

The Making of An Exhibition/Delia Popa, Interview with Anca Sînpălean, Oncurating, Online Magazine, English, 5/2010

Delia Popa is a young Romanian artist. In her practice, collaboration is an essential tool for artistic creation. She does not have a permanent collaborative group, but she develops her performances together with other artists or friends, with whom she stages her works. This drive towards collaborative practice has prompted her to publish her list of artistic intentions in the first person plural (we), rather than the singular (I).
(www.deliapopa.com)

Anca Sînpălean (AS): On which occasion did you first work in a collaborative way?

Delia Popa (DP): I started collaborating with other artists fairly early, while I was still at university.

When I was studying at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) in the US (2005-2007), I took a class called The Art of Collaboration, taught by Professor Lin Hixson in the Performance Department. It was probably the most fun I've had in a class in my life, and when I say fun I mean enjoyment and a real sense that something beautiful was being born there.

AS: How do you manage to merge different positions and to solve conflicts in your collaborative situation?

DP: The class focused on collaboration within any kind of performance, be it theater, dance, performance art and especially the meeting point between all of these. We were taking turns in directing and performing and there were fixed rules as to how these performances were being conceived.

First of all, there was one space in which we were working and everything was happening there within a few hours per week and we were being transported to other worlds each time. The rules of the game varied during the course, but one type of collaboration was as follows: You were assigned a team of three or four people and the (assigned) director had to give them some words and ideas to think about and to write a little text for next time and bring it along as a fragment of the performance. In the following week, the director would have a set time to design the performance from all the fragments and to give instructions to the performers. The duration of the performance was also set in advance by the class instructor. Most of the time this time limitation, the knowledge that the public (the other students) was open and eager to experiment and the dedication and capacity to 'be in the moment,' as Lin Hixson would say, of the team members would make for a magic experience.

The critique at the end of the performance would not be based on the binary oppositions of yes/no, good/bad. Instead we had to imagine the performance as something else, for example food, and then describe it. The fact that we were using our bodies to make work and before that to relax and

feel 'centered' made us feel more open and intimate with each other, so that we could give a lot of ourselves in the making of the work.

To answer the question about previous collaboration, the answer is no; that was the first time I worked with those artists and the class was purposefully structured so that people would not choose who they wanted to work with. That was for me an ideal collaboration.

In 'real life' situations, there is always something at stake, which doesn't necessarily have something to do with art, for example deadlines, money pressures, power negotiations and miscommunication. When a collaboration is longer, there will always be bad days and conflicts. You cannot expect two or more people to work passionately on something without stepping on each other's tails. What I learned in that class and in the Goat Island Summer Class in 2006, led by Goat Island director Lin Hixson and other Goat Island company members, is to never say no to an idea just because it doesn't sound good the first time you hear it, and never think that you have the solution.

AS: How would you describe your collaboration?

DP: Depends on the situation. I have worked with artists in making a common work and that is the hardest type of collaboration, I think, and I have worked with curators and people who were assisting and guiding me in my process and, because there is a better defined relationship, it can be easier. A lot of the key to success in either case is trusting the other person to make the right choices and trusting yourself that you have chosen the right person.

I've had collaborations with other artists in which we were just following the process and (almost) nothing was set in advance, and we got to the point at which I was left to continue on my own, because the other artist stopped liking what we were doing. It can be as simple as that and that can happen if the terms and conditions are not discussed properly in advance. Usually the enthusiasm while working is very high and only after the work is done, or it gets to a difficult point, do problems appear and questions about credits (if it's not co-authored) and authorship arise.

AS: What are the advantages of team working?

DP: It's a complementing relationship. After a few years of various kinds of collaborations, I have come to the conclusion that it is indeed smart to have a team of people with different skills, that do not compete with each other. They should not all be great drawers or great rabbit catchers, there

