

Matt Thorne – Staging Directions and Creative Process

Original brief from the Hungarian Cultural Centre in London:

“As for the play, you have full artistic freedom, but as the space is limited, we can only use 2 actors/actresses at the same time. We would like to have creative responses for specific images, as the performance will be staged in front of the chosen images (at least to begin with, there is room for movement if it serves the purpose of your drama).”

The audience will obviously be standing in the gallery, and the performance will be two hours, but it should have potential entry points for new audience members to be able to pick up on the action every thirty minutes, how you choose to interpret this is up to you. Walking through the gallery, the visitors will become part of the theatrical setting and decide themselves how long they stay at a particular stage.”

Matt Thorne – discussion on staging direction and creative process

I was involved in briefing the actresses and guiding their performances, and helping them with staging directions, particularly with their physical use of the gallery and movement between different spaces and scenes. I was open to what they brought to the characters, but it had to fit with my conception of the whole.

I received the brief along with a catalogue of Hajas's work. I could choose whichever images I wanted, but that would determine where the audience would be in the gallery, so it was also a site-specific work. Given the limitations of location, cast and the choice of images, my task was to produce a work that would make a transition between the photographs, the actors and the audience. I researched action-painting, Hajas's background and the situation in Hungary in the late 70s. All of this fed into the initial dialogues, but the second piece grew out of how I imagined these images could be re-interpreted for the present day.

The treated photographs I was writing about are called ‘Surface Torture I-II’. Hajas was a ‘Fluxus’-inspired artist and in his work, he tended to focus on two things: actively punishing his own body in the name of art and then manipulating the surface of his photographs with other media in order to give the sense that the work had been altered/damaged. Hence the pun in the title of this particular work. Hajas believed: The story without proof becomes not only private, but a secret story, a hallucination with which one must cope alone.”

Taking this notion as a starting point, I constructed two duologues playing with the idea of ‘surface torture’ in other contexts: primarily a relationship between two women, having as many resonances or plays on this term as possible. I also tried to replicate the manipulation Hajas had done to the image in psychological terms and imagining how this would impact on someone. The second duologue refers to characters who have lived through the era that Hajas was working in (although in England rather than Hungary) and are suffering a similar psychological process, this time in relation to a fictional film with the same title as Hajas’s work and depicting a similar relationship.