

Art – take it to the street

In December 2017 I travelled to Bucharest to give a workshop about living statue face and bodypaint to the actors of Masca Theatre. It was a wonderful experience. But before I tell you about this workshop, let me tell you a bit about my background.

My name is Yvon Hollander. I live in the Netherlands. I come from a theatre family. My parents, aunts, uncles ... everybody is into theatre. When I was 11 I learned how to facepaint for theatre. I got introduced to 'living statues' in 1998, 20 years ago. This is when there was a small competition in Arnhem, the Netherlands. Only 15 competitors then (now more than 130!). People loved it. I saw it for the first time then. My younger sister just started at the school of drama. I studied music & organization. In 1999 we decided we wanted to apply to the festival. I didn't play that year but I helped her to make the costume, the décor and put on the facepaint. We were sunflowers. We won the price of originality that year. And it was the start of my company Adorabel. If I see those sunflower costumes now I find it funny. They are so pour. Luckily I can say we have developed our skills 😊. And now 20 years later I'm invited to teach upcoming actors. Something I really love to do.



There are many forms of theatre. I personally adore to be a streetperformer. Rather than being on stage. It's easier and more difficult at the same time. Because the audience, the surroundings, the weather. I all can be a surprise too. You need to know how to improvise.

What I love about living statue as artform, is that it has many different kind of aspects in it. If you want to be really good as a living statue you need to:

- Have an original idea. Preferably something that has never been done before.
- Know how to sew a costume.
- Know about fabrics (not all fabrics work well).
- Know how to prepare a costumes so it gets texture and you can paint over it.
- Know about colors and blending.
- Know how to copy materials.
- Know how to make a base (pedestal), so be handy working with wood / décor.
- Know how to face -and bodypaint yourself in a way it fits with the outfit / colors of the costume and to your character.
- Know how to prepare a wig and make it look like stone or other materials of your choice.

Ok... now you look good. That's nice. But still not quite ready to perform. In order to perform you need to:

- Know what your character is about
- Be in good shape
- Know how to divide your energy during the day
- Make beautiful stills

- Move like a robot / slow motion of puppet
- Know how to express yourself without words so develop mime skills
- You have to know about timing. When to move, when not to move.
- You have to know how to get the sympathy of the audience.
- Move the audience.
- Keep your balance .
- Keep your concentration.
- You have to know how to surprise the audience even though they already know you are a living statue. So you have to bring something more than just standing still.

Level 1 is to stand still and have a costume in 1 color. But to reach level 10 you can improve endlessly. I consider myself to be somewhere between 8 and 9 now. Still -after 20 years- not a 10... Maybe sometimes. But not consistently.

I like to teach others what I have learned along the way. But there is one problem with this. I don't want to teach 'how it is done'. Because that kills creativity. Sometimes the best things happen when you make a mistake. It's how I came to my (secret) mixture of ingredients to make structure to the fabric.

I have seen the art of living statue evolve through the years. Artist find new styles. If they are successful they get copied. I used to hate copycats, now I realise it's their compliment to the master. If you get copied you are good and you have inspired other people. So thumbs up!

Also there's a big difference in living statues worldwide. Or there used to be. In the beginning when we didn't travel as much and didn't have many international festivals (Arnhem was the first one). Each country had its own approach. The people from Spain were purely street entertainers. They moved a lot. Because they only moved when you gave them money. Their way of making a living.

Whereas Living Statues from Holland wanted to look as real as possible and didn't move much at all. Dutch statues were mostly hired by corporations for PR purposes.

I noticed a lot of history in the Romanian statues. And a background in opera. Though I see Masca theatre evolve as well. The costumes and acts get more modern each year.

One of the 'dangers' of working internationally is that the uniqueness of the cultural background disappears within time. Then again... I can give a painter brushes, canvas and paint. It's up to him what he will paint. And it's good to learn basic skills first. But I sincerely hope that artist will never stop experimenting. To put it even stronger: Only true artist experiment. It's their nature. Because creative people never stop playing. They want to find new ways out of curiosity. Because in the end doing the same thing over and over again gets boring. Of course you cannot always be successful. In order to get successful you need to fail every now and then. It's the fastest way to move forward. Just remember there is no right or wrong in art as long as you put your feelings into it. Art is all about emotion.

The thing I like about our way of performing is that it can be understood by everyone. We don't need words. We have got our body's and our faces to communicate. And actually that

is all we need. Costumes and paint make the performance nice, but when an actor is playing without his/her energy, there's nothing to look at. It's an empty shell. What I basically teach is to work with what is already there. You just need to see it. Put your art glasses on and approach life like a photographer does. Pick little things in daily life that you like, make it your own, live it, twist it and bring it back to the street into your performance. So that other people who don't have this gift of seeing art in daily life can see and enjoy it now. You are the magnifier.

When I give a workshop I take the students to the street. To show them that inspiration can be found everywhere. I show them things that they walk by daily and never had noticed that it is so beautiful. I ask them to look for material that they like and select a 10 by 10 cm surface. I want them to study that 10by10 piece. To examine the structure and memorize all the colors. Then we go inside. I tell them to copy their chosen surface on their hands. Then I give them 3 colors, black and white. Good luck... But they manage. I teach them about blending colors and give them a random color that they must forge using only primary colors, black & white.

Most of them were quite talented. I could tell they liked the assignment. After we did this I also taught them about shading & high lights. Using latex add on noses etc. I taught them how to work with putty, wolcrepe and tooth enamel. And how to face paint so you can look older. I gave another assignment. Make yourself unrecognizable. The result were very funny and very good!

After all of this we had one last assignment. We were going to body paint two of the actors with our group. In this final assignment I taught them about structure and material copying.

It were a lovely two days. The actors were very motivated. I'd love to come again and teach about costume / wig design. Of do a workshop on clean mime. But I am sure this will happen one day. In the meantime I'm going to work on new material myself and hopefully see you all again in June at the Masca Theatre Festival. I'm looking forward to it.

Never stop playing and fooling around.

Go, go, go! Good luck to you all!

Yvon Hollander