Life long scavenger hunt - in conversation with artist Lizzi Bougatsos

Lizzi Bougatsos is a multidisciplinary artist/musician mostly known as a singer of Gang Gang Dance.

Lizzi is Greek-American artist born in Queens, New York. Her body of work incorporates sculpture, collage, installation, writing, music and performance. Either on paper or live, she is very loud, chaotic, humorous and sharp. Lizzi’s Greek origin often makes cameo especially when it comes to collages. Seeing Gyros, Tzatziki and a fair amount of awkward ad posters is nothing unusual when it comes to her practice. Bougatsos life is one big scavenger hunt. She collects things she finds on the streets, things she finds while traveling and all these “things” at one point become something more. Her work has been shown at James Fuentes LLC – New York, American
Lizzi, what made you want to be an artist and enroll in art school?

I went to art school as sort of a fluke. The rave scene in New York City was big in the early 90’s, and frankly, I was scared of it, so I jumped on my first offer to go to art school which was a full tuition scholarship situation. I was already taking life drawing classes at FIT. I was bored with the traditional program, fascinated more with immediate reactions to happening type performances in rural situations such as malls where I would film myself walking around with ceramic guns sewn on my clothes in Middle America or filming myself eating in restaurants. That piece was called, “The Fallacies of Food.” I started performing with props, was rhyming with my writings. I began opening for bands with my spoken word at the punk club. In between school, I did a summer program in Southampton and met Jerry Saltz. I showed him my sculptures, but then I opened my mouth and started spitting my lyrics. His advice was to quit college immediately and move back to the city. Of course, I finished school and didn’t listen to him. He still has never seen me perform which I don’t mind at all. I consider him one of my greatest mentors.

Is Gang Gang Dance an art performance or is it a musical group?

Gang Gang Dance is very much a musical group.

Tell me more about Angelblood.

Angelblood started in an elevator in the meat packing district. Well, that’s where we came up with the name. Rita Ackerman asked Jess Holzworth to make an album. She rented a studio in upstate NY. We documented the recording with photos and made an album. Jess eventually left New York, so Rita and I continued the band as we wanted to keep performing and curating art shows. This led us to Europe where we performed impromptu in Paris at the Purple Institute, All Tomorrow’s Parties curated by Sonic Youth and various other festivals in Holland and St. Gallen. After we had recorded Labia Minora, Gang Gang got real busy, and we had to prioritize. My boyfriend at the time was playing in Angelblood and Gang Gang, so we were getting burnt out going to rehearsals uptown in Harlem for Angelblood, then downtown to Williamsburg for Gang Gang practice. Jess sort of stopped performing with us after our Mass of the Daggers album because I went off with her ex-boyfriend. Our friendship has come back around as we were also creative partners in the collaborative duo Boug & Worth. We have an art exhibition at Balice Hertling this coming October.

And then I. U. D. what was that about? How does each group/performance differ from one another?

With Angelblood done, I was pretty much full on Gang Gang. I was on a plane coming back from Japan with the band and saw OOIOO and some other Yoshimi-related drummer groups, AI and decided I wanted to get better at drumming. I heard Sadie was drumming in D.C. in some bands and I asked her if she wanted to jam. That was 2005. We had to come up with a name because people were asking us to gig. We liked EUD because it was so weird, but then we decided on I.U.D. as we figured the periods in-between were up to the audience to name us. Obviously, an I.U.D. is also a sperm blocking contraceptive. It was also the name of a radioactive bomb.
What's the craziest thing you've ever done?

The craziest thing I have ever done was probably a fire stunt I attempted on my body as a protest against the music industry. I am scarred for life for what a friend called “A punk protest.”

When was the last time you got into trouble?

I got pulled over yesterday.

Did you always practice art even when other projects were popping up more?

I write ideas and lyrics all the time, but my art practice varies as my performances require a lot of preparation. I get discouraged with making physical objects often. Money is usually a factor. Production costs often hold me back.

When are you more confident, when performing or when you do art and show that to the public?

I am much more confident when I am performing unless I really like a piece like Working Class Bird. Then I don’t really give a fuck.
What kind of reaction do you hope to get from people?

I usually get reactions from people that I want and much more pleasant surprises and commentary, but I always want more out of myself. A Euphoria does come out of a great performance, though. If the elements are right, I am high for days.

Do you still collect things and then make your art of that?

I do. Collecting garden tools, bird cages, and white fabric at the moment, and songs and words of course. Are you still into hair?

I hate my hair.

What is your favorite possession?

My favorite possession is probably my “save your skin” spray. I am obsessed with essential oils, psychic power and shamanism on a daily basis.

How do your parents feel about the work you make?

My parents have finally come around with my mom as my biggest fan. She actually used to sit in on Angelblood practice. She also collects slate and pine cones for me, and stores my work on Long Island.

Do you still write journals? What was the last thing you wrote down?

I can’t tell which thing I wrote down last was. My final elegance, Saturn is the sixth planet from the sun, like a pope with the computer in 2001 or Queen of the South, a new show on Netflix.

What is your favorite part of the day?

I like the early morning where I am half dreaming.

Do you feel like an adult?

No.

What is your greatest superstition?

I still don’t like a hat on the bed.

Interview: Katja Horvat

Photos: Courtesy of the artist