

"Hopefully, it provides a glimpse of an embodied way through this difficult time."

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Come Closer: Sasanel, a larp experience by Susan Ploetz in collaboration with Nina Runa Essendrup

January 24, 2020

Workshop for larp participants: 5.30 – 8PM

Regular visitors: 8-9PM

An interview with Susan Ploetz about LARP and Sasanel, by Radna Rumping

Susan Ploetz is an artist, somatic consultant and live action role play (LARP) designer. For Come Closer, the public program of Oude Kerk, she developed a new version of her larp script *Sasanel*. On Friday January 24th, visitors are invited to join a 2-hour workshop – facilitated by Susan in collaboration with Nina Runa Essendrup. After the workshop, participants can play in the unique location of the Oude Kerk – and the current installation by Adrián Villar Rojas – where other visitors are also welcome to witness and interact with the culture of *Sasanel*. To get to know more about the role of larp in her practice, Come Closer curator Radna Rumping asked Susan some questions.

What experiences can larp offer us that would be otherwise difficult to achieve?

I became interested in larp because I was doing performances, but wanted to really connect with the audience – I think performers sometimes overestimate how much of their own experience they transmit to viewers. I wanted to cut out the middleman, so to speak, and give the “audience” a chance to have an experience more directly. In a larp, you all start together, and you discuss the boundaries and rules of what you will do together, and have ways to opt in and out. Even in pieces I’ve designed with non-larpers that come to interact with larpers, the visitors are briefed, so they can decide if they want to interact, and are given mechanisms to interact with: that the larpers can also accept or decline. In this way, hopefully everyone is doing what they feel like exploring, and doing it for their own experience. I think there are very few activities that give you a space to explore your agency as an individual while also feeling very much a part of a collective, bigger thing (and feel your part in building that collectiveness), in a very conscious, structured way.

I also think in larp, you cycle through these moments of both immersion and non-immersion, in your character and the fiction. These moments of non-immersion are just as important as being “immersed”: you’re given tools as to how to instrumentalize these moments, for you as a “player”, your character, and the other player/characters, where you can create this layered reality for a moment, to reflect on yourself and others. This can be a truly powerful experience.

Your work is informed by somatics (the body experienced from within), how does this background influence the larps you develop?

My larps almost always incorporate techniques I have learned through somatics: which I studied here in Amsterdam, with Patricia Bardi who has a wonderful depth of knowledge and approach. I don’t really view somatics as a wellness activity, although it definitely can have healing effects, but more as a philosophy in motion and action, a way of approaching the world. I usually lead people through sensory awareness exercises, and utilize touch as an interactive way to construct character’s inner lives and imagery. I use different ways to teach participants to hack their imagination through physicality and vice versa. I think the imagination and cognition are full-body experiences, precisely

because the body and mind aren't separate, something we interrogate and explore so deeply and beautifully in somatic practices. To tap into that is so exciting: not only to structure pieces that are multi-sensory, but to actively engage people's own sensory systems in the creation of stories, feelings, experiences that are both not real and very real all at once.

Sasanel is a larp about the crisis of consciousness, communication, and climate. How does this play activate a different kind of consciousness, and perhaps a new perspective on the climate crisis?

The idea behind *Sasanel* was to create a "magical materialism" by leading participants through somatic sensory awareness processes that help them to really attune to the environment around them, coming down to the materials in which things around them are made from. I think for me, the crisis of climate is a cosmological one, and the mind-body split that somatics seeks to heal is also the same ideology that separates intelligence from matter or material. This hierarchy of intelligence has made it so easy in our culture to exploit: leading to certain hierarchies exploiting minerals, plants, animals, children, women, and other ethnicities. In the past when I have run it, people do feel calm, slow, and a really different sense of time and what's around them: a *communication with* rather than a *utilization of*. This difference becomes even starker when also other visitors come in, who have a different way of being and interacting. Most of the people that come to my larps are already sympathetic to the climate crisis and want to do something about it: it may be a way to process some of the grief and anger that comes with that. I can't pretend that a small larp could change much in a world that really desperately needs some fast and drastic solutions; but hopefully, it provides a glimpse of an embodied way through this difficult time; to reconnect to ourselves, others and the world around us in a generative, mindful way that can hopefully shape a new, less exploitative approach to living here together.