

Deborah Hunt

Hunter and Hunted: a Haunting

My compulsion to create comes from two places: a nebulous land of images, dreams or signs and from situations that I see around me and feel compelled as an artist to respond to. My practice is divided into two areas: construction of masks, puppets/objects and training/montage. It is a chicken/egg situation; sometimes it is hard to know what comes first.

I used to train exhaustively, maintaining an extremely fit and aggressive body, cultivating a sense of being able to do anything that was required of it. Now, menopausal, I find my body overweight... and I smoke too much. That confession off my breast, I find myself developing a training that is particular to the next work.

INTUITION

The next work, *Fragile*, is an encounter between a woman and a child performed with masks, puppets (including marionettes) and miniatures. A seemingly predatory woman attempts to maintain her balance and stay upright as she is assailed and weakened by the past, especially by the memories of an extraordinary child. The child is joined to the woman with a rope and, as the work progresses, the protagonists walk the fine line between hunter and hunted. *Fragile* explores themes of property, manipulation, vampirism and the expropriation of the future.

Intuition: fall down. I spend an hour falling down and getting up again.

Intuition: spin. I spend time spinning round.

Intuition: sit. I sit as still as I can with an alive body for as long as I can. (When I started this one I lasted about three minutes and finished crawling on the floor crying.) This is my personal training as an approach for manipulating objects on a table. I wait, perfectly still, my hands resting on a wooden table. I then begin a string game - cat's cradle - anything I can invent with string.

Intuition: drag. I drag heavy things around the floor. I haul a very heavy object on to the terrace of a four-storey building; at first with one rope then trying with

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Deborah Hunt and Crow. Photo: Guie Beeu Guerrero

several, hoping to strengthen my fingers. I lighten the load. I leave the objects behind, experimenting with body memory and imaging the objects as feather light.

THE CLAY

In the meantime, on the construction side, I begin to create the masks and objects. The masks come in odd ways. The way I like, is when I get a feeling that someone is following me. It is a signal that perhaps a character is on her way. When I get a glimpse, I start to make a mould of clay. This

I cover with a thin layer of petroleum jelly, followed with four layers of *papier maché*, alternating newspaper and brown paper.

During this period I sometimes listen to the radio or to music that I find. It is quite a homely process, like making jam. I find myself staring at walls and researching different things. During this work, a friend gave me a book, which talks about Einstein's theories of time.

MANUEL

Then the child makes his presence known. I remember Manuel from twenty years ago.

Manuel lived with Fili the Talentless and his Fat Wife. Fili was mean and took no notice of Manuel, whom I suspect, came from a wrinkle in time. Manuel hung out with the Grandfather, a charcoal burner who took himself seriously. Each morning Manuel would wash himself and his clothes with water drawn from the *pozo* (well). He would take off his shirt, and scrub it vigorously, singing to himself something about being a black saint. He would put on the clean wet shirt and, indicating to me to turn around, would shed his shorts and wash them vigorously, singing to himself about being an ugly man who knew how to love. He would put the clothes back on wet and whistle to me that I could now look at him. He gleamed. He gleamed when he was dry too.

By this time the Grandfather turned up. He would talk a while with Fili the Talentless and drink the coffee served to him by the Fat Wife. Manuel waited, without coffee, without words.

The sun rose and the Grandfather would get up slowly, rub his poison-dog stomach, glance at the Fat Wife and turn to go to the market. Manuel would follow him, rubbing his stomach and imitating the Grandfather's bandy-legged walk perfectly.

Manuel could transform himself into any living creature. Manuel had an eye and listened and knew the shortcuts to other worlds.

Before my eyes he became the lizard before it was caught and had its lips sewn shut. He became the shrill bird that walked in circles. He was the ox pulling a cart with coloured papers flying. He performed these changes on top of a high wall; away from the eyes of Fili the Talentless and his Fat Wife.

A FALL

"Watch *huera!* I am the Hunter and the

Hunted. Manuel, six years old: he never fell."

Text slowly appears, just as I feel my fingers are going to drop off from hauling heavy objects up four storeys; the *papier maché* is drying and I am trying to be still. I begin to make the marionette that is Manuel, deciding that his body will be created out of empty gallon and half-gallon water containers... Puppetry is truly the art of resolving problems.

I bring the mask and the marionette into the rehearsal space. Strings tangle and I am short of breath. Fili the Talentless and the Fat Wife are created from a dough-like material that I work on the table, imagining that they are made of silken cords. The woman spins and turns on Manuel. Something/someone cuts her strings. She falls to the floor.

I am not sure where this will go, but this is, this time, my practice.

DEBORAH HUNT (New Zealand/Puerto Rico) has spent the last thirty years experimenting with masks and puppets. Born in New Zealand, she has lived for the past fifteen years in Puerto Rico, where her company MASKHUNT has its base on the fourth storey of a run down building, in a workshop called Mongolia.