



jesus_c_ odd_size 2002 (Roberto Fortuna)

The Face and the Divine Space

By Christian Pagh

jesus_c_odd_size (2000) is both a performance and an exhibition. The basic concept is a series of tableaux that takes place in different rooms, while the audience perambulates. As a spectator you walk about for more than 3 hours in a position where you have to relate to what is taking place around you. In the peculiar universe of *jesus_c_odd_size* you are not so much a spectator but rather an uninformed guest who is exploring a world, a quietly humming and biblical marketplace, along with the performers. A central tableau is *The Last Supper*, a live picture you encounter in the large central space in the Church of St Nicholas'. Here the familiar motif of Jesus and the disciples is brought to life in a quiet, contemporary interpretation, in which an odd gathering of people, artists, misfits, and destinies are quietly sitting and standing by the long table. They talk softly, one rises – someone else moves over. In the middle – Jesus, the American artist Mike Diana, who with his distinct tattooed appearance fills Jesus' place in the center of the image. The same applies to the thirteenth disciple 'Matthew', who fills the role as disciple, but due to his disfigured face is clearly also his own personal body and destiny. All characters in this image and in the rest of the performance are double figures: clearly a certain man of today and clearly a mythological figure from the Christian imagination. We do not see an actor, we see a human being, a face inserted into a picture. This is true of the visually striking crucifixion, where three people hang in vacuum packages like hams in a supermarket. Here the faces are not readable, but hang vaguely bizarre and disturbed behind the thick plastic wrapping.

In addition to these larger, manifest tableaux, where you look at people and their faces, there is also a series of tableaux on a smaller scale that the spectator can interact and talk with. Here you meet the wrinkled faces of old women, young faces, tattooed faces, disfigured faces, and classically beautiful faces. You stand face to face with these people in all their odd sizes. You cannot hide in the soberly lit hallways and rooms; you are there just as unshielded as the people, actors and audience, you see around you. You encounter, for instance, the lepers: girls on small boards with small wheels below using their arms to move about the audience while singing. Meeting a gypsy girl with atrophied arms and legs is unfamiliar. Or the encounter with Matthew, who with his bright blue eyes and deeply disfigured face offers you a cup of soup in the adjacent library. He speaks of love and faith. More cheerfully, you meet the grandmothers of the disciples drinking coffee in their own small room with tablecloths. They offer coffee and talk of their grandchildren, the disciples, or about this and that. They knit, enjoying themselves in their own universe although it is also strange and artificial to have such a collection of grandmothers in the middle of this biblical scenery.

In *jesus_c_odd_size* you become part of a number of powerfully staged tableaux that you can look at or participate in and talk with. The performers are both themselves and performers, and this also applies, to some extent for the spectator. In an indeterminable room spectators are floating in the tension between the personal and the mythic. At the same time their personal

stories are interwoven with myths.

But why this? Why do we need this distension between mythology and humans? Why do we need these striking images and spaces around the 'real', but also bizarre, people and faces? In any case the immediate experience is that the peculiar thing about many of the performers is not a sensationalist exhibition observed from a distance. They are there. The spectator is there. That's the way it is. The meetings take on a special character since they are subject to a particular aesthetic organization of time and space. It is not readable and familiar, as in the classic theater, but you were part of a highly orchestrated spatially course.

Dehlholm's version of the divine does not represent something beyond what we see. It is a way of presenting and a way of seeing. The divine is not something elevated, but an opportunity, a hope, right here, between all of us creatures who share time and space on the planet – or at least there in Nikolaj Church that evening.

The interesting and perhaps counter-intuitive point is that this gaze and this opportunity to see each other must be created as a surface, as space. There is no 'deep' underlying message we can access to. There is a relation to something absent, understood as images of the imagination of something possible, mythical, alien - such as the idea of God and Jesus, but always printed out in imaging, spaces, patterns and course. In a way the performance is reminiscent of Christian rituals like baptism, confirmation, weddings and funerals. A ritual practice, where the known: the child, the bride, the deceased are lifted out of the daily and into something extraordinary.



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