

# TRINITY IN VILNIUS

BY KATE LANE

Brave New Worlds is a collaboration between Italian theatre maker Valentina Ceschi, Lithuanian artist Guoda Jaruseviciute and myself, a British scenographer. As a collective we create design-led performance, where the narrative, movement and moments on stage are instigated by an aesthetic concept or visual theme. Our work sits on the border between live art, theatre and dance, creating emotive, visually provocative productions. We do not distinguish and separate our roles. Instead, we all work as directors, scenographers and performers. In our devising process we start by exploring concept through visual research. We then create rough three-dimensional forms, which are tried out in the rehearsal room to discover both movement and composition possibilities. The work at this stage can be seen as a series of tableau vivants. Our final role in the devising process is acting as visual dramaturgs, piecing the work together through images. Our work evolves through close collaboration with sound and lighting artists, or photographers.

We have had a number of residences, principally in the United Kingdom and Berlin, and were keen to work in Vilnius in Lithuania to where Guoda had recently returned, after living in Berlin for a number of years. We were lucky to gain a Lithuanian Arts Council grant and residency at Arts Printing House in Vilnius for ten days in August 2016. *Trinity* is a production that has been burning away for a number of years. We were talking, thinking, dreaming of it whilst we made our last production, *Utopia*. The idea of *Trinity* was one of the reasons we wanted to continue to make work together, and it became emblematic of

our collaboration. The residency in Vilnius followed several residencies and scratch performances over the last couple of years and gave us the time and space to piece together a final performance. An earlier developmental period in July this year at Middlesex University had allowed us to create the skeleton of the piece.

Our thinking around *Trinity* was inspired by female representation and, in particular, that of the Virgin Mary, which is a recurring motif from Renaissance art to contemporary pop culture. This motif was fueled by the common link between us. Despite growing up in different countries, we had all been brought up in Catholic families, our Sundays spent in the theatricality of Mass with its entrenched symbolism and ceremony designed to evoke an emotive reaction. My grandmother was a staunch Catholic and one of my memories of her house was the knee high statue of the Madonna at the top of the stairs (she also had St. Joseph as a lamp but that might be another show). As I grew older I kept seeing this female image in fashion magazines and music videos. This iconic figure of a woman, virginal and pure, was constantly re-appropriated and absorbed into our western European culture. The idea of this woman was both objectified and 'iconified' at the same time.

She became symbolic for us of how our society viewed women. She was the ideal, an example of pure, innocent woman-hood, her pivotal achievement – motherhood – being imposed on her. This was always troublesome from a feminist perspective. She was a one dimensional figure, dominated

Image: [Opposite Page] Brave New Worlds *Trinity*. Photo: Camilla Greenwell



by a patriarchal stance on what an ideal women should be, and constantly referenced in contemporary society. As a company we started researching the accounts of her life, and images of her or ones modelled on her. We were looking at female representations in society and how these have influenced our understanding of ourselves as women and artists.

Vilnius' old town is an Unesco world heritage site blending Gothic, Neo-Classical and Baroque architecture. The streets are a mixture of narrow cobblestone lanes that open up to straight, grand, central roads. The churches are numerous and spectacular, with plentiful images of the Madonna. Vilnius is, however, a city of sharp contrasts. Despite the beauty and romance of the old town, a short bus ride away are vast warehouses full of haberdashery and fabric, on the side of a busy freeway. The evidence of its Soviet past is clear in the worn metal playgrounds and in the towers blocks looming on the side of the road.

We were staying in an ex-Soviet purpose built artist studio, with high ceilings and brutalist aesthetics. It was owned by the architect partner of our arts council representative

and felt open and modern. These studios were highly sought after in Soviet times but like many modernist housing blocks had seen better days. Walking down the potholed tarmac of the drive we saw, in sharp opposition, a few traditional wooden houses, with allotment gardens. Both these forms, living next to each other, were representative of different moments in Lithuanian history. The district was Užupis, an area of the city that declared itself an artist republic in 1997 but, like in many areas across Europe, when the artists moved in, regeneration followed. Few of the artists I met could afford to live there now.

Our residency was in Arts Printing House, a space known for experimental dance and theatre. It had a gorgeous black box theatre for us to play in, with large airy studios overlooking the castle. Can a space you are working in become a collaborator? We found it to be the polishing of the process, adding touches to the forms. For myself, it felt as though the work had come home. Walking through the baroque city was like putting the final pieces of the jigsaw together.

For the first week it was Guoda, our sound designer Demetrio Castellucci and myself.

Demetrio predominately works with his company Dewey Dell which makes similarly visually led performances. His experience meant that he was a great sounding board for devising the scenes and playing round with the structure, in addition to writing a score. We spent our time constructing and polishing the final costume forms, the sounds of the show echoing through as Demi was working on them.

When agreeing to take on this piece, he asked us to record sounds for him that were to act as provocations and stimuli for his design process. These could be anything from the sound of the London tube recorded live to complied playlists. In the first development stage of *Trinity* we had a residency at the MacBirmingham and stayed in an Ibis Budget hotel. The sound of the button to call the lift is still interwoven into the final track. As with the set and costume ideas, the sound design was developed in the rehearsal room. Neither pre-dated the other but were braided together, the aesthetics acting as the catalyst for the devising process and the sound. In the process, the spaces in which we were or had been creating, influenced our directional approach whether it was the lift button in the Ibis Budget, or the stark contrasts of



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# BLUE PAGES

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