

My Protestant Origins & Catholic Fantasies

a series of photo exhibitions and performances of
COUNTER REFORMATION
by Inga Gerner Nielsen

My Protestant Origins & Catholic Fantasies emerges through a combination of longing and a sense of necessity. First of all by a deep fascination of the baroque and campy decoration of Virgin Mary; which the Catholic Church cultivated in order to attract its lost followers in the course of a COUNTER REFORMATION.

- A concept, which this performance series borrows as its working title, hinting the desire to bring objects of it to the outsider; a mystical world of sensuous poetics, bodily gestures and rituals into a seemingly secular and rationally ruled society.
- A movement, which could be channeled by the arts. More specifically by the Scandinavian interventionist immersive performance art, IGN has been part of cultivating as a performance genre and movement since co-founding the collective *Club de la Faye* in 2007 and *Fiction Pimps* in 2009. Since then she initiated the project EMBODYING SCIENCE as a way to integrate performance installation in the academic context of social science, to introduce the body and fantasy as a medium of knowledge production.

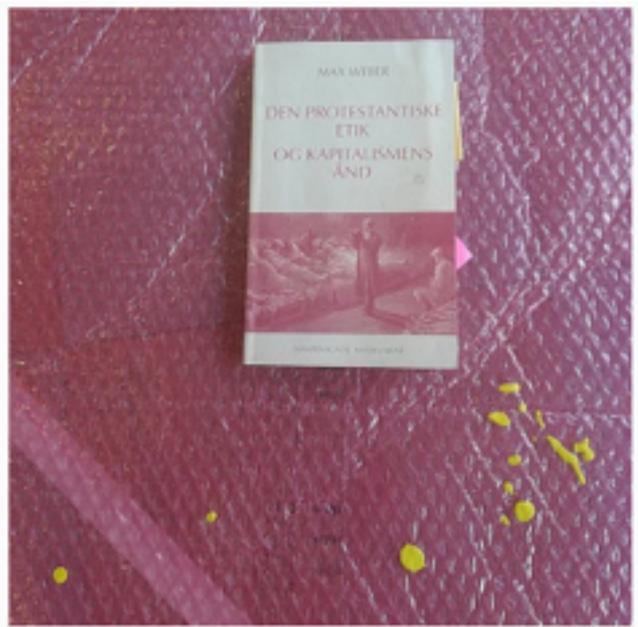


CATHOLIC HEAVEN AS OTHER



The performance's first part, *My Protestant Origins*, is influenced by contemporary performances, that are created with an outset in the so-called Critical Whiteness theory and its injunction: NOT to use fantasies of *the Other* as a means to define white* cultural identity. However, the *Catholic Fantasies*-part plays with exactly that; to use *the Other* as a magical mirror to get a sense of how everyday practice could undergo a *re-enchantment**. Moreover, the choice of Catholicism as the *Other World* is a conscious move. This exotic irrational *Other* has its cultural origins within the ever-tightening borders of Europe today.

The spring point of the artistic research is the analysis of sociologist Max Weber and his late analysis *The Protestant Ethic & The Spirit of Capitalism*. Here Weber takes us through the secularisation process and *disenchantment* of industrialised society, showing step by step how the protestant worship of God was taken out of the Church and into labour. When eventually God was lost, the protestant prayer remained as an intense dedication to work, eventually carving the way for Capitalism to take his* place.



COUNTER REFORMATION

Through the COUNTER REFORMATION performed in *My Protestant Origins & Catholic Fantasies*, interventionist performance art will be explored as a possible way to reintroduce the space of the church and the worship of the divine / body in to the everyday life. Through site-specific installations in different areas of society, the performance becomes a kind of dream mirror reflecting the religious traits and possible longings of a secular society.

DIVINE GESTURE

The image work with lovers and friends (partners / colleagues) draws from today's love for posing and making ourselves iconic on Instagram. Channeled by the desire of *My Catholic Fantasies*, this posing is set to reach a next level. The performers are thus directed to work with classic psychological gestures of Catholic mythological figures and saints. Parts of the rehearsal process is dedicated to training them in the psycho-somatic technique developed by Russian director Michael Chekov (in an attempt to teach acting students how to work with *radiation* through visualization and gesture.) A technique which in contrast to psychological acting styles brings a spiritual imaginary dimension into the space, through the image of the body.



RITUAL

I G N always works with the way an audience influences a performance. A former piece like *Seeing Pink Narcissus*, for instance, directed the audience to apply a certain adoring queering gaze on the performers body, which would enable him to live the fictional image of the beautiful boy Pink Narcissus. In the performances of the COUNTER REFORMATION the audience will also be guided into taking part in the ritual of creating a social space, which supports the imaginary other world of the performance.

PROTESTANT IDEOLOGY IN ARCHITECTURE

The changing sites of the series' performances allow for the study of how the former protestant ethics shows itself in the aesthetic of work today. Visually through working in relation to the architecture of the past and present. And in the way secular communities come together as a community through working on projects.

THE POLITICS OF PRESENCE

Through making performances and seminars in the context of contemporary art spaces, My Protestant Origins & Catholic Fantasies strives to update its own critical and theoretical apparatus. Here the focus will be the question of a possible protestant ethics inherent in the notion of *presence* through action and *authenticity* in contemporary performative discourses.

The artistic research is set to open to reflections on the idea that the obsession with presence* in much of contemporary performance is a mirror / part of the emerging culture of mindfulness; it is where God can be found today; and this obsession is part of what carves the way for neo-liberal capitalist structures to find its way to slip unnoticed into every aspect of human life?

The (silent) prayer of the series is that looking for religious, protestant and catholic, traits in different genres of performances, will make us aware of the ideology of the architecture and practice we have dedicated ourselves to.

