

1001caps – Un Poema Visual

A Tribute

Nicki Jackowska <http://nickijackowska.co.uk> 22 September 2015

<https://vimeo.com/108393043>

This document is from <http://www.ilankelman.org/menard/Jackowska20151001caps.pdf>

I'm staying in Valldemossa. I've been told there's a ceramics exhibition at the Cartuja. I imagine Moorish pots, Mallorcan plates and bowls. I walk in. The centre of the room is taken up by a low platform and floating above, a sea of heads, small heads the size of a fist. There are so many, it delights me.

The first experience is of bounty. Every head is different. I begin to explore. They are every shade of stone and clay, from chalk-white to a deep terra-cotta. Then to brown or black, the surface smooth or crumbling. The variety of tint and texture is intoxicating.

I circle this gathering, scanning the shapes and colours, catching one or two in detail. My mind is swiftly invaded by remembered heads and faces that have come and gone from my life over decades. Faces that have spoken, passed me in the street, appeared in dreams, with whom I've been intimate, cool, formal, enamoured. Those I've neglected, embraced, known deeply, glimpsed, idolised, despised. Then emerging from film, book, artist's studio, fairytale, war reports. The Elephant Man, Quasimodo, gargoyles, the sculptures of Marcus Cornish - men and women half-emerging from clay, on their way to human. And then the scars of war, moving backwards, as it were, faces melting back into the material they were born from. The slow and tortuous destruction of a man. Images from the Gulf War, the Iraq invasion.

I slow down. Here is a rascal, a sly one. Here a thinker, a joker. I am tempted to say, as the title of a chapter from my latest novel – *The Whole Cast*. You create a world entire, yet it is ready and eager to expand and evolve. In this case, as though the whole of humanity is

here, Shakespeare's complete works – The Dream, Hamlet, Calibans in plenty, noble faces, gaunt faces, sprites and goblins, Grotesques. Possibly the scarcely-formed, the half-eaten, fossil faces, traces from antiquity. Is this a massive archaeology, the world's stage, extremes of fantasy, every single person one has known, imagined, dismissed? I wander among the stuff of fairytale, at the mercy of human diversity, these heads quiet and orderly but each one leaping from this or that landscape, digging into memory, remembered or invented.

Here is my grandmother, surely? Here the very essence of terror. This one hides, his face covered by his hands. A tongue hangs out, the back of a head is hollow.

There is now the gestation of further possibilities for this unlikely and unique gathering. All the heads are mounted on poles. The poles are all the same, there is no distraction from the variety and concourse above. Each head is transportable. One thousand heads hanging in the air, as though it is settled that the priest accompanies the diva, a coarse face with the disdainful, but now I see, with the means to create other configurations.

I see the May Day Padstow Hobbyhorse, one matching head held by the single dancer as a taunting-stick to draw the horse to her with his great circular collar rocking down Padstow's narrow lanes. I see a play enacted, as with puppets. I see the similar, the sharp contrast, the strange and the recognised. I start to play with mathematics. How many possible conjunctions, duets, trios, quartets, families, casts are possible from this much choice?

Having recently created and directed *Behold*, a theatrical event devised from one text, musicians, dancers, singers and a film, I can only begin to imagine how this still and silent gathering of souls might start to shift about. Might sing and be sung, be danced to and among, be lit up by music, might have their heads extended downwards by actors and dancers to a whole human form. Or remain disembodied, in performers' hands, feet, sound.

One head? The entire company? I can imagine my grandsons, Seamus and Morgan. I say to each one, go choose a head and imagine what they might say and do to each other.... I cannot express more powerfully the vital and essential nature of this installation, and at this time. My event concerned the erosion of humanity as linked to the Holocaust and the 70th Anniversary of the liberation of concentration camps.

Here, seemingly as a logical progression from that production, is a tribute to human diversity, to tolerance and equality, the human in all its forms, gathered to remind, warn and sustain. The heads stand against the threat we all face, already encroaching upon human quality, human depth, the vital presence of the unknown, the mysterious. The advance of technology, fascism, racism, lurk in unseen corners everywhere, burst into horrific life where circumstance permits. The rise of the Ku Klux Klan, fundamentalisms, the shere volume now of the stateless, the homeless, the destitute.

Without polemic, the thousand heads, joined by one's own, together here call up a protest, a resistance.

Each head (with a few exceptions) is made by a different artist. The thousand-and-one's head one's own! What a message, a call to responsibility. And to belonging. An invitation to take this silent crowd into the wider world, without the need to articulate a project. I once said, privately, *I have noting more to say*. Here, most acutely, we feel the power of art to speak, where not a word is uttered.

Miguel Segura Palmer, I salute you! You call up hope, delight, a unique energy, the restoration of value in difference which the world's forces are acting to extinguish.