

Today we launch our new series lockdown elevenesses. In this we'll be catching up with a brilliant artists in our upcoming programme and asking them a bunch of questions to find out how they're making work, keeping their heads during these weird woody times why isolation and so you can find out a bit more about them.

So prepare yourself some elevenesses sit back and enjoy.

Hello, and welcome to lockdown elevenesses. I'm your host John Harris and in today's episode, I'm delighted to be joined by Fani Parali, an artist born in Greece now living in London. She works across sound, performance sculpture, large scale painting, installation and moving image to explore the formulation of identity beyond the body's presence.

Fani creates situations where different medium components are choreographed together often through directing collaborating performance. She employs use of self recorded audio that is communicated through lip synching. Fani studied BA sculpture at Campbell College of Arts and completed her postgraduate studies at the Royal Academy Schools. She was the recipient of the Studiometer prize by Outset and Tiffany and Co in 2017 and it's currently supported by an Arts Council National Lottery project grant.

Her recent solo and group exhibitions include 'The Terrace of Lungs' at Zabłudowicz collection, London, 'Hypermesh' at assembly point in London and 'Chumming' at the Pipe Factory that was part of 2018's Glasgow International.

You may have also seen a work previously at Southwark Park Galleries in DOG SHOW last year and part of Dark Water // Dead of Night programme by Tai Shani and Anne Duffua in 2017.

John: It's lovely to welcome you Fani, how you doing today?

Fani: Hi there, hello.

John: Lockdown has brought out (both laugh). Let me start again.

Fani: It's okay to worry.

John: Lockdown has brought out creativity in many people, as a form of therapy perhaps, but we all have very different situations and constraints we are dealing with. Have you been able to continue making during lockdown? If so, how are you finding it? And what are you working on currently?

Fani: Yeah, so, I find it quite hard actually to concentrate at times and it's been hard blocking the shadow of this whole situation out. But it feels, it feels like it's wrong to block it out as well and at the same time, I don't want to be pessimistic. I'm deeply optimistic person really. So finding a balance between this cruel reality and holding on to a hope that this will pass before the loss can grow bigger and bigger.

I think I've been spending lots of time trying to exist in that balance. It's easy to feel guilty, if you're not being productive all the time, I think, but we should allow ourselves to just be, you know, be confused about this and be unsure. But nonetheless, I have tried some times to keep going. So when I found some peace of mind, I'd be making some work.

I'm working on some sculptures and paintings for the show that's coming up hopefully when all this is over at Southwark Park Galleries. The unexpected time has given me an opportunity for some experiments which is exciting because I have the opportunity to try some new things and allow space and time for mistakes, which can be very useful.

What else? I'm also working on some watercolours in a very small scale, which I don't do often and I've tried to do some reading like to help with ideas.

Yeah, I think that's about it.

John: You said, you're experimenting?

Fani: Yes

John: So you can you tell us what experiments you're doing?

Fani: Yeah. Um, well, when I say experiment, it's more like trying some things in the studio or at home, that you're not entirely sure how the process is going to go. And especially with sculpture, like with moulds for example, there's many unknowns and now that there's more time. I kind of have the opportunity to try some things that are maybe a bit more complicated or things that I haven't done before. Like a kind of a multiple part mould, for example and there's a high probability that along the line is not going to go well. So it's good now I can try again and again.

Fani & John: (Both laugh)

Fani: Yeah, this one example with the painting because with the show at Southwark Park Galleries, I'll be showing some paintings kind of on this scale for the first time. So although I've been painting for years, it's not something I've been tested on in like exhibitions. So there's a lot of experimentation and that I think, it's it's exciting because I'm going to be showing some new things.

John: Who is the person in your life who has had the most influence on you as an artist?

Fani: Um, well, thinking about this question. I'd have to say, more than one person, although I'm going to talk about my family a bit because they they have had the most influence on me, I think, as a person and as an artist, for various reasons and in many ways.

First of all, I was very lucky to arrive in my family as the second child and my older sister, Georgia, was really lovely to me from day one. She took me straight away in a very creative world. It was a world that we kept building for ourselves and we would make so many things together with her guidance and very rich imagination. We drew, we made life size paper characters like we recorded our own stories, we made our own board games. We took photographs of our favourite toys and acting stories. We made those into books like endless things. And when my youngest sister Angie came along, this kind of enhanced the whole dynamic I think, as we wanted to involve her or communicate to her as a bit, a bit older sisters, what we all kind of we had been up to.

Both our parents were artists, so luckily they were they were like always very gently encouraging and allowing us breathing space to, to create and to kind of have ideas and to trust those ideas, I guess. And tragically and unexpectedly, we lost my dad quite early on. Since then we've all had to find our own feet in this kind of new formation that his huge loss left. But despite all the difficulties and and the grief and we've been very, very close, and we've had very strong bonds between us with so much love and support. Our mum Tina has been incredibly brave and endlessly generous in all this and personally, I know that I wouldn't have been making the work that I'm making if it wasn't for her and my sisters and my dad.

Talking about my mum a bit furthermore, my closeness to my mum is stronger now than ever. We talk about work a lot and we talked about how to make work, what it is to be making, and she understands me a lot. She kind of constantly feeds me with ideas and stimulation and encouragement and I hope I give something back. She's working with sculpture herself back in Greece and she's pushing her own boundaries within her work. I thought I would like to read you a few bits of an email conversation we had back in December.

John: Yes please that would be lovely.

Fani: Just a few little bits here and there to show you how close we are as artists mainly which is quite moving. Just a few bits. So this is from her so she's saying; black polythene on the table, clay and plaster ready, a couple of small plastic containers for plaster, a rounded knife, plaster bandage, scissors, I felt no sense of fear. I felt total trust in myself and what I'm trying to do.

So that's her talking about kind of setting on to make new work.

John: All this sort of language that kind of making new work and the way kind of you send emails to your mum is quite similar, quite kind of poetic, a lot of the time?

Fani: Yes, I think so, because we're so close because we understand each other so much. It's an opportunity to talk the same language, if that makes sense.

John: Yeah.

Fani: We were moved by the same things and you know, we question the same things, or similar or some of the same things, so it's really rewarding. I'm just gonna read you one more she's ending a conversation;

or my love, I was thinking that you will work words and sound in this way, you will get way beyond meaning or content and a magic and an energy of vibration, a resonance starts to be made, like pouring the leveller, like welding metal. It's making it in a state where you can see and hear somehow more.

John: So kind of following on from that. Can you tell us about artwork or an exhibition that you've recently seen recently sort of before lockdown that's had a significant effect on you?

Fani: Yes, I was trying to think obviously, it's been a while since I've seen new things but just before all this has happened kind of late February. There's one work that I am happy like to talk about this stood out from the artist Dominic Watson and it was a work called Touchmatic.

There's quite a bizarre experience it involved like booking a slot, waiting outside of a pub, getting into it to a Toyota Prius car, like kind of like a taxi with a few other people, then going off on an unknown ride through South London, where kind of the work was unfolding through sound mainly.

So, it's playing through the car speakers and kind of seeping into everything and making quite a strange unique experience, because every element on the streets and every person while you were in the car, listening to his soundtrack, were kind of becoming mysterious, maybe significant. You didn't know kind of what was reality what wasn't. And then in the end, you were dropped off at a pub, in Elephant and Castle where Dom himself was there and like some other people from the previous slots.

I'm not sure what the effect was. But it was quite a different experience. I've never seen something like that. And it was like weirdly private and also weirdly collective.

I don't want to say too much because he might do it again. So yeah,

John: Yeah yeah of course.

Fani: I don't want to spoil the surprise, but it was during the ride that was also a stop like behind an estate and the driver like open to the trunk of the car revealed some kind of dark, dark secrets.

John: That's interesting, this kind of straddling, like the collective experience and also the personal in the sense that there's only a finite amount of people that can travel in the car and experience it exactly how you've experienced it.

Fani: Yes.

John: Yet, when everyone meets up at the end, you've experienced a very similar thing, but everyone might have a different take on it.

Fani: Yes

John: I guess in some sort of ways, that sort of experiential thing important to you?

Fani: Oh, well I think so. It's you know, it's not I don't come to judge or measure not what's value with that beforehand, but if it gives me if while I'm if I'm seeing something or experiencing something. You know, it gives me that little bit of, I don't know, gives me you know, actually wakes me up in some way. Then. looking back I can see that I think they're good. Okay. That was you know, that was something that did something to me.

This was quite particularly like strange because yeah, you sat in the car, but like everything was kind of happening and unfolding, but in a constant move and a constant mystery, I guess. Yeah, kept you on your toes in a strange way.

John: So you sort of, you've mentioned before kind of your experimentation but has sort of locked down enabled you to do anything that you've been meaning to do for a long time, not just within your work, but just in general?

Fani: Yes, I mean, I've got a huge list of house things to do i'm trying to tick off a few of those. I mean, some are like quite tedious and not very exciting to talk about, but like some other things, like going through stuff and you know, sorting things out sometimes really helps.

One, of my most exciting moment was My Granddad, My Grandad had passed away like more than 10 years ago and I had taken his old typewriter and it's been living in a bag for all this time now. So I was like, okay, this is time to take it out. And I took it out of the bag package and I gave it a good clean then, you know, I really thought it wasn't gonna work but it's working perfectly

(Laughs)

it's a very sophisticated old typewriter and that was that was quite nice was like really moving. kind of thinking of him and feeling excited that I'm going to use use this typewriter.

John: Yeah, I guess it's that sort of thing where if we're organising stuff, it's stuff locked away that we've just put into a drawer and then rediscovering.

Fani: Yes, again, sometimes it's after literally years. I mean, I knew that it was there and I wanted to like open it, but it just felt quite important to, I guess, to find a little bit of peace and time now to give that. So it's things like that I guess. It's an opportunity now, but as I said before, I also kind of feel numb, but not all the time and not necessarily ready to do all the things that I want to do.

John: Going on that sort of like numbness and sort of strange time. Do you sort of think this surreal period will affect how you live or work in the future once we've returned to the kind of 'normality' in a sense?

Fani: Yeah, like I hope that I and everyone really can, we can direct our energy, I guess more into what's important and less, less of unnecessary noise. That can so easily take hold valuable time in our lives. I know it sounds like a cliché but being grateful for things that we take for granted, our precious time with loved ones, you know. All these things are things to think about more, I think severity and trauma of such a global and collective again, pain and worry, I think can only be dealt if we, if we can help something else. On the other side of it, that some things will get better after this. Or that we will kind of somehow learn through going from going through this.

I was thinking we can be more humble about what we think we know. But on the other hand, we can also be more trustful about the things that we do know or things that I'd like you've been fighting to understand on a deeper level and you yeah I was thinking that normality is underrated and overrated as well, in a way. No, when we're shaking out of comfort, we're forced to think new ways and in the best of cases that that new ways of thinking might be fruitful or inventive or generous. And I strongly believe in meeting each other, in a deeper sense of getting close to other beings, I mean, and I strongly believe in the support we can give each other. So I just hope that when this normality, we're talking about returns, we can enjoy these things and lean on and trust that these meetings and support systems are there or create them where they don't exist, or where they're faded. No, make them stronger.

John: Yeah, I definitely think in that sort of way, the kind of new ways of thinking, new ways of... is definitely a huge, huge thing, In kind of just just thinking, about things in general.

On the back of that sort of as we kind of eagerly anticipate your show coming up once we're able to reopen. maybe it'd be a good time to kind of describe what your vision for the exhibition is and what kind of experience can we look forward to?

Fani: Well, I'm very, very excited about the show coming up. It's called 'Aonyx and Drepan and The Minders of the Warm' and it's over both the two galleries. Aonyx and Drepan is going to take place in Dilston. Aonyx and Drepan are the two two new creatures like characters that I've created.

The Minders of the Warm is kind of a collective title for the exhibition that's going to be in the Lake Gallery which is going to be lots of things is going to be moving image paintings, sculptures. It's going to be kind of a whole world and all of it together Aonyx and Drepan also are included in The Minders of the Warm and I think the title The Minders of the Warm because I think deep down as I said, I'm really optimistic person and most of the times the characters I create are kind of like angels or guardians and they have, they come in good spirit. So by saying The Minders of the Warm I'm like trying to create this world of a collection of these creatures that are looking after each other and looking after us, I guess in a way.

So now the exciting part is the performances that are going to happen in Dilston. I mean, Dilston is one of my favourite spaces in London and it's a dream come true really to make work in there. Aonyx and Drepan our two beings that are gonna exist in there, where do I start? (laughs) I don't want to give too much away. I guess generally in my work, and this is hopefully one manifestation of it where it's everything's going to be amplified and you know, honed in and failed kind of to the maximum is the power of the live and the fact that as an audience, you're right there close to these creatures. And sound is hugely important to me. And I think the scale and the nature of this space can kind of help the audience transcend onto onto, onto a kind of special place.

In more detail the names like Aonyx and Drepan, I've made these names up for them. So I'm quite excited. They came up in relation to the idea of claws, like animal claws, to both the names have like a bit a bit of a word game with that, in their forms and in their words they're going to be singing I use quite a lot of elements of certain animals. I've been researching, again, things to do with claws. And that's to do a guess with limbs, and is to do with supporting yourself or it's to do with how you exist in relation to other creatures.

What I was gonna say? I was gonna mention some of the animals so the harpy eagle which is one of the biggest eagles that exists beautiful creature and has the biggest claws and it has a face that is shaped in such a way that it's kind of its own personal speaker. Short clawed otters and wild dogs, both because of their lack of claws. So I'm kind of looking into lots of details of different types of animals. Mainly, I think to get close to like their essence and the essence of wildness, if that makes sense.

I'm also, yeah, I'm in that space. So, the performers are kind of mediating these two creatures. And they will be, each of them will be in a metal structure and building and building these metal structures that are extensions part of their bodies. Yeah, I guess the aim is to experience these creatures on their sounds and their words and their presence in a very particular way that is of this space of Dilston. I'm trying to use the scale and place them in relation to the audience and the building in, in a very particular way,

John: Because I've seen lots of your other performance work, so I'm really, really exciting by the new performance at Dilston but also, I think, what's exciting about the show is kind of the opportunity for audiences to see sort of breadth of your practice. Like you were kind of mentioning a few paintings and which maybe people haven't seen before.

Fani: Yeah, so in the other gallery in the Lake Gallery, I'm also very excited about that, I guess in a way more scared about it because it's, it's more new to me to be showing work that is not live, you know, but I'm very excited to place things against and with each other in there. Obviously, I kind of like there to be a continuation and a contrast between the two spaces. And I'm going to be using natural light in Dilston. So that's kind of the brighter space and at the Lake Gallery is going to be more subdued kind of darker atmosphere.

I guess the challenge is yes to how do I make a world that is that makes sense out of the paintings and the moving image and the sound and the sculptures. And I guess in a way, I have to make that space be alive.

John: Before we go, have you got a sort of a lockdown playlist?

Fani: Yes, I wanted to recommend my sisters, my sister Angie, who lives in Athens. Among other things she does. She's also excellent DJ. I wanted to share her playlist one of her playlists she compiled because I've been listening to it. She's called it 'Quiet Places'. It's really nice to listen at home (laughs) and yeah, it's called quite places and it's on Mixcloud it's kind of exotica soundtrack, library music, it's really atmospheric and quite beautiful.

John: Of course, we'll provide the link. So anyone can go and listen to that. Well, thank you so much, Fani for taking this time today.

Fani: Thank you.

John: And we really look forward to seeing you soon

Fani: Thank you me, I hope what I said makes some sense

John: Honestly, absolutely amazing!