

Interview with Aun Helden

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Speakers: Silvia De Teresa and Aun Helden.

Silvia: How did the residency influence your artistic process? Was it different from your usual way of working?

Aun: Yes, it was totally different. When I work alone in my studio, I am, of course, always surrounded by people, landscapes, and feelings—I am always contaminated by the other. It's never just myself. But in the residency, we worked together in a place that was distant from downtown, in a very nature-filled space, and I decided not to leave much in order to fully focus. It was a very immersive process, something I had never done before.

What was different for me was deciding that the space I was in—something strange and new—was going to be an important element in my work. In the end, the result, the film, and the performance were shaped by the place and my interactions with everyone. That became one of the biggest concepts in what I did during the residency.

Another very important thing was seeing other people working—their fragility, the vulnerability of their thoughts, and how their work developed. When we work alone, we know things aren't easy, but when we see another artist's work, we usually only see the final result, not the process. So it was so beautiful, intense, and magical to witness other performers creating something from zero—having all these catches and everything else.

Especially in performance, which is so bodily and intimate, it was magical to see presence being shaped in such an intimate way. I will never forget it because it was the first time I had so many strangers, who became friends, sharing their intimacy with me and living together.

Silvia: Has your stay at the residency shaped the way you create art? Has your artistic process changed since encountering the concept of choreomania?

Aun: I think I replied to this in the first question, but I will add some things. I feel that the choreomania concept and this collective residency gave me the sensation that sometimes, when I'm questioning something in my work, when I'm trying to find an answer, maybe I really have to look to the collective. I have to look to the dance that is being danced by the environment around me, the collective around me—the world itself.

I remember we were questioning a lot, especially after our talk with Kéline Gotman. We started asking, *What is life? What is surviving? What is dancing the choreomania?* And we were all together making those questions, but we didn't have an answer. It was impossible to answer individually. The answer was so multiple that it was impossible for everyone to just reply by themselves.

This intrigued me a lot. It made me think that sometimes, when I'm doing research and I can't find an answer—what is life?—maybe it's because I have to look and listen to other things. You have to kill the ego. You have to change the ego and understand that this dance is not just being danced by you.

Silvia: What role did choreomania play in your process?

Aun: Of course, it created a sense of empathy in my own practice. I feel that art is about changing. Art is about transfiguration of the social imaginary. And you must be empathetic when you're doing this, because you cannot create a scar in the world or leave a mark so you can walk around just thinking about yourself. A lot of things about community and the sense of community came to me during the residency. And of course, it changed my work a lot.

Silvia: I'd love to hear more about your process. When I spoke with Alexandra Cassirer, she was truly amazed by your method and how you work, and I'm really curious to learn more. Did choreomania serve as a starting point for you? Or did you integrate it into your existing concept? How did you approach this integration?

Aun: No, my process didn't start when I arrived at the residency. I was already carrying certain questions with me, particularly about life in a body that has faced multiple "death sentences." My research revolves around this—exploring a body undergoing transfigurations and metamorphoses, constantly confronting death as a way to enter those processes.

When I arrived at the residency, I remember wondering: instead of facing death, is there a way to face life? Could I try to understand what kind of life this body is creating or amending? This was the first question I brought with me.

Of course, my experience at the residency shaped the answers I found, especially because of how I isolated myself there and the nature of the place itself. The space held a strong history, intense energy—like the ammunition site and all its past. Yet at the same time, it was a beautiful place, with a lake, families riding bicycles, children playing. It created a strange contradiction: a place where I felt both safe and unsafe.

This duality connected deeply with the body I was researching. I realized that perhaps this body—one that feels like a corpse, like a ghost—will never truly experience safety or freedom. My process is always rooted in my own history, in what I carry with me and construct as a body. But at the same time, I am constantly open to being shaped by my environment and the people around me.

That's why I feel my work is fragile, sensitive, and resonates with people. It exists in a space of fantasy and fiction, yet when confronted, it feels deeply real; grounded in the present, in human emotions, in raw, immediate experience.

So, yes, this is how my process unfolded.