All Alone on a Small Island Somewhere in the Middle of Nowhere

MRes Exhibition

Performance Artefacts and Photos

September 14th & 15th 2022

Melissa Pasut

Andrew Leslie Hooker

Eden Augustine Hooker

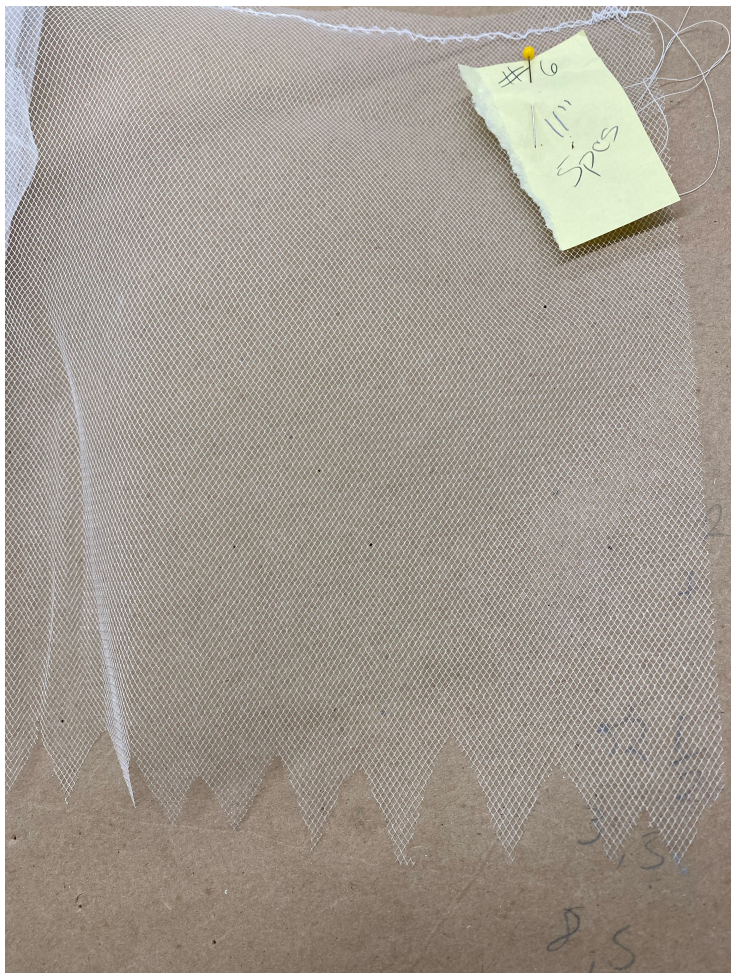
Monica Pasut



Costume Construction

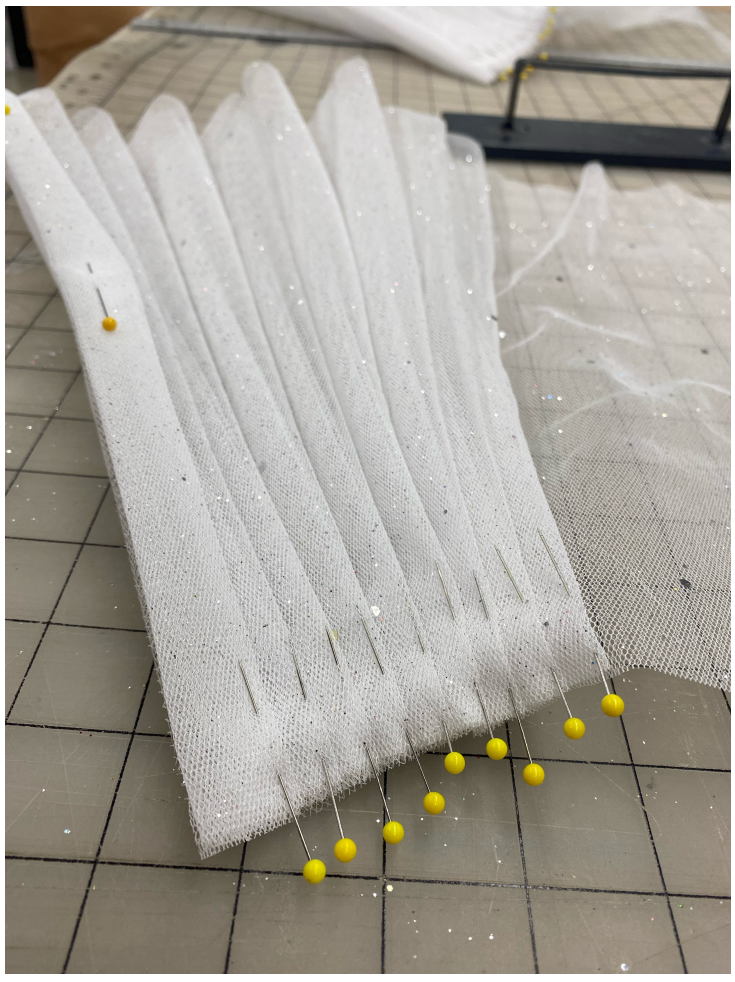
Designer and construction Monica Pasut

Pattern supplied by Claudia Folts tutu.com



Initial stages of construction for Monica's interpretation of *The Dying Swan* tutu. Austin, Texas








1/4 yd
1/2 yd









Photographs by Monica Pasut

Thoughts on Dying Swan
By Monica Pasut

The first conversation I remember having with Melissa about the Dying Swan was January 2022. The proposed idea was making a replica of Pavlova's Dying Swan costume that would be cut to shreds during the performance. At first, we were trying to come up with ways we could do it cheaply or easily, since it was only going to be used one time. As the conversation continued, we both concluded that it would be most effective to create a costume that was constructed to the highest level of artistry, so the pain of destroying it would be as painful for the creators as the audience watching.

I began to research Pavlova's costume. In the last few years, one of the many iterations of her costume had gone through an extensive restoration. I watched videos and sifted through many photographs of the delicate restoration process. I was fascinated by the love and care shown to this costume that is intrinsically tied to Pavlova and her iconic swan. It is a strange dichotomy researching this work of art that has existed for over 100 years knowing that my version would only be used once. This did not stop me from studying the costume and imagining how each piece was constructed and how I could re-create the tutu.

The constraints on this project were time and money. I opted to go with a tutu kit that provided me with all the fabric and patterns necessary. I altered the patterns, cut the fabric, and learned how to put together a classical tutu, something I have never done before. I personally chose the embellishments and fabrics based on Pavlova's costume, including the jewel that represented the heart of the swan. I studied the techniques and consulted with friends and experts. I also made a lot of it up as I went along, using my years as an experienced technician to help guide me when I was uncertain of the next step. As an artisan, taking short cuts are only acceptable if I'm certain the final product would still be of the highest caliber. My work ethic and standards were not compromised knowing the outcome of this piece.

Fittings In Wales



I also had to take into consideration the fact that I was doing this for my sister and what effect this would have on my process. I took on this project because I believed in the story that Melissa was telling. I wanted to be part of her process and contribute to the overall experience. It was a labor of love, but my approach on the research and construction was the same as if I was hired to make this costume. I was able to put the energy and love for her into the project, but not attach myself to physical object of the tutu. The real-life collaboration with Melissa is what I hold sacred. The time spent connecting with others creating art is what remains when the project has ended. The physical objects are a tangible manifestation of this collaboration, but the connection and the full experience of the process are all that remain after the performance is complete. When others see the piece or exhibition, it's not the feathers or fabric alone that will resonate, it's the transformation of the physical and emotional states of the performer, designers, musicians, and artisans that will form lasting impressions.

This is a different idea than the bond that Pavlova had with her costume. To her, this costume was an extension of herself, it helped define who she was even when she wasn't dancing on stage. Her sacred bond to the piece has allowed it to live on long after her death. The swan is unchanging and sits in a glass box, capturing a moment in time. The power in Pavlova lies in that fixed state. When the swan dies in the piece, the swan always dies, it is static. In Melissa's piece, the swan is reborn, the transformation is constantly in motion. It opens possibilities for change and evolution.

As a theatre designer and artisan, I am part of a group of story tellers. A collaborator whose focus is to serve the story, not my own ego. I knew from the beginning of this process that part of the story Melissa was telling included the destruction and transformation of this costume. While it is a rare occasion that one spends weeks of work on a garment that exists for only one performance, it is also a rare gift that one gets to see the complete, permanent transformation of a costume live on stage. This costume in its altered state also lives on as work of visual art in the exhibition. I feel privileged to see my work exist in and live on in a new iteration. The tutu isn't a precious piece that is preened and cleaned and placed on a hanger pristine and perfect for years, static. I was able to watch the tufts of tulle and feathers float magically through the light on stage as it was cut away. The image of the layers torn and trailing and grounded and silhouetted in the light was an equally powerful image as the buoyant, ethereal tutu that existed moments before.



Photographs by Andrew Leslie Hooker

In Rehearsal

Studio in Wales with finished Costume











Photographs by Monica Pasut

The Sounds

Composer/Performer Andrew Leslie Hooker
Performer Eden Augustine Hooker

Reflections upon the nature of art and sacrifice
By Andrew Leslie Hooker

In the opening scenes of Andrei Tarkovsky's final film The Sacrifice, one of the characters, Otto the local postman, delivers an antique map of the world as a birthday gift to the main character Alexander, who incredulously at first refuses to believe that the map is genuine and if it in fact were to be, then an excessively generous offering. Otto then goes on to convince Alexander that the map is indeed a 15th Century original saying that a gift is worthless without it containing some form of inherent sacrifice i.e. that any gift-giving should cause the bestower a sense of pain and loss, and that according to French philosopher Jacques Derrida is a kind of madness.

For me, this idea of the gift as a sacrificial act stained with psychosis is closely related to the nature of art in general and specifically to performance art involving a live audience. It is within this arena of communication between performer and audience that a sacred space is carved out from the air itself, creating a metaphysical cosmos starred with resonating fragments of meaning...other meaning, beyond the performance, and ultimately unknowable.

An awareness of sacrifice and ritual is essential in an appreciation of Melissa Pasut's conception and performance of *The Dying Swan*, an extremely well known and one could say iconic piece of early 20th century choreography for solo dancer by Mikhail Fokine to Camille Saint-Saëns's *Le Cygne* from *Le Carnaval des animaux* as a pièce d'occasion for the ballerina Anna Pavlova.

From the very first discussions in regard to how this piece was going to be staged, Melissa (my wife as well as my creative partner, together with our son Eden Augustine Hooker who played the double bass for this incarnation, and her sister, master dressmaker Monica Pasut who meticulously crafted the Swan's tutu that Melissa wore and ultimately destroyed) and I discussed the significance of performance and art-making in general vis-à-vis these current times of massive political/economic unrest and disastrous climate





Photographs by Andrew Leslie Hooker



change. What was it that we were trying to achieve with this work, indeed with all of the pieces that I've worked on with Melissa over the course of the last Twenty years? Something felt different this time, as if we really were dancing and playing at the end of time, recalling the Dance of Death at the conclusion of Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*…merrily we go, skipping into the infinite black. Observed under these theoretical lens, any act of 21st century art-making runs the risk of seeming completely nihilistic, egocentric, without meaning, pure entertainment even…and yet? Why the desire, the urgency, the absolute necessity of deconstructing cultural iconography as enacted via Futurism, Dadaism, Aktionism and indeed, any other -ism that seeks to address perceived injustice in the world through violent acts of disfiguration, when we fully understand, especially in our social media saturated haze, that nothing really changes? Could it be as Melissa believes that something else will "rise from the ashes", something good, something better…and for whom, and for what… the human race, the planet earth? Is a faithfully and lovingly stitched facsimile of Pavlova's costume ripped apart to save humanity from itself? Is a lathe-cut vinyl of Saint-Saëns' *Le Cygne* scratched into nothing but white noise in order to impart a sensation of tabula rasa? Perhaps, but I don't think so.

Art is empty, it is a parlour game for the meek to transcend their misery. It is only by transcending this game, by admitting its hollowness that it can be affected into a holy space of death. It is a death scream, a death embrace in which the performers do not perform, do not put on masks, but expose their reality, their nothingness, their spirit. It is Leonid Andreyev's Red Laugh, it is the Sex Pistols "FUCK" on mid-1970's peak-time television, it is Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's dumping of renaissance paintings into the Tiber, it is Francis Bacon's brutality of fact.

For me, the Dying Swan as danced by Melissa inspired by Anna Pavlova and accompanied by myself and our son on turntables and double bass respectively is an ecstatic gift of love dedicated to the human race, to the loss of a beautiful dream; a ritualistic, clearly pagan sacrifice of all that we hold dear…the sacred cultural icon, the dress, the vinyl, the musical instrument…not at all according to the Christian philosophy of self-sacrifice, more the supremely affirmative gesture of a Nietzschean self-transfiguration.

This Swan seems to exist within the realms of a peculiar kind of violence, the kind that reveals (and indeed revels in) an absolute purity of collapse, of pure experience; something dread, colossal and hallowed, moving with new flesh on old bones, stepping from the ancient to the future. Suggesting what exactly? A celebration of the end? The spectacle of a risen Phoenix fecund with absolution? A spectacle certainly, not one intended though to impress the commercialised imagination of simple people, but one that fixes and perpetrates the memory of cuts, scissions, ruptures and ultimately, the bottomless fall from an imagined grace.

With this piece, Melissa has remodelled her own world according to her own, idiosyncratic approach to dance and cultural theory, according to her own methods and techniques in a profound act of bodily reclamation, and this world which she has created means nothing more than

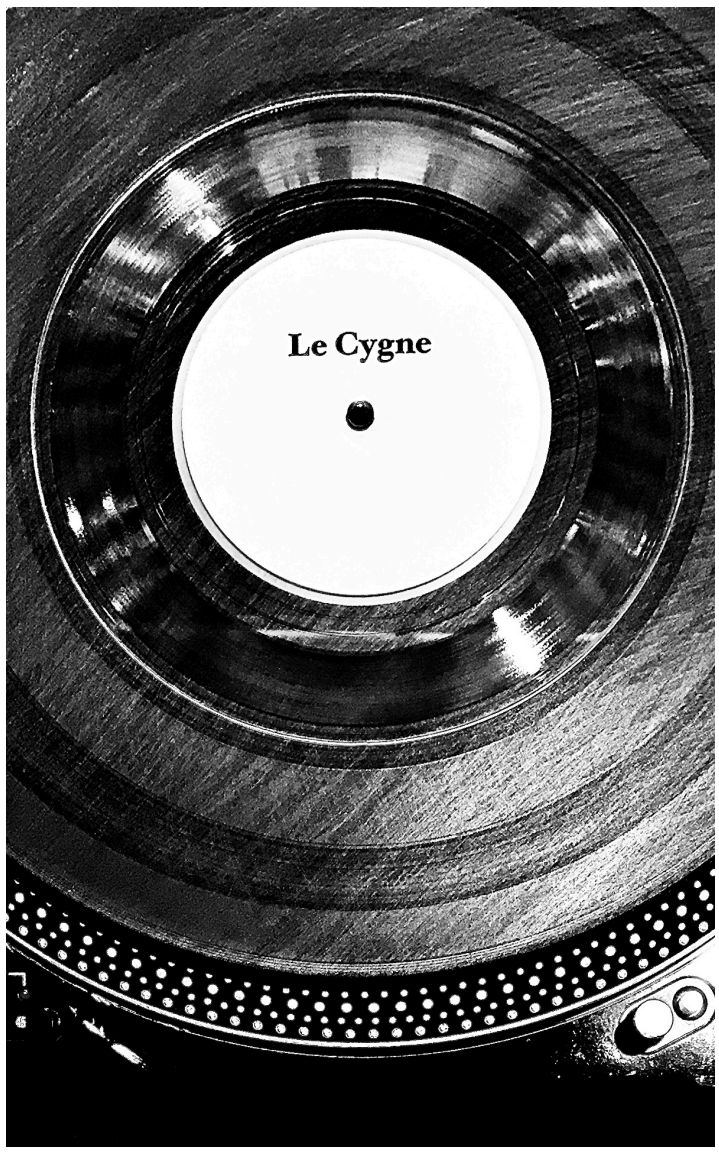
the movements, fabric and sounds from which it is constructed.

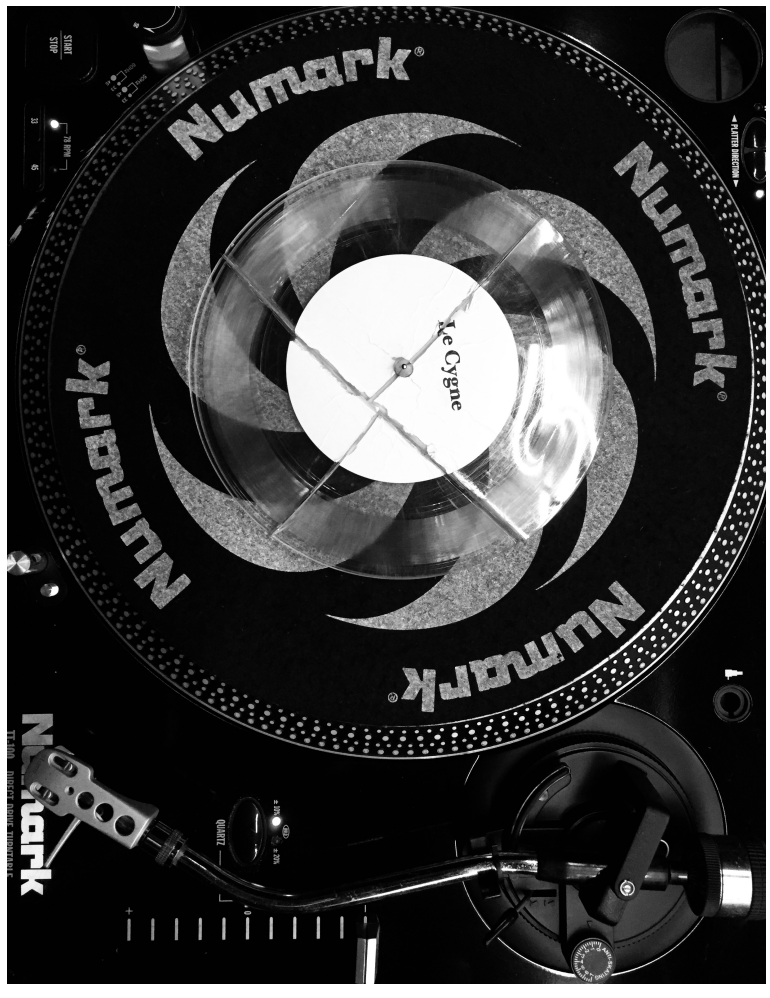
It is this nakedness of spirit, this extravagant, intimate exposure to possible ridicule and failure in the pursuit of an ecstatic truth (the truth to be, in a real sense, and at the same time, not to be), which in the final analysis creates an almost mystical level of communication between performer and audience, a cabal of post capitalist bodies suspended within a sacred space of disillusionment and chaos.

This embracing of material entropy in Melissa's "dance macabre" however, is not merely to rebel or to find a meaning or reason for humankind's vanished innocence and moral bankruptcy, but only to love them, without hope, to the very end.

Fly or Die.







Photographs by Andrew Leslie Hooker

The Cutting











Stills from performance film



Biographies of Collaborators

Monica Pasut is a costume designer and technician with over 20 years of experience. Her work has varied from regional theatre, university theatre, dance, puppetry and theme parks. She holds her MFA in Costume Design from Texas State University and currently serves as the Costume Shop Manager and lecturer for the department of theatre and dance.

Andrew Leslie Hooker was born in England in 1962. He is a filmmaker, composer and improviser of electroacoustic/no-input music currently based in North Wales. He began his career as a photographer and graphic designer, collaborating with various music, art and fashion publications, record labels, theatre and dance companies. He has exhibited paintings, photographic works and experimental films in various galleries throughout Europe and the United States and was included (as a filmmaker) in the 49th Venice Biennale.

At the present time, as well as being co-directer of North Wales based contemporary dance company Anoikis in collaboration with choreographer/dancer Melissa Pasut, he is continuing his compositional studies as a PhD research student at The Academy of Creative and Performing Arts/Leiden University under the supervision of Richard Barrett whilst contemporaneously working on various music, dance and extended cinema projects.

His film works and compositions are published by Entr'acte (London/Antwerp) and Dinzu Artefacts (Los Angeles). Past and current collaborators include: Gavin Bryars, Manuel Zurria, Philip Jeck, Jon Wozencroft, Cosey Fanni Tutti, Von Archives, Aleksander Gabrys, Seijiro Murayama, 3/4HadBeenEliminated, Giuseppe Ielasi, Penny Rimbaud, Eve Libertine, Graham Dunning, Sarah Saviet, Sylvia Hinz Toshimaru Nakamura and Rhodri Davies.

Eden Augustine Hooker was born in 2012 and has been playing the double bass since 2019. He competed at the National Eisteddfod of Wales in 2022 and has joined his parents on various occasions in performances. He also plays regularly with the Wales Improvisors Orchestra and has been inspired by his teacher Dee Moses and his grandfather Alex Pasut.