

MINDPLACE THOUGHTSTREAM

JULIA GEERLINGS IN CONVERSATION WITH SHANA MOULTON

Anybody invited to realize a project in 1646 is asked to engage in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

This conversation takes place via e-mail and stretches through the whole period during which the artists develop their initial idea into final results. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process.

In trying to picture what result the artists' work is going to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

This issue is part of the exhibition by Shana Moulton, *Mindplace ThoughtStream*, October 24 2014 in 1646.

This artist
Shana Moulton

This correspondent
Julia Geerlings

Concept and design
Nico Feragnoli

1646.

Boekhorststraat 125, 2512 cn, The Hague
The Netherlands

<http://1646.nl> - info@1646.nl

OCTOBER 11: Julia Geerlings [JG] to Shana Moulton [SM]
Dear Shana,

How are you doing?

We never met, but I know your work. In fact I remember the opening of your exhibition at Nieuwe Vide very well. I was there with a friend and we were giggling while watching your videos. We felt the videos were maybe a bit confronting for us, because we both spend too much attention to our appearances and we are like your alter ego 'Cynthia' a bit neurotic. Do you do yoga by the way? I do it, but I actually hate it. I think lots of women can relate to Cynthia. Which made me wonder, how much are you like Cynthia?

I hope to hear from you and I wish you a very good night,

Best regards,
Julia

SM - JG
Hi Julia,

Nice to hear from you!

I'm about to get on the plane to Schiphol but I thought I'd make a quick reply before I get bogged down in travel.

I've tried committing to yoga since high school, I do it on and off but have never fully invested in it. I think part of the problem is that I prefer to do it alone so I've never had focused guidance from a teacher.

I've tried getting into many similar things; meditation, studying chakras, breathing exercises, pilates, kundalini, etc., but I also have a hard time fully committing to any one practice - in this way I am totally like Cynthia. Even though I haven't been able to commit to any of them they've all become creative pathways in one way or another.

I've realized that Cynthia is really just me when I'm alone, with a wig. She's an excuse for me to put on makeup and enact the creative scenarios I've imagined during neurotic moments looking at fashion magazines or yoga websites or the bathroom mirror. I don't think of her as a character with a separate background or having specific biographical details besides being from California.

Thanks for the questions Julia!

All my best
Shana

OCT 12: JG - SM

Hello Shana,

I hope you had a good flight! May I ask where you are heading for? And are you still based in New York by the way? I know you attended *De Ateliers* [in Amsterdam] a couple of years ago. Do you still come often to the Netherlands?

I feel the same way about yoga. My problem is that I tend to be too self-conscious during yoga class and I'm not motivated enough to do it by myself.

I'm intrigued to know more about Cynthia (or you). The earliest *Whispering Pines* videos date from 2002. Did she/you grow from experience through the years? And if she/you did, to what extent?

OCT 17: SM - JG

Hi Julia,

I'm in Den Haag now, I came straight here from New York and am back and forth between here and Muenster - where I teach, until the opening.

I am still based in New York but also Muenster since last December to teach at their Kunstakademie.

Yes actually the first few *Whispering Pines* videos were more based on the medical dress Cynthia wears in them. Before the videos I started making a series of medical dresses, you can see at the bottom:



and I wondered what kind of person might need to wear such a dress - and that is how Cynthia began - a state of anxiety over various real or imagined medical problems. But after a few episodes the narratives became more and more personal, or anecdotal from incidents in my life or a member of my family's life, and I realized I didn't want her to have a biography or character that was separate from my own.

After 5 or 6 episodes I would imagine that each video would be the last in the series - because the videos usually end with some kind of death or transcendence - but every time I had a new idea for a video I needed her to execute it. And I decided it would be interesting to see her age. Even though a lot of the more recent videos aren't titled *Whispering Pines* I still consider them a part of the series.

But besides aging I don't know if she has grown that much - personally I have become more and more receptive to

some of the spiritual subjects that I've learned about through making the videos,

Ok - thank you again for the questions, let me know if I can expand on any of these.

OCT 18: JG - SM
Hi Shana,

Thanks again for answering my questions (even though you must be really busy at the moment)!
Nice to hear you are teaching at Kunstakademie Muenster. What is your teaching method if I may ask? And does teaching influence your own art practice as well?

I'm also interested in your last comment about the spiritual subjects in your videos. Which new spiritual subjects have you learned about? Spirituality and art have a long and historic relationship. Did that also influence you in your work?

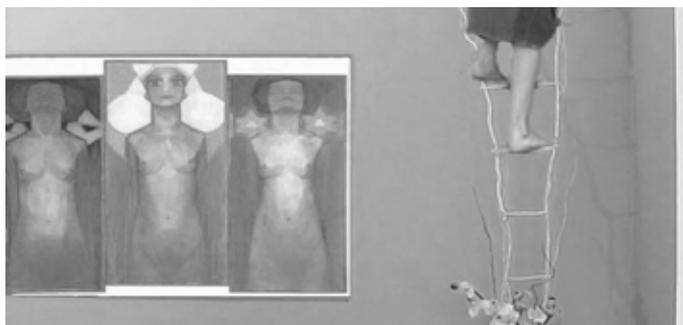
OCT 22: SM - JG
Hi Julia

I only started teaching at the Kunstakademie last December and so far my main method of teaching has been trying to figure out how I fit into the German style of art academy instruction. Its very different from the American system. Otherwise my approach is to be more on the positive and constructive side rather than the critical side. For me so much is about personal taste and I don't want to impose my own taste on the students.

With the spirituality, I've learned a bit about the collective unconsciousness, alchemy, the more occult aspects of major religions like kabbalah, chakras, yoga, meditation, reflexology, astrology, numerology, etc.. I'm interested in the idea that something like Genesis in the bible as a metaphor for the evolution of consciousness on the planet rather than a real story.

I became especially interested in the relationship between spirituality and art when I discovered a painting by Mondrian that expresses some ideas from theosophy. When I first saw the painting I was very surprised that it was a Mondrian - I thought it was a recent new-agey painting that you might find in the waiting room of a hospital.

As I was living in Amsterdam at the time - and my tutors at *De Ateliers* kept encouraging to connect more to art history - I was compelled to make a video based on this painting (*Whispering Pines 8*, perhaps a good one to show).



Another video I made was largely inspired by the work of Emma Kunz. A few years ago when I visited Zurich I was very surprised to find a pharmacy that was selling a mineral salve called Aion A that she discovered in a mine around the 1940s. It is still sold in the original packaging with a drawing of hers on the front of the box. A museum of her artworks is right next to the mine and you can reserve 30 minutes of time alone in the mine to soak up its healing powers. I also read that she created her drawings to be healing tools rather than art.



Please do send more questions if you have them!

JG - SM
Hi Shana,

Coincidentally I also discovered Mondrian's *Evolution* during an excursion at the Gemeentemuseum organized by my university. I would also love to visit the Emma Kunz museum in Switzerland one day. It sounds like a great experience!

I would like to know more now about your new work at 1646. What is Cynthia up to now?

OCT 23: SM - JG

I've been writing down some ideas from the show, it goes a little all over the place but I think I start to get to something by the end ... this is in response to your last question, about the new work:

Mindplace ThoughtStream is named after a Biofeedback system I bought.

This tool measures the rapid, tiny fluctuations in your skin's electrical resistance known as the Galvanic Skin Response (GSR). When your psychological stress/arousal level increases, skin moisture increases and ThoughtStream USB can help teach you to monitor and control this. In use, it 'learns' what sensitivity level works best for you, and "feeds back" this body/mind information to you in several forms of feedback. With regular practice it is an ideal relaxation training system. Biofeedback research has "encouraged the dream that human beings can aspire to previously unimagined levels of personal control over bodily states, reaching unprecedented states of wellness and self-control."

I wanted to use the idea of biofeedback to frame several

audio samples that I've been using in a recent performance and turn those into a new narrative that ties together samples from: an ASMR video, a Ted talk by a stroke survivor who experienced Nirvana after losing the capacity of her left brain, an interview with a man about his experience doing DMT in a medical research study, an Activia commercial featuring Shakira, an old HBO intro, video of a woman demonstrating sponge painting techniques, Constant Craving by KD Lang and a couple songs by Enya. Because the performance was largely inspired by these audio samples, I thought I could further explore in the videos way sound affects the mind and body.

I chose audio from an ASMR video because of its explicit attempt to trigger specific sensations in the body with sound. ASMR stands for *Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response* and the creators of ASMR videos intend to elicit a relaxing, tingling sensation in the head, scalp and neck of the viewer - or at least send them into a trance-like state with the sound of their voice. Many of the ASMR video-makers use whispering to achieve this, and I actually discovered the ASMR community while searching for songs with whispering in them. This particular ASMR sample is an introduction to an elvish chant that the speaker whispers, and it seemed like a good lead-in to the following KD Lang, Activia, Goddess section.

There is a wooden shack/temple with various fertility and goddess carvings on the property of the residency in England called Wysing that an artist had built there in the 1980s.

I've featured goddess imagery in my past work and have always been intrigued by the goddess pose where the arms form a circle around the goddess's head. There is a large goddess effigy in this pose carved into the front of the shack, and I knew I wanted to film myself in this temple but I wasn't sure what to do until I remembered an Activia commercial that features Shakira dancing in this pose. Discovering and eating Activia in a hand-carved goddess temple therefore seemed like a natural activity for Cynthia.

I set this scene to Karaoke backing vocals for the song *Constant Craving* by KD Lang, which are played in reverse, as the above elvish chant being introduced by the ASMR speaker. Once Cynthia sees the Activia those vocals are played forward to emphasise the notion of female craving.

The speeches by the stroke survivor and DMT research subject both describe experiences of the divine while having some kind of relationship to science. The stroke survivor is a neuroscientist, so as she is having the stroke and experiencing a oneness with the universe she is able to locate a neurophysiological correlate.

The HBO intro was simply one of my first ecstatic experiences with sound that I can remember. As a toddler I didn't pay much attention to TV besides cartoons but whenever I heard the HBO intro I would run to the TV and try to immerse myself in the sound and image. There is a chance I'm confusing this memory with something my little brother would do ... either way one of us would run to this HBO melody on the television.

Finally I also was looking for a way to use a *Malcolm's Miracle SWIRL Moisture Jamzz Moisturizing Goddess Glove*

I'd purchased online and I realised that the glove could become a tool for warping and twirling the world similarly to how the woman warps and twirls paint in this sponge painting demonstration video I saw online. I find her enthusiasm for the sponge painting similar to the ecstasy that the stroke survivor describes in her talk and the DMT test subject describes in his interview.

For me there is also a correlation between the potential of the distortion tools I've been using in After Effects, the way the sponge painting lady manipulates paint, how the stroke survivor describes being at one with the world and all the molecules in the universe and the experience described by the DMT test subject of breaking through the picture puzzle patterned door. As if breaking through the plane of reality or seeing the interconnectedness of all living beings could be illustrated by distorting the 2D picture plane of a video with the twirl, ripple or turbulent displacement effect [in After Effects, a computer program used to manipulate and modify video footage].

OCT 29: JG - SM
Hey Shana,

Thanks for the complete and detailed description of Mindplace ThoughtStream and your sources of inspiration for the work!

I have one final question. How do you see the future? Will you be making more videos and performances with Cynthia? Are there any subjects you are already thinking of using in your videos?

NOV 5: SM - JG
Hi Julia,

Sorry again for the delay - school got the better of me!

Yes I do think I will continue to create videos and performances as Cynthia ... whenever I get an idea for something I need her to execute it. And I always thought it would be interesting to see her age, although I've only really envisioned the really elderly part and not the part between now and then. As for specific ideas, I only have some loose associations and objects in mind at this stage that I may or may not use coming up: Toxoplasma Gondii, cat dancers, divining rods, hair dryer, talking echo, Gurdjieff, personality tests, Kings Quest, Sierra Entertainment ...

I hope that works Julia, let me know if you need anything else.

Shana
