Espace Sculpture

D’un duo à l’autre
Questions & réponses [deuxième partie]
From One Duo to Another
Questions & answers [part two]

Duo en art [deuxième partie]
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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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Citer cet article
La revue ESPACE a interrogé différents duos d'artistes afin de connaître leur position concernant la question du duo en art et leur manière d'être ensemble dans le processus de création. Pour ce faire, ils étaient invités à répondre librement aux questions suivantes :

1. Depuis quand avez-vous une production commune?
2. Comment—à quelle occasion—s'est développée votre collaboration?
3. Étant donné que duos d'artistes, y a-t-il un médium qui vous convient le mieux? Ce médium a-t-il à voir avec le fait que vous travaillez à deux?
4. Ce travail en commun se fait-il en permanence? De façon sporadique?
5. Y a-t-il dans votre duo un partage bien précisé du travail? Autrement dit: comment s'organise à l'intérieur de votre duo le processus de création?
6. Voyez-vous une différence essentielle entre travailler en duo ou travailler en solo; si oui, quelle serait selon vous cette différence? Sur quel plan celle-ci jouerait-elle?
7. Est-ce que travailler en duo vous a donné accès à de nouvelles possibilités sur le plan de la création? Autrement dit: travailler en duo a-t-il changé votre perception de la création?
8. Selon vous, votre travail en duo s'inscrit-il dans une démarche esthétique qui viendrait détruire une certaine conception romantique de l'artiste?
9. Autres commentaires...

ESPACE sent this questionnaire to numerous artists duos in Quebec, Canada and abroad to find out how they feel about duos in art, and how they work together in their creative process. They were invited to answer the following questions.

1. How long have you been producing art work together?
2. How, and under what circumstances did you begin your collaboration?
3. As a duo, is there a particular medium which best suits your artistic collaboration? Is this choice of medium determined by the fact that you work as a pair?
4. Is this collaborative work a permanent and ongoing pursuit, or more of a sporadic or ephemeral experience?
5. In your collaboration, is there a clear and well defined sharing of the work? In other words, how is the creative process structured within your collaboration?
6. Do you see a marked difference between working as a duo and working in solo? If so, what would you say is the difference? On what level is this difference played out?
7. Has working as a couple opened the way for new creative possibilities? Has working as a duo transformed your perception of artistic creation?
8. Is your collaborative work inscribed in an aesthetic representation which might nullify certain preconceived, romantic notions of the artist?
9. Other commentaries which you may wish to add...
Nina Fischer & Maroan el Sani
Born in Emden (Germany), in 1965, and in Duisburg (Germany), in 1966. Both live and work in Berlin.
2. We were asked by a friend, a galerist, to create an exhibition together, when he found out that we were organising events together, although we were working separately as artists. This turned out to be a great experience and we have been working together since then.
3. No. We work with film, photographs, eventlike exhibitions, fiction. These elements were in each of our works before.
4. Ongoing. But we can't speak about eternity, because we are a couple!
5. No. We discuss everything, and finally, we share the organisational parts, but the decisions and the creative parts are always made together, even if it sometimes takes a long time for one to convince the other! It's part of the game.
6. Yes there is a big difference. Working as a duo, you reflect more. It is comparable to a game of ping-pong where ideas are exchanged. Finally the ball hits and there it is! For me (Nina) it also has another effect: when I worked on my own, curators were always looking for the female point of view, and I hated it. I hated to be asked to do woman-exhibitions, it feels like you need special treatment because of your weak gender.
7. Yes it has. When we first started to make our collaboration official, we thought about a concept of self-presentation: we shot a video, Be supernatural: we invented a fictive biography about our paranormal childhoods, where we met and about our present collaboration as "mediums" (in German: Die Medien). We were fascinated by the historical mediums who traveled around showing their supernatural abilities and exhibiting their talents. We wanted to travel around the world like them, and teach people how to use their supernatural abilities and how to telecommunicate in a non-tech way. We invented a method of doing this. Be supernatural was very successful, and gave us a good feeling about our idea of collaboration.
8. If you mean by this the loneliness of the individual in the studio, day by day, the poor hungry soul... it that is romantic, I don't know... We are a team of two, but we also like to work with all kinds of people, for film, music, and other events, we have to collaborate a lot. We spend our time coordinating and driving around the city to meet all these people. Our studio is more like an office. I never imagined an artist's life would be like this. But it's good. You organise things, you travel around, we like it. And of course you have your thinking-moments for the creative parts, but that can be anywhere.

COZIC
(Monic Brassard et Yvon Cozic)
né à Montréal en 1967, vit et travaille à Longueuil, Québec

Au début des années soixante, au sortir de l'École des beaux-arts de Montréal, nous avions une pratique individuelle (peinture, gravure). C'est en 1967 qu'a débuté, sous la forme de collaboration, la création d'œuvres communes. L'attrait du relief nous a amené à œuvrer ensemble, mettant ainsi à profit notre compréhension du spatial et nos techniques individuelles. Dès ce moment, la sculpture s'est imposée comme médium idéal et principal axe de notre production. Le processus créateur utilisé dès le début se fait sur le mode de l'amalgame des matières, une stratification des gestes et une accumulation des différentes composantes apportées par l'un ou par l'autre. La réflexion conjointe découlant de ce travail formel nous a amené, au cours des années de pratique, à mieux cerner la nature d'un tel processus. Notre travail en duo n'est pas du même ordre que le travail en solo. La présence physique et spirituelle dans une même œuvre de deux individualités redéfinit la notion d'Ego.

L'artiste solo, une fois l'œuvre complétée, recherche l'œil critique chez les autres, le public. Le fait de travailler en duo implique automatiquement cette critique puisque le regard de l'autre est constamment présent lors de l'élaboration et la réalisation de l'œuvre; l'un est spectateur de l'autre. Dans notre cas, œuvrer à deux a élargi notre perception de la création, la vision de l'un s'ajoutant à la perception de l'autre, et vice versa. Au cours des années, cette pratique a évolué en raffinant les méthodes de production d'œuvres de galerie et d'art public. Notre démarche esthétique est l'amalgame et la superposition d'actions sans concession: l'œuvre doit exprimer intégralement les deux artistes qui composent le duo. Créer dans un état harmonieux nécessite d'être à l'écoute et de tenir compte de l'autre, il ne s'agit pas de s'entendre sur la place qu'il faut laisser à l'autre, mais que chacun trouve pleinement sa place. Notre travail en duo, symbole de deux artistes, a produit un ensemble d'œuvres qui à son tour a mis en scène une entité artistique virtuelle, signature de la production, COZIC. Notre duo en réalité est un trio, une trinité artistique.
Barbara et Michael Leisgen
Barbara, née en 1940, à Gengenbach (Allemagne); Michael, né en 1944, à Spital a. Pyhrn (Autriche).
Vivent et travaillent à Aix-La-Chapelle et à Paris.

2. Quand nous avons terminé nos études des Beaux-Arts.
3. Premièrement, c'est la photographie, deuxièmement la vidéo. Les médias permettent — ou demandent même — de travailler à plusieurs.
4. Le travail commun se fait en permanence, dès le début des années 70.
5. Notre travail est un travail conceptuel. Nous développons le concept commun ; en ce qui concerne la réalisation, chacun sait tout faire (ce qui est pour nous très important).
6. D'abord ce n'est plus l'image d'artiste comme génie. Travailler en duo cela veut dire profiter de la communication et des différents points de vue.
7. Pour nous, ce n'est pas un changement au niveau de la perception car nous ne connaissons que ça. Prévoir le regard du spectateur, essayer de l'intégrer : une démarche où l'échelle est de travailler les clichés bien connus.
8. Avec les nouveaux médias on se doit de créer aussi une nouvelle définition de l'artiste dans son époque (voir question no. 6).


Ilya & Emilia Kabakov
Ilya born in 1933, Dnepropetrovsk (URSS).

It is very difficult to answer your questions, because it isn’t a usual collaboration between two artists. But, on the other hand, it is the same thing for other artists, like Oldenburg, for example. Very often, because the other artist is a wife, people tend to take the collaboration as a joke: “Well, she has a big ego and he just lets her have her way”...

How did we start? In 1988, when Ilya came to the West, we met again (we had known each other all our lives, because we are second cousins). He didn’t speak English so I started to help him with the organization of his projects by translating his letters. Then, I became an assistant. I was an art dealer, I knew a lot of people in the art world, but I also began to organize things, to make them happen. Ilya was interested in installation as a medium, it was the best way for him to express his ideas.

I understand installations better than paintings.

In the beginning, he would ask my opinion and I would be careful expressing it because I wasn’t sure if I understood the installation — sometimes, it could be very complicated work.

Now, ten years later, it is a full collaboration. We discuss ideas, we work together making the installations, on the texts, etc.

What are the things we don’t do? I don’t make drawings (although, in Belgium, when we needed “children’s drawings”, I made fourteen of them, and incidentally, all of them were stolen (not because they were so good, but because people did not know they were made by me and not by Ilya!).

Ilya doesn’t get involved in any of the organizational planning, correspondence, planning of exhibitions, printing, proof reading, shipments, etc.

I don’t paint and never will — “it’s not something that interests me”.

Sometimes I have the ideas — he works them out as an installation, a project. I take care of its realization (find a place for it, organize the financial part, etc.).

As I said before, by now there are very few things where we can... "This is where we work separately". We talk a lot. Out of our discussions an idea is produced, a theory, an installation, a project.

Now I’ll go to the 7th question: we are two different people. Creativity is a process which is not defined by time or space, or possibilities. You are either creative or you are not. In this case, we both are. Ilya creates the new artistic ideas. I create the way of realizing them and bring them to life. That gives him the opportunity to create more; which then gives me the opportunity to create more...

(B) A collaborative union is based on romantic ideas — if it’s artistic, otherwise we call it a “business venture”. An artist is a dreamer, a person who has a lot of fantasies, and as his wife and collaborator, I love to dream with him, to share his fantasies, and to help them become real. So, I am a dreamer as well. Does it make me an artist? If yes, then it’s an artistic collaboration; if not, it’s love!
Dempsey and Millan
Lorri Millan, born in 1965, North Bay (Ontario); Shawna Dempsey, born in 1963, Toronto.

2. We became friends in 1986. I arrived at the first day of a theatre rehearsal, and found her, the stage manager, knee deep in water. Flooding was a new foible of the work space, but neither of us were particularly surprised, and together, stoically, bailed it out. I had begun my professional work in theatre in 1984, also as a technician. My duties as a worker in alternative and children's theatre included countless tasks that one would not usually consider part of my job description. Everybody did everything because we had to. Lorri's career was not dissimilar. At the age of sixteen she learned to run a lighting board one afternoon, so that she could operate it that evening for one of the first annual Rhubarb! festivals. Through these do-or-die situations we both acquired a tremendous number of skills, all of which enabled the presentation of live art. Mopping a floor was yet another adventure in how to make theatre happen.

At the same time we began to develop our own work as artists, outside of the theatre system. For Lorri, this took the form of photographs, drawing, film making, and song writing; for me, performance art. Each of us also began to critique the theatrical model; its preoccupation with character psychology rather than ideas; the formal conventions of its presentation; the tremendous amount of unseen and uncredited labour that goes into its execution; and the seemingly unavoidable hierarchy circumscribing the roles of its workers. We concluded that even within alternative theatre, the weight of theatre history sets up expectations in both the audience and artists. It is these expectations that we wanted to attempt to dissolve.

We became friends in 1988, and as often happens, we began freely stealing each other's ideas in our own art practices. It became clear by 1989 that she was no longer doing her work, and I my work; but quite organically it had become our work.

By 1992 we had left theatre and were supporting ourselves full-time with our feminist performance/video/print/film projects. The stress involved in creating, living, and loving together was not incidental in our break-up the same year. However, despite the vagaries of the heart, we were certain of one thing: we wanted to continue working together. Given the emotional hardships involved in the transition, this was a Herculean task, and one that has taken years to work through.

3. The forms in which we choose to work (performance, film, video, and print) are all media that are traditionally collaborative, involving teams of people. It is probably not coincidental that we don't do collaborative paintings, for example, or other forms that lack the model of group involvement.

4. We work together 365 days of the year (which is really too much, so we're currently trying to negotiate a more reasonable schedule). We continue to live together. We are committed to each other in both professional and familial ways.

5. For us the work begins with a visual idea, something that bugs us — something we want to say. We then find the medium to best embody the visual and thematic ideas.

For performances (our primary medium) we conceive, design, and build the sculptural costumes together. We often spend up to a year, after their construction, looking at them and unraveling their meanings. I then write, and Lorri edits and re-writes the performance texts. (Since I embody the text, we find that it has to be something I "own" in order to function as it comes from my lips. This is why I always do the first drafts.) I perform the finished piece, and Lorri acts as outside eye and technical co-ordinator. After the first public performance, we will often work for two more years, re-writing and refining. This process might include the creation of video pieces, film, slide and sound components, and music; also made or co-ordinated by us both. In putting all the pieces together we are conscious of each other's strengths and weaknesses. Therefore Lorri is much more likely to shoot video footage, and I am much more likely to buy/rent/build the art department. But despite this loose division of labour, we share ownership of all aspects of the work. Sometimes the finished performance bears little resemblance to its original incarnation. Occasionally it remains virtually unchanged. No matter which path the development takes, the final product is truly ours, and where her ideas leave off and mine begin is indiscernible.

6. It's so much less lonely with two. Creating... touring... the painful process of self-critique... We prop each other up. We keep each other going. And we keep pushing each other's ideas further. We have to make sense of an idea to each other, before an audience ever sees it. We are each other's first, primary, most critical, and most loyal audience.

Because there are two of us, the work is stronger. (Two heads are better than one). Plus we can get more done! The body of work we have done reflects the labour of two.

7. I think working together has made us more generous as people. That sounds high-flown, but giving up a degree of ego in creation — sharing ownership — has made me feel richer, has made me feel that what's important is doing the work, getting the ideas out there, not who does what or who thought of what first. (It has made me less uptight about my own self-importance.) I also hope that our experience of working with each other has made us more respectful of artists who work with us in specific capacities (i.e. as video editors, or composers, or production assistants), and that we have given them a sense of investment in the work as collaborators as well.

I must say it isn't always easy. Lorri can be very difficult and I know she thinks the same of me. Sometimes we hate each other. Often. But by constantly having to work through very real, very hard differences (in experience, in reception, in ways of working, in aesthetics) we are both challenged and broadened. I would not be the same person I am today if it weren't for this very important relationship in my life.

8. There still persists the idea of the artist as a lone, individualistic, maverick guy. We refute that; we reject that. We cannot be that, by reason of our gender. And the needs of our work (specifically having an outside eye) are not best served by that. So we have adopted/created another model. I
Monika et Bernard Hubot
Monika, née en 1958; Bernard, né en 1956.
Vivent et travaillent à Lustin, Belgique.

2. Durant nos études artistiques : lors de jeux, d'expérimentations autour de l'art, d'actions photographiques, faux théâtre, décors, etc.
3. Ce qui nous convient le mieux c'est l'espace. La création d'installations, d'environnements.
4. En permanence.
6. Comme il n'y a pas un ego qui domine dans notre personnalité, il y a toujours une ouverture vers l'autre qui permet de s'orienter vers de nouvelles pistes. L'œuvre est «entre nous».
8. Oui, absolument.
9. Non seulement nous formons un duo en art, mais également dans notre vie, pour la plupart de nos activités.
Loriot & Mélia
François Loriot et Chantel Mélia : nés en 1947 ; vivent et travaillent à Clisson (France).

1-2 [C.M.] Nous avons une production commune depuis 1992. Un soir, une nuit... le hasard a voulu que l'on repère « ensemble », sur le mur, une très extraordinaire tache de lumière. Absolument subjugués par le mystère de cette tache — mi-abstraite, mi-réaliste — nous sommes restés un long moment à la décrypter. D'où venait-elle ? De quelle source lumineuse ? L'énigme fut résolue lorsque on vit le chat s'étirer... Il s'était endormi en cachant une partie de miroir posée sur le lit encombré d'objets divers. Le chat sauta, l'image disparut, le miracle était fini !

1-2 (F.L.) Au regard de cette tache, une grande partie de notre création venait de prendre un sacré coup de vieux...

4-5 [C.M.] Le processus de création n'est pas toujours clairement défini. En fait, il s'agit plus d'une communauté de pensée... Nous sommes à l'affût de toutes ces petites énigmes du quotidien. Sans arrêt nous traquons ces signes (ou clins d'œil) que nous fait le monde : une sorte d'art du « dérisoire ». L'art du peu. Pour cela, nous échangeons en permanence des informations, des idées, des découvertes, des observations. Les œuvres sont amorcées dans nos discussions ; en ce qui concerne leur réalisation, on verra plus tard... L'échange, voilà sûrement l'élément capital de notre duo. Chacun doit être très perméable aux idées de l'autre.

4-5 [F.L.] Le grand avantage de travailler en tandem tient d'abord dans le fait de pouvoir entendre la critique de l'autre : un avis sans concession. C'est ce qui permet de voir plus clair. Cela peut être absolument destructeur et très douloureux, mais cela fait aussi terriblement avancer les choses. En cela, l'ego de l'artiste en prend parfois un coup. Le deuxième avantage, c'est de ne jamais se trouver au creux de la vague en même temps : l'angoisse circule. Enfin, les installations demandent souvent un partage physique actif. Vous savez, il y a beaucoup d'intentions qui se résolvent par la manipulation, l'expé-