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As told to Brandon Stosuy, 3472 words.

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On using your body to tell stories

Sigrid Lauren and Monica Mirabile of the performance duo FlucT discuss how their relationship informs their collaboration, and why it's important to let yourself recover after making emotionally and physically taxing work.

How did you figure out you worked well together, as collaborators, and how have you managed to keep working well together?

Sigrid Lauren: Super uncomfortable conversations. And communication.

Monica Mirabile: Yeah, every time I say, "Oh yeah, we've been this project for eight years now, almost a decade," people are like, "How do you do it?" Because we're also really close friends. We usually talk to each other everyday. If not everyday, it's every other day. It is funny because it's such a rare thing. But, you know, we both fuck up all the time. So, like Sigrid said, having uncomfortable conversations is definitely something that... I just think, for the most part, we're really good at communicating with each other. Or, accepting our flaws and working towards something better in our relationship with each other. But also it's always there. You know? The acceptance of it.

Sigrid: We became close at a very vulnerable moment. And since then, we've been able to feel comfortable. Like really oversharing. And becoming understanding in storytelling, the intimate kind that you wouldn't have with people you just met. Brutal honesty, listening, and compassion has allowed us to learn and grow beside one another. If we're not on the same plane, one of us will keep digging for the other. The other person will be like, "Look, if we don't stand under this umbrella together then we're going to get struck by lightning."

It's kind of been excessive in that way. It's unlike other relationships, which has been really cool. Especially, creatively, because we both give and take with ideas.



Photo by Walter Włodarczyk, 2016

Monica: We're both very passionate people. Passionate about our ideas. And that kind of passion often leads to an explanation and a defending of what you believe in. Where we can compromise. And even if it is fiery and we're yelling at each other, and you're like, "But what about this?," we turn towards understanding.

Sigrid: And humor.

Monica: And humor.

Sigrid: There's usually a little poke at the end. Once the space gets tense it's like a balloon is popped—someone will pop a little pin in there.

Monica: That's a good metaphor. It's definitely like a pop in the balloon, in all of the sensual capacity within that. Like the expansion of rubber and the explosion of air and the pin prick.

Sigrid: Which is all the bullshit of human existence, too. It's like, a bunch of humans want to make sense of every little thing so much. In a way, it's been our work to be like, "Well, if we make this map of why people do this, and this is biologically related to that in the human capacity to always try to analyze themselves..."

Monica: "...Well, let's just be clowns."

Sigrid: Yeah, I mean, a human that's trying to figure it out, or to analyze themselves constantly, won't be able to figure it all out.

Monica: That's all we are, a bunch of fools trying figure it out, and appreciating the foolishness.

Do you return to ideas that have been pushed aside?

Sigrid: Yes, one time Monica really didn't like this idea. I was like, "What if, really simple, we're both on hands and feet position and running in circles trying to sniff each others butt." And she was like, "That's so stupid. No." Eventually we got to do it.

Monica: It was more because it was hard for me.

Sigrid: But it was like a month long in between that, where I was like, "This is the perfect moment; you know where the circus is."

Monica: We create these moments and each moment comes from one of us. And then there are many that are combined. A lot of them return because we didn't use them last time. They come back. And that's always interesting for me to think about because I'm wondering: Are we limited physically by who we are? Our personality, the way we move? Or are there endless possibilities for how you can be flexible in your body?

Sigrid: I do like just the feel of the thing. I do think it's interesting, the playing out of our own or other people's experiences.

Monica: It's always fascinating. This last piece, at the Broad Museum, is a new piece. And our piece before that, *Sissy Joker*, I would say was pretty successful in our minds. We really liked that piece a lot. We liked performing it. And we were thinking, "How are we going to get passed that?" Because there was a formula that worked. So we asked ourselves: "How are we going to evolve? Can we surpass the things we've created? Can we grow?" I feel like with the Broad piece we did, I was surprised at the evolution. It transcended what I thought could happen.



Photo by DV Devinentis

Sigrid: It's hard to imagine two years ago when we made the *Sissy Joker* piece. We were sitting at Maccarone Gallery, arguing. I'm stuck arranging clips on Ableton in a frenzy and she's like, "That sample can't be there, we have to have put it earlier in piece." And I say, "If you want me to move it back I'm going to fuck up all the little samples." You know, it was just total mania minutes before the premiere. And then at that point, we hadn't performed it—so we didn't know if it "worked." By "works," I think what Monica means, too—every single time we perform it, we are emotionally moved and have our own wild internal experiences that are different each time.

The same thing happened with the Broad Museum piece, *everythingmakesmehappy*. At first we thought, "This piece isn't emotional." We were finishing mastering and rearranging the sound minutes before the premiere. When we agree to the formula, which takes weeks and up until the last minute to understand, we won't fully know of our belief in the piece until it's performed for a live audience so that we can fully experience it, too.

Monica: And the thread, you know, keeping a thread to it. Because it's all mixed. There're a lot of things happening, and if the thread doesn't make sense on a psychological level for us, it's worthless for us. We were up until the last moment with a piece like *Sissy Joker* or the piece for The Broad. We were thinking, "No, we have to shift that part here, okay this makes sense, no." We did it five, six times.

Sigrid: I was losing my mind. And levels were going off.

Monica: *Sissy Joker* was more tumultuous, though.

Sigrid: Yeah. With the Broad piece, even the night before, we didn't know if it would create an emotional response. We were like, "I don't know. Do I have any feelings towards this?" But, immediately, we were both performing and all of a sudden I was just crying and I was like, "Why am I crying right now?" But, obviously, I did know.

Monica: That's the thing with these. Ideas are limitless, but there are a ton of restrictions with how you can dance. With what we do, so much of it, half of it if not more, is that psychological emotional energy, and comprehension. That merges with the flexibility of your body, and only then does it actually feel like something else.

That's where it only exists. And there are these limitless possibilities with what dance is within it. I say that because, within the actual performance of it, which is already a transformation, performing anything is like a crazy drug. There were these moments where I really didn't realize I would be so sensitive... and cry. I just didn't realize it would feel that way. And when we were doing it, there were many points where I was thrown in to this sort of physicality. You know? A physical reaction to something happening that was transcendent.



Installation view of IS IT GOD OR AM I DOG? BY FlucT at SIGNAL. Courtesy of artists and gallery.

Have you ever gotten to a point where you performed a piece long enough that you weren't stressed about performing it? Or is that uncertainty important to what you do?

Sigrid: We've definitely not rehearsed and seen each other for like two months and performed *Sissy Joker*. It was actually better than the last time. I remember feeling like, "Whoa, this is deeply embedded."

Monica: There's something about the brain though, how when you take a break from something and you process it and come back to it and it's better.

Sigrid: Muscle memory. Psychosomatic muscle memory.

Monica: As far as discomfort, I always get the same physical reaction before we perform, I gag. It usually happens right before the performance, I just start gagging. It's pure reaction. I'm never mentally nervous. It's not a fear thing; it's purely physical. I was reading a book called *The Body Keeps the Score*, and it's basically about how the body deals with trauma. It talks about therapy and study. It was talking about how one of our most primal bodily functions is rooted in the stem of the brain. When you see something dangerous, or see something that could have a bad response, you release a stress hormone before you have the time to understand what it is. Before your pre-frontal cortex can really understand.

I think that's what's happening to me. I'm releasing adrenaline to prepare myself for what's about to happen. It's mostly physical, I know what I'm about to do and it's physically intense. But also it's emotionally intense because it is touching on many concepts that I have a hard time processing or making decisions about. And just things that are upsetting sometimes. So, you know, I think it's a good thing—it's like my body knows what it needs. It's a good thing when that happens; when I start to gag, I know it's going to be a good performance.

Because the adrenaline is also a fuel. That's where the transformation takes place. It's like, "Now I'm ready."

Have you ever had a thing where your ideas go beyond what you can actually physically do and you have to scale back?

Sigrid: It's always kind of great when we do that because sometimes we'll restart completely and try new choreography. But usually we'll find a beginning posture and then, "Ok, where can we go from here?"

Monica: It's where new things happen. In trying to do those things, we're adapting. Assimilating.

Sigrid: Into each other.

Monica: Within the last six months, we were trying to do this thing where we rolled on each others bodies. We were going to do it in the beginning of one of the last performances of *Sissy Joker*. And we just couldn't figure it out. I feel like that's one of the only moves I can really remember. We still tried.

Sigrid: Right, we still tried to do something like that. It led to other things. The beginning where I'm climbing up your back and you lay on top of me.

Monica: Yeah, that's where that happened.



Installation view of IS IT GOD OR AM I DOG? BY FlucT at SIGNAL. Courtesy of artists and gallery.

Sigrid: It usually just leads to new ideas. I'm reading this book called *The Queer Art of Failure*. It talks about how new ideas aren't conceived by following a straight-lined path, doing exactly what the teacher tells you. But finding ways to teach yourself how to, because every body is so different, and a straight line won't work for all and won't produce a new wiggly line. It is something that's been really

prevalent for our practice. We're not worrying about, "Oh man, I can't do this one kick so high." It's like, "Okay, well then you kick your leg into my hand, I'll throw it that high and then I'll catch your neck so you don't fall."

You're doing live performance, and I imagine things don't always go as planned.

Monica: We often try to incorporate that. We're so interested in what happens in the margins. Within the formula that we use, we leave room for improvisation, which is really what the freakout is at the end of every performance. We don't know what's happening and we're very aware of space and I think we train to be aware of space, and to be aware of each other and we don't hurt ourselves or each other anymore. We used to hurt ourselves really bad and now we don't.

Sigrid: When we work with other people, we always say, "If you do fuck up or you do forget, just throw a couple glitches in there, be aware that you're aware that you're not doing what's right. And then get back in." Because that is everybody, you know?

Monica: That's the thing. The honesty of it is way more compelling than the trying to perform. I think it's one of the hidden senses of humanity, or one of the essences—this psychic sense that people can always call bullshit. And that's fine. Sometimes bullshit is really interesting. I love storytelling. I even like lies. You always know when it's happening, but I feel like in performance, when I know someone's performing dishonestly, it's less compelling. For myself, I love to tend towards an honest reaction. But we create a vocabulary, too, that is...

Sigrid: Self-aware. FlucT pieces are very American. It's a lot of American contents; the news articles, the quotes, the music, etc. I've learned to love the frivolousness of Americans in a specific way, that's tragic and beautiful. They're hopelessly trying. They really want to do this new thing and are usually failing, and in some ways progressing. I feel like FlucT is very much like that. We're self-aware that we've been trained and are habitual movers and speakers and everything, but we've been created by an amalgamation of outside factors, by our environment, social class, peers, biological makeup. But in turn want to alter that, and defy the origin.

Monica: I remember a while back when Sigrid went to Vienna for this dance thing, she said, "I miss the stupidity of America."

Sigrid: The humor. I miss the humor because it's self-aware of the blasphemy of existence. Which is not fully true. But again we try to know it all or figure it all out when there are just so many variables at hand that are unknown. Like America's self-aware of that in that sense in their comedy. Of their seriousness. It makes sense because there's a lack of tradition, culture, honesty, and history. We're just so young, "you Americans are so naive."

You're often performing for a non-dance crowd, as part of music events, etc. What's it like being in front of people who aren't dance experts?

Sigrid: I don't think the dance experts like us to be honest.

Monica: That's not true.

Sigrid: Well, some do, but I also know a lot of dancers who low-key, will be like, "Oh, they think they're dancers."



Photo by DV Devinentis

Monica: I think that's something we think. But every time someone describes us they describe us as dancers. We're typically the ones to say we're not dancers. We feel uncomfortable with it because we're not technically, technical dancers. We don't train in ballet or whatever.

I think those are the people who are like, "No, they're not dancers." I remember one time, this girl was like, "She's not a dancer, she's a choreographer." This girl was a very dancer-dancer person. She was talking about me. And I was like, "She can't say that!" But it's true, I agree. That's what I say to people. We started in the music scene. We started in the experimental scene. We both sort of like to play with those expectations. And question why they exist the way they do. And I think we question why everything exists the way it does. So it is gratifying to fuck it up.

Sigrid: Yeah, it's fun to play. We are very much more apart of the music and art world. You know, before when she was talking about the part when she gags—when I perform I get anxious, and I have to use tapping techniques. I'm also angry, even though I've been wanting to perform; I'm very angry. I'm like, "These assholes!" Kind of this defensive, offensive kind of energy. But it is true. I'm not sure if I fit into this world or these people understand, but there's so much that we're going to communicate. It's got something for everybody. [laughs]

Monica: You get angry and I don't get angry. The feeling is like, "Why are you watching me?" That is how Sigrid gets. Within an art context, you can make sense of that anger—that discomfort with what they think, because it's a market, and so much of what we say is criticizing capitalism. Or, the way that it affects you psychologically. Specifically, in an art market, which the art world often is, is confusing. It's enraging. There is the sort of feeling of, "Why do you even want us here? What is it about?" Which goes along with the questioning.

What's it like recovering from one of your performances?

Sigrid: It's really taxing, physically, the day after and week to come.

Monica: The amount of time and energy we have to put into taking care of ourselves and relaxing and treating our bodies right and recovering, is three times the amount we have to put into making the piece.



Photo by Walter Włodarczyk, 2017

With that in mind, how do you decide when to say no?

Monica: We're just starting to understand how to say no.

Sigrid: We've definitely overbooked ourselves sometimes in the past. Even if you want to do something, and it's your friends and it sounds great and there's money involved, you sometimes have to say no. It's been hard in the past because that's everything you always wanted, right? But now I'm realistic about my life and taking care of myself and maintaining my body and my mind and my...

Monica: Creative space.

Sigrid: Yeah, creative space.

Monica: Not that I don't love doing it. I'm a workaholic, Sigrid will tell you. I always want to be doing things, but I want also to be in a meditative space so newness can occur. It seems like you'll never get that if you don't learn how to say no.

Sigrid: If you don't just take a step away from the fire. There're a lot of confusing situations that could happen if you're just constantly playing shows and working. It's this kind of—I wouldn't say corporate creative way, but corporate in the sense that it's financial-opportunity driven. There's a lot of things going on that are subliminal in that process of working that I don't think would produce the kind of person that I would like to become. I think it's important to make some space and take some time.

Monica: I think it's natural on a personal level, both of us, our personalities are very critical and analytical and we think a lot about what is happening and how it might be good or bad for ourselves and the people around us. That can be so taxing. That mental space is hard, but I don't think either one of us are willing to have it any other way. Sometimes we talk about simplicity and simply focusing on the shape of things or the form, but it never happens when it comes down to it because, I don't know, I don't think it's in our nature.

FlucT recommends:

Reach out to artists, especially in different genres/mediums/scenes, to collaborate or organize a show together. Always ask.

If you feel insecure about an idea, that's usually the most valuable one.

Having a daily physical practice will change your life.

Go to therapy, take baths, talk about difficult topics, write a poem/free conscious flow - all these things will make you a better artist.

The love that you give to the people you care about/friends, will create the invisible bridge you will need to walk on when you're not feeling strong.

Name

Monica Mirabile and Sigrid Lauren

Vocation

Performers, Dancers, Choreographers

Fact



Minnie Bennet

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