

ANNABEL DAOU, ARTIST

A Worry Keeper: An Interaction with Annabel Daou and Her Collected Worries.

Interaction is an act of communication between two objects. These two objects don't necessarily have to be organic, and the act of communication does not have to be limited to language or words. If we take chemical reaction as an example, the interaction is an action that consumes time and energy. If we apply this to human beings, the added element will be "emotion". We build up ourselves through interacting with others. The aim is to exchange pieces of information, which can include emotion. This is also the aim of the Breakthrough + "Re-" platform, it works as a mediator to create linkages, interact with artists' messages, etc.

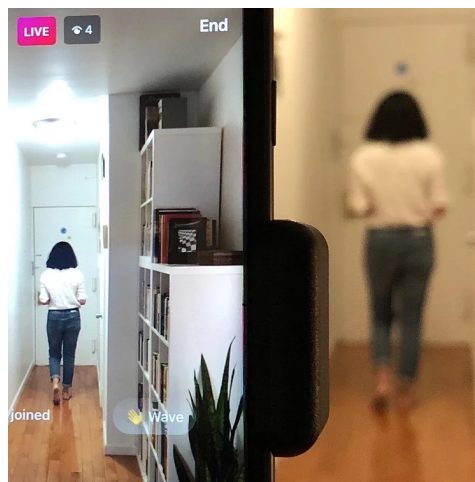
For the last interview of our Re-Interpret platform, we invited Beirut artist Annabel Daou to be our guest and share her experience of using art as a means to reconnect with the public. Living in New York City, her works focus on power and intimacy and are structured around language, speech and non-verbal modes of communication. Born in Beirut, Annabel Daou has witnessed the Lebanon Civil War. She has seen the unthinkable. She is used to interacting with emotions that we dare not touch.

About the project: *I will worry for you (from dusk till dawn)*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Annabel Daou invited people to share their worries with her. We began our interview by asking the details and origins of this project. She replied:

"The project is titled *I will worry for you (from dusk till dawn)*. In spring of 2020, I invited people to send me a worry they had and to select a specific time between 6 pm and 6 am when I would worry for them. On the evening of the performance, I read each person's worry silently (the entire performance was silent) until I felt that I focused on it. Then I paced the hallway of my apartment with that worry on my mind over the period they had each selected. I had created 12 sets of worry beads, one for each hour, and I moved through the worry beads sets as I moved through the worries. The performance was continuous with no more than a minute or two breaks every once in a while over the 12 hours and as live-streamed on Instagram so people could watch me walk for them."

In the performance *I will worry for you (from dusk till dawn)*, the worry beads were linked to Daou's childhood memories. In the Lebanese Civil War, men paced back and forth carrying worry beads in their hands. After the performance, Annabel Daou made a little drawing of each set of beads and marked the time she walked for each participant. She sent them each a scan of their specific drawing. "While it (the little pictures) remains with me, it belongs to them," pointed out Daou.



I will worry for you (from dusk till dawn), 2020. © Annabel Daou, Galerie Tanja Wagner and signs and symbols

How *The Lobby Lead the Way*

Daou shared the progression of her project with us. In the past couple of years, she and her friend have been running a project called *the lobby*. She lives in an old building in Brooklyn that has a strange and beautiful entrance hall. Every few months, she would invite artists to do a project there for a few hours and then come up to her apartment for drinks and food. Under a principle that the lobby could not be treated as a gallery, artists would express all their creativity in their interaction with the lobby. "The lobby is a place on the way home or on the way to the street, where people come and go, meet or don't meet, where things are left and passed by," interprets Daou.

The pandemic is an accidental occasion that reshaped Daou's planning after her experience in The Lobby project. "The community we were building was great and supportive of each other. I had been thinking about how we connected with the others under this context. I decided I would do a project myself, a live performance where people would take on another person's burden and then pass one of their own troubles onto the following person in a relay. I was just beginning to organise the project in the first days of March for it to take place a few weeks later. The remarkable moment was when the whole world went into lockdown in March and all of a sudden, the idea of having people pace the lobby became impossible, and at the same time the relevance of connecting to and caring for each other took on a new meaning."

"I decided that I would take the worries on myself and that I would open the project to anyone who wanted to participate and send me "a worry". I chose the period from dusk till dawn because that is often when our burdens feel the heaviest and we feel most alone. I sent emails to friends and acquaintances and publicised it through Galerie Tanja Wagner in Berlin and signs and symbols in New York. The result was that many of the participants were strangers to me and were living in countries across the world. Eventually it also became clear that it was not possible to do it in the lobby as it is a public space so I decided to pace my own hallway."



An image of The Lobby project © All right reserved to the photo owner



An image taken from MATTHEW WHITENACK's project HELLO... WE'RE HERE © All right reserved to the photo owner

Becoming A Worries Collector

Annabel Daou received all kinds of worries in her project. Influenced by the widespread disease and frustrating lockdown progress, many participants shared their concerns that were arising under this context. "The shock of what was happening came over everyone and the strangeness and difficulty of the situation brought up worries that no one had ever had before," the artist mentions. But there were also worries related with more personal, intimate problems. For example, Annabel Daou remarks "there were people who shared older, more personal and often painful worries that had kept them awake for many nights." How does it feel to bear a stranger's worry? Annabel Daou replied: "It was quite moving to read what people sent me. I did not engage anyone too much personally, but rather kept a certain formality and space for them to express their concerns without any reaction from me. When I did the performance I read each person's worry a number of times and then I would focus on it in different ways, like I was just listening to them and being present with them and often just letting their worry play in my mind so it could perhaps not play in theirs for a moment."



I will worry for you (from dusk till dawn), 2020.
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The Responsibility

It is a tricky, difficult job to handle negative emotions. When you interact with these negative energies, they could become a harmful weapon to injure you. A balance between being sensitive and keeping a distance is challenging. How did Annabel Daou position herself in between all these negative emotions? "When I conceived of the project I wasn't sure how it would feel to actually do it and whether it would be too difficult emotionally. But actually the trust and kindness people expressed to me, the sense of breaking through the isolation and all being part of something together (there were so many participants and viewers of the livestream that it felt like everyone was connected somehow) made

it feel quite moving and intense, but not painful. The beads moving in my hands and the rhythm of the pacing also created a certain structure that allowed for me to feel close to each worry but not crushed by it." Taking good care of yourself is the first step to taking care of others.

A Story to be Continued...

After the first round of the livestream performance, Annabel Daou arranged a new iteration of the performance, I will worry for you (from today until tomorrow) on April 18th. A few months after, when we conducted this interview, Annabel Daou shared with us her new plan. "I'm beginning to work on a new participatory performance, but it's still in the early stages of conception. I think it will have something to do with asking people (strangers and acquaintances) to confess something or perhaps to try to find the words to say something they may not have said out loud before. Like the worry project, my aim is to create small connections between people, even for a short time."

After our team invited Annabel Daou to participate in Breakthrough + "Re-", the disastrous Beirut explosion happened on August 4th. We immediately contacted Annabel Daou to check up on her. In her email, she wrote "I answered these questions before the recent catastrophic events in Beirut and it is heartbreaking to think of how many years of sleepless nights filled with worry that city has suffered. The war began in my childhood, and as I mentioned earlier, this project has its roots in those experiences. Like so many others, I feel the urgency of offering care to the people of Beirut who are experiencing, so profoundly, the results of the carelessness, corruption and inhumanity of governments and ruling classes." We treasure the interaction we had with Annabel Daou, an artist who deserves all our appreciation and respect.

This interview was conducted in English by Yannie Hung.