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Katalin Pazmandi is a multi-media installation and performance artist, born in Hungary. In 2000 she graduated at the Karoly Eszterhazy College in Eger, Hungary, where she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Fine Arts and Fine Art Education. She moved to the United States in 2001. In 2006 she has completed one semester at the School of Visual Arts in New York in Painting. She was instructor of record of Intro to Sculpture class, has received a Research and Creative Project Award for 2014 and a Sojourner Truth Fellowship in 2015. She is a recent graduate of the Master of Fine Arts Sculpture program at State University of New York at New Paltz.

**ARTIST STATEMENT**

I am searching and not defining.
Finding and not keeping,
Loving and not possessing,
Perfecting and not advertising.

I manifest my deepest understandings without defining them with words. Words are limiting definitions of the unspoken. If something shouldn’t be spoken about, it should speak for itself. I attempt to reach the point where my work of art can speak for itself. My deepest understandings of life is undefined, or defined temporarily, to constantly lose stagnation. To keep mind and life in always-changing realization, to never be able to say we have arrived or finished. Arriving and finishing are always departing and beginning. Like a deepening spiral, everything goes around to constantly redefine itself. I reside in this constant change to undefine and redefine and define everything without end.

The interactive installations I create invite people to meet their subtle self while entering the space. My practice is across a number of disciplines and media including woodworking, video and sound, and with my outdoor installations the natural environment: sunlight, fire, movements in nature and weather phenomena. My thought process involves many crossings between quantum physics, eastern philosophies and religions. I chase that special moment across both science and spirituality where the glimpse of unity can be experienced. I perform rituals and ceremonies based on ancient traditions and I draw a connection with the sacred in everyday life. I believe that artists should think of themselves as inventors, prophets or visionaries, and not as workers who want to make a living with their art. Art should be free from any kind of objective expectations.
LUMEN - ENTERING
-Inspired by the Tibetan Book of the Dead-

Installation by Katalin Pazmandi

Opening Reception: Friday, May 15, 2015 from 7:30pm to 9:30pm
Exhibition Hours: Friday - Tuesday, 11am to 5pm

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Special Thanks to:
Emily Puthoff, Steven Bradford, Steve Rossi, Matthew Friday, Brian Gardner, Charlotte Gibbons, David Levy, Amadou Diallo, Jim Luckiner, Harry Sweet, Rebecca Perlman, Stuart Bigley and the Unison Art Center.
The primary question that inspires me is how to create a sacred space in an outdoor environment where people would feel more connected to their own spiritual essence. To be connected means that you live true to yourself and also take part in the collective evolution of consciousness. I am interested in the nature of dying and reincarnation. I also incorporate nomadic and shamanistic elements of various ancient traditions into my work.

I constructed an outdoor structure where people were invited to participate in an interactive performance that took form in a series of ceremonies. This installation was inspired by The Tibetan Book of the Dead, the great liberation through hearing in the Bardo. As one of the commentators in this book, Chogyam Trungpa said: "one could refer to this book as "the Tibetan Book of Birth", because it is based on "the fundamental principle of birth and death recurring constantly in this life." Bardo means gap. This gap represents the transition between life and death, but it can also mean any transition for the living, psychologically or in everyday life when you are in a dream state, or in meditation.

I am inspired by nomadic lifestyles, shamanistic and Buddhist beliefs, merging Tibetan, Mongolian, Hungarian and Romani traditions. I touch on Buddhist symbolism, especially when it comes to what colors represent. I created a path with various doors that lead to the hexagonal space that I constructed. This pathway represents dying itself with six gates. The shape of the hexagon represents the human mind in Hinduism; it is also a structuring agent in nature, and in shamanism the primal crystal, the potential for all life. A hexagon is the only shape that fits into the hexagram, a six-pointed star. The hexagram consists of two joining triangles, as they join in union as yin and yang, earth and heaven, male and female. They form a new hexagon in the middle. The hexagon is the entrance to the womb.

In this sacred hexagonal space, nature’s elements: earth, water, fire, wind are all included in the experience. When the process of death begins, these elements become symbolic changes and a reality in the dying person’s mind. These are the six gates. As we slowly lose physical, emotional and brain function, earth turns into water, water turns into fire, fire turns into air, air turns into consciousness, and consciousness turns into space. All the elements represent the loss of solidity, the losing of concrete form and intactness; the losing of what I identify as me. Once one becomes combined with the original source, they loose the notion of boundaries and dualism, the illusion of separateness. Then complete death arrives. The darkness is immense as in the deepest, dreamless sleep. Then a light begins to defuse through the darkness, like the dawn of the sun after the night. What the dying person feels is grey nothingness, luminous emptiness. That is your basic essence, the source of yourself that is always alive. That is you. Everything else is a play, an illusion. These are principal elements of dying in Tibetan Buddhism.

The hexagon also symbolizes the act of creation in the Kabbalah (an esoteric philosophy that originated in Judaism). Creation is an act of conception, process, and birth. You enter this place to choose your next life from all the potentials. A series of ceremonies (performances) take place in my installation, where people are encouraged to participate. The building process and the ceremonies in my work are documented using video.

These chain of thoughts were originated from my deepest desire to be close to my universal self that is connected to everything in love, and to give this possible experience to others. Everybody has an inner spirit that is always intact and never dies; it is located in the
heart chakra and will be the only thing left after death. That is your Universal self. The you, that is connected to the universe and not divided by false ego perceptions or memories of your conditioned brain. I believe that consciousness was before the brain and not visa versa. Recent experiments in quantum physics and research about the Universe point to this direction as well. This is the first time that I used natural elements in my work and in a natural environment. It builds upon my previous ideas by losing the four walls around it, by involving more natural elements in the work and by opening up to a wider audience in addition to the art museum visitors.

I built the installation at the Unison Sculpture Garden near New Paltz, NY and I invited people to participate in four ceremonies. Approximately fifteen people can fit inside the structure at the same time. The questions I ask: How is sacred space understood as a space for everyone, no matter what vocabulary you understand or use for your everyday spiritual practice, and without any exact religion? How does interactive sculpture act as a mediator between everyday and transcendent life without becoming an amusement ride? How do time, space, spirituality and reality interact with each other in the context of living and dying? How could a ritualistic experience allow us a deeper spiritual understanding about questions like ‘Why are we here?’, ‘What is the essence of us that remains after we die?’, ‘Where do we come from?’.

Liberation means... the awakening from an illusion in which we believe that we are separate, substantial and independent.

Performing, exhibiting and building in regular rooms, galleries and between the four walls, completely feels unnatural and forced my work. I decided to create a space where my art and thought process would feel at home. In my deepest existence, I know that I am deeply connected to the Universe. The Universe is much more than what can be explained by physics. It is much more spiritual than we think. I believe, our physical bodies are much more connected to subtle levels of life than is explained in modern society. If you have ever tried any psychedelics you would get a glimpse of how different the world can be perceived: how we are all united and one with the living earth and the Universe around us.

I want to un-divide the separateness between our spirit and god, thinking about god as our own life force, not as a separate individual being. In this context, god is not a person who fulfills wishes and listens to verbal prayers. In this context, god cannot be named, or pointed to. It is everywhere, in us, between us, in the whole Universe and in dreams, other dimensions that we have never realized existed and in our imaginations, creativity and will. God is you, the awakened you. It is not a different person because you are not a different person. When you are awakened, these all become one, there is no more duality, no more divisions, and it is saturated with love.

And who are we right now? Constantly changing egos, with a forever-pure essence, a seed deep inside us that is experiencing and choosing whatever happens to us. What is the meaning in all this? The meaning is the evolution of consciousness. The following categories about the dying process are the inspiration for the ceremonies included in my installation/performance.

THE MOMENT OF LIFE OR DEATH

Who choses when we die? When you are driving in a sharp turn, you have two choices: you will hit or miss the tree by the side of the road. Our spiritual essence choses which reality we will continue imagining. Both realities are real and possible, but only one of them will be experienced as our continuous story in this life. You will miss the tree and keep driving along, or you hit the tree and die in that second. Your spirit has chosen. It is always the best way for one to learn and to develop memories and various experiences for higher spiritual development. The quantum self is your higher self, your essence that is always present. The quantum self chooses what will happen at the moment of life or death. When the question of life or death suddenly emerges, you split the Universe into two different possibilities. You will continue your journey in the Universe that your quantum self chooses for you. You will also continue your journey in the other Universe but you perceive only one side of this dimensional-split. You are either alive or dead. If you are alive, you are also dead in the other dimension. If you are dead, you are also alive in the other universe. You are alive and dead at the same time. Your quantum self can recognize both of these states and see them at the same time, but you perceive only one option. It is because your quantum self-chooses to be alive. So you continue driving on like nothing happened, but you just split dimensions.

In the same way, when we die, our higher self, our life force chooses that we will die. It’s either a predetermined day by our own higher self, or a decision that is not what your intellectual mind creates. It is decided by that pure life force, which was always enlightened in you, and you are carrying around from no beginning to no end. When we die it is just the decision that you close your eyes to see reality. Not your ego choosing, but your inner spirit. Leaving this material imagination leads to the Bardo of Death (a state of existence between death and rebirth) where you can experience the real reality, and using your accumulated understandings and what you learned in your inner spirit, to recognize or not recognize the way to a higher realm or to another human life to be reborn.

As we fall asleep, we go through a process analogous to death, as the perceptions of waking consciousness dissolve and fade away. We consider this to be falling into the state of unconsciousness, but really the mind is resting in its most profound, natural state, which we are unable to recognize as such because of our confusion.

THE MOMENT OF DEATH

We practice death every night when we fall asleep. We are connected to the more subtle world by sleeping, dreaming or possibly through psychedelics. Ingested plants can do magical things to people to open up their minds and to feel connected to the whole. One example for this is the Ayovaska tea that tribes in the Amazon rainforest use regularly and grow up drinking. When you die, you leave your body and experience confusion, but have to understand that you must leave this life behind, and become a higher spiritual being, or reborn again to learn more about recognizing what is important in life and what is useless and withholding your spirit. In Tibetan Buddhism the human realm is the number one learning place between realms, sometimes even gods become humans to learn more through suffering.

What is the difference between an interactive installation and an amusement ride? Amusement rides help you lose yourself for a moment but keep your ego just as it was before. It is experiencing the complete objective, with no subjective left. You are an object riding along with others. Interacting with an installation, you are not only experiencing an experiment, but you are connecting with yourself and the artist who invited you into their space. It is a shared communication between two consciousnesses, a communication without words, but it is very personal and subjective. It is for you as an individual, and should speak individually to your heart and not en masse to a fictional crowd. Having a subjective experience between the artist and the audience is what makes interactive art. It will make its mark in your experience, in your memories, in your ego, and, if it’s deep enough, in your spirit.

_in the second when you realize that all that you see_  
is a projection of your own mind, you will be enlightened  
_and immediately liberated._

THE AFTER DEATH STATE

When you enter the after death state, you wander around confused, “did I really die?” The Tibetan Book of the Dead tells you that you will meet different deities and they all point at the way out from rebirth.

You will get many chances to recognize the oneness and the subtlety of life and death. It may be confusing and terrifying experience. You just have to recognize that you are the deities, you are the nice or terrifying experience, and you are the one who will choose, these all are projections of your own mind. If you don't recognize this, you will arrive at a womb, and enter the womb to be reborn. You will have chosen rebirth to live a life again to deepen the understandings in you that lead to spiritual growth in this new life. Of course you will take your karmic experiences with you that marked your unconscious or conscious tendencies.

That's where love enters the picture. It is your own responsibility to bring yourself to a higher level of consciousness, in a loving and respectful way.

THE PERFORMANCES

The hexagon space has 11 pillars made out of fir wood, one door and five benches around the pillars. For every ceremony, I will change the wall covering and adjust it to the appropriate theme. Occasionally there is a fire pit in the middle and a hexagonal opening on top. This is where the spirits should leave.

A pathway leads to the hexagon with six gates, representing the stages of dying. When you reach the door to the hexagonal space, that door is the moment of complete death. The space itself representing the Bardo of Death, the first five visions or experiences you will experience after the time of death.

Five ceremonies were planned. Four outside at Unison in April and May, and one inside the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art at SUNY New Paltz.

THE FIVE CEREMONIES

1. Healing by the wind, daytime ceremony.

The first day of the Bardo of Death is the invitation to reach pure openness, without center, not clinging to anything. The primordial condition of awareness. The installation has flowing blue curtains on every side. The blue color represents all-encompassing knowledge, non-dual knowledge of total reality. Everything is blue and white. The performance is an initiation to accept death and happens individually, people enter the space to meet with me one by one. The book I am reading from contains passages from the Tibetan Book of the Dead and a Loving Kindness Meditation. Everyone gets a different message, depending on where the book opens up for each person. The question is: are you able to give up self-preservation for true reality?
2. Symbolic letting go of our bodies, nighttime ceremony.

The second day of the Bardo of Death is to let go of any notions of the body, and to see what is wrong, not only what is right. It is the mirror knowledge to embrace the cosmic mirror that contains the whole of existence. The installation has wooden shingle walls with white fabric and mirrors. This time there is a burning fire in the middle of the space with a hexagonal pot. To begin the ceremony I announce a short part from *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*: “…when your body and mind separate, the essence of reality will appear, pure and clear yet hard to discern, luminous and brilliant, with terrifying brightness, shimmering like a mirage on a plain in spring. Do not be afraid of it, do not be bewildered. This is the natural radiance of your own essence, therefore recognize it.” People are offered drinks in ice cups. While the ceremony lasts they feel the coldness in their hand and after drinking the hibiscus juice we all melt our cups in the melting pot to create steam.

The question here is: are you able to let go of attachment in an awakened way and get connected to your inner spirit at least for a moment?
3. Healing by the Sun, daytime ceremony.

The third day of the Bardo of Death, to find the perfect space, the wisdom of equality. The whole installation is covered with burlap and yellow fabric while the inside has hanging mirrors and strings. The ground is black under your feet. This time it is a meditation place that you can visit by yourself. There is a circle of water in the middle in a steel pot, with a mirror with reflecting lights. On the mirror is a child like drawing that creates a mandala map. You can take a golden pebble and place it on the map. That implies your own knowledge of where you are in your spiritual journey. The question is: Are you ready to feel and enjoy the equalizing knowledge of sameness, to feel one with everything?
4. Healing by sound and singing, nighttime ceremony.

The fourth day of the Bardo of Death, to reach compassion and see things as they really are. The main color is red on the installation with tied up red fabric. Red represents the investigative knowledge and the presence of absolute love. Fire burning in the middle. When people arrive, musicians greet them at the beginning of the path and lead them one by one into the space. I begin the ceremony with lighting a pine incence and then a flute player starts playing, I start singing without words. When music ends we sit in silence while the musicians start playing outside and come in for the people to lead them away with music. The question is: Are you ready to transmute passion into compassion? Are you ready to give up wanting, greed, grasping and attachment?
5. Healing by acceptance, daytime museum ceremony.

The fifth day of the Bardo of Death, this time the installation is indoors; everything is white and green. A video of moving leaves are projected on the walls of the hexagon dome. A fan blowing the tied up white fabric and that creates a humming sound. The projection of moving leaves and the slight breeze creates the notion of confusion about what is moving. The shadows and lights create a moving animation on the walls around. It is the experience of constant vibrations to help to reach the power of fulfillment. In the middle of the installation is a wooden hexagon with white sand and a circular steel pot with mirror that bounces the projection on the ceiling as well. The element of air is present that represents constant movement. There is no more form you can cling to, dualism and time doesn’t exist and the ego was dissolved. Complete emptiness is complete Everythingness. The green color represents the purified element of air, the action-accomplishing knowledge. The question is: Are you ready to express your enlightenment?

In the ultimate sense, everything is already accomplished and all sentient beings have always been awakened. In the realm of enlightenment, cause and effect are reversed: the result is already certain and already exists, so the actions that appear to be its cause are automatic, spontaneous, and effortless.\(^4\)

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We are constantly forming the conditions for our rebirth, whether it is in the next life or here and now. ... It will never end ... as long as we continue to believe that we really are this body and mind.5

THE MOMENT BEFORE BIRTH

The hexagon space is open on one side where a door is placed. You have to enter from the east, this is where everything begins, the direction of sunrise. This is a place to be re-born, spiritually, mentally, emotionally or physically. This is the place to reincarnate over and over again to reach higher and higher consciousness and to unify yourself with the universe. You are arriving from the east and leaving to the east, or through the opening on the top. This is the place when you are about to re-born, where you actually choose the path you will walk on in your next life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

