

### 3 Questions to Claire Vivianne Sobottke

#### **Tanz im August: Your new piece is called “Velvet”. Where did the title come from?**

Claire Vivianne Sobottke: I had the feeling that this new piece was comparable with a person. That it was a figure that would show itself at some point, and so it needed a name – so as to be able to call it. You could say that the whole process of rehearsal and research for a new piece is a kind of calling. I’m very involved with the body, and I think that bodies are subject to a certain terror. A turbulent accumulation of culture, concepts, history, memories, projections, expectations and categorisations. It’s important to me to counter all this with a body that can’t be categorised – or at any rate potentially can’t. Velvet is a hybrid name, neither female nor male. It’s also a colour that you can’t pin down. A material with a certain heaviness. It reminds me of a particular moment at twilight. The transition from day to night.

I wondered for a long time about calling the piece “Mathilde”. Mathilde is the name of my elder sister. When I think of her, I remember a series of explosive scenes. I see her on the beach, for example, running naked after a guy who’d masturbated in front of us, screaming and throwing stones at him. I was incredibly impressed by her. I have an affinity to drama and the comical aspect of the dramatic body. While rehearsing I think a lot about my sister and sisterhood – #sisterhood.

#### **TiA: “Velvet” is a solo, like your earlier works. How do you work on them? What are the possibilities of a solo?**

CVS: I’d describe my work a little differently. Actually it’s quite rare for me to concentrate on a solowork . I work with other people a lot. My practice is driven by the desire to explore relationships, and to be in relationship. I don’t exclusively mean relationships between people . I think that performance is a space in which particular norms of contact can be questioned and possibly changed. I experiment and think a great deal with others.

At the moment, after a series of very social and collaborative processes, I’m back in the studio to work on my new solo. For me this space is ambivalent at first – it’s an extreme confrontation with myself and my own judgement. It’s both very full and very empty. Solo work can be very uncompromising, which feels positive to me. It’s a space in which personal ideas, urgent issues and irrational desires can be manifested directly. Without further explanation to others, at first.

For “Velvet” I’m working with a larger team for the first time. In this sense there’s an interchange with others, and inspiration from them. I’ve been working very closely for years with Tian Rotteveel, who also composed the music for “Velvet”. But he’s more than the composer of the piece; he’s at my side in all artistic questions. His music is a form of architecture, an intensity, a performer that creates situations with me. We’re thinking a lot about how the whole space can speak as an immersive experience.

In “Velvet” a lot comes out of the surroundings in which I work, from the garden. The garden is an invitation to various figures, embodiments, visitors and situations. At the same time the question of eroticism and sexuality is very important to me. Esther Perel says ‘The erotic is the antidote to death’. For me this gives rise to a necessity. I have the feeling that too little is said or shown about eroticism from an explicitly female perspective – the female gaze is an open question to me. Also on an entirely personal level.

#### **TiA: For “Velvet” you create an onstage garden. How are dance, theatre and nature connected for you? Or are they unconnected?**

CVS: If you understand dance as a process, then you can certainly say that a garden is comparable with dance. A garden is a very lively independent process, which actually doesn’t need me as a performer or actor. It lives, grows, changes, dies and speaks for itself. For me, nature and garden are quite different concepts. Although nature is definitely part of the garden, the garden is a form of nature into which human beings have intervened. There’s a desire to produce nature and be in touch with it, and at the same time a desire to control it. I often imagine what will happen when there are no human beings left on the planet, and nature just grows everywhere. It’s a lovely thought.

There are different kinds of gardens and gardening. There are wild gardens or very tidy gardens. But they all need care in some way, and sometimes this means leaving them alone for a while. I think that rehearsing a piece is exactly the same. In the beginning you create a kind of habitat, a constellation of ideas, objects, wishes, people – and there are a lot of forces and possibilities within this that you can't see yet. I think you have to let this habitat grow without wanting too much.

For me, nature and the idea of the wilderness are also an inner space that inhabits the mind . Wilderness stands for unmappable nature. For forms of life that aren't human.