

Rituals of Passage is the result of a co-creative project between artists Ryan Falzon (MT), Aaron Bezzina(MT), Alexandra Fraser (UK), Yasmine Akondo (BE), Mladen Hadžić (SRB) and Stefan Kolgen(BE).

The theme of this exhibition emerged from a series of discussions between the participating artists and the curators. Whilst listening to each other and whilst challenging each other's ideas, it occurred that all were intrigued by rituals and how they might help us find balance in disrupted times. During COVID-19 people were creating new rituals to get safe and sound through the day. Now post-COVID-19 one notices that the pandemic had a big impact on our wellbeing and our mental health. Society forces us to pick up where we left off before covid, but that is a challenge. There is a lot of pressure, a lot of intrusion on our 'being-in-the-world'. This exhibition wants to address this challenge in an artistic way by reshaping rituals.

Defining what rituals are is complex and rather impossible as it depends on context, circumstances, background, and time. Though, one may say that rituals do happen in a spatial setting and most often entail a repetitive action; being sequences of activities involving gestures, actions, objects, and sound. Rituals are embodied interactions with the audience, performed in a specific way and possibly taking the performer and the audience from one stage to another physically or mentally. Thus, finding a place for healing, ease of mind and/or comfort. Finding yourself.

Or as philosopher and cultural theorist Byung-Chal Han defines it in his book 'The disappearance of Rituals': *Rituals transform the being-in-the-world into a being-at-home. They are to time what home is to space.* This metaphor about rituals nicely connects with the way rituals are presented in this exhibition. All works involve some kind of passage towards the being-at-home. Hence 'Rituals of Passage' is a visual story of six artists, with six different backgrounds and six different views on rituals, all attuning with the issues mentioned above. All addressing the topic in a very personal way.

Alexandra Fraser got inspired by the ritual of anatomical votives from across the ancient world; she built a sculptural homage to the womb using fibreglass, polyester, metal, and thread. **Chthonic Incubation** is a material symbol of humanity's dominance over nature. In human arrogance we strive to control our rituals of passage and our fates. From within this colossal symbol of femininity, she sleeps. In birth, death and sleep we exist, but how can we exist unconsciously? The installation is accompanied with a sound installation made from fragments of the artist sleep talking, words she never said yet spoken by her voice. The drawings **Klein Liedje, We are All Down Here Deep in the Earth, Love You Very Much Da, I'm Dying as a Triangle, It's so Weird in this Wardrobe** relate to these fragments.

Starting from a place of anxiety but also interest, *Mladen Hadžić* found himself between the topics of masculinity and esotericism. It was a personal quest, in which he tried to dig through these monumental elements of culture in search of material for a better self. In its occult form, the work is related to the concept of the **Homunculus** found in alchemical texts, as well as an interpretation of the sigils of chaos magic. In terms of masculinity, the model of the work is an obvious gesture, but it was the tactility and physicality of the processes that became a kind of ritual or meditation. Making from the wooden sculpture mould after mould after mould which made the masculinity fade so that only the essence remained.

With the work **Rituals as aids against ruminations existing out of seven paintings** (Lucky Love Lines, Mercure, Religion, Let me water your plants in the morning, Let me water your plants in the afternoon, Let me water your plants in the night, Old Flames never Die) *Ryan Falzon* explores the rituals that are the ones automated by the brain in the form of intrusive thoughts and escapist

behaviour. Rituals are routines of control and safety, where one can allow just a hint of unpredictability. Ruminations of the mind are a safe way to deal with unpleasant experiences, lost opportunities, and a defence mechanism for future encounters. In this body of work, these automated rituals are visualised and transferred into a visual language of marks, colours, text and selected imagery. Here the artist is exploring the tranquillity and safety associated with routine gardening, rituals of seduction and divination as extension of the human psyche.

Cycles I, Cycles II, Hamsa and Qrun question how we interact when we meet someone for the first time. Through a handshake. The hands are also used to make specific gestures when encountered with superstition, especially in Mediterranean communities. As *Aaron Bezzina's* work is always questioning touch and interactivity when one approaches sculpture, this project will try to interrogate the merger of the points above, making use of a kinetic counterpart to emphasise the notion of repetition. Repetition could also be a means to alter, to elongate time and possibly matter - to stretch. This latter point will be reflected in another work where everything is static, however, the cycle and movement occurs in one's head.

The falling of sand is the trail we leave behind. It starts running the moment we are born, but ... all that matters is 'the now'. The trail itself will be washed away, blown away, ... made by memories, happenings, moments, crossroads, and decisions that are made or not made. They all lead to who we are, but do not define us. When the sand stops falling, we become the all-comprehensive moment. This thought accompanies Yasmine Akando's **Materia Prima** the installation and the performance; both an ode to *Ula Pupaya*. She is the embodiment as well as the protector of life (ka/qui), and of time. In her mythology, she was born from ancient waters. She later chose to be reborn in human form to experience the concept of life as we do. But as life itself, she was curious and eager to learn. Soon she began to transcend time and space to become one again with a greater understanding of herself. She is merely a symbol to signify the essence of life. The performance accompanying the installation will be an appropriation of a time-transcending ritual, performed in ancient times to get closer to your own 'qui' and to understand time and space as one moment inside you.

Possibility of Silence is the account of the recurring ritual of visiting the Mirila memorial sites in the Velebit Mountains of Croatia. The video encapsulates *Stefan Kolgen's* quest to make the noise of the past in his head bearable and - perhaps - briefly muffle it. A Mirila is a grave for the soul of the deceased. The meaning of the word is 'to measure'. The body is measured by putting the corpse on the soil, facing sunrise, and placing a headstone and footstone. After the burial the soul separates from the body and finds its way back due to its measurement and permanently binds itself to the monument due to the glue-like capacities of the limestones used. The interactive installation **To measure and bind (the soul)** entails the sonified measurement of the artist's body, floating halfway and made out of Belgian limestone, in order to invoke the ritual of briefly touching death without stepping away from life.

The works were created with the exhibition space in mind and were placed in such a way that they interact with each other and with the viewer. Thus, offering a context in which the viewer can create and experience its own passage whilst walking through the exhibition space.

This exhibition is curated by Ann Laenen and Stefan Kolgen, though is the result of a co-creative process with all participating artists. It is supported by the Arts Fund of the Flemish Community, Valletta Contemporary and Sint Lucas Antwerpen - School of Arts.

Text Ann Laenen