



## Questions and Answers

### **Please introduce yourself briefly.**

**Moe Yoshida (Moe):** I am a visual artist. I moved to Italy in 1998 to study painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna, after graduation I remained there to continue my artistic activities. I met Luca in 2006 and our collaboration began in 2009, since then, in parallel with my own endeavors, I have been creating a series original works, mainly stage objects, for his contemporary dance and opera productions. In 2016 we began collaborating on a puppet theater project, intended as a form of experimental total theater. We have a strong interest in the world of puppetry, as represented by Bunraku, by traditional Javanese puppetry, or as expressed in the plays of Maurice Maeterlinck, all things that were introduced to me by Luca. Over the years, I have been inspired by these worlds containing a deep symbolism of the human condition. I have created several rod puppets for Luca's production, these I later developed into a series of interactive sculpture projects that include their activation in live performances.

**Luca Veggetti (Luca):** I am a choreographer and stage director, my work spanning different activities: from dance to opera, to puppetry, to film, to forms of museum installation and performance.

Asian theatrical traditions, and the Japanese ones in particular, have for long represented an ideal, catalyzing my efforts towards an all-encompassing theatrical form. These different practices and studies form a whole and embody a passion for different cultures, for what can be shared and in doing so enrich us. The more recent involvement with drawing and works on paper, something that Moe has greatly encouraged, represents in truth a long standing interest and to some extent also a practice, having trained in my youth, in my native Italy, in both dance and visual art schools.

### **As you mentioned before, you have collaborated on theater and dance projects in the past, but what made you decide to do an exhibition together this time?**

**Moe:** Luca is both my partner and a person who has a very unique artistic practice. So I believe that his influence, latent in my everyday life, inevitably shows up in my work. Each collaboration with Luca has brought to me new points of view and new subjects to explore. His requests are always full of challenges that tend to break my artistic habits, pushing the limits of the moment. It is often as a journey into the deep of an unknown forest.

So it was quite natural for Luca and I to come up with the idea of collaborating not only in the realm of the stage, but also in the one of the art gallery. It is a field that is more familiar to me but, by collaborating with him, I had the fresh feeling that I would be able to bring a new element to my work, something completely different from the way I think and work on my own.

**Luca:** Moe and I share the need for making things with our hands - and in that sense I do make “handmade theater and film” with my collaborators. Our work together in the performing arts has been inspiring for both of us on many levels, and also opened on each occasion new paths in our respective fields of artistic practice. As Moe says, it was therefore quite natural to suggest to you and Taga 2 Gallery a project that would bring us in front of a new territory. We thought in fact that it would be interesting to explore together the boundaries of a more imaginative art, and within a form that is not time-based, though the sense of time plays a role throughout these works.

**What is the theme of this exhibition? Please also tell us what the title "OLD FACES – for an imaginary action," suggests.**

**Luca:** Through a body of interrelated works, the exhibition brings forth the vision for a theatrical universe yet to be created. As a whole, they suggest an imaginary dramatic form that honors the animal world in its ancestral and complex relation to man, as well as a potential performance celebrating the dawn of life. In spite of its imaginative and utopian nature, the exhibition is rooted in a life-long study and practice of the performing arts. Its title, OLD FACES, refers to the role and significance of masks within this timeless universe. I let Moe expand on their form and meaning

**Moe:** When Luca told me about an imaginary theatrical space that included animal masks, I knew that the key would be in discovering which animals to use. In choosing the animals, I wanted to focus on how they relate to the human dimension. The mask is a tool for becoming another but I wanted to create masks that would reach for something hidden, for an animal hiding inside our body.

To do so, a book written by a prominent Japanese anatomist named Shigeo Miki, "Internal Organs and the Mind", was of great help. I created seven masks of seven animals, stemming primarily from three iconic animals that appear in this book in the chapter "The 400-million-year-old World in the Womb". In it, Miki describes his experience of cutting the heads of formalin-preserved fetal specimens one after another, in order to observe their features. As he describes in the book, he was in fact obsessed by the question of repeated phylogenesis in the development of individual organisms, and wished to observe the features of a fetus, which could not be seen by looking at the formalin specimens from the outside.

He tells us about the excitement of witnessing the metamorphosis of a fetus in just one short week, recalling it with poetic expressions unlike that of an anatomist. On the face of a 32-day-old fetus, he found the facial features of a deep sea shark named frilled shark, which retains the body structure of the 400 million-year-old cartilaginous fishes; on the face of another 35-day-old, he recognized a tuatara, a reptile that retains the primitive traits of 200 million years ago and lives only in a limited area of New Zealand; and on the face of a 36-day-old, the facial features of a three-toed sloth, according to Miki an animal boasting a family tree of tens of millions of years as a primitive mammal.

These all are so called living fossils and the very symbolic animals living in our body. Reading this book gave me the idea of seeing the animal masks as the masks of the human archetype.

Since they are all vertebrates, I used the keyword "spine" to derive the other four animals, searching in the common ancestors a prototype of the structure of the human body.

**What does this exhibition and the theme of this exhibition mean to you both? What was of interest to you in the creative process?**

**Moe:** For me, creating the masks was something completely new. The difficulty and the depth of the challenge are very meaningful. Moreover, the models for them were of rare animals which are not easy to encounter even in zoos or natural history museums. I picked up data and images mainly from books and the Internet, reconstructing the information and creating the masks based on the inspiration generated from it. As I was working with a lump of sculptural material on my lap and looking at the vaguely outlined faces of animals, I realized that while I was aiming at modelling animals that were supposed to be the absolute other, the facial features of the masks were somehow beginning to resemble myself. The animals had slipped through my hands and gone somewhere else, I was just making a self-portrait as a living fossil.

The symbolic implications of this are very deep, they seem to point at a universality that is appropriate to the performing arts intended as a total art form that can also extend the specific methods of visual art.

**Luca:** Every person involved in artistic creation knows of the tension between what is envisioned and the material result of that inner process, of the sacredness of the space between imagination and actual realization. Thinking of how much the visual arts have informed my work in the theater, and also of a life-long fascination with unrealized projects, I wanted to explore that space by translating a vision for something that normally exists in time, sound and movement in a series of still artifacts; by being themselves the fruits of an imaginative process, they become symbolic of it. An inspiring factor was the impression received by seeing long time ago the drawings of Akira Kurosawa, and very recently the ones in the notebooks of Vaslav Nijinsky, both in their originals. Two legendary artists who, for different reasons, at a moment in their lives were prevented from realizing their visions in the media proper to them, that is to say film, with the complexity of its production, and dance, the most ephemeral of arts. They were “out of work” so to speak, all they had was paper and pencils, or some brushes and colors. The force of their visions traced on a sheet, as the only mean at their disposal at that moment, is extraordinary. In the case of Kurosawa it has to be noted that he ended up making some of the films first born on paper, though I like to imagine that the drawings, with their explosive energy, served as a catalyst for his unique filmic vision.

**Could you give us some tips on how to appreciate the works in the exhibition, Moe's masks and Luca's drawings?**

**Moe:** Most of these masks are made for looking outward from the mouth. If we trace back the origin of the form with spine as the key word, we inevitably realize that the mouth and the organs surrounding it are of great significance. With this idea in mind, I hope that visitors will appreciate this series of masks as a way to connect with those mysterious ancestral animals.

Ascidians, the most distant relatives of vertebrates, are living siphons that live attached to rocks on the seabed, they are shaped like broken jars or torn intestines with a suction opening at the top and an outlet at the side. Then there is the Lancelet, its flesh-colored body has a simple shape, like a single line drawn with a brush, its mouth covered with fine tentacles. The Hagfish, is an eel-like chordate with no jaw and teeth growing on its tongue, the Frilled Shark, a prehistoric shark, the Tuatara, a reptile said to have a third eye, the Three Toed Sloth moves so slowly that moss grows on its body. And finally the Suncus that looks like it belongs to a painting by Hieronymus Bosch.

**Luca:** The ensemble of these drawings embodies a two-fold purpose, being at the same time the end result of a vision and the open-ended project for its realization.

The seven drawings on paper can be seen as diagrams of movement, as energy patterns, but also as visual suggestions for a series of stage situations corresponding to each mask. Having been drawn on old prints, they search for a tension with the underlying existing images – which are mainly of human anatomy from the 17th and 18th century - following in this an intuitive logic led by both the relation to the material and the nature of the situation.

The large panel drawing, Palimpsest for an imaginary theater, is an open structure: at once the conceptual skeleton of dramatic and performative structures, a diagram suggesting possible relations between their elements, the ground plan and elevation of the architecture that could contain them. The lines and forms that represent these interrelated dimensions, create new physical and conceptual imaginative spaces by intersecting with one another. As the title indicates, it is also an artifact whose written and drawn content is regularly erased and re-worked upon.

All these works have been greatly informed by Moe's technical expertise in regard to the materials used.

**Luca, you have conceived and designed the exhibition, what are the key points?**

**Luca:** Naturally I have designed it according to spatial concerns and aesthetic principles that stem from the works themselves, though the exhibition is a tool for the imagination, and visitors should feel free to navigate it by relating the various works through their own intuitive logic. However, as a mere suggestion, the large panel drawing can be seen as a sort of map that, by showing the entire physical and conceptual territory of the project, suggests possible connections. All the works have been created with an attention to details, with the small space of the gallery working as a magnifying glass that brings them into a greater significance.

**This is your first exhibition together, what are your discoveries and what do you have in store for the future?**

**Moe:** To create an object with the intention of actually using it, or having someone use it, is to think specifically of how you want to connect with the world outside. I think this is a profound element of expression. It includes the amount of time that it takes to master the use of the object, and the possible dialogues/monologues that can arise between the object and the person using it.

Through the creation of rod puppets for professional dancers, I have been exposed to the phenomenon of how an object that strongly reflects my own physicality, can show something new when combined with the physicality of others. This was a most magical and poetic experience for me, and one that also brought another dimension to the one of the manipulator. I hope to encounter similar discoveries with the creation of animal masks.

**Luca:** The project of this exhibition has led me to experience a different creative process - though maybe one that secretly I had always wished to explore – and ultimately new goals: the creation of visual artifacts as a humble way to suggest, but also to better understand, a theatrical vision. Being the practitioner of art forms that by nature exist mainly by oral transmission, I had in fact so far adopted, almost as a principle, its exact opposite: rarely taking any notes or creating visuals in support or in preparations of envisioned works. Moe and I love our respective working environments: the rehearsal room and the stage on one side, the studio and the gallery on the other, but we have also enjoyed experiencing the atmosphere of the other' s when there was the chance. Each one entails the use of creative energy in a very different way, theater being by nature a collaborative effort, in which the material is in essence the physical and spiritual presence of the performers, while visual art is often conceived and produced in the introspective solitude of the studio.

Through the work for this exhibition, we might have come to realize that we need to experience both ways to feed our imagination.