

MOVEMENT



IN



HARMONY

A conversation with multidisciplinary artists Zlatko Ćosić and Audrey Simes

Video Stills from "Chameleon Dance Series"
Zlatko Ćosić and Audrey Simes



When Zlatko Ćosić was announced as the Director of Video Art for Angad Arts Hotel, he began working with local artists to curate and create special video works to give life to one of AAH's focal points: The Chameleon Lamp in the hotel's lobby. He joined forces with longtime collaborator Audrey Simes, dancer and co-director of artist collective FloSTL.



The two award-winning artists come from very different backgrounds; Zlatko is a native of the former Yugoslavia and Audrey grew up in Los Angeles, but they've both found home in St. Louis cross-collaborating with one another and local artists. Their collected pool of skillsets ranges from video direction and creation to dance and choreography to installation, performance art and beyond.

We invited Audrey and Zlatko to discuss collaboration, their love of movement and the impact they hope to achieve through their work.

A: We met through Webster University in 2011.

Z: I was already a professor at Webster and was invited to be a guest artist for a semester in the Webster dance department. I spent several months working with dancers and filming footage, and Audrey was selected to be in the work—that's how we started creating together.

A: I was already working on my self-designed interdisciplinary major, and was navigating and combining four different departments at Webster. I was engaged with and trying to find crossover between video, dance theater and the limitless possibilities of performance art. That we could combine all these different tools, elements and ideas to make worlds really sparked our continued collaboration.

How did you two meet and what sparked your desire to create together?

Z: I love discipline, so when you're collaborating with somebody, you don't want to give up on a project. There's a certain responsibility when you work together. Audrey works similarly to me. She's focused, she's addicted to the work and she uses her time professionally. All of the multidisciplines we get into make for a great collaboration.

A: I've been thinking about this concept a lot lately— about what collaboration is to me, and how it's perceived, not just in the art world, but in general. There are dynamics between dancer and director, between the piece and the audience, and I feel like even that is a collaboration. I want to make full sensory experiences for audiences so that they're actively participating, and I think right now, that's what people need and want. They want to feel like they're part of something. They want to feel connected. And to me, that is truly what collaboration is about. It's about, in a way, surrendering, being vulnerable, you know? And being able to share ownership of things and say, "We made this," and not be afraid of that.

What makes collaboration so integral to your practices?

Z: The work Audrey and I are doing for the hotel highlights the beauty of the body altogether—the movement, the shapes, the colors. I always search for movement, whether it's from nature or even artificial animation. I love experimentation, and the improvisation and surprises that come with a performance.

What does your collaboration for the Chameleon Lamp focus on?

Z: It's important to somehow reframe visuals and give our artistic approach to viewers. Hopefully they get inspired, take something from it, go and share with somebody else. Teach their kids to care about nature, humans, or maybe become artists themselves. Tell stories or bring other people to see the work. To wonder. To ask questions.

A: Everything you said is very much how I feel as well, and I think creating experiences where people can view art in new ways that break down constructs is important too. I'm not as interested in making work that you can easily sit in your chair and watch on your television to view. I like inspiring people to move, get engaged and get involved through the work itself, and I think the thing the Chameleon Lamp offers is a new way of experiencing projection and filmmaking. It reframes how we think of shooting it. How you think of dancing it. How the viewer can be outside of it or inside of it, sitting and experiencing it almost in some sort of immersive landscape.

What kind of overall impact do you want your work to have?

Z: To me, movement isn't flat— it has dimension, space, narrative, it brings life. With the Chameleon Lamp being part of the space, it's bringing movement, and it's not on a schedule, so you're not there to watch it like a movie. It's almost like a life— what you take from it is really up to you.

A: I also think viewers of art versus viewers of dance tend to be separate audiences sometimes. But I do think that when people see a human experiencing something onstage or on a screen, they're ultimately going to have more connection with it than a sculpture or a two-dimensional image. We are connected to humans more so than we are connected to objects, and I think that movement relates to the human experience more.

What can captured movement communicate, whether through video, performance or dance?

Z: I find that in an alternative gallery such as the Angad Arts Hotel people are under less pressure to get it, to understand, to talk about it, so I love this kind of sneaky way of giving people art and comfortably pulling them in.

A: It's just a new way of framing performance and video, and it's exciting to see that the hotel will offer that more and more. There's so much that the hotel is going to offer to the community. I think the concept of a hotel, as an art hotel particularly, makes it feel like you're immersed fully. For a period of time, you're in residence in an art space, and that's something unique, I think, in any city.

How can viewing art in a hotel help viewers feel more connected with the experiential art?

Z: I think the hotel is going to serve as a starting point in the Grand Center, like a hub where people have somewhere to stay which has been missing in the neighborhood. Grand Center is a great place to visit theaters and exhibitions, socialize and participate in many types of entertainment. Angad Arts Hotel will provide a unique living and art experience for guests and St. Louis residents.

A: There's an intersection between artists and art lovers, and maybe, like you said, those people who consider themselves art lovers will feel they can engage and will want to take a risk and make something themselves. I think the hotel can be a very inspiring place for people. When you provide platforms, people really open up and want to share.

What can Angad Arts Hotel add to St. Louis, specifically to the Grand Center Arts District?

