

Amy Bryzgel discusses the work of Bulgarian artist **Adelina Popnedeleva**.

<http://performingtheeast.com/adelina-popnedeleva/>

Adelina Popnedeleva

Adelina Popnedeleva uses the materials of everyday life in her performances and videos. In a statement by the artist, she said, “my works are made of provocations from real life because I think that life is full of art.” In many of her performances, she says, she “shows her soul” to the viewer. The result is often a visceral and engaging psychological performance.

Adelina started working in performance in 1999. She talks about working intuitively; it was later that she completed a PhD in art history and theory, and looked at her previous work from a more analytical perspective. She told me that for her, the idea comes first, and then she “tries to find the best way of expressing it.” One of her earliest performances was *Nirvana*, which has been performed several times in different locations. The artist, dressed in a white gown, with her long hair flowing, proceeds to wash several white men’s shirts, one at a time. She washes the shirts in mud, so they become dirty, not clean. The contradiction between the action and the result is central to the performance. She says that this contradiction exists in every aspect of our lives, and is what makes us complete. She sees this performance as a way of getting to know her “dark side,” or *nigredo* – an alchemical term, which Jung also used in his theories regarding the self. Years later, when Adelina felt that she had gotten to know her self better – perhaps through these ritualistic performances – she created *Alchemy* (2010), a performance in which she washes the same white shirts in gold. In the background, as she does this – perhaps as a reminder of the process she has gone through – the video of *Nirvana* is displayed on a screen.

In fact, the artist got to know herself through a very candid and revealing piece entitled *Psychotherapeutic Performance* (2004), which she did together with fellow artist Ventsislav Zankov, and in conjunction with the exhibition *Symptom*. *Symptom* is an exhibition of photographs of the artist taken by her daughter when she was suffering from migraines, from which she had suffered for most of her life. She thought that by analyzing the reason for her suffering, she might get to the bottom of it. In this 40-minute public performance at the Irida Gallery in Sofia, Zankov played the part of a psychotherapist, and asked Adelina about the

photographs. She told me that she used the performance as an opportunity to speak very honestly and openly about her fears and insecurities, which she was not used to doing. The piece was successful for the artist, because she has not had any migraines since. Adelina feels that the reason for this is that she faced the deep, dark secrets about herself and freed herself from them, allowing her to live in peace.

An earlier performance, *Masochistic Performance after Hans Christian Anderson* (2000), also explores the element of pain, as it involved the artist weaving with nettles. The idea came from the story *The Wild Swans*, in which an evil queen turns Elisa's brothers into swans, and the girl must weave shirts out of nettles to turn her brothers back into humans. The artist told me that the performance was about love, which brings not only pleasure, but also pain. Just as with *Nirvana*, she wanted to show the other side of the coin, the one that we often forget about, or take for granted. There was also a social aspect to the performance, about initiation rites for girls, who in ancient cultures were often initiated into adulthood by completing a project, such as a woven garment, on their own, with their hands for the first time.

When I asked Adelina if she considered herself a feminist, she qualified the term by saying that perhaps she was a "soft feminist." More importantly, she said, she is against hierarchy. She acknowledges that there are differences between men and women, but disagrees that one should be treated better than the other, because each has its strength. More importantly, however, her work is about the development of the individual in society, and the equanimity that can come from his or her complete integration.