

PERFORMING THE BODY
for the
Storytelling and the Body Conference, 2019

By
SUNITA S. MUKHI,
DeviDiva Productions
&
De La Salle College of St. Benilde, Manila, Philippines

devidivaproductions@gmail.com
sunitasundermukhi@gmail.com

These stories deal with the narratives that have shackled women regarding their bodies. In *My Eyes Adore You*, notions of beauty are confronted and turned upside down, while in *Cold Fish* a woman's sexual pleasure is forefronted as a source of power. In *My Eyes Adore you*, there is strong involvement of the audience to push the story along, collaborating to experience humor, delight, and even upliftment. *Cold Fish* is performed as a story told around a fire, while downing a few drinks, amidst an intimate gathering. During the conference it preceded the oracular *My Eyes Adore You*.

MY EYES ADORE YOU:
You Are Beautiful To Me

There is a crack, a crack in everything/ That's how the light gets in
- Leonard Cohen

Beauty can compel, destroy, inspire. A multi-billion dollar industry insures that women are forever insecure by their lack of beauty, and yet there are efforts by activists, humanists and feminists to redefine and reclaim what beauty is. Spiritual exegesis assert that outer beauty is ephemeral and true beauty is within, and yet studies have shown that attractive people are more successful, even happier, in the world.

My Eyes Adore You compels you to grapple with the contentious, uplifting, complex concept of BEAUTY through a live interactive improvised performance in which I invite people to come to me, like a fortune teller, with the endearment "You are beautiful to

me” and urge them to confess the one aspect of their physical appearance that they most revile. In turn, I shower the individual with compliments beginning with “My Eyes Adore You, You are beautiful to me” and improvise on why this person’s so-called flaw is actually an asset - invoking another story, if you will, to transform it into a thing of beauty.

I compliment in the kindest voice while maintaining eye contact the historical, folk and contemporary notions of physical attributes, beauty and well-being mined from various cultures.

The Japanese art form of Kintsugi is invoked – mending broken pottery with gold, thus enriching the flaw, and incorporating it as part of the design of the bowl. I am costumed impeccably, but of course.

The engagements can get risky, exhausting and/or quite fulfilling for all of us.

*The first iteration of this performance happened as part of the South Asian Women’s Creative Collective’s suite of performances entitled BEAUTY mounted at the DUMBO Arts Festival, 2014, New York. It’s second iteration was at Benilde’s REINTERPRETATIONS exhibition mounted at the Alto Mondo Gallery, Picasso, Manila, Philippines in 2017.

COLD FISH

This is an erotic folktale - a recuperation of the feminine sensual, as well as an appreciation of nature. It is also a rebuffing of asceticism that reviles sexual pleasure as base. The virile carp is the triumph of the natural over the sterile. This tale has been refurbished from a Japanese folktale which I was first introduced to in Isabelle Allende’s *Aphrodite* - a paean to the pleasures of the senses. I have ‘Indianized’ it, satirizing erotic stereotypes, as well as exaggerating the obsession with purity.

“A messy woman flees her controlling, clean-freak lover and reclines blissfully on a muddy bank while enjoying the oral ministrations of an able and obliging carp. Silly as this story is -- and it's not the only silly one -- the language is so seductive that it comes off as quite sensual. "And afterwards," Oyu concludes, "she laid her mud-slicked hand on his accommodating head, and both carp and lady lolled back in the sultry shadows, she heavy-lidded and content, he with his lidless eyes unwavering under the curious scrutiny of the stars." From: THE PILLOW BOY OF THE LADY ONOGORO, by Alison Fell.

The Lady appears before him, resplendent in her silk. Her hair falling like a black waterfall on her shoulders.

He undrapes her methodically, pulling at the cloth that cascades around her until the sheen of the afternoon sun is reflected on her bronze skin.

She knows what is to come. She lowers here thick lashed eyes, bites her full lips, fighting back the tears that threaten to reveal her true feelings.

He urges her to submerge herself into the bath filled with steaming spring water heavy with the perfume of jasmines.

He is meticulously attentive that each fold and orifice of her luminous body is washed, soaped and cleaned. Particularly behind her ears, under her arms, between her toes but especially in the crevices between her legs, he makes sure that she is without that pungent odor.

He hands her the whitest pumice stone and requires her to scrub each inch of her body so that it is even more supple to his touch.

He demands that she plucks each hair from her body, chiding her for missing this spot or that stray strand.

And then he himself clips her nails short and neat so that she may not scratch him. Scraping the dirt under her nails, sloughing off all the dead skin. He wants her feet and hands to be as soft as rose petals.

After this fastidious foreplay, the man wears his elbow length gloves of leather and proceeds to make love to this revamped, overhauled, and virgin-like Lady.

He is careful that his lips do not touch hers since he may catch her impending cough. He is masterful that his manhood leaves her before he secretes his essence. He does not want to stain the sheets, leave a wet mess or decimate his energy.

As she lays befuddled on the silken bed staring absent-mindedly at the vast nothingness, he washes himself with the same attentiveness that he had subjected her to earlier.

Feeling clean and fresh, he withdraws into his own room, and meditates for a full two hours. After all he has to make sure that the karmic debt he has incurred by succumbing to his baser self is paid off.

Dejected, our Lady sits by the pond in her garden where an enormous saffron carp made its home. His firm athletic body, sloshes and swishes about. His body shimmers like a brilliant topaz in that sluggish pond. This amuses her somewhat. The koi is pleased to have pleased the Lady.

This happens every afternoon. Before the evening meal.

After one session of antiseptic lovemaking, our Lady is consumed with sadness. She sits by the pond where the enormous koi lives and she begins to weep.

Startled by her sobs, the koi swims towards her. He notices the slightly upturned toe of her languid foot barely breaking the water. He begins to suck that alert toe, slowly encompassing its flesh with his strong lips. And then he sucks another, and another.

The Lady feels a wave surge at the pit of her stomach, her skin tingles with a sizzle she had forgotten. She lets her other foot into the water and that big fish kisses each toe with even more fervor.

The massive orange carp then brushes his glistening body against her calves. Understanding his earnest invitation, the Lady plunges herself into the muddy pond, open and hungry as a lotus flower.

The bold fish circles around her, around her neck, strokes her hair, around her waist, kisses her by now petulant breasts, around each trembling thigh.

He nuzzles her navel, and nudges her to spread her legs and surrender to his virile caresses.

The golden fish bubbles streams of water across her most sensitive parts, and thus little by little, makes ever deeper incursions into her powerhouse, leading the Lady along the most sublime paths of pleasure – a pleasure she had never known in the arms of any man, certainly not with her begloved lover.

Later, both Woman and Animal rest, floating languorously on the frothy ooze of the muddy pond, beneath the gleeful applause of the gasping stars.

About Sunita S. Mukhi (short)

Sunita S. Mukhi is a theater/film/performance artist, writer, cultural programs curator, interdisciplinary performance scholar and educator. She writes and performs her poetry, stories, monologues that espouse the redemptive power of the arts with dynamic women as central characters. She continues her curatorial work, arts advocacy and practice as the Associate Dean for Arts and Culture Cluster (Arts Management, Dance, Design Foundation, Production Design, Music Production, and Theater Arts) at the De La Salle College of St. Benilde's School of Design and Arts in Manila, Philippines, and as the Artistic Director of DeviDiva Productions.

About Sunita S. Mukhi (long)

Sunita S. Mukhi

Currently in her fifth year as the Associate Dean for Arts and Culture at the De La Salle College of St. Benilde in Manila, Sunita S. Mukhi is a cultural producer, theater/performance artist, and an interdisciplinary performance scholar. She was the pioneering Director of the Charles B. Wang Center's Asian/American Programming at Stony Brook University, New York for 10 years, and Program Coordinator at the Asia Society, New York 6 years prior. Her book *Doing the Desi Thing: Performing Indianness in New York City* (Taylor and Francis/Routledge) is based on her dissertation for her doctorate in Performance Studies from New York University, and is a continuation of her graduate work from San Francisco State University. She has performed, directed and choreographed in university, community, and professional theatrical, television and film productions in Manila, United States, Mexico and Singapore. Though she lived in New York for 26 years, she is born and bred in the Philippines. The formidable foundation of her character, culture and knowledge base are derived from St. Scholastica's College, De La Salle University, and her Sindhi Hindu home, diasporic family and community. As a self-proclaimed SindhiPinaYorker, she dreams, schemes, enables and enacts performative and scholarly endeavors that explore themes of the Asian mythic, female empowerment, moral redemption and social transformation through the arts.

Some of her most recent artistic-scholarly endeavors are a one-woman show and performance art pieces entitled *The Devi Diva Triad*, *It's a Drag Being an Indian Woman*, *Shrimati Liberty is an Awesome American*, *Who is Asia America?* performed in New York. At Benilde, she put together a 6 hour pilgrimage homage to Dante Alighieri's Purgatory *Love Gone Wrong*, *Love Redeemed*; a dance theater piece immersing the audience in the ambitions and anguish of the artist in *Quartered*; played the serpent and *bruha* (witch) in Nonon Padilla's *Ang Mga Misteryo ng Liwanag* and *Makbet* respectively. She was the dramaturg and artistic producer of Benilde's innovative dance musical based on Mars Ravelo's Darna told from the perspective of her devoted brother who is deaf: *DING, ANG BATO!* She forayed into installation art with *Shards* in Chicago (April, 2019). She

regaled artist-scholars in Verona, Italy (July 2019) and in Hawaii(August, 2019) with her stories *Cold Fish*, *My Eyes Adore You*, and *Dance Stories of Magnificence and Joy*.

**MY EYES ADORE YOU
&
COLD FISH**

By **SUNITA S. MUKHI**
DeviDiva Productions
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Progressive Connexions,
Verona, Italy
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Hotel San Marco

MY EYES ADORE YOU:
You are Beautiful to Me
There is a crack, a crack in everything? That's how the light gets in
- Leonard Cohen in Anthem

Confess the one aspect of your physical appearance that you most revile,
and let's transform that into a thing of beauty

Preceded by:
COLD FISH

There's a lovely woman, her fastidious lover who is as cold as a fish. And then there
is a magnificent, magnanimous carp who notices her sadness ...

Progressive Connections
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BENILDE COLLEGE OF SAINT BENILDE

Covered in the Philippine Press:

<https://www.manilatimes.net/benildes-associate-dean-of-arts-and-culture-performs-in-italy/598038/>



