

'VIVA LA VIDA, FRIDA.'

Submission to Handspan Theatre Co.

During the 1989 Fringe Festival I saw a performance piece by Lynn Ellis and Sally Forth. Although I was quite dissatisfied with their piece as a whole, a couple of their images resonated within me.

Soon after the Fringe Festival I found a biography of Frida Kahlo, the Mexican artist who died in 1954 at the age of 47. The impact of the self portrait on the cover and of imagery of the paintings inside was similar in nature to some of those in the performance piece. Frida's images however were truer, and thus work on many more levels. One of the problems I perceived with the performance piece was the lack of context that provides a framework from which to read these images and makes a link, a dialogue, between the conscious life story and sub conscious inner life.

These particular images, in the performance piece and the art of Frida Kahlo, deal in what I would call 'Women's Imagery', that springs from Women's issues. This imagery seems to embody a voice from the female psyche. While men may relate positively to it, it pertains to a uniquely female experience of life, hence perception of reality.

After reading Frida's biography I understood the connection between her images and those of the performance piece. It was simple. The female life; a biography. This was the missing context, the conscious key that enables one to decipher this surrealistic language of dream images.

Frida's paintings need no other apparent context to enable the viewer to understand them - because the viewer supplies their own life as the context. The viewer can stay as long as is necessary for the connections to take place. In theatre the images are fleeting, transitory, and require the production to provide a context.



Last year I wrote and produced a 20 minute opening sequence of the play for my drama course. On the basis of this work I was awarded a grant from Melbourne University to travel to Mexico and research the rest of the play. I am now in the process of assembling all the relevant bits of information, ideas and images into a first full draft of the play.

Before leaving for Mexico I realized that the stage techniques at my disposal were inadequate to voice this 'dream dialogue'. I needed an appropriate medium for this exploration. Puppetry and Handspan immediately sprang to mind. Handspan has been refining this type of dialogue for many years now. hence this application.

I am specifically interested in depicting Frida's growth from a reactionary middle class girl to a mature independent politically conscious woman who developed her own holistic spirituality, against a background of a repressive Latin third world society.

I hope to debunk the 'suffering artist' myth and show how Frida used it as a fantasy as well as her pain as a catalyst to produce some of the most important artwork of this century.

Frida led an exotic hedonistic life full of trauma pain and joy. I am fascinated with the way she used what we would call neurosis and turned this into creative eccentricity. However I want to explore how physical accidents in her early life caused her to bury painful feelings which later manifested in the creation of stormy dramatic situations in order to re-contact these painful feelings.

In order to achieve all this I intend to juxtapose images and text that on the surface appear to have little or no connection. However it is through these gaps I hope that we will perceive the real person, in the difference between word and action, belief and presentation.



I have included for your perusal a list of images with some loose suggestions for the type of puppetry I have envisaged, but this is where I see the need for working with puppeteers and workshopping a rough script before too much can be finalized, as only so much of such a production can be worked on the page.

Also I have included the first few pages of the script I wrote last year. This was not written for puppetry but should give an idea of my work in its embryonic stages.

Yours Sincerely

Karen Corbett

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