

TEXT FROM *The Ballad of PAVES* DVD

by Helen Kaplinsky, July 2010

# PAVES

Poshya Kakl, Anne Bean, Vlasta Delimar, Efi Ben-David, Sinead O'Donnell

PAVES was a year-long collaboration between five female artists from Croatia, Israel, Kurdistan-Iraq, Northern Ireland and the UK/Zambia supported by the British Council Creative Collaboration programme. The project began in London in March 2009 and culminated in a performance commissioned for the National Review of Live Art, Glasgow in March 2010.

PAVES have been working as a multilateral collective since 2009, undertaking performances which bear witness to the political antagonism of their local ecologies. Performing across these various territories and situations, their activity has sought to transcend the formal political boundaries which divide them. Obstacles encountered upon the actualisation of their collaboration exemplify the agency of borders and together they have developed strategies to breach these perimeters.

The format of the film does well to communicate the relational and dialogical operation of the collective. The montage of material from a year of activity indicates thinking one idea through another as audio, video and still image are layered and inserted in a crowded milieu. The performances shown here are subjective responses to one another's situation. Their performances are comparable to the refrain of bird song, used for communicating over long distances, infiltrating dense and complex environments. The subjects mimic one another, each response is an elaboration upon the sequence of the former and in this way the song continues ad infinitum.

On the occasion of the publication of this DVD, it is just over a year since the group began in residence at Toynbee Studios, London. Over recent years Anne Bean has worked on a number of international projects which have united her with the members of PAVES. The opening footage on the DVD is of *MASS* (2008), a memorial to those lost in the recent Kurdish genocide. Anne undertook this performance with local residents of Erbil, Kurdistan-Iraq and whilst in the region witnessed an arresting performance *Mosque and Harmonica* by then art student Poshya Kakl. Later that year Anne produced *Undress* (2008) for a performance art festival in Stagninec, Croatia run by Vlasta Delimar. In this way the linking of performance artists who have in common a mediation of their particular location, emerged organically from Anne's network. The original concept for the collaboration was for the artists to visit one another's countries, and produce work in physical proximity to one another. Although the successive phases of the project took place throughout 2009 in Croatia (June) Northern Ireland (September), Israel and Jordan (December), Poshya was unable to participate in person because of visa issues.

Poshya's absence became symbolic of the women's encounter with political antagonism. It became necessary to find strategies to make Poshya *present* across political territories in order to overcome her reclusion. This was achieved through the actions of the other members of the collective. Efi often scribes fragments from Poshya's emails on her body; '*HER FACE WAS RAINING*' prompting the action of dousing water on her body and inspiring a series of actions by all the women employing water as a flowing and mobile material. Anne made a series of works in response to Poshya's words '*MY EYES STRETCH OUT TOWARDS YOU*' in which she drew three dimensional vanishing points across landscapes and gallery interiors. Sinead printed masks bearing Poshya's face and disseminated them in public areas, discussing the issues at stake as she went. For the phase of the project in Cavan, when Poshya was again unable to be physically present, Sinead organised for Poshya's email to be displayed in a shop window. These actions amount to a public and private physical embodiment of Poshya, enabling her visibility and freedom to roam outside the administrative borders of her homeland.

The adversity of their being together also instigated a shift in the established mode of performance and documentation; the failure to share a physical geography enforcing the production of a time-based place for convergence. *Crossing Borders* was the first in a series of works which saw the collective overcome physical obstacles through the production of a *space-time*. For five hours on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2009, they undertook simultaneous performances, each from their home country. The artists have continued to work in this way since and utilise new media such as email, Skype, digital photography, and video to communicate actions to one another. These technological tools are conversely both indicators of distance and connectedness. The physical remoteness from one another is collapsed in their strategy to gain proximity in the sharing of time. The immediacy of their communication produces a time-based locality for the group; a space of self-disclosure.

PAVES exists as an ongoing process of negotiation and reconciliation of freedoms. Several collaborative performances acknowledge the primacy of co-dependence in collaborative practice. *THIRSTY* (2009) sees Poshya and Anne having their hair plaited together. Mutual reliance is reflected in the physical weight of bodies leaning upon one another, pulling one another this way and that. This performance is repeated between Efi and Anne, with the footage of the previous manifestation projected behind. The motif of mimicry and repetition here multiplies the empathy and embodiment of one another. Co-dependence is also delineated in a performance in Staglinec, where Anne draws Efi towards a well by way of a wheel connected to a string in her mouth.

The work of PAVES articulates the continuing consequences of national borders. It is often said that the world is getting smaller, that we live as one multilateral community, however these individuals have strived to be *with* one another despite great adversity, leading them to focus upon the transcendental medium of time when most else fails. Prioritising the private physical experience, each artist employs their body as a locality for empathy and estrangement from place.