# Oa4s on how collaboration can make you braver

February 22, 2017 - Oa4s (On all fours) is the working-group of Temra Pavlovic and Michael Ray-Von, active since 2013. They are based in Amsterdam and Mexico City. They diagram poetics and narrativize intersubjectivity.

As told to Brandon Stosuy, 2385 words.

Tags: Art, Collaboration, Independence, Process.

**How did you guys come up with the name On all fours and how did you decide to stylize it the way it's written?**

The name comes from a poem, whose content I don't remember entirely, that Temra had written. When we were in the midst of coming up with a name, she had introduced the idea of the poem to us. We were originally three people—one of us moved on to other work, recently in the past year.

The title of the poem, as I recall was, "On all fours." Then just for the sake of ease of use, we made an acronym. This idea of a broken acronym has come up repeatedly in our practice at different moments. This was the first one that we'd ever written, which was Oa4s, standing for On all fours, where it's not a proper acronym. A proper acronym would be OAF, I guess. It's a derivation of a proper acronym.

Capitalizing the first character was just to make it more of an individual. Early on, I think we put more emphasis on presenting ourselves as a singular identity without an identity.

That focus has slipped away in recent times. Early on we were really careful not to use a particular pronoun that didn't feel right or refer to ourselves as a collective. That's always been something that was really important. Initially we referred to ourselves as a poetry group and later on that sort of fell out of favor between us for various reasons.

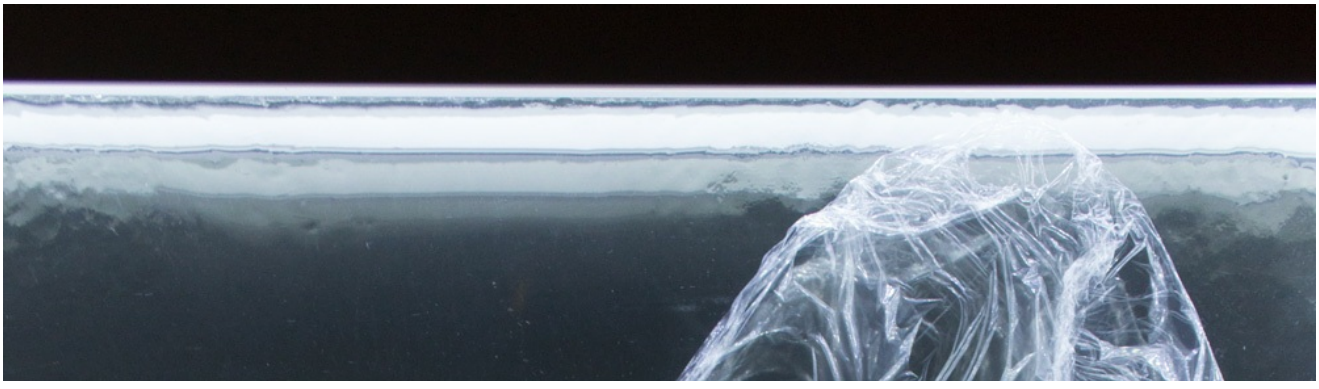
**Right, for a while you were a poetry group, then you were called a working group. What was that shift?**

That came later on. Part of it was that we were working in Los Angeles for a while and there was a bit of a poetry boom in the scene there. I think we realized, not that we didn't want to be a part of that, just that we wanted to distinguish what we were doing from that. We didn't want to be a group of people writing poetry but more so a group of people interested in the poetics of the empirical. I think we just wanted to put more focus on our process than the poetry of our process, so we flipped that. Also, just as a means of misdirection.

**On your website where you have links to all your works: the text is generally first with the images after. I was wondering how reliant are the works on the text? If someone were to wander into one of these pieces and not know the text, would they be missing a large part of it?**

Yeah, perhaps that's the case. I wouldn't want to admit that that was the case because I wouldn't want that to be the case that you would miss something without the text. At least, if we had to frame our work, we would probably start with a text affiliated with it because that's how our process is. Whenever we're not working we're probably producing text or taking notes together. We do a lot of collaborative Google Doc-ing.

A lot of the work doesn't necessarily rely on text but definitely derives from it. We use text as a starting point, whether it's writing what we call poems or just sketching out ideas together. In more recent projects, we've become interested in the practice of playwriting and script writing, so that's another place where a text is primary to the enactment of the work.





True Butterfly, 2016. One-way mirrors, LED lights, plastic film, display case at Chin's Push, Los Angeles.

**You're on the border of a lot of practices. Is this an intentional thing? You're not fully an art collective necessarily, you're not fully a writing collective…**

I think we just dabble a lot. We invite a lot of play into the boundaries of what is included in our process. Our process has been just an

exploration of what we could do together rather than why we were doing it in the first place and what made us happy together. It's just a little too romantic to fit into one category for us. At least for me it feels quite romantic, the boundaries of our process and the way that we slip—the slippage between different domains of working.

**Could On all fours be any number of people or are you and Temra the core?**

After one member, Clay, left we started to really consider that. We've always collaborated with people outside of the group from that first project we did at the Material Art fair its first year. It began as sort of a curatorial project. Temra had just done something at Human Resources in Los Angeles where, as part of a group exhibition there, she had filmed a short video piece in the gallery and had found actors, like non-actors, to be in it.

That project was a big emphasis for some of the work that we've done, at least for me. She found some non-actors and then cast them in roles and then did this short video piece in the gallery as the setting for the thing. After seeing that, we started to think, "Okay, what if we in addition to casting these actors to play these roles, what if we actually built the set for them to be in."

In that case, because it was an art fair booth, we sort of approached it as we were a curatorial entity. We invited a number of artists to contribute art works as set pieces and we filled in the gaps and built our own set pieces as our sculptural contribution. Then, those artists and other individuals, some people who were just working at the fair, some people who were just in the proximity served as actors in what was a live, silent short film. Like film noir without the dark lighting, that we directed live at the fair, standing behind a camera while people were walking around.

We were shouting directions at the actors and they were performing. From the beginning we had always involved other people and counted them as part of Oa4s. It was useful that we had this entity without a face or without a singular identity that we could expand and be a little bit more jelly. After Clay decided to move on and do other stuff, we took another look at that part of our identity and how it was important in the last few exhibitions we'd done, two of which were plays. For those we invited people who worked in the galleries where the plays were going to be performed to also be actors in the plays. It kind of removed our hands entirely from it and their contribution really became what manifested the work, more so than ours.



Temra and David in 4 parts, 2016. Installation view, at Sorbus, Helsinki

**One thing I thought was interesting is when we were talking about wanting to interview you: I asked various people for contact information and I was given a bunch of different emails. I started figuring things out but no one was quite sure how to contact you, which was**

**interesting. Another thing I was thinking about: You're represented by Lodos Gallery. If someone wanted to collect your work, how would they collect it? Is there a collectible part of it?**

There absolutely is. Certain works, particularly ones that Lodos has in their archives, are ones that are more autonomous. We have made autonomous works, autonomous sculptural works and autonomous artworks in general. I think those are much more collectible in that way. With everything we've done there's always some sort of physical ephemera, which makes it easy. With the exception of some plays that we've written recently—well with the exception of a number of things but what comes to mind most are these plays that we've recently written. It's one play that was performed in two different instances and in the second instance, an additional part was added to it.

What we do is we write a play. It's called an installation play. The script is called Temra and David in Three Parts, initially. Later on it was Temra and David in Four Parts. David is based on David Hoyland, he runs a gallery called Seventeen that's from London and they're also in New York, I believe. We were invited to be part of a show in London by our friend Atillia, who's a curator that we are close with.

What we did is, we wrote a three-act script for Temra and David to perform. Temra went to London and they performed it during the time of the installation of the exhibition, which was a group show. Throughout the script there are a number of simple, modest, everyday materials that get maneuvered or re-manifested in different ways throughout the exhibition space according to the script, which acts as a set of rules in time. There are some lines that get said and there's a loose, sort of abstract structure to it, which is based on the Spanish bullfight.

With that, the things that are manifested by the actors, I don't know what would be the thing that is autonomous from that other than the script itself, perhaps. I don't know how collectible that is.

**For you, what is the attraction of collaboration versus doing an individual piece?**

I can't speak for Temra but for me, I find myself very much drawn to collaboration. I don't know what it is. It's really special. I collaborate a lot. I'm always trying to find ways to work in a social way. I think it feels more real for me, or more applicable to the world when it's social. Maybe there are more lines of sight in play.

I think we exist in an intersubjective realm. Oa4s is very much about intersubjectivity because it considers itself as a collaborative and because it considers collaboration but also just because of the content of the work. Having theater come in has a lot to do with intersubjectivity. I think that when something has a very strong, concrete foundation in a notion of intersubjectivity, then you can start to talk about a lot of things that are very dynamic and active and can find more tangible grasps on social relations or social reality. Not truths, but different domains of things that exist in the universe in a way that's more than just a single subjectivity.



Épée, 2016. Aluminum, modeling putty, aerosol paint, latex. 193 × 304 × 212 cm

**One thing on our site that we're really into is spirals. I was curious about your recent work with the spiral.**

It started with a poem that we wrote. "But, what's a circle without hands or time? Is that you?". Which later was adapted into the title of a video as, "A spiral is a circle without hands or time." Something that I've realized recently is that in each project that we do, I feel like there's always either a visual or a geometric or a spatial form that serves as a skeleton for the practice at that time. Sometimes it'll be a spiral or sometimes it'll be a barrier. Recently we did this project in Oslo where it was a mobius strip. We often rely on these simple geometric forms to serve as skeletons for what are later character dynamics or narrative structures and things like this.

**You were saying before that you see the trajectory of On all fours, and where you're going. What are some things you guys are working on now or that you have coming up? Is it more a conceptual aesthetic trajectory that you see?**

An aesthetic trajectory, yeah. In the last few projects I think we kind of hit a stride. We agreed to—and this is when Clay decided to move on to other things—five exhibitions back-to-back. I shit you not, we were tripping over ourselves trying to get these things done. We did something like two group shows and four solo shows in the span of five months. It was exhilarating and exhausting and Temra and I were just chewing each other out by the end of the day, but all the work turned out. We were really happy with the product of all of it, which is incredible because of the constraints we were under.

With those projects we really hit a stride in what could be an aesthetic trajectory or the kind of finish that we will accept in our work. I think that we really finally expressed it, though I don't know what adjectives or verbs I could use there. It's better in photos than words, probably.

**You were talking about the social aspect of collaboration. When you're working on your own individual practice, how different is that than what you do with On All Fours? Is it a lonelier proposition?**

It's weird. With On all fours, there's so much mutual reinforcement that goes on that uncertainty becomes this problem that we can just discuss it out. If one of us has like a fuck-it attitude toward a certain uncertainty, the other one will be like yeah, "fuck it." I think

that’s actually really healthy toward doing work that doesn’t need to obey expectations that you have for yourself or expectations that other people will have for you. We can just remind ourselves that what we’re doing is good. That’s really special, I think.

At least for me, it’s taught me to do that on my own. I can have a little Oa4s conversation in my head where I’m like, “No, this is good, we’re moving forward. We’ve only got a week left to finish this thing.”

**Oa4s Recommends:**

Black Bear with Northern Cree at Ottawa Pow Wow

Axiom Funk - “Sacred to the Pain”(Eddie Hazel & Umar Bin Hassan)

Shaitan - Sueño tu presencia

Whitehouse - Why you never became a dancer

White Flag & Tesco Vee - “Hot Rails to Hell”

Name
Oa4s

Vocation
Artists, Poets, Theorists, Writers

Fact

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