

PUNCH Performance Art
Network CH

An abstract graphic consisting of several thin, colorful lines (yellow, red, blue, cyan, orange, and light brown) radiating from a single point at the top left. A thick yellow diagonal bar is positioned behind the text on the left side of the page.

MAPPING EUROPE

PLACES/ORTE

OSLO, NORWAY

DATE/DATUM

1.5.2019

INTERVIEW FROM/VON

ANDREA SAEMANN

WITH/WITH

FRANZISCA SIEGRIST

OCCASION OF THE TRIP/ANLASS DER REISE

RESIDENCY AT VILLA RUFFIEUX, SIERRE

**Interview from Andrea Saemann with Franzisca Siegrist
on the 1st of May 2019**

Andrea Saemann: It's Wednesday the 1st of May around 4 o'clock in the afternoon, at my house at Isteinerstrasse in Basel and I am making an interview with Franzisca Siegrist who is coming from a residency at Villa Ruffieux in Sierre. I think she's on her way back home to Oslo, Norway. It's an interview on the background of PANCH Eurovision «Mapping Europe» with a set of questions. The first question is: Could you introduce yourself briefly?

Franzisca Siegrist: Yes, thank you for having me at your house. My name is Franzisca Siegrist. I was born here in Switzerland, in Zürich. I was raised in Spain, where I had most of my art education, and where I studied performance with Bartolomé Ferrando. Nowadays I live in Oslo, Norway. I mostly work with performance art but also with installations and objects.

AS: What kind of networks do exist in your country?

FS: There are basically two performance art networks. There is Performance Art Oslo (PAO) and Performance Art Bergen (PAB). Actually I was a little bit surprised when I moved to Norway that there was not more happening. I was looking for performance art festivals and there were not that many. There was not even one in Oslo, at least not one that would last over time.

AS: Where were you coming from?

FS: From Spain. At that point I was coming first from the Canary Islands to study for one year in Oslo. Then I went back to Valencia. Of course in Valencia and mainland Spain the performance art network is quite big. Almost each city has a festival or an event. I felt it was actually a bit strange that Oslo would not have its own festival. So few years after, when I was already based in Oslo, I got to know about Bergen. They had a more established network with festivals. So I was travelling a lot to Bergen. Then suddenly everything happened for it to also create Performance Art Oslo. But I did always have a wish to also organize a performance festival and then suddenly the opportunity was there. Of course there have been smaller festivals or just one big festival. But then they don't do it anymore. It's not like a continuity in the festivals. Now there are the festivals of Performance Art Bergen and of Performance Art Oslo. There is another festival a bit outside Oslo in Hamar, which is organized by an art institution. They have been doing a festival for quite a long time. So there are three main events in Norway dedicated to performance art.

AS: What is the name of the event in Hamar?

FS: The performance art festival in Hamar is organized by Kunstbanken Hedmark Kunstsenter, the art centre of the Hedmark province.

AS: By which institution do you feel represented? Is it PAO? Or are there other institutions that make you feel at home? Is there a space that represents performance art in Oslo?

FS: This is a bit difficult to say. Because PAO doesn't have a space. We always collaborate with different locations. The locations we have had, they are now part of performance art. I do like a lot the space, we are collaborating with at the moment, which is ROM for kunst og arkitektur, a space for art and architecture and I like that in a way because performance is so related to space and architecture. But I cannot say that there is a space that represents performance art. However, as an artist I do feel represented by PAO.

AS: Can you tell me more about PAO? How does it function? What kind of formats you develop and who and where are you partners?

FS: PAO started because my colleague Tanja Thorjussen was on the board of Gallery 69. One day she woke up and said I need to know more about performance art. She is not a performance artist, she's mostly working with drawings. Because she was in the board of this gallery she had the opportunity to make an event. She made an open call, to which I responded. It was a really nice event. After it was finished there was this group of artists, who really wanted to continue this. We were like «Oh, we want more!». You know, we were hungry for more performance art. So we met again in this strange bar, because we didn't have anywhere else to meet. People had jobs, it needed to be in the evening. We had these meetings in this crowded bar, where we started to get ideas. What should we do? Just a festival? Should it be an organization? Then we contacted Performance Art Bergen which already was established for one year and they suggested just to make the same. Let us be sister organizations, just copy the format. We did that and became Performance Art Oslo on the 12.12.12. That was the formal register date as an organization. We are a member organization. Per today, we are about 43 members, living in the area of Oslo, but also in Østlandet, the south-eastern part of Norway. We have two main member meetings, the yearly meeting, and we have a Christmas - dinner meeting. In the yearly meeting we decide together how we want to continue things. But there's Tanja Thorjussen and myself who run the organisation.

AS: You're the board?

FS: Yeah. We are in charge of the applications, in charge of the money, and we have that responsibility. And also the responsibility for the different events we do. We wish to promote performance art and want to support performance art and the artists mainly through our events. Give visibility. Then we also collaborate with PAB – Performance Art Bergen. We have this event

not exactly in the middle, but it's the highest point, the highest mountain between Oslo and Bergen, there we meet every two years for a performance camp meeting.

AS: For how many days?

FS: It's a weekend. Of course artists can come earlier. You choose if you want to sleep in a tent in the mountains or if you want to sleep in a cabin. One day is the performance day. We do performances and exchange and in the end of the day we have a dinner at this cabin. Apart from PAB, we try to collaborate with other international festivals or performance organizations.

AS: How do you do that? On what level?

FS: We have been exchanging artists. Maybe a festival curates two Polish artists for our festival and then in exchange we curate two Norwegian artists for their festival. We have done that with PALS – Performance Art Links in Sweden for example.

AS: With whom did you cooperate in Poland?

FS: With Galeria Raczej, a gallery that is specialized in performance art in Poznan. Else, we had lots of collaborations with Spain in general, with different festivals and smaller organisations, doing smaller events. That's my background, I studied in Valencia.

AS: Can you mention a few of them?

FS: This is a longer story. There are these European grants, EEA Grants and it's mostly for collaborations with Norway. You can read more here: <https://eeagrants.org/Who-we-are>. Each year they have a different partner / country. One year they had Spain and a lot of people knew that I was in Norway. So I got contacted by many individual artists, but also by people organizing small events. In the end 4 artist from Spain collaborated and they got this grant, came to Norway and we worked together, Norwegian and Spanish artists. Quite many collaborations developed from such exchanges.

AS: They came for a residency?

FS: For one week. We would work together and have a final presentation. This was very interesting. I think, we have travelled with Norwegian artists two times to Spain now. And I always try to invite some Spanish artists to the festival.

AS: Concerning formats, how is your festival taking place? Is there a speciality of your festival or what is it about?

FS: Our main event is the festival in November taking up most of our budget. For the last three years we have had a three years support from the Norwegian Arts Council, which is really nice. It

gives a continuity. This year we need to apply again for the next three years. The festival is the event that is curated and everybody gets paid. The other events are low budget events. The festival format is three days. On the first day we have artists talks with some of the artists. We want it to be a performative artist's talk. So we ask the artists to experiment with the format of the artist talk and we want it to be short, like eight minutes. This has actually worked really well. You get this sharp insight of one artist's practice. Sometimes they even don't talk so much in their artist's talks but present the materials they use. It's really nice to get this other insight of an art practice. We also collaborate with PAS – Performance Art Studies, with BBB Johannes Deimling. He has been doing these educational courses for a long time. We have organized for him these courses at the Art Academy in Oslo. They usually work for one week and then on the Friday after the artist's talk they have their final presentation. Which is nice, because they play in different ways with how to present performance art. That has been very interesting. On Saturday and Sunday are the live performances. We usually have between 10 and 12 artists. So between five and six each day. It's quite an intense program. Another thing we have been doing is a video program, parallel to the live performances. Three videos programs of performance documentation or performances made for video, and also photo slideshows made by the festival photographer. Each year we have a different photographer. We always have invited a photographer who has been documenting performance for a long time and is kind of specialized. This also allows us to see the different styles of documenting performance art. We think that documentation is an interesting topic. And the format works really well, the audience can watch the video program between performances, in the moments when we need time to clean after a performance and prepare for the next one. It takes place in a different room, close to the entrance. There we have always a soup which is free for the audience and free tea and coffee. The festival takes place in November, a really dark month in Norway. Just to have this warm soup to hold on, I think is important. It loosens the atmosphere, not like this stiff art white cube atmosphere. People get hungry. If you watch art for four hours, you need to satisfy your stomach.

AS: The blocks are about four hours each day? Just in the evening?

FS: It's a day program actually. In the evenings in Norway things go... We start at 2 o'clock, from 2 to 6pm. This is really different from Spain, where you start at 9 or 10pm. We figured out that this is a nice program. We are finished at 6pm, clean up and have a dinner all together. It doesn't get super late. The next day you stand up again for the next festival day. It's doable. We are looking for formats... I mean three days is already tiring, but it is a format where it's possible not to get a burnout. I think, I mentioned everything.

AS: The smaller formats with less money, what are they about?

FS: We have had one event during the culture night in Oslo. In other places it's called white night or museum night. This is in September and we have been doing performances in public space. We always tried to organise one event which is open for the PAO members.

AS: The members are invited to join the event and make a collaborative work?

FS: Sometimes single work or short performances or we make a tour through the city. For two or three years we made it only for the members. Then one year just to try a bit different we curated it and invited some other Oslo based artists to participate. Now actually we have decided to stop that event because there are so many things happening that evening, that it's hard to know which part of the city is already taken by another event. Also many artists already have other invitations. It's really a busy time of the year. Even we as organizers don't have time, we get invited for other things. Sometimes just at the same day is the big opening of Høststillingen which is the state exhibition of Norway, the equivalent of the Swiss Art Award and it's like this crash of so many things. Last year we made an open call for the members and actually nobody could. So we decided finished this event. This year we are trying a new event in public space in May to see how that goes. Another event we have been doing is on an island in the fjord of Oslo in summertime. We had different strategies. In the beginning it was just for members, one time we have had an open call for the south-east area of Norway, this year we curated it. It's about trying out different formats. This is really a summer event. You are on an island in the middle of the fjord, a tiny island where nobody is living. We ask the artist to do land art performances, with not much materials and for sure not leaving garbage behind and low tech. There's no electricity on the island and no drinking water. An event in nature. There are several islands, on one we perform, on the other one there is a house, where we can cook and take a shower and camp. We have tents provided by the management of the islands. This is also a collaboration. They let us use the islands and the facilities for free. The only way to get there is by a little tiny ferry. It's really an experience and we ask people to join us, to picnic and watch performances.

AS: Do you spend two nights on the island?

FS: Yes, we camp two night on the island. We have had luck with the weather so far. Last summer it was really hot, people were bathing between the performances, really nice.

AS: What terms do you currently use for your performative practice? I see both of you, PAB and PAO, talk about performance art. Do you have other terms that you would use for your practice?

FS: I used a lot the term performance art. In Spain you have arte de acción, like action art, which I've used sometimes as well. But

I do feel comfortable with the term of performance art. When I describe performances I talk about... how do you say ‹handlinger›, Handlungen? Actions? Several ‹handlinger› create a performance. I am a visual artist. I don't call myself a performance artist. I call myself a visual artist. Because everything I build up is really visual.

AS: What are the conditions for performance artists in your country? What kind of support you get?

FS: I guess this counts for all artists in Norway. You can apply for artist grants, for project supports. But in general, performance is still not very well paid.

AS: What do you try to pay?

FS: Once we said it should be around 800 €. Or even 1'000 €. Our minimal fee from the festival – it depends on the funding – is 500 € plus accommodation and flights and everything covered. Often when I get invited, I don't get 500 €.

AS: You mean in Norway?

FS: Yes, the Norwegian state exhibition pays 600 €. It's the same payment even when you do the performance twice or three times or it is a series or you are two people. It's just that. There is another juried exhibition, the East region exhibition, they asked us some years ago what they should pay. They have kept this 800 € fee until now, just as we recommended.

AS: You didn't dare saying 1'000 €?

FS: At that point we had agreed on 800 €. But the Norwegian crown has changed. A couple of years ago the 8'000 Norwegian crowns were a 1'000 €. Then the Norwegian crown fell. I think the situation for performance artist is not so good, it's not paid. There's still a lot of «Ah, can you do a performance at this exhibition opening?» «Yeah, how much do you pay me?» «Ah, I don't know. It's just for the opening.» But you have other possibilities to apply for funding. There are quite many foundations for project support and to develop your work.

AS: Within the visual arts? Or a special fund for performance art?

FS: No, it's within the visual arts. It depends on your background. Some artists working with performance art have more theatre or dance background and go to that kind of funding. There's actually more money in that kind of funding. So, why not. I myself have been applying for a travel grant in the scenic arts like dance and theatre. They have performance as a category. So there I have been starting to apply for travel funding and have received it. While with visual arts I have not received anything. You really need to find your way, what is working for you and what

is not working. But for the working grants I apply in the visual arts.

AS: What kind of strategies did you develop? So your strategy is just try out several ways and see what works...?

FS: Yes, for my own work yes. For the festival we have the funding from the Arts Council, this three years grant. But we have to have more sponsors. They never pay for the whole event. So I think it's maximum 50 percent they pay. Each year, we still need to apply two to three other funds. But we feel quite established, at least in the last four or five years, when we have received more or less the same amount from the same sponsors. I guess, we have cracked some kind of code for that kind of funding.

AS: How do artists share and develop their knowledge about performance art? Are there critiques in your country who write about it? How is the discussion going on?

FS: There is not much. Art critic in Norway in general is not very present. With the festival we try really hard to get press and it's not easy. Sometimes we get specified art press, art magazines or art bloggers who come. Sometimes two people come, sometimes just one person, last year none. Regular press like the daily papers have never come. All artists in Norway complain that the press is not present in the art world.

AS: Did you take on the task?

FS: Since 2014 we have been interviewing all the artists that participate in the festival. It is a standard questionnaire we send the artists by email. We asked them to fill it out and give back to us. It's really about their art practice and we think it's interesting, you can see them on the PAO website. You can see how so many different artists respond to the same questions about their practice. We hope to publish them in the future in the book. Since 2014 we have also been hiring a writer to write about the festival. One writer, the budget doesn't allow for more. One time we had a really good budget, there we had two writers. It has been really nice to get the festival documented by text.

AS: You also publish like PAB?

FS: No we have not done that. But we want to make a book. This year we finish the cycle of the three years funding and we have seven years of PAO festival. So we want to make a publication, we want to make a book and then kind of start a bit different. We still don't know yet, but it will be a little different. We want to do some small changes. Maybe not to have three to four events a year, but maybe have two and change which ones we have each year. We will see.

AS: Apart from inviting writers to the festival and to send out a catalogue of questions that artists respond to, did you develop other formats of joint practical or theoretical thinking?

FS: We have tried to do that through member's meetings, we had them every other month, so six times a year. This was the goal. Also to have different topics we discuss together. But this started to fade out a little bit. It was very harsh to keep organizing it all the time. So in the end we have two main meetings, as I mentioned in the beginning, and the summer event on the island, where we also gather and discuss.

AS: Within the last seven years of PAO, how would you describe the development of performance art?

FS: Performance art has become more visible in Oslo and in Norway. All the members really appreciate it to have this network and sharing with like-minded people. We have this group on Facebook where we can share information about performance or when we need help. This is a platform of exchange. I do think that PAO has given much more visibility to the artists living in Oslo and Norway, both in Norway but also internationally. The festival has become quite known internationally as well. We get quite many e-mails of people interested in the PAO festival.

AS: Do you research about other performance artists and how do you go about? Do you have archives?

FS: We do try to keep everybody's contacts, to keep kind of a list of the artists. We do a lot of research when we curate the festival. It's nice to have this list because suddenly you forget again from year to year who you have been looking at the years before.

AS: Do you research mainly in the Internet? Or do you create your own archives in Norway?

FS: No. We have all the members listed on our website. A lot of people are using it as a research tool to find Norwegian based artists. It's a way to promote their work. When I get invited as an artist to a festival, you get also introduced to new artists and this is always nice.

AS: That was it. Thank you very much.

INDEX

PEOPLE/LEUTE

- Franziska Siegrist: <http://www.franzisca-siegrist.com>
- Bartolomé Ferrando: <http://bferrando.com>
- Tanja Thorjussen: <http://www.tanjathorjussen.com>

FESTIVALS/PROJECTS/PLACES

- PAO – Performance Art Oslo: <http://www.performanceartoslo.no>
- PAB – Performance Art Bergen: <http://www.performanceartbergen.no>
- Kunstbanken Hedmark Kunstsenter: <http://kunstbanken.no/performance/>
- ROM for kunst og arkitektur, a space for art and architecture: <http://www.r-o-m.no>
- Galleri 69: <http://lufthavna.no/galleri-69/>
- PALS – Performance Art Links, Sweden: <http://www.palsfestival.se>
- Galeria Raczej, Poland: <https://galeriaraczej.wordpress.com>

OTHER KEYWORDS/ANDERE STICHWORTE

- Villa Ruffieux, Sierre, Switzerland: <https://www.chateaumercier-residence.ch>
- EEA Grants: <https://eeagrants.org/Who-we-are>