

WE FELL IN LOVE ALONE ON STAGE IN THE REFLECTIVE AGE

SILVIA BOMBARDINI IN CONVERSATION WITH CAROLINE ROBERT.

As Søren Kierkegaard puts it, in the shallow waters of the reflective age peril is as absent as action and passion.

Yet if one listens to REFLEKTOR carefully, the balsamic power of music, to lift us from the indolence of our daily life into a collective passion once again, shines through. Caroline Roberts, the graphic designer and artist behind the almost magical appeal of Arcade Fire's newest album, told us a bit about her work and influences, the outdated charm of CDs, suminagashi and astral forces.

Orpheus, a musician so talented he might have been trained by Apollo himself, couldn't resist the temptation of a vision of love. Dedicated to his loneliness and longing, the theme of sight recurs through the lyrics of REFLEKTOR: see, stare, eyes, look, vision, glimpse. As a visual artist who works extensively with music, how do you come up with an image to a song, in a way hopefully safer than Eurydice's?

To me, the artwork had to be deeply connected to the music and to the band's energy but at the same time it had to be strong, generous and playful, so people would also like to keep it and to re-appropriate. For REFLEKTOR, the band fell in love with Rodin's sculpture "Orphée et Eurydice", that we have on the album cover. Orpheus' myth inspired them while writing some of their songs, but they were also talking a lot about the influence of Caribbean culture on their music and their desire to bring back carnival energy into live performances. They wanted to create a clash between those two worlds: super classic and beautiful (Rodin's sculpture, black and white) versus raw and spontaneous (Haitian raw art, voodoo, carnival, textures and colors), a tension that is very strong in their music. The death of CD, the end of an era, the reflective age, was also frequently in the discussions. They wanted to use old CDs as reflectors during live performance (collage on congas) but also in the artwork. Once again, a clash between the fact that this shiny and multi-colored object is at the same time the symbol of obsolescence or death. Paradoxically I wanted to make a CD jacket that people would like to have and not throw away in five years. Something that they would keep like a treasure. So the idea that the artwork should be a reflektor came naturally.

A shallow and frozen sea, a window, a screen, a pellucid, effulgent, holographic surface and someone trapped just beneath. You chose to represent it through the use of "suminagashi," marbling prints, liquid maps of Japanese wisdom, to help us find our way through: can you tell us something more about this technique, and the creative process behind it?

I wanted this reflektor to feel organic, as if it was an open door to the Other Side. Water is reflective and at the same time is a significant element to enable access to another world in a lot of beliefs (sacraments, purification...). So I started to do a lot of marbling prints to petrify the surface of water. Those prints became the backdrop of the sculpture, and were also integrated through the artwork (inside panels, CD and vinyl labels). The artwork, printed on holographic board, embodies this idea of passage between life

and death. Dead and alive at the same time, the black and white artwork comes to life thanks to light. It animates in colors when you move it, like a CD.

Haitian rara music, a Jamaican castle named Trident, and the organic, spontaneous quality of Caribbean arts and culture are, like you said, a welcome, exciting new influence as well on the melodies of Arcade Fire. I know you yourself were inspired by Haitian voodoo vèvés when drawing the first of many REFLEKTOR symbols that are now blossoming all around on cities' walls. How did you first come across this particular type of cosmogram, and what kind of astral force would you like yours to represent?

At the very beginning, Win Butler lent me a book of Hector Hyppolite's art, for inspiration. Hyppolite was a great painter but I was even more touched by his vèvés drawings for their simplicity and their strength. Hand drawn symbols that were meant to reach invisible forces. To me, Arcade Fire's music is an invisible force. It is with a great respect for voodoo art that I started to sketch REFLEKTOR symbols with a chalk. I wanted the symbol to be simple enough so that anybody could draw it but it also had to be strong, so people would want to draw it and make it live on walls, school tables...

I didn't expect this symbol to travel that much. Maybe it carries some kind of force, after all! It is not mine anymore. It's alive art! That's my best reward.





