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## Soft Frictions

**Mourners, a milk bath and various Virgin Mary figures opened the Performance Art Festival “Friction”. The curator herself, SU-EN, was, as previously, in the centre of the suggestive drama, Sebastian Johans writes.**

One voice of lamentation, two voices of lamentation, three and even more. Around one hundred visitors are met first by a line of chanting mourners entering Uppsala Cathedral and this constitutes the opening ceremony of the Third International Performance Art Festival “Friction”.

The sound from the black-clothed mourners placed irregularly around the Cathedral pews spreads like a chanting audio collage around the room and with varying intensity it follows the visitors moving about in the great Cathedral hall.

In the centre of the Cathedral, dancer and Festival General SU-EN stands in a vessel filled with milk. She is dressed like a bride, completely covered in white greasepaint and from her hands white drops slowly drip down into the vessel. At her feet two assistants offer milk to those visitors who dare to taste. SU-EN's Virgin Mary figure is of course the life-giver, the one who offers her body and gives.

A little further ahead, by the High Altar, and in contrast, Indian Rakini Devi sits in a Pietà pose. She is dressed in black and portrays through make-up and costuming more a goddess of revenge than the fragile mourner that we usually meet in the motif of the Virgin Mary with her dead son's body just taken down from the cross.

SU-EN and Rakini Devi's Virgin Mary figures are both frozen and in a paradoxical way this gives life to the performance's third Virgin Mary: Anders Widoff's wax sculpture, permanently placed in the Cathedral's chancel. The overall impression is slowly bewitching, breaking down the experience into smaller units so that in the end only a core remains leaving the visitor entirely responsible for his/her own impressions.

“Friction” is a festival that follows SU-EN's personal interest and circle of acquaintances, and consequently most of what is offered has a touch of eastern contemplative tradition, rather than explosive happenings and other things we might expect from the performance scene in general. One might rightfully question why a curator puts herself in the centre of her presentation, but as an arena for the art definition that SU-EN represents, and perhaps also as a kind of illustration of how one should view the Butoh that is her main artistic enterprise, “Friction” is hard to beat.

The focus upon the Virgin Mary is of course about motherhood and in one way it re-interprets Christianity in almost a medieval direction (when the Virgin Mary cult was blooming), and in another way it moves on to a broader discussion of how the role of women in history has been written. One could perhaps say that the performance gives a distinctive image with references to biology, but that is fortunately not a necessary conclusion.

In spite of a slightly surprisingly lack of friction, the opening of the Performance Festival created a distinct awareness of here and now.

Sebastian Johans