

Borderland – ‘One connection led to another . . .’

The idea to create a performance that would be a re-working of *The Yellow Wall-Paper* began in Autumn 2014. This has led to this week, where we are now in the production week of *Borderland*, and tomorrow we open an exhibition of the process of creating this performance at the 44AD Gallery in Bath, this journey has been amazing!

Inspired by the story by Charlotte Gilman-Perkins, one thing led to another, I discovered the work of the photographer Francesca Woodman as the images of her *#House* series may have also been a re-working of the *The Yellow Wall-Paper*, this set a strong aesthetic for the design and physical score of the performance. One connection after another, and then a successful funding bid from ACE for research and development of this project, we were ready to go.

Borderland is a provocative re-working of the 19th century Gothic novella, which tells the story of a young mothers post-partum psychosis, who, confined to a Gothic mansion, and not listened to, tells of her frightening experience of a women not being heard. Little is known about this illness, and the project aimed to provide a voice. In the early stages I made contact with local charities, as I was keen to hear real stories that would inform the devising process, and would be part of the exhibition in the 44AD Gallery space which would run alongside the performance.

Drawing together an strong all female cast of five wonderfully versatile performers, collaborating with a designer and musician, we went into the studio to start to explore imagery and develop key themes; of dissolving, merging in and out of the architecture of a room, and dresses, dresses, dresses - as skin, as the fabric of the wallpaper, as bodies! This exploratory stage could only last 2 weeks, but abundant creativity produced so much rich material that I could begin to structure, and find a narrative thread that was central to our re-working of the original.

This came from a beautiful red velvet dress that one of the performers had brought in to the rehearsal, which used to belong to her mother. The dress insisted on its place in the rehearsal room, and I had to keep asking what it was, why was it there . . . This was the final connection and the *Borderland* tells the story of 5 women, who are in the early stages of the onset of his illness, they are also confined to a room, and through telling their own stories, they tell the story of the woman who remained in this

room – the woman in *The Yellow Wall-Paper* who didn't get out, Bertha Mason (Rochester's first wife) in *Jane Eyre* who also never got out alive. In our story there is transcendence, the telling of the story gives these women's experiences a voice that releases them the confines of this space, and the stigmas that keep them silent.

Two weeks of tightly structuring, and refining the details, and we have a performance that is poetic, visceral, and compelling! Then, this week there is a major storyline on the popular soap opera, Eastenders, as the character, Stacey, is experiencing postpartum psychosis; this is a brilliantly observed storyline. Now people are talking about this little known illness in the news; women are now talking about their experiences. I posted a comment on the BBC website about our installation and performance at the 44AD Gallery, and a woman from Action Post Partum, an online network, directly got in touch with me, and this is the wonderful part, she offered to send stories of her own and other womens' experiences to be part of the installation. This is serendipity at its best, this is very important and we are so grateful to have made these connections with real womens' lives.

January 2016

Borderland opens at the University Theatre, Bath Spa University from 28th-30th January at 7.30pm, and 2pm on Saturday 30th.

Tickets from <http://www.bathspalive.co.uk>

Devised by the company and directed by Mary Steadman

Borderland, the installation runs from 26th-30th January at the 44AD Gallery, Bath. Daily from 2pm-6pm

<http://www.44ad.net>

For more information contact <http://www.marysteadman.co.uk>

Mary Steadman is the Artistic Director of Red Room Productions. Our aim is to bring together artists and performers to collaborate creatively. Our work explores narratives where voices have been silenced or unheard, we work with imagery and movement to delve into the archetypal and universal in these narratives.



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Supported using public funding by

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