

Léonard Engel

:

PAROTIA

OUT

OF

THE

BOX

Léonard Engel

PAROTIA

Choreography:
LÉONARD ENGEL

Costume Design:
JOSA MARX

Mentor:
GAIA CLOTILDE CHERNETICH

Performance:
GIZEM AKSU & LISA STERTZ

Music:
9T ANTIOPE

The performance *Parotia* by Léonard Engel explores the physical and visual qualities of the act of whirling. Inspired by his practice of the Egyptian folk dance Tanoura, the choreographic heritage of Loïe Fuller and Oskar Schlemmer, and the visual experimentations of Marcel Duchamp, Engel develops a choreography with two dancers, Gizem Aksu and Lisa Stertz, that deconstructs the simple movement of spinning. Wearing heavy skirts created by Josa Marx, the dancers become kinetic sculptures in constant transformation. Caught in their continuous whirling, they seek to maintain a connection between themselves, while slowly transforming the spectator's perception of the space and body.

LÉONARD ENGEL, born in France, is a Berlin- and Munich-based performer and choreographer. He started his career as a ballet dancer at the Bavarian State Ballet, before becoming a freelance artist. He has worked with Laurent Chétouane, Meg Stuart, Moriah Evans, Paula Rosolen, Gintersdorfer/Klaßen and the Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch among others. His choreographic work focuses on the body and the alteration of its perception through movement, costumes and states of being. His first piece, *Pavane*, premiered in 2019 as part of the Tanztage Berlin at Sophiensaele, and was followed the same year by *How to get rid of a body. A magic manual. Parotia*, his first group piece, was created in November 2021. Aside from his stage performances, he has since 2020 been studying the Egyptian whirling dance Tanoura with dancer and choreographer Elsayed Morsi. He's currently working on the subject of masculinity in dance, and the "depatriarcalization" of the representation of the male body on stage. Léonard's pieces have been invited to Hybrid Festival (Berlin), Soundance Festival (Berlin) and the Rodeo Festival (Munich). For his choreographic work, he's been granted residencies at Tanzfabrik Berlin and at PACT Zollverein (Essen).

GIZEM AKSU is an independent choreographer, dancer and instructor based in Istanbul and Berlin. She graduated from the Department of Political Science & International Relations, Bosphorus University and the Department of Contemporary Dance, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University with honor degrees. She has worked with renowned choreographers; Aakash Odedra (UK), Ann Van den Broek (Ward/ward) (BE), Aydın Teker (TR), Marc Vanruxt (BE), Sharon Hayes (US), Tijen Lawton (BE) and Tuğçe Tuna (TR).

LISA STERTZ is a German artist and educator, who works in the performative and healing realms. Through her studies in media, philosophy and art she became both, a savant and a maker. Her interest in movement-based practices led her to be a sojourner of Butoh, Noguchi-Taiso, Baguazhang, Taiji Quan, and meditation. Recently she finished an apprenticeship to become a Dervish Whirling Teacher, with which she has enriched her knowledge and fields of action.

Performing sculpturing hypnosis

By Gaia Clotilde Chernetich

Léonard Engel: *Parotia is a bird. A small passerine of Papua New-Guinea, a member of the birds-of-paradise family. The male of the species performs a very particular dance to attract a possible mating partner, in which he expands the feathers around his neck like the tutu of a ballerina. From the point of view of the female, perched on a branch above the carefully prepared « dance floor » where this mating ritual takes place, the male turns into an abstract black circle, a canvas on which flashes of colors appear as he reveals the iridescent colors of another set of neck feathers.*

En position!

If you are reading these lines, you may be attending the performance *Parotia* by Léonard Engel at HOTO - home to artists Art Gallery in Berlin. My name is Gaia Clotilde Chernetich, I am a dance dramaturg and scholar, and I am based in Rome. I mentored Léonard during his artistic residency. We did not know each other before, but this presented a positive starting point because we both had the opportunity to start from a blank page. There is at least one reason why I would like readers to become aware of this information. As a dramaturg and mentor, the negotiation of trust and the construction of a sense of alliance are two key aspects of my labor. The same counts for choreographers working with dramaturgs. And nothing can be taken for granted within the sensitive realm of creative processes.

Words landing softly.

During the collaboration with Léonard I felt an immediate genuinity, generosity and the possibility to feel safe, free to share my tools and questions. I cannot state if the opposite occurred, but I can confirm a good atmosphere for thinking. We started off with long emails. In the privacy and in the delayed exposure of one's thinking, that is permitted by the writing of letters, lies the possibility to share some sort of intimacy without invading or overwhelming the other person.

Gaia Clotilde Chernetich: *I like writing for one main reason: it is a private action that we experience knowing that, even if it is solitary, it immediately involves someone else. I am writing to you in my personal, in this case nocturnal, time, and I am allowed all the freedom and all the time I need to do it. Nonetheless, the idea that this text will originate and end as a form of directional text, or as a textual dialogue, from me to you, remains stable. It is a delayed conversation with potentially infinite time available for reflection.*

Thus, instead of consuming the time of our collaboration with reciprocal presentations, the *not-knowing-each-other* start proved itself to be highly valuable in helping us get straight to the point. This allowed us to, from the outset of our collaboration, set a level of directness that was not rooted in a common background despite the particularity and the delicacy of the process that Léonard was about to face. *Parotia* was staged for the first time in 2021 and it was about to go through a process dedicated to presenting it in a gallery.

PAROTIA

Casting discourses.

Creating for galleries has become an important part of dance and performance makers' creative practice. From a lateral perspective, today it is also possible to consider the creation of new performative formats and concepts originally designed for galleries as a different form of knowledge that performing artists can develop as site-specific performances or as spin offs. From a theoretical point of view, scholars and critics have produced considerable literature on the relationship between the performing arts and their alternative modes of presentation, shedding light on the methodologies, on the implications and on the cultural and artistic policies related to these practices, and on their future horizons. Artists, on their side, have contributed in a decisive way to the development of new dialogues and discourses within the performing arts and the visual arts field, allowing both sectors to evolve and dialogue positively and reciprocally.

Delving into the performance.

Defined as hypnotic and sculptural, Parotia's focus is coherent with Léonard's wider artistic interests.

L.: *And there it is, the main focus of my work: the abstraction, the disappearance of the body, but also the work that hides behind this seemingly effortless display, and how this all brings us to the reality (and mortality) of the flesh.*

..

In *Parotia*, dancers whirl in space. Their action physiologically appeals to one of our main moving abilities: turning repeatedly on the vertical axis of the body. Extended between usefulness, playfulness, and virtuosity, turning explores the complex boundaries between motor coordination and perception. Adopted in many different cultures as a key-move for performances, from ritual to popular dances, the act of whirling can have many purposes, meanings, and objectives. Léonard's interest in the turning practice started in 2018, when he first encountered a dance called Tanoura.

L.: *An Egyptian whirling dance, a secularized cousin of the Sama of the whirling dervishes. A celebration, a funfair of a dance, in which a dancer wearing weighted skirts (plural, at around 7 kg the piece) performs various figures and tricks, becomes a monster with several heads, a collection of abstract shapes, a luminous whirlwind of colors and patterns. I was researching animal mating rituals for what would become my first piece, « Pavane ». I thought: « I'm looking at all these documentaries and videos to find a way to transpose these animal dances to the human anatomy, and this middle eastern dance has been doing exactly what I'm trying to do for centuries! » And that in such a wonderful way I've decided to learn that dance myself. I got to know Elsayed Morsi, the then director of the folk-dance group that I had the chance to watch perform, and he taught the dance for over a year. I became quite good at it (I've lost the practice a bit since then sadly). And the more I was practising, the more links to our western choreographic heritage appeared. Loïe Fuller and Oskar Schlemmer, the dancing body at the service of shape and costume, where the movement of the performer is (almost) only there to bring the fabric to life. A working body. A spinning body. The idea of a piece started growing in me.*

LÉONARD ENGEL

Turning represents a transcultural practice, and many examples point to a spiritual horizon. *Parotia* does not aim to offer a spiritual experience per se.

L.: When you whirl for an extended amount of time, the spinning becomes a neutral state. You forget about it. But it generally produces an introspective affect, a sort of trance. I wasn't interested in this from an artistic point of view. It seemed to me that this spiritual experience is too private to allow someone else in. The spectators would be witnessing something. I wanted them to experience it. I started researching with several dancers how to whirl, while keeping a connection with each other as well as the audience and the space they share. We found a state of being that allowed us to relate to each other beyond vision (which becomes mostly irrelevant while whirling). A state of expanded awareness. A state of empathy, of intuition, that opened the door to a new relation to the space and the audience, a necessity not to plan the actions, but to react to what is happening around us. The dancers wear these heavy skirts designed by Josa Marx, that have a similar construction to the ones worn by the Tanoura dancers. Part of the research was to explore how this costume can be both a support in the whirling (it has a stabilizing effect) and a restriction. The weight of the skirt gives it an active role in the evolution of the dancers spinning. They can't fully control what the costume will do, and often must accept that they must follow its movement and adapt to it, the same way they're brought to follow their intuition when it comes to moving with the other performers through the space.

As the practice becomes clear, the question of space emerges and, being in a gallery and not on stage, Léonard's performance is now facing a new orientation, and a new visual perspective.

L.: Space is one thing that intrigues me in a gallery context. Especially concerning the HOTO gallery. Everything about that space goes against what we've been doing so far with the piece. There's no continuity (it's clearly cut in three parts), not all of it is accessible for the dancers (there some beams and a wall and a pedestal with a sculpture) and there will be work from another artist hanging on the walls. It's intimidating and exciting at the same time. How can I integrate this in this new iteration of the piece? What do I extract and expand from the original piece to make it relevant in such a context? What does it mean to share the space with other works? Just a few of the things that cross my mind after visiting the space.

And now it is about to be performed. Dancers will face the proximity of the audience. The performance will try its new temporality, thus discovering a new form of accessibility. The process revealed itself as not merely being about the adaptation of *Parotia* for the site-specific nature of the gallery but as a new questioning that, starting within the piece itself, has developed new visions and perspectives. If just one keyword had to be chosen, that would be *empathy*, hopefully shared with you today as a treasure the gallery, thanks to *Parotia*, holds.

This text was written by Gaia Clotilde Chernetich in dialogue with Léonard Engel. Gaia Clotilde Chernetich is a dance dramaturg, performing arts scholar and writer based in Rome. In 2017 she completed a European PhD in Arts, with a specialization in Dance, at the University Côte d'Azur and in Humanities at the University of Parma. The focus of her study is the transmission of knowledge and the uses of memory in contemporary performing arts culture. She is the curator of Spring, a choreographic residency program organized by Oriente Occidente (Italy).

PAROTIA

..

LÉONARD ENGEL

The experimental performance series Out of the Box, organized by MMpraxis and CAA Berlin in collaboration with HOTO - home to artists, provides a platform for Berlin-based emerging choreographers to adapt existing stage works to a gallery space. Each edition offers a short residency and a mentoring program in which the artists receive support from a mentor of their choice.

The MMpraxis curatorial platform organizes exhibitions and events at the intersection of performing and visual arts with a focus on choreography, time-based media, and performance art.
www.mmpraxis.com

The Contemporary Arts Alliance Berlin (CAA Berlin) is a private platform for the promotion of contemporary culture in Berlin. It supports young artists from the fields of visual arts, theater, music and dance both financially and in practical matters.
<http://caa-berlin.org>

HOTO - home to artists is an exhibition space and an independent residency project that focuses on the promotion of contemporary artists. During the residency, the space is left to the artists to take possession of, develop in, and to translate this experience into their work.
<https://hotoart.de>

Supported by the NATIONAL PERFORMANCE NETWORK - STEPPING OUT, funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media within the framework of the initiative NEUSTART KULTUR. Assistance Program for Dance, CAA Berlin.

Parotia is a production of Léonard Engel with PACT Zollverein as co-producer. Funded by the Departments of Arts and Culture of the City of Munich, supported by the Nationales Performance Netz Coproduction Fund for Dance, which is funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media of Germany, made possible with the support of the Bayerischer Landesverband für zeitgenössischen Tanz (BLZT) financed by funds from the Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Wissenschaft und Kunst. With the friendly support of Tanztendenz München e.V.

2022

21/22 MAY

7PM–9.30PM

HOTO

home to artists