

Venice, Italy, December 7, 2012.

*To Ingrid Kristensen's Dance Theater – A letter about WATER and Sensing & Dancing.*

These lines are written far away from Denmark. For the time being I am working in Venice, this wonderful place - *the City of Water* - the Queen of the Adriatic. Venice, here the feeling of being in strange, yet – at the same time familiarly surroundings, is a feeling that is also present in the performance at Ingrid Kristensen's Dance theater. At the performances one can never be sure what to expect – except being shaken and filled with new experiences. In *Sensing & Dancing* it is experiences that go way beyond the classical dance, experiences which explore not only dance but also the place and the viewer.

For some time I have had the hope and wish to cooperate with Ingrid Kristensen, to meet her strong experiences in the area of *Sensing & Dancing* in an architectural context. In my point of view, and I know Ingrid agrees, the physical element for a project together could be water. Water, being one of the four known basic elements which represent the substance of the world. Its physical form is needed to live, as one must drink or absorb in a way some form of it, as life - be it plant, animal, human or sentient life – we all seem to depend to a large degree on this element in order to survive. Water is often associated with emotions, art, and especially time, sensing and philosophy. Water has the depth of a philosopher's soul and is the inspiration for many artists. But that makes them depended on its unpredictable nature. Water gives much, but – as experienced in the Northern areas of Denmark, where a large number of residents are occupied with fishing – we still repeatedly see how the water can claim back everything with ease.

But let me start another place; let me introduce the Palazzo Fortuny here in Venice, where the exhibition "*Fortuny and Wagner -Wagnerism in the visual arts in Italy*" mark the bicentennial of Richard Wagner's birth in 2013. No doubt that the German composer had a great influence on several arts. And at an iconographic and aesthetic level the "Wagnerism" phenomenon was an inspiration for visual arts, not just in Italy, but in all Europe from the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. It's an overwhelming experience to be in this newly opened exhibition which displays the work of two pioneers.

Let me move to the pioneer work that Ingrid Kristensen is doing. Her work with developing the involvement of the senses into the room of dance, not only the physical but also at the mental level, is exemplary – and also

overwhelming. Her work is so eminent that we can be sure it will not only be of great inspiration to others; it will undoubtedly have a big impact on dancing.

The Wagnerism was a true cultural fashion, which in its diverse expressions – in literature, music and painting – enjoyed widespread and profound diffusion. Attending the exhibition at Fortuny and researching on the Wagnerism, I cannot help thinking that there are some parallels to Ingrid Kristensen's Dance Theater.

Often Wagnerism is seen as the musical theory and practice of Richard Wagner, characterized by coordination of all musical and dramatic components, use of the leitmotif, and departure from the conventions of earlier Italian opera. The characters and vicissitudes of Wagner's musical dramas, Valkyries, Nibelungs, Parsival, Siegfrieds, and of course Tristan and Isolde - lately performed here in Venice at La Fenice - occur repeatedly in the paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, illustrations and postcards during that period in both Italy and the rest of Europe.

In this field of growing something unknown, exciting and adventurous, Mariano Fortuny played a key role, as he, besides making scenography for Wagner settings, was the author of a "*Wagnerian Cycle*" with 46 paintings and also numerous engravings; I have to mention this, because the entire cycle is on display here in Venice for the very first time. The Fortuny Museum is the perfect place for an exhibition like this: Spanish by birth but Venetian by adoption, Mariano Fortuny was greatly influenced by Richard Wagner in his theatrical settings, who, in turn, had a very intense relationship with the city, and spent long periods of his life there.

I have been wandering about in this exhibition today. An exhibition that includes over 150 works: paintings, engravings, drawings and sculptures, as well as a documentary section with books, magazines, illustrations and postcards, all set up in the most marvellous settings – the home and studio of Fortuny. Among these fantastic and exclusive art pieces, we find Isolde's Ascension". The piece of art which is part of American artist Bill Viola's major "Tristan Project" inspired by Richard Wagner's opera Tristan and Isolde.

In it, Viola does not offer a narrative interpretation of the opera's plot but creates an autonomous visual world that is parallel to what takes place on stage. Viola's film literally submerges the viewer into a body of water through which a light ray penetrates, gradually becoming ever more intense. At one moment, its movement raises Isolde's body draped in shining clothes from the depths, lifting it up high. The ray of light then dims just as slowly as it appeared, leaving the screen in total darkness.

As Bill Viola says himself, "*Richard Wagner's Tristan und Isolde is the story of a love so intense and profound that it cannot be contained in the material bodies of the lovers. In order to fully realize their love, Tristan and Isolde must ultimately transcend life itself.*"

Viola nearly drowned in his childhood, and this extreme experience led to

water becoming a recurrent theme in his work. For Viola, water, like the other forces of nature, are equivalents of powerful human feelings. This aspect may have attracted Viola to Wagner, for whom, according to Viola, *"..musical instruments were the embodiments of the forces of nature - the non-human world in which passion is raw, surging, seething and uncontrolled - whether it's the sea, a storm or a feeling you have inside you."* Viola makes these primary world forces visible. His slow video, accompanied by three-dimensional sound or thundering silence, brings the viewer into the space of all-encompassing contemplation.

Should Ingrid Kristensen and I move further on working with water as the element in a project, I want to draw attention to how important it is to understand that water also is a source of impetus for many choreographers as well as scenographers.

I think, being here in Venice, in a city built on water, one cannot help to realize that water manifests itself in many ways on this planet. Lakes, streams, rivers, geysers and oceans can all be catalysts for a piece of choreography. The dancers can glean emotions from water. Water can be tranquil like a still cirque lake or wild like a hurricane brewing in the Atlantic and pounding the west coast of Jutland. Visually the sundown or sunrise over water can be arresting and can give one a whole color scheme for costumes or lighting.

Ingrid Kristensen is already now an internationally renowned artist that has contributed to the emergence of Sensing in Dance. She and her team have been studying the horizons of sensory perception, considering it to be, I think, a means of self-cognition. Ingrid Kristensen's work with Sensing and Dancing focuses on universal human experience – birth, death, but much central the life of consciousness – and refers to a large body of responsibility, concern.

As an architect I have studied the history of the innovation of scenography, and in my opinion it teaches us that as new markets open, artists will draw on developing technology to feed the consumer's need for spectacle and continual variety and novelty. Fatal is our understanding of how we can consider the impact of the scenographic practice on theatrical compositions. Ingrid Kristensen's Dance Theater is both an experimental Theater, but also a Theater that tries to understand theories from outside its discipline. In this manner new models for embracing multi-sensory experiences in the theater practice can be developed. What do these practices mean to society and how can they show us how theatre as a medium may function in the future?

To respond on these questions, I have been inspired by studying artists as Wagner and Fortuny. Firstly because their artistic expressions depend upon the pioneers work, they worked dedicated developing new ideas to a perfect form of art. Secondly they made art that set new standards for experiencing.

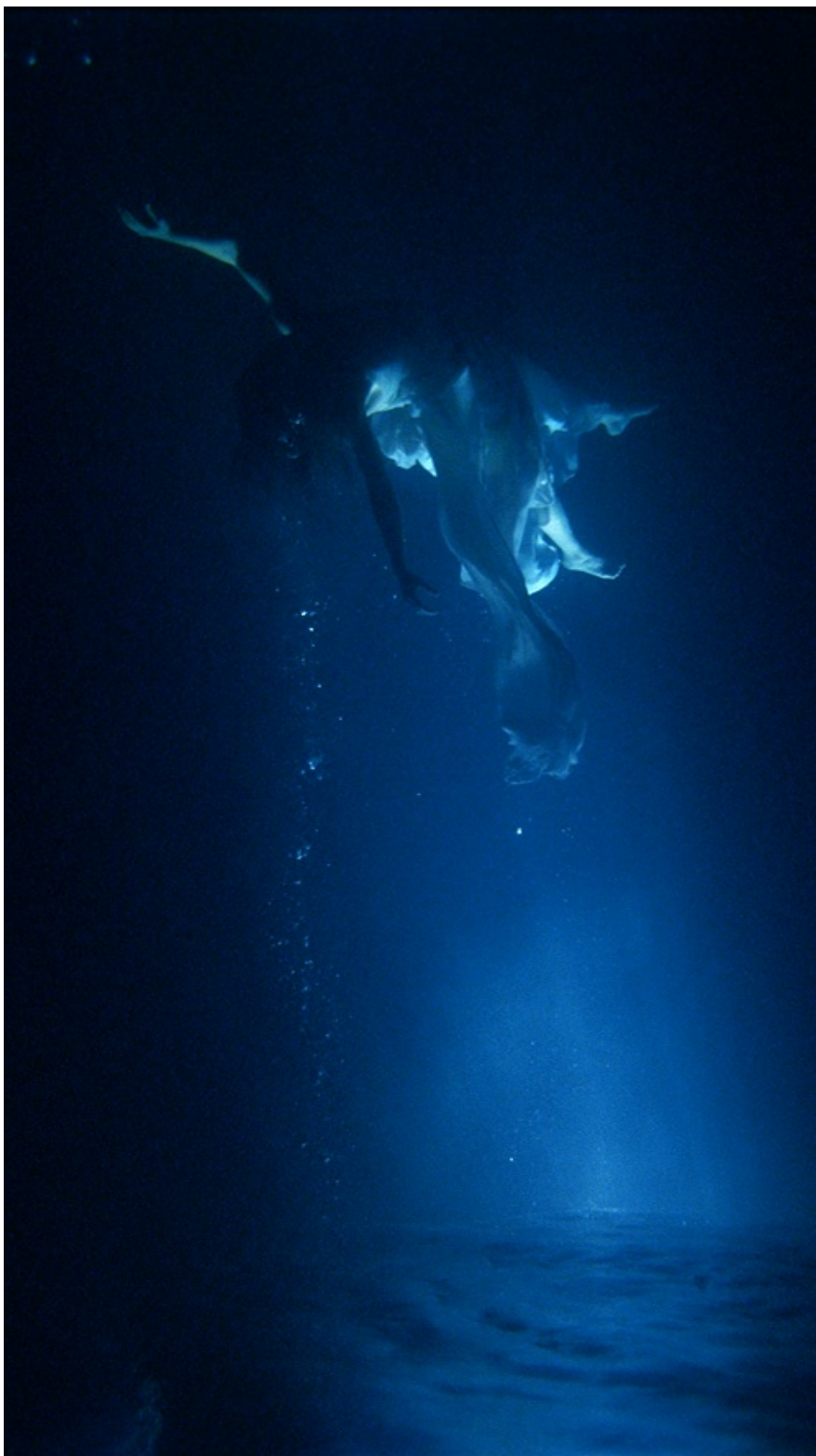
Many artist develops a *maniera* of his or her own and creates works that appear, first, as art objects; second, as products of a particular artist, and last (if at all) as representations of something. The unique art can by time become a part of the environment and have great influence, like Wagner and Fortuny.

How can we understand the ways in which these environments can be harnessed for use within live theatrical entertainments?

By supporting works as those Ingrid Kristensen do!

So, here I am in Venice, remembering the effect full performance of Ingrid Kristensen's Dance Theater, close by, if not - on the Water, thinking about future projects with W A T E R as a subject for cooperation. Let us challenge Water and find out whether Water can be a friend or foe to dance with.

Anna Marie Fisker



Bill Viola

*Isolde's Ascension (The Shape of  
Light in the Space After Death)*

2005

Performer: Sarah Steben