

## **After Death Ritual Environmental Performance:**

**May 2022**

**Calvary Building, Epreskert**

Artistic dramaturgy: Samira Sinai

Environment Designer Artist: Erekle Chinchilakashvili

Performers: Enkhtaivan, Zita Mayer, Lili Mayer,

Iranian community creators: Samira Sinai, Ahmad Shekari, Akram Asrani, Arghavan Shekari, Helia Chaichi, Obaidullah Shinwari,

Musicians: Ashkan Ghanbari, Lukács László

Photographers: Csanadi Gabor, Mona Monsefi, Matyus Kriszta

Camera: Manuel F. Contreras, Cecilia Bandeira.

During my experiences about the relation between audiences and performance in unconventional environment, I gradually understood that there is an invisible string that interconnects all my art practices and me. The ritual aspects of our everyday life were this invisible line between my art pieces and me. From my point of view, the ritual returns us to the center of who we are. In times of transition, loss, disconnection, and loneliness, ritual offers transformative power. It can provide a language for expression and offer emotional support. Unfortunately, in our modern times, the ritual has lost its original function in human life.

I wanted to bring some of these ancient, thousand-year-old ritual gestures into my performance. I created this language of expression in my complex exam performance based on the Iranian funeral ceremony. "Darkness before Birth and after Death"

Some of the images of this performance were photographed as a Series of post-documentary photos by Dr. Csanadi Gabor. Besides that, there is a documentary video of the process of photography of the performance shot by Manuel F. Conteras. This photo series and a documentary video were exhibited in HÁROM HÉT Gallery on September 25, 2020. "After Death" has the same roots as the previous performance but with new branches that started to grow.

I worked with the community of Iranians who are living in Budapest. Being part of a community and working together around a common concept is the first step to getting close to the origins of a ritual ceremony. Representing the form of a few small ritual gestures that still have a function in our culture and our life, the “After Death” performance is the outcome of our gatherings and meetings every Saturday evening for almost 3 months.

### **The similarity between the Tower of Silence and the Calvary building and its relation with the ritual activities of the Iranian community:**

The architectural structure of the Calvary building has similarity with the structure of the Tower of silence. Both of them are round towers with a flat circular shape top. In both structures, visitors should embark on a journey climbing up the stairs until they reach to the top. Beside the structure, Mount Calvary, evokes the site of Christ’s death on the cross in Jerusalem.

Calvary is a place in Christian art that refers to the story of Christ’s suffering. A pilgrimage based on the movement of the believer (viewer) in which the believer travels a path (usually a path leading to a hill, a mountain). The journey is framed by works (paintings, sculptures) depicting scenes from the Passion, and at the end of the journey a crucifixion of Christ appeared. Calvary in its original essence is a sacred place. The believers and prayers imitates the route and movement of christ’s former way of the cross.

After the relocation of Epreskert’s Calvary building, the function of this chapel had been changed. In Its new function after 1945, It became a lookout, a space similar to a stage. This building by the attempt of Strobl became the exhibition space for artists and students belong to Epreskert artists' colony.

In this masterpiece project, the rooftop of the Calvary building is where the audiences meet the ritual performative gestures that come from the Iranian funeral ceremony. The similarity between the structure of the Calvary building and the Tower of Silence makes me sure that the Calvary building is the right place for this performance. 3 circles created with charcoal on the roof of the Calvary building were inspired by the Tower of Silence structure. According to a

tradition, bodies were arranged on the roof of the Tower of Silence in 3 circles. The outer circle belongs to men, the middle belongs to women and children are located in the inner circle.

In this project, audiences could see 3 circles made by charcoals on the roof where they could stand in the outer circle and see the corps located in the inner circle. Furthermore, the circle could be a metaphor of human existence. We were born out of the darkness of the womb, see the light of life and back again to the darkness when we die. (Images 1, 2, 3,4,5)

Beside the 3 circles on the roof, we created one more circle on the grass in front of the Calvary building by handmade earthenware cups. Using the round circle as a stage is very common in Iranian ritual and traditional performance arts. Especially in Persian passion play, the circle stage could be created by people who are standing around this circle. In this project, the circle on the floor which was created by the Iranian community, is not far from this historical Iranian tradition. This circle on the floor transformed into the little stage for the Iranian community performance. (Images 34, 36, 38)

As I already mentioned, the Tower of Silence as a complex raised structure was built to hold the particular Zoroastrian's funeral of the dead. This project also represents the Iranian funeral ceremony on the rooftop of the Calvary building finding inspiration in the death ceremony on the Tower of Silence.

The relation of this project with the ontology of Khayyam<sup>1</sup> poems appeared without any personal intentions. When I started to work with the Iranian community, I already knew that the part of the performance was related to the Iranian funeral ceremony and the previous project of my complex exam. I created this ritual language of expression in my complex exam performance based on the Iranian funeral ceremony. "Darkness before birth and after Death" (May 2019). "After Death" (May 2022) has the same roots as the previous performance but with new branches that started to grow.

I worked with the community of Iranians who are living in Budapest. Being part of a community and working together around a common concept is the first step to getting close to the origins of a ritual ceremony. Gradually during our meetings, we made a decision to choose

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<sup>1</sup> Omar Khayyam(1048-1131) became known to his country and to the west world as a mathematician, philosopher and astronomer. His poems Rubaiyat came to be known to the whole world after Edward FitzGerald published his English translation in 1859.

some Iranian ritual gestures that still have a function in our culture and our life. We decided to perform on the ground and work on the concept of being alive and celebrating our present moments in contrast to the After Death concept that happens on the roof.

What would be closer to this concept than reading Khayyam poems, drinking red wine in an earthenware cup, singing in our circle, and sharing these moments with our audiences?

The poems written on the earthenware cups are selection of some poems from Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat. (Images 31, 32) In his poems, Khayyam talks about happiness while living for the moment. In the second part of the performance, the Iranian community members read some of these poems in Persian and Hungarian language. The most significant concept of these poems refers to living in the present and not concentrating on unknown future, with which Khayyam is telling us to celebrate our existence and enjoy the moments of our lives since we do not know where we come from and where we will go. You can see below one of these poems in Persian, English and Hungarian.

این قافله عمر عجب می گذرد  
دریاب دمی که با طرب می گذرد  
ساقی غم فردای حریفان چه خوری  
بیش از بیاله را که شب می گذرد

One moment in Annihilation's waste,  
One moment, of the well of life to taste,  
The stars are setting, and the Caravan  
Draws to the Dawn of Nothing oh make haste!

Egz perc Megállás, egyetlen íyes  
Korty az életből, s íme a tüzes  
Sívtag Lídérc Karavánja már  
Hazaér a Semmibe óh síess

(Omar Khayyam Rubaiyat \*\*\* Translated by Edward FitzGerald)

“Funeral” is the documentary video of the photography session process from the “Darkness before birth and after death” performance. This documentary video was shown in the exhibition space of the Calvary building at the same time as After death performance was happening. This

video was shot and edited by Manuel F Conteras, while Dr. Csanadi Gabor took photos of this performance in November 2019.

The Hungarian performers on the roof walk in the circles while one of them is holding a mirror and another one a tray full of rice. Using the traditional ritual materials in this performance help the audience to feel the spirit of these ancient gestures. (Images 17, 18, 19)

I chose rice since, preparing, cooking and eating rice is very traditional in Persian culture. In most of ritual ceremonies like wedding or funeral, the family members cook rice and serve it to their guests as the main part of the ceremony ritual. Before the cooking process, the rice needs to be cleaned. Usually, a group of women sit together and put dry rice in big trays. The action of pouring the rice up and down on the tray, to separate the dust and small stones from it, was the inspiration for this masterpiece project. (Images 16, 20, 22, 23)

A mirror is another significant traditional object which has been used in most of the ritual Persian ceremonies such as a wedding, funeral and Persian New Year celebration. In the Iranian funeral ceremony, a photo of the dead person with candles and a mirror are placed on a table. The mirror next to the photo of the dead person is a metaphor of death for each participant in the ceremony who see themselves in it. (Images 17, 18, 21)

Beside the Iranian ritual and cultural gestures, on the top of the Calvary building, there was the ritual shamanism ceremony for a dead person represented by Mongolian artist, Enkhtaivan Ochirbat. As I understood from him, a shaman is a person who lives side by side, communicates with the holy spirits of the offspring, nature and his ancestors. Enkhtaivan who observed this shamanism ritual ceremony, from his mother and his sister, tried to bring some ritual gestures to this performance by sitting close to the head of the corpse, praying and calling the birds by making some voices and using his special musical instrument. (Images 26, 27)



Zahra Fuladvand

# AFTER DEATH

DLA Masterpiece Show  
RITUAL ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

19:00 - 22.5.2022

1062, BUDAPEST, BAJZA UTCA 41, EPRESKERT  
HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF FINE ARTS, CALVARY BUILDING

SUPERVISOR: JUDIT CSANADI

ARTISTIC DRAMATURGY: SAMIRA SINAI

AN ENVIRONMENT DESIGNER ARTIST: EREKLE CHINCHILAKASHVILI

PERFORMERS: ENKHTAIVAN OCHIRBAT, ZITA MAYER, LILI MAYER, ANNA KECSKÉS

IRANIAN COMMUNITY CREATORS: SAMIRA SINAI, AHMAD SHEKARI, AKRAM ASRANI, ARGHAVAN SHEKARI,

HELIA CHAICHI, OBAIDULLAH SHINWARI, ABOUZAR SOLTANI, ZAHRA FULADVAND,

MUSICIANS: ASHKAN GHANBARI, LUKACS LASZLO

COSTUME DESIGNER: ARGHAVAN SHEKARI

POSTER DESIGNER: TRA NGUYEN

PHOTOGRAPHERS: CSANADI GABOR, MONA MONSEFI

CAMERA: MANUEL F CONTRERAS

**The video Documentary of the “After Death” Performance :**

<https://vimeo.com/735906752/245d94774c>

**The Photo Documentary of the “After Death” Performance:**



Figure 1, After Death Performance, photo made by: Mona Monsefi



Figure 2, After Death Performance, photo made by: Mona Monsefi



Figure 3, After Death Performance, photo made by: Mona Monsefi





Figure 4, After Death Performance, photo made by: Kollar Margit



Figure 5, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 16, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 17, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 18, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 19, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 20, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 21, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 22, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 23, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 26, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 27, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 31, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 32, After Death Performance, photo made by: Csanadi Gabor



Figure 34, After Death Performance, photo made by: Kriszta Matyus



Figure 35, After Death Performance, photo made by: Mona Monsefi





Figure 36, After Death Performance, photo made by: Kriszta Matyus



Figure 38, After Death Performance, photo made by: Kriszta Matyus