



Converso; the key, Dawn Kasper

by Elena Bordignon
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Dawn Kasper, the key (2016) - Performed at Converso, Milan, on October 13, 14 and 15, 2017 -

Photography by t-space studio

On October 13, 14 and 15, Converso presented the key, a durational performance by American, New York-based artist Dawn Kasper.

the key investigated the possibilities of healing rituals: healing a body, healing a soul, healing an environment. Healing, then, as the humus which receives and nurtures the seeds of the artistic gesture—the key to pass through, to go beyond the threshold in between doing and creating. Kasper's rituals challenged choreography with improvisation: movements, sounds (human voices or of musical instruments or of things—that is, noises), texts (words, sentences, speeches) and body configurations operated the search for the other, without seeking a climax.

They interconnected without spiraling into sequence, instead weaving the dullness of a pattern.

With the key, as in many of Kasper's performances, we are located before and after the artistic gesture. As the audience who surrounds the stage, we are brought to the periphery of creation, a hazy landscape in which either we wander—and so we get lost—or we stay yearning for the center. Where is art? Is it there? Is it here? Is it with her, the (alleged) artist? Is it with us? Didn't we just gather (in a church!) to partake in an artistic happening (a ceremony!)? Of course, belief is the most pervasive force at play here. And the exercise of belief is what Kasper's performance called to an arrest, a suspension—so we asked ourselves more and more questions about where the art lies.

Interview with the artist –

ATP: Can you tell us about the very first feeling you had entering the San Paolo Converso deconsecrated church?

The first feeling that I had entering the church was gratitude.
- How much does this environment influenced (or limited) you?

Dawn Kasper: The church environment influenced the work, Nadine d'Archemont shared a story with me about some of the history of the church, d'Archemont said that the front of the church was used for church services and the back was reserved for the cloistered nuns who had a convent nearby, the story of the cloistered nuns stayed with me. I could hear singing, so I proposed to Converso a meeting with a few singers to rehearse with me inside of the church. Converso church has incredible acoustics, the performance rehearsals sounded incredible.

ATP: In other occasions you 'invaded' the exhibition spot and turned it into your studio place. Did this happen even in this occasion in Milan?

DK: I held rehearsals with 7 singers inside of the Converso space after hours, the church was for a few hours each evening an active improvisational rehearsal space.

ATP: Improvisation is a fundamental part in your practice. How can you manage the unexpected? What leads you in your "actions"?

DK: Improvisation is a huge part of my process. I prefer to remain present in my actions and through research, experimentation and study I have come to discover and firmly believe, that through utilizing forms of improvisation one can not fail. I believe that there's actually no such thing as failure. Failure is simply a learned behavior, we are conditioned to believe failure exists. Improvisation as experimentation has become a huge part of my practice. Improvisation eliminates fear.

ATP: Speaking about the performance the key. Its theme it's about the healing rituals potential. Can you explain better what does exactly fascinated you about these rituals? Healing from what...?

DK: The performance action and improvisational score itself was not about realizing or justifying ritual as a theme, I reference ritual in my performance work as a form of repetition or practice. The Key was a performance about choice, practicing the choice to heal, heal from the self, heal the ego and finding answers from within ourselves. The goal in creating The Key was to fill the Converso church with sounds, tones, and music. I was able to create the first improvised movement by working with the singers inside of the church to establish and put into practice a series of movements and sounds, using repetition over a period of time The Key was about creating healing sounds through repetitious movement. The improvisational score that was created while working with the singers was a way to mark the passing of time while experimenting with the potentials of using sound inside of the church. I was collecting data through experimentation with the singers on how utilizing forms of improvised sound, once put into practice, can heal.



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