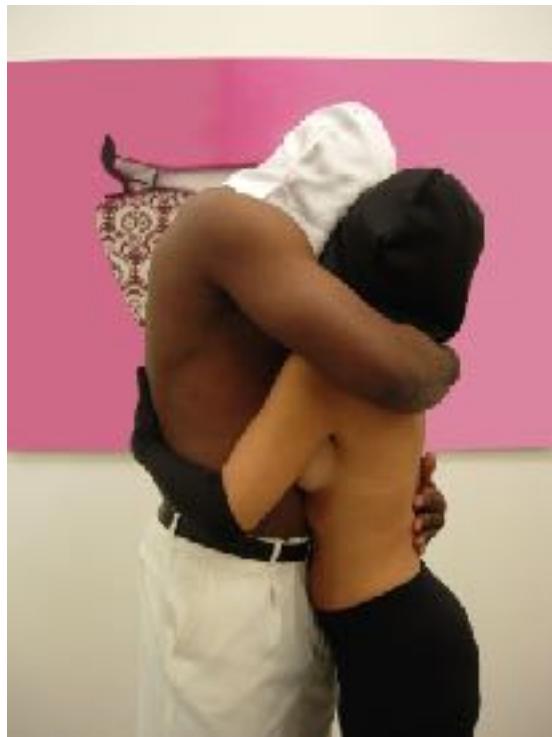


## This is Not a Performance!!! Performance Art As a Social Soul.

Damina Killeen, 2015

*From the Venice Biennale and Art Basel, from Brazil to New York and Berlin, the performance will never be the same. LIUBA Says.*



It seems a while since **the artist-performer known as LIUBA**, irritated us with her deafening shrieks in **Side by Side at the Venice Biennale or with her red stickers in Virus**, with which she branded a certain class of contemporary art associated with well known 'names' that was too busy being sold and selling out at the Fair.

Since, also, her shocking live performance in *Les Amantes*, performed on site in a distinguished French art gallery, in which the artist, taken by a strange Stendhal Syndrome, working on the border between the public and private sectors and the mystery of sex relations with an African-American partner specifically selected for the performance, both their faces hidden under Magritte style hats, unexpectedly surprised the audience present at the opening night.

And, last but not least, **since her amazing and exhausting performance in New York** and in other European cities: of the Slowly Take your Time project, in which LIUBA walks in infuriatingly slow motion to challenge, literally, the frenetic rhythms of a megalopolis such as the United States, inviting citizens to take their time, objecting to a capitalist society that wants everyone to chase success and social status through an obsessive doctrine of profit under pressure, always incited to a accumulation of capital and investment that is not always, indeed almost never, on a human scale or to address various social problems.

This may seem déjà-vu, but LIUBA is really still one of the few artist for whom any project or performance idea succeeds directly in expressing the essence of creative action which, through every possible form of engagement or direct or cross-involvement of the audience, invites reflection and, possibly, even action where the situation requires it. She does this with a consciousness, sensitivity and, especially, a social spirit, an inspiration the visual and performing arts, in general, cannot and must not be without.

So, LIUBA, a respected Lady of international performance and student of distinguished names as Omar Calabrese, now offers different visions of new possible performances and is always around, everywhere, putting in the closet her sophisticated top model dresses and her unmistakable hats. She will speak to us directly about her vision from the shade of the Rimini Riviera at the same time as Cattelan is provoking locals with his scattered politically incorrect installations.

### All this, exclusively for Tablet 2.0.

**1)** You are now a performance artist and video artist whose work involves challenging interventions in public spaces and occasions. Before we discuss your work in more detail, can you tell us something about how 'Liuba' was born, what inspired you to become an artist and what influences, if any, have contributed to the development of your artistic style and persona?

*L. First let me tell you that Liuba is my real name. My middle name, to be exact, because I have also an Italian one. Liuba is a Russian name, and it was given to me because my parents had been living in Russia for work. When I was a child, and until the recent emigration from eastern Europe, in Italy no one had ever heard that name and it was so unique that no one would forget. Most educated people remember a poem by Italian poet Montale entitled 'A Liuba che parte' (For Liuba who's Leaving) or a short story by Čechov with Liuba as the protagonist, but nothing more. When I began to show my work exhibiting in group shows I used to ask curators to just write my name instead of writing only my last name. But it was only in 2000 that I decided to remove the family name and keep LIUBA as my art name.*

*I started as a child to draw, paint, write and dance and all of these media were congenial and necessary to me. And when, at the time of College, people asked me if I wanted to be a painter or a writer I couldn't answer, because they were for me two complementary languages. So I decided to work mixing those languages, and performance art was a consequential result. My first performance art pieces consisted in works where I mixed slides of my paintings, texts of my writings (poems or fairy tales) and my body, adding music, space, objects. I soon discovered that I loved performance art very much, especially for its live aspects. Later on, choosing to work performing by surprise in everyday life and not performing for an audience in a dedicated space, the video became a natural consequence of the work and a complementary way of expression.*

*Becoming an artist wasn't a choice but a matter of fact, sometimes also unwanted but necessary. I say 'not wanted' because I have often (and still do) wish for a 'normal' and more structured life, but I had been never able to: my deep emotions, beliefs and inner feelings lead me, without any choice, to follow the unpredictable and hard street of creation and the only way I feel good is when I turn my ideas and imaginations into reality, giving them form through my work. Well, I simply can't do otherwise. Sometimes I complain about it, but I'm deeply happy because I know I live the way I am made for and the way I am!*

*I've had a lot of influences: beginning from my family, my father and my uncle. My father, a chemical engineer but a great painter and art lover, took me to see exhibitions since I was 3-4 years old, even if, when I grew up, he often quarreled with me, repeating to me that art should be just an 'hobby' and we must do something else for a living. My uncle was a great and famous poet, and he was a great 'performer' reading his poems in public. His 'carnality', his ethics and his irony inspired me a lot. I grew up with them, though I realized it only after many years. There are also many important artists, poets, writers, philosophers, filmmakers, theorists, musicians who inspired*

*me and founded my ground. Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Caravaggio, Wenders, Bach, Bataille, Blake, Duchamp... just to name a few basic ones, but there are many others.*

**2)** Much of your work is a commentary on the contemporary art world, challenging the values and operations of the art market. At the same time, you are regularly invited to conduct your subversive performances by the organisers of high profile arts events. What is your analysis of the relationships involved in this aspect of your work; why do you think you receive such invitations and what compromises, if any, do such performances require of you as an artist?

**L.** *I like this question, because it's really how it goes, but the point is that most of the time I make my 'surprise actions' and 'interactive performances' without being invited by the organizers of the big events. I usually go as a visitor or with a vip card invitation, and then I start my action. I don't like to perform just to be seen but because I have something to say and something I'd like people to question themselves about. Yes, I admit that I don't like the art market, its logics and the behaviour of the rules, as I don't like stereotypes and prejudices. I like to play with irony, to say something stronger behind the lines and to be gentle and delicate whilst saying something hard and critical. I am interested not in giving my point of view with my work but in making people think their own way with a more open and critical approach. I am interested in raising questions and not in giving answers. And also, when I am officially invited my approach does not change, I am not a person who knows how to manage compromises.*

**3)** Some of your work places you in situations which are, at the least, stressful, challenging and potentially confrontational; for instance, walking through cities extremely slowly, 'taking your time' or 'praying' in front of the Vatican in a variety of religious styles. What is of most interest to you on these occasions, your performance or the situation which it prompts? Your work also invites and provokes direct responses from members of the public. These interactions are videoed and included in your documentation and subsequent showings; what is the relationship, from your artistic perspective, between your crafted performance and the relatively unscripted responses of the public and authority figures?

**L.** *This is a very interesting question because it addresses some crucial points of my artistic work. My performance art pieces and the videos are part of the same process and deeply joint, indeed necessary to one another. I love to call them the two sides of the same coin. Both of these steps are independent works, but deeply intersected.*

*The performance project appears first, often as a vision, in which I can see in my mind all the details (the difficulty then is giving form and substance to this 'vision', concretely realizing it).*

*In conceiving the performance action I am always aware that it will have reactions from the audience, or from the passers by, or from the participants in the participatory work I'm doing in recent years and that it is linked to the specificity of the place where the action happens. I am often interested in replicating similar actions in different spaces, to investigate the different anthropological nature of people and reactions, as well as of the territory.*

*For this reason the video that comes from the performance is of essential importance to the conception of my work as it embodies the performance itself, the reactions of the people, the geographical and anthropological reality of the place and, last but not least, the element of randomness.*

*Without the video I think that the project is not complete as it allows the viewer to see the 'meta-performance', that means the performance art piece with all its side concepts and layers.*

*In recent years I'm giving more and more attention to the process than to the work and to the reactions of people rather than to the performance itself, which is almost disappearing, in order to focus on life (see projects such as 4'33 "Chorus Loop where the work was about staying in silence with people, or Refugees Welcome, where all the project was in inviting the refugees to the gallery, or This is not a Performance, where I question concepts such as boundary between art and life, truth and fiction.). The video then becomes sometime the mapping of the back stage where contacts and relationships with people are part of the work.*

*I'd like to say more about the concept of 'randomness', which is an essential part of my work. I believe chance is an important component of life and, therefore, of my artistic work. Again, I would speak of a coin with two faces closely connected: on the one hand I conceive the performance art project with an almost obsessive attention to details and, on the other hand, I want it to be executed with spontaneity and naturalness and as a means of random interactions. First of all I require the naturalness from myself. I prepare everything meticulously, but by definition during the performance I live in a natural way, so I do everything that I feel I want to do without a pre-established script. That is, there is a track (such as walking in slow motion, with all the concentration that requires, physical and mental, or screaming, and so on), but then there's the spontaneity of reacting, following my naturalness and my emotions and interacting with what happens.*

*Chance is also conceived as a founding element in many of my actions: I never know what will happen, nor do I know which and how many will be the reactions, nor can I predict, despite the signs that I give to my cameraman, what is captured by the cameras and which shootings I will have. In this regard, it is crucial that the cameraman is hidden and mobile, so as not to interfere with the peoples' reactions, which are spontaneous and free.*

*I am also interested in the chance of what happens during the performance, because it becomes a key to the social and anthropological identity of the place where the action is performed. For example, my performance Virus at Bologna Art Fair was welcomed and accepted, despite the shock and surprise of many gallery owners and visitors, but it was not at the Sofa Fair in New York, where I was expelled by the show's management, since my red dots interfered with sales, touching the topic of 'money' that is a taboo in the US. The comparison between the two performances, with the different reactions, has become a video installation with many levels of reflection.*

**4)** You have a background in the study of semiotics and you say that this plays a significant part in the development of your work as an artist. Can you explain, for a general audience, why this perspective is important to you and what effect it has on your creative life?

**L.** *Semiotics is the discipline that studies signs and their mechanisms. A sign is something that stands for something else, or, as outlined by Umberto Eco, "everything with which it is possible to lie."*

*Semiotics is interested in studying the sign not from a diachronic point of view, ie historical or philological, but from a synchronic one, investigating its structure and the relationship with other signs. That's what fascinated me from the very beginning of semiotics. The semiotic approach analyses a 'text' (that is a group of signs, either verbal, or visual or musical and so on) from the*

*inside and it studies the constitution, the structure, the significance. It especially relates signs with each other and their meaning through conceptual categories. Having learned this methodology on the works of others, I apply it also on mine, but only after they have been made. In this way I become more aware of the signs and of the concepts and of levels of meaning that emerge in my work and of their potential to be explored.*

*However, the strongest influence of semiotics on my work - and I realized only in retrospect - is the use of the symbol and its mechanisms. I believe that most of my artwork has to do with symbols and, like the symbol, it has several layers that can be read at different degrees of depth.*

*I am aware that my artworks have different levels of reading and I'm okay with that; everyone can access different levels of meaning. Indeed, according to Umberto Eco again, the symbol is by its very nature a nebula of meanings that expands continuously, like a stone thrown into the water forming infinite concentric circles...*

5) Liuba and 'LIUBA' live closely intertwined lives. Can you give us some insight into the challenges and opportunities created by the relationship between your private and personal personae; does this distinction mean anything to you or are you, perhaps, a 'living artwork'?

*L. Probably it is exactly as you say! There is no distinction between the two Liuba and I am always myself both in life and in art. I don't even know the border between what is life and what is art and most of my recent work is centered precisely on the impossibility of this border, indeed, favoring life over than art.*

6) What is next for Liuba; what changes do you perceive in the environment in which you develop your work and what responses are you interested in making to these changes.

*L. It seems to me that today's society has become very tiring and it is an ongoing challenge. Technology and social networks can be useful tools but are also very complicated and difficult to manage. From this view, I find it interesting to work more and more with human interactions and directly with people.*

*For these reasons, I am more and more developing participatory projects, involving people in the performance. I am interested in creating projects where the art and the performance is not merely a matter of producing artworks but mainly a tool at the service of people in questioning themselves and society and in opening new perspectives and experiences. This participatory approach, that involves people of different backgrounds and territories, is certainly a direction that I will develop further in the future.*

*Under this scenario, of a technological and sped up society, I'm interested in proceeding with slowness and quality, in traveling as usual in different places of the world exploring social contexts, and in focusing on projects that give priority to human interactions, physicality, nature and play, as a means of knowledge, development and social and symbolic interaction.*

