

On Mythical Animals, Textures and The Spirit of Now

Interview with Viviana Druga

Marta Jecu : Which is the connection between the real character and their mythical and symbolic role from the cards? How did you choose the correspondence between the characters and the role? How did they absorb the role, what was their input as incarnation of the symbol and what did the mythical character transfer onto them?

Viviana Druga: We did not want to have a 22 models casting that would be shot in a row and then we're done! The real people interpreting the characters were chosen according to the significance of the motives depicted on the cards. Sometimes we would take a longer time to find the right person but usually time played an important role as the people I would meet during my quest would prepare themselves for the upcoming cards. I see a transfer between the characters and the real people taking place, a transformation into the mythic character and vice versa. Some of the real characters would bring their own input into the card: their own personalities manifest into the card, adding contemporary elements (the microphone on the Magician's table is significant as he himself wanted to improve his singing and be more creative), not to mention the Devil who basically created his own representation: adding breasts and horns that he made out of polyester.

M. J. In which way did these new cards that you created generate an information transfer between character, actor and audience./viewer?

V. D.: Usually the information transfer from mythic character to actor would take place in the performative photo session that took around 3-4 hours. Another transfer happens during the exhibition of the kinetic photo-installation, where the visitor chooses 3 out of 22 images. The kinetic cards flip and reveal the characters. Some are drawn to certain images because there is a visual correspondence with our interior character. Otherwise, a new personal 'you' is revealing itself in contact with the image. The mythic character created anew with elements from the daily reality and inspired by the canons of the original Marseille is situating himself closer to the contemporary viewer, so the transfer is easily enabled.

M. J.: In your cards the animals are transformed into humans, the real landscape becomes anorganical matter (fabric), the humans are passing from the original bidimensional illustration into tridimensional.

V. D.: Humans playing animals was a decision that worked well as it created new roles for interpretation and self-reflection. La Force is mirrored in the Lion that she is taming, The Chariot is drawn by horses that are another representation of the Chariot master, signifying that he incarnates his own will and direction. Even me and Julie are on the World card, 'hiding' as an angel/bull and a bird/lion. The backdrops, costumes, and props were inspired by the original cards, but also by the own own private mythologies and those of our actors, who were selectively drawn from family, friends, and acquaintances. The natural elements were all basically replaced by drapes, creating a diorama of a natural environment. This choice is made in order to distance the viewer from the natural daily landscape, which is placed in a parallel dimension – a sort of hologram reality where humans gain a bi-dimensional illustrative quality. On the other hand, the painting-like quality of the created image is transporting you out of the tridimensional into an iconic image which resembles Christian representations. Maybe it has a lot to do with the fact that I was born in Transylvania - Romania and my childhood was influenced by the the Christian-Orthodox Mysticism that was introduced to by my mother. I do believe that the newly created characters have a saint-like resemblance.

M. J.: I am interested in which way the fluctuation between bi-dimensional space (collage and the original woodblock print of the Marseille Tarot) and the tridimensional / real space (created by the presence of actors in a certain moment of their life) is creating also a fluctuation between symbolic space (filled with real characters) and real space (filled with symbolic content)? At the same time there is a sliding between hyperreal space and abstract space.

V. D.: This fluctuation between real and and hyperreal and abstract is reminding the threefold simulation-simulacra order of the world we are living in – that J. Baudrillard writes about. What is real, what is a copy of the real and a copy of a copy of the real? The 22+1 series is belonging actually to the 3rd order because: 1. there was a performance with real protagonists, 2. a moment of the performance was captured in a photograph that is also a reflexion of the real, but in a mediological sense. I am using this term, since for Andrei Ujica mediology designates the fact that the reality of the real is already a mediated one. In this sense the image is not real, but a transformation of the real; 3. the digital manipulation of the photograph places the

image on an abstract level so it distances it from reality, referencing the woodblock print but gaining a new life of its own and becomes in a way real and alive again in the kinetic installation due to the motion it has acquired.

M. J.: In which way did you access the symbolic dimension of the cards through the medium performance?

V. D.: The performative element was important as it enabled the real character to dive into the mythic one. Time is therefore quite important. When the next performer was chosen he /she would have time a couple of days to 1 week to reflect on his interpretation and the relation between him/her and the one to be interpreted. When the actual performance took place, it would be captured in a photograph. All elements were created on the spot and following the performance tradition – the outcome would stay unknown.

M. J.: In which way is the symbolic dimension of these cards intervening upon or altering the classic Marseille Tarot?

V. D.: Vast eras and auras are being bridged in our '22+1' series of art cards. The classic Tarot du Marseille is reanimated: in a way the flesh and the bones of the real characters are adding soul to them. Archetypal symbolism is revived and reinterpreted in contemporary, razor-sharp photo collages, printed and installed as a life-sized game. The relevance of the psychological and transcendental dimensions of the photos, which can be accessed selectively in turn by each viewer during the exhibition, is closely linked to the relativity of the game itself.

J.: The intrusion of technical manipulation in these cards has its relevance. It creates the magical device through which the world is perceived.

V. D.: Art is shaping and creating the pinhole through which we perceive reality. Being a creator is having the responsibility of your own outcome but at the same time it is necessary to let go of this outcome, in order to make way to a multiplicity of interpretations to manifest. The new characters brought to life are having a life of their own and in a way this is magic! The digital intervention on the photographs transforms the image-making into a painting-like activity. It can change completely the initial photo sketch taken with the model. In this way photography regains the magic that only the painting was invested with and gains the possibility to create something completely new and fresh.

Interview with Julie Bourgeois/ Tata Christiane

Marta Jecu: Fabric has the power to take any shape and to take any surface – from a thread to an entire cloth. In 22+1 fabric fills in and replaces other type of materialities and changes the nature of things. How do you interpret and in which way did you work here with this power of fabric and its symbolic character?

And also: Why draping and not dressing?

Are you interested in a magic dimension of fabric, of draping and dressing?

Julie Bourgeois: We work within the limits that the fabric offers. Initially I was thinking of making costumes, but I was soon repelled by the idea of producing something that is not ephemeral. For this project I have chosen to use a polyester fabric with a pretty sporty appearance and with qualities that provided value to me: color intensity, heavy fell of the fabric to make drapes, its ability to not wrinkle. I collected then a few meters of this fabric in different colors that matched perfectly with the colors of the Tarot de Marseille. These fabrics, colored paper, white clay, artificial light and sometimes natural light in the morning, along with not very sharp scissors and various pretty wacky objects we found in Viviana's studio, were our games' instruments, our ceremonial tools.

I think these limits on materials that we have set, have been the key to our freedom, and our game: the moment when we recreate the image from the map, with the models.

What struck me most in this process, is the act. Our game was sometimes that of witches. It represents the result of this magic moment which is the act. The relationships with the models, the construction of the stage/set, the reaction of each model to the card for which he would pose were all part of this process. I liked also that this process was quite long and quite secret for two years.

M.J.: The entire set in these images is made by folds, which represents the capacity of fabric to reproduce itself infinitely. In which way do you work with fabric to create space, considering also that this space is in between bi-dimensional and tri-dimensional?

J. B.: The fabric is not infinite. There is an end, a finitude. It is a few meters long. But the game, as a reading, is so infinite. Realizing a drape looking at a Tarot picture, implies respecting the body of the model, and

working in the order of his/her body. In this process of freezing we have used only a few pins. We were being careful not to move too much, not to disturb the folds and other times needed to re-drape, if the model needed to move.

Draping determines also the way in which the fabric catches the light, absorbs light and makes the color more intense, which I think has strengthened the depth of our ephemeral sculptures. Part of our works was also the acceptance of the accident and the chance. And the very presence of the person.

M.J.: Textiles have also a capacity to evoke haptic sensations, smells, feelings. How did you work with this dimension in here?

J. B.: At the end of the work, our fabrics were increasingly tattered, more dirty. After each shooting in Viviana's studio, it resembled a battlefield or a nursery.

M.J.: In a way, textiles are a shell of things. How does space constructs itself between material and abstract? In this work every materiality is replaced by textile, so they can take any form and they construct space in a sculptural way, but still keep textures and materiality. In this paradox way, an abstract effect results. Please tell some words on the quality of textiles for you between abstract and material.

J. B.: The fabric for me is colors, falling and draped. I have just explained how I believe that we constructed our games. At that very moment something absolutely concrete and anchored in the present was going on. I think a kind of distortion can happen, that determines that quite surreal photograph, takes a very realistic appearance, too realistic to serve the strange and magical aspects that it actually contains. Our sculptures (or better *tableaux vivants*) that took place in the studio, were almost always so intense, happening there in front of us. Many times we were surprise and fascinated by them. It was not only a matter of textiles. It was an ensemble, a spirit of now. Also the fact that we repeated these sessions regularly for two years was important. This time there was invaluable.

Marta Jecu is researcher at the CICANT Institute, Universidade Lusofona, Lisbon and freelance curator. She has published in magazines like: E-Flux, Kaleidoscope, Berlin Art Link, Idea Art +Society, Journal of Curatorial Studies, Esse Arts + Opinions and among others in: Jim Elkins (Ed.): "Contemporary Visual Culture Reader," Routledge, New York, 2012. With a 2011 curated exhibition, she edited the volume: Marta Jecu (Ed.): *Subtle Construction, Bypass*, Malmo, Lisbon, 2011. Her curated show *Open Monument* was on view at Kunstraum Kreuzberg Bethanien Berlin, Germany, in May-June 2013. Her volume *Catalytic Space. Architecture and the Virtual* will appear this year at Intellect Book, in the U.K.