

Csilla Toldy : Ec(h)o

In 2021, during the lockdown, I created a 12' long film poem, Axis Mundi. In "Axis Mundi" I "travelled" around the Earth through the time zones, giving a voice to indigenous people, and using languages as a guide to reflect on diversity and environmental issues. This was a 360-degree journey on the surface of the earth represented by different languages, and translations of the same poem about the Earth.

My head is the earth,  
my skin the air  
dusk is my hair.

I am the earth -  
I open myself  
and make love  
with the sky.

On my horizon  
we touch  
and eternity cascades  
on me  
with the night/light.

"My Head is the Earth" is a personification of the earth, duality arising from the light source, night and day. I wrote it originally in Hungarian when I was twenty and found it by chance in a publication on the internet. I translated the poem into English and sent it to nineteen translators asking them to translate it as well as record themselves reciting the poem in their language. Reflecting on duality, I changed the last line depending on the gender of the translator. A male had to say: light, a female had to say: night.

From the unit of my home, I reached out into the world.

I found my translators through friends and colleagues - the sound came from all over the world: New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, China, etc. I had: apart from English and the major European languages of Spanish, German, French, Portuguese and Italian, I had Maori, Algonquin, Irish, Danish, Japanese, Mandarine, Russian, Arabic, Farsi, Zulu, Polish, Hungarian and Hiligaynon. It was completely up to the translators how to translate the poem, I had no control.

Some translators asked questions -

Some translators sent me 5-6 versions of the recital

Some only one - I had to ask for a repeat if they were not good enough quality, or too fast, for instance.

I made the film entirely during lockdown. I collected the footage for probably over a year.

The Axis Mundi- the pivot of the footage and - my world - was a meadow in Rostrevor, County Down, where I live. During lockdown nature and the said field gave me immense solace during the long months of isolation. Connection with the planet, the birds, and the peace of the meadow helped me to preserve my peace of mind.

Apart from the collected footage, which served as cutaways -

On this field, on an exact point, we set up a video camera on Spring Equinox Day in 2021, and turned the camera 360 degrees every hour of the day from sunrise to sunset. On the Northern Hemisphere, day and night is supposed to be the same length on this day. There were 12 rotations.

I am fascinated by the round shape, the 360-degree circle and have used it in many of my films as a visual metaphor,



The repeated shots during the hours of the day, the change of light and humidity in the air, gave completely different textures to the shots, yet we were on the same meadow, on the same day, in the same spot, on the same planet.

Gazing at this footage, and listening to the sound of the different languages immerses the viewer in a sense of meditation.

**Ec(h)o** is an installation, supported by the National Lottery and Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and it is a work in progress

Although I would argue that the 16-minute long film, screened in a loop, would be immersive in itself, the presentation, or installation is planned as a multi-sensory experience, combining eco-video poetry; digital art and clay, the most ancient material for human expression.

I want to engage as many senses as possible, sight, sound, spacial awareness, movement and touch. The installation will challenge the spatial awareness of the viewers, too, as they turn 360 degrees in the middle of the room and become part of the artwork. Interactivity is key.

The footage will be made up of four video poems, each representing an element – air, water, earth, fire, with animated text on screen, screened in a cube, in a black box, or an igloo, with a clay sphere in the middle.

The clay sphere will have writing in braille. The voice-over will be echoed, of course. The poem is a haiku:

victorious breath  
trees grow from the ashes  
of human - sacrifice

Apart from this multi-sensory presentation, I would like to argue that the 16' video poem will be “immersive” in itself, even if screened without the other multi-sensory elements.

You can create the same meditative state with footage and sound on the screen. In a recent film, I created the following montage:

I would argue that this, by the nature of our eyes and gazing, is immersive, too.

