



INK

INTERVIEW WITH DIMITRIS PAPAIOANNOU

***Ink* is a duo, and the environment you have created is an almost closed one, like a space apart from the world.**

Dimitris Papaioannou: Yes, it's a semi-circular, closed shape, dominated by water. The walls and the ceiling are all black and covered with a plastic, transparent canvas which, under the effect of light and water, starts to look like metal-blue velvet, maybe even like leather plates. Water gushes out of a sprinkler, an agricultural irrigation system I wanted to place at the centre of the stage; it flows continuously in that place we can't really date or define. This strange world, almost untethered from reality, is inhabited by a character who seems to be its master. I embody this divine presence who presides over the functioning of his world and can even challenge the mysteries of gravity. The unexpected arrival of a visitor throws a wrench into this system and threatens its equilibrium. The stranger enters this closed space through the ground, he slips inside uninvited, at least consciously, and poses the dilemma of the duo to its original inhabitant, the "inhabitant zero." The latter now has to contend with the other, a double who is, of course, much younger. The situation is therefore just a game of balance, of leverage, of positioning constantly counterbalanced and questioned, caught always in the instability of the forces they each bring against each other. At times, the master seems to have managed to absorb the stranger into his space; at others, the young man seems to claim ownership of the place. This is, in a way, about pregnancy and birth. The young intruder becomes a child, who then becomes an octopus. Shapes and meanings shift, everything is moving and fluid, the space is invaded by the ever-flowing water. *Ink* is first and foremost the story of a visit, an "Annunciation:" that of the angel or devil who, by his very visit, upsets the course of things. While one can find several meanings and references interlaced throughout the show, I don't want to impose any one of them. Everything remains open in this closed space.

The world of the show looks futuristic, or even like a nightmare world...

The aesthetics of science-fiction and horror quickly come to the fore. The space we're looking at could just as well be a post-apocalyptic wasteland or the place of all beginnings: the beginnings of life, the apparition of desire... We're in a world of alchemy, where thoughts can materialise. It might bring to mind the planet in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris*. Without guessing just how violent it will get, we are faced with the present time, with actions heavy with suspense. It adds the thrill of horror. The sound of water flowing continuously, the flashes of the metallic blue fabric constricting the space, the game of human hide-and-seek unfolding before us, all combine to create a nightmarish atmosphere. This place can look sometimes like a ship that has run aground, maybe even like an abandoned spacecraft in orbit and in which unfold almost inexplicable events... or is that just a creation of our minds? It's also the story of a sadistic relationship between two people. They take and take, and in the end the games of opposition just keep inverting and great violence arises from this duo. A parallel narrative follows the story of our species: the evolution of living beings from their amphibious form to the human phase, eventually becoming deities. But at the same time, I wanted there to be a second narrative that would offer an alternative, bring more balance. I tell the story of a hunter who becomes a trainer, a circus tamer, then eventually becomes a victim. Like my previous show *Primal Mater* (2012), *Ink* questions the reality of the situation. Are the two characters projections of ourselves? Is this duo a fight against or with my subconscious? Or am I watching two unknown entities moving through unsuspected dimensions? The whole creates a palimpsest; there are many fictional references which reveal my love for painting, aliens, science-fiction, and dark fantasy.

Can you tell us more about the title of the show, itself a mystery?

At the very beginning of the show I, or rather the figure I'm playing, catch an octopus. A sea monster. Then the young man opens a breach through space and enters through the ground. Without it being laid out in detail, there is a close connection between the two events and/or the two creatures. The octopus produces an ink that can be confused with the water which flows clear at first, before becoming opaque when it comes into contact with the dark ground. An unconscious flow of desire. The ink released by the animal is a source of creation, it is the medium we use to write or draw. The carnal and primal matter turns into spiritual matter through the work of two men, the alchemist and the stranger. Ever since I was a child, I've been fascinated by the octopus as an animal, in particular by the way one softens its meat by throwing it again and again against a rock so that it can be cooked. It's a very violent method, but also a fascinating one, in a disturbing way. This animal has often been depicted in surprising ways throughout art history, with unique cultural representations. Its atypical, almost alien shape, its colour and texture are often eroticised... It's shrouded in fantasy and mystery. Just like the wild animal that comes out of nowhere, the stranger, who enters this space entirely naked, carries within himself the traces of another world. The alchemist will try to train him, to tame him, past the tipping point. Is the only possible end the erasure of the other?

Violence becomes a new subject to explore here...

I think that psychoanalysts would probably have a lot to say about the different layers of narrative and meaning in *Ink*. It's as if I was exploring territories unknown to me. I don't really know where the violence that arises here comes from, but it's become one of the main subjects of the show. The duo quickly launches into a hunt whose end remains uncertain. The intrusion of sounds and music play a part in this growing unease, just like the fanaticism of the alchemist who tries to control every single element of his environment. I started with great tenderness, but found darkness along the way.

Yet it started as a show for eight dancers...

No, that's *Transverse Orientation*, on which we were working when the pandemic interrupted us. *Ink* is an unexpected consequence of the first lockdown we went through in Athens in March and April 2020. We were working with many performers, but we had to stop in the middle of creation and step away from it. With Šuka Horn, one of the dancers in the show, we decided to answer the proposition by the Torinodanza Festival in Turin and the Aperto Festival in Reggio Emilia to create a show during that troubled time. When rehearsal studios finally reopened, Šuka and I met to explore the figures of the father and son, or of the master and his disciple. A duality as complementary as it is discordant. At first, I wanted to create a plastic installation through which two performers could move, and it evolved into a dance show. The elements of scenography we would manipulate ourselves, without the help of any technical staff at first, became the real starting point of our research. We played with matter, with the objects we'd gathered in the studio. We reused things that were part of the floor for an old production, *Medea* (1993-2008), and flexible and translucent fiberglass panels that became an important object in *Ink*. It's very stimulating to have the opportunity to create something when no one expects you to, without having to think about co-productions or being subjected to a constraining schedule; this form of total freedom is rare nowadays. I threw myself into this show, I experienced this opportunity as a revitalisation of my creativity.

Interview conducted by Moïra Dalant in February 2021 and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cleach