



Art Woo

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Olivier De Sagazan

7th Videoholica / Transfiguration / Art is Dead! /
Pilsen Biennial / Keith Haring Foundation
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INTERVIEW

“Transfiguration”

Olivier de Sagazan



MAY 2014

An interview with the French artist Olivier de Sagazan

An insight into his art and practices
of the “Transfiguration” performance.

by Titika Stamouli

The French artist Olivier de Sagazan, originally from Congo-Brazzaville has had a breakthrough in his career with his innovative and deeply personal performance “Transfiguration.”

Through the years Olivier de Sagazan has taken part with artworks and live performances on many art venues and festivals in France, Europe, Canada, Brazil and Korea. The “Transfiguration” performance” was established back in 2001. Since then a series of performances have been documented on video and can be found in many video database websites, such as YouTube and Vimeo. The latest “Transfiguration” was performed in January of 2014 at the International Theatre Festival of Kerala, South India.

Olivier de Sagazan has a special place in the contemporary art scene and a career of more than 20 years in the arts. He combines all the art mediums, namely painting, sculpture, photography and performance. An exemplifying example of his body of work is his performance “Transfiguration,” in which he brings together clay sculpting, body painting, the use of natural sound and himself; the performer giving out his inner self in a play of existence.

In his artistic performance the self-respected man strips off his costume: a signifier of the norms of civilization. During the performance the artist builds layers of clay and paint on his face and body and adds to them other natural materials like sticks that he then sheds to reveal his inner physical matter.

The artist lowers himself inside the animal pyramid and positions himself to the lowest scale of a hybrid.

He turns into a woman by applying red paint on his lips and nipples signifying his transformation from male to female. All this carried out in a spiritual manner as in a ritual.

African influences of his birthplace, Congo, are evident in the “Transfiguration” performance. Olivier de Sagazan leaves marks onto his body reminiscent of the scars left on the inhabitants’ bodies of the African tribes. Their practices included tattooing, scarification and septum piercing with pieces of bone, wood and tusk prevalent among warrior cultures for a fierce looking effect, as well as for identification purposes among other tribes.

He later transfigures into a bird. The use of classical music imposes this elevation in nature. He tries to fly, but he cannot. The limitations of the human existence. He disappoints himself and hits himself against the wall causing an outrageous crashing sound. He has not succeeded in changing his nature. He leaves his prints behind on the wall and floor; reminiscent of his life on earth, like the forgotten ruins of old lost civilizations.

The human is the only being that can easily change his state and purpose of living. This question remains unanswered for the rest of the animals, but for the humans purpose in life and the meaning of the self can change instantly once one interacts with another human being.



Olivier de Sagazan, when asked about what made him walk down his artistic existential path, begins to narrate a dream that he used to have as a child.

He used to see himself asking his friends and around about the purpose of life. None of them seemed to know. They were just there staring at one another and talking secretly.

“How come he doesn’t know? No one told him?” Suddenly it occurred to him that everyone knew why we exist and were brought to this world except for him. He, then “exits the room, runs through dark places in the night and wakes up.” He continues by saying that sometimes he thinks of it today, when he distinguishes a general indifference in people for matters like that. He still questions himself: “There must be something that people know that I don’t?”

A comforting reaction to his thoughts is his performance “Transfiguration” and the appeal it has to people in art festivals around the world. This is something that makes him stop wondering, whether or not he is the only one that finds the human existence bizarre. His aim is to “make this performance come to the same level, to overflow the central nervous system of those watching with the deep feeling of the bizarre.” In his opinion this can be accomplished only “by placing a figure there, inside the world like in a strange connection between ourselves and things.”

Relating his work to a young artist, he sums up his work by the following: “I ask from inside my work what is it that lives? And with my poor means I try to be a little more precise with my existence, the physical conditions that prevent me from seeing myself as I truly am and my biological system that I have to try preventing from its simple function of just to survive.”

He sees art as being a critique to the world: “To make art is to perform a scream that tries to wake you up and if you are lucky, you sometimes achieve this scream to echo inside the heads of others.”

Olivier de Sagazan speaks of the "harsh critique on art" and how such a critique has influenced his work: “ Those fundamental questions lead to nowhere ”. When he comes up against a bad critique he says to himself: “ This designates the beginning of a submission, the lack of enthusiasm, of ideals... those people could have never built churches, create spaceships to travel to outer space or a boat to lead the way heading straight to the unknown.”

Here we see the special interest Olivier de Sagazan has put in the word church. He compares it to a boat or a spaceship; to a means of traveling to the unknown. In his words religion is a means to the unknown or a means to explain it. Maybe truth lies beneath and among his own words: church – ideals.

As this article comes to its end we will reveal Olivier de Sagazan’s idea of a dream project and hope that someone reading this interview would like to contribute in person.

So, Olivier de Sagazan’s dream project is “to have the means to be able to assemble a cast of 10 dancers and actors, a big spectacle based on the “Transfiguration” performance.” This idea stresses even more the theatrical dimension of the “Transfiguration” project and might be reminiscent of the ancient Hellenic mysteries performed for Dionysus or the rituals of the Mayas and Aztecs in South America.

INTERVIEW

