photography and Live Performance

My interest in performance art documentation did not originate in an academic impulse, but in an artistic one. I have been actively involved in performance art practice as an artist, curator, and

Patrick Morarescu studied at the Academy for Photography in Munich. Although his main technique is photography, his projects also combine several formats, such as collage, performance and installation. He has shown his works in Germany, the UK, Spain, the Netherlands, Estonia, Switzerland, Poland, Finland, Australia, Cameroon, Morocco, and Taiwan.

organizer; I realized several solo and group performances and organized performance festivals and gatherings. Those experiences and collaborating with the research project ELAA (European Live Art Archive)—in which we interviewed experienced performance artists with the goal of archiving their memories—brought me to the idea of systematically photographing the performance artists I came across.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to get to know many different performance artists, including their different approaches to creativity, their particularities, and their individual personalities. And it is those differential factors that interest me and, I believe, make this series interesting, colourful, and strong.

From my years of photographic study, I have maintained an interest in portraiture, especially for the way it captures the dynamism and complexity of human beings. I photograph individuals to whom I feel an initial attraction, and I try to reflect this appealing force in images. I am attempting to represent a power that cannot be described in words or concepts but captures my attention and curiosity, a sort of addiction not only to body shapes, eyes, skin tonalities, but also to what is underneath: the thoughts and the mental states of these persons. And I feel a sort of instinct of possession, a desire to materialize the moment that this person is living.

The sheer human presence of these performers, in all their emotionality, is sometimes too strong. They are shouting to get all the attention: like a red dot in a forest of green, like a flash in the darkness. To balance that force I need the background, the space that as a negative form defines the contour of the figure. Through that supplementary space, I create a whole story. The key to my research lies in the dialogue between the person and the background. Sometimes I think I am not portraying a person against a background, but a background alongside a person; sometimes it is the opposite. The background speaks about fear, happiness, peace, desperation; it speaks about the circumstances through an atmosphere.

Additional images from the *Performers* series can be accessed at <http://morarescu.de/performers>.

References

Phelan, Peggy. 1993. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York: Routledge.



Alastair McLennan (Scotland)



Akashapusha (Finland)



Ato Malinda (Kenya)



Béatrice Didier (Belgium)



Jelili Aitku (Nigeria)



Anna McCarthy (Germany/UK)



Irma Optimist (Finland)



Jürgen Fritz (Germany)



Kira O'Reilly (Ireland)



Yingmei Duan (China)



Nikhil Chopra (India)



Panoply Lab (USA)



Saskia Edens (Switzerland)



Valentin Torrens (Spain)



Watan Wuma (Taiwan)