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*"Prox: After all this time, what do you think the two of you can accomplish together, that you can't do alone?"*

*Nabiha & Thom: True happiness."*

## Interview With the Artist Couple, Nabiha & Thom.

AUGUST 15, 2016 BY PROX CENTAURI IN ART, PSYCHEDELICS

Nabiha (Born in Germany) and Thom (Born in Poland) is a duo operating out of Germany who create pieces that focus on harmony within oneself, and those we form relationships with. The

artist couple has used their unique talents to create an aesthetic symbiosis that has garnered much praise in recent years.

The outstanding "*Doors of Perception*" set (based on William Blake's theory of the same name) is a fantastic homage to classic psychedelia while still recreating elements discussed in Blake's writings.

The "*UNITY*" series documents the couples evolution (beginning in 1997, up until now) in a selfie format (which was fairly uncommon in the 90s). This set acts a wonderful opportunity to view the growth the two have had together in an honest, and natural context. There is something peaceful (and assuring) about seeing romantic longevity being depicted in such a way. It's comforting to see that two people can still learn, grow, and achieve a kind of spiritual unity.

I spoke with the couple to learn about the inception of these catalogues and their journey as lovers and artists.



"EOS"

**Prox:** Tell us about yourselves. Where did the two of you grow up and why did you decide to

**pursue Art?**

N&T: Thom was born in Katowice, Poland and came to Bremen with his parents at the age of 2. Nabiha grew up in Wuerzburg.

We found out there were several similarities in our childhood: The cities we both grew up in are middle sized, both of us lived in the city centre near the river – and both of us have some kind of “migrational background”: Thom's parents fled the communist regime in the 70's – and Nabiha's father was a young student of medicine from Aleppo/Syria who went to Germany to become a doctor.

**Prox: Why did you decide to pursue Art?**

N&T: Being an artist is a profession where it is possible to include all aspects of our personalities and to have a free and exciting life.

Creating art is something we would do anyway, money or not - this way we do not have to waste time and energy with a "normal" job and can concentrate our efforts into something we really like. Working together also gives us more time as a couple, because neither of us is routinely away for ten+ hours every weekday doing something the other is not deeply interested in.



"Nereid"

**Prox: How did the two of you meet?**

N&T: We met at a goth party in a club called “The Golden Crown” in Darmstadt (Germany). Thom was costumed as a vampire, being his character in a live action role playing game – and Nabiha wore her blue “London” wig for the party.

**Prox: Could you tell us about some of the thoughts you had before you approached one another for the first time?**

Nabiha: We were introduced by a friend. That night in the club she told me to wait near a billiard table so I just sat on it and waited. After some time, it was Thom who walked directly towards me – I immediately knew it was him and thought "Wow – what a handsome guy/spirit!" ... meeting him for the first time made everything else disappear in a blur ;-)

Thom: From the first moment I knew her to be the One. Awakened, aware, beautiful and authentic.

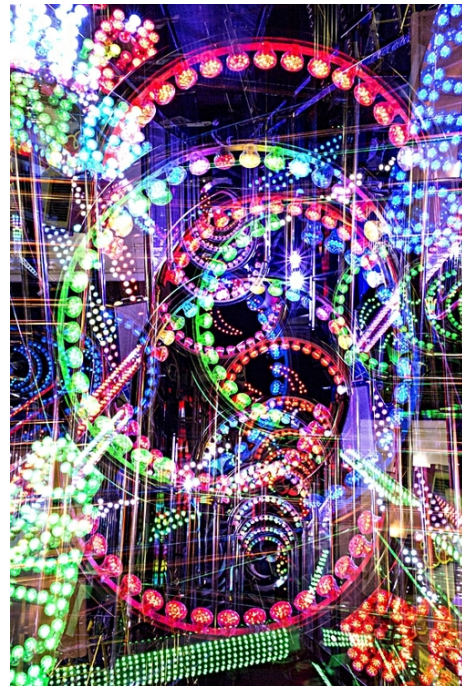
**Prox: Were there any challenges that you encountered when you first started working together? What were some artistic compromises you had to make in order to ensure that you could accommodate each other?**

N&T: Actually, there were no challenges we encountered when we first started working together, because our structure of collaboration developed naturally – almost like playing or dancing. For both of us, the experience of working together beginning in the years 1997/1998 as part of Nabiha's studies showed us that we are stronger and more productive together because we manage to combine our unique skills. Also we are sharing one big photo archive.

We do not have to compromise in any bad way, because we are not competing with each other and we are somehow able to accept each others critique without feeling hurt.



*"Doors of Perception"*



*"Doors of Perception"*

**Prox: Your Doors of Perception series has recently garnered a lot of praise and recognition. Could you talk about the initial planning period and message that you're trying to convey with it?**

N&T: There was no real planning. It was more of a lengthy period of inspiration by Eastern and Western philosophy, physics and cognitive psychology that led to our understanding of the relativity of perception and the way the mind works, which is expressed in these images:

Our sensory organs, brain and nervous system mainly function as filters: they select and reduce the excessive oversupply of stimuli. It is their function to protect us from being overwhelmed by this amount of mostly useless and irrelevant knowledge.

Therefore, of the information picked up each moment, only a small, carefully selected amount that is of practical use remains.

What we generally conceive of as "this world", is only a fraction of our surrounding reality. These filtering mechanisms can be loosened through meditation, hypnosis or chemical means, allowing additional aspects of reality to be perceived.

DOORS OF PERCEPTION simulates a bypass of the visual filter.

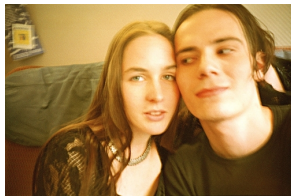
These filters keep us functioning efficiently and from going insane, but they also cut us off from spiritual experiences.

Blake says it best:

"If the Doors of Perception were cleansed, every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."

(William Blake (1790) in: The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Plate 14.)



1997



2004



2009

**Prox: The UNITY series is also a fascinating timeline of the changes that you two are undergoing together. How did this start and what are some of the most admirable changes that you've seen in each other over the years? How has the unity between you made your lives better?**

N&T: Thom initiated the UNITY series naturally without any further thoughts shortly after we had met in February 1997 and fell in love with each other. He began to take the first double-self portraits as we like to call them.

These images were and still are our private visual diary and at first, they were not meant for publishing.

After finishing her studies of Photography and Art in London (2001) and Bielefeld (2004), Nabiha went to her first portfolio review at Gruner + Jahr, Hamburg – Europe's biggest publishing house – where she showed a small selection of these images to the Gruner + Jahr gallerists. Knowing the work of Cindy Sherman and Nan Goldin whose work impressed her strongly, she was curious about feedback to our own self portraits.

The two gallerists immediately offered us a solo show, so as a result UNITY became public in 2006 featuring the first 9 years of our relationship on over 50 meters of wall space. (See: <http://unityart.eu/unity-gruner-und-jahr-2006> and <http://unityart.eu/unity-making-of>)

It was a time when the act of pointing the camera at yourself – especially as a couple – was quite unusual. Today of course, "selfies" are everywhere. In a way, we feel like pioneers when we think back to almost 20 years ago, when we began to turn our analog cameras onto ourselves...

Looking back on almost 20 years together there is a lot to reflect. We know our weaknesses and our "individual madness". It feels like we are both a "guru" for each other.

Nabiha: Thom helps me to become calmer and prevents me from burning out. He also helped me a great deal to realize the value of private happiness – in contradiction to my strong ambitions to be successful and dedicate my whole life to my career – in an uncontrollable crazy world.

Thom: Through Nabiha, I was finally able to accept the world as it is.

We understand "Unity" as a concept that unifies and includes individuality, uniqueness and variety.

Every individual being or entity – whether plant, animal or human being – is of the same origin.

Everything is interwoven, and has a purpose. Every part is needed for the world to be balanced.

Simply knowing that this also applies to ourselves, makes our lives better.

**Prox: How have you helped each other grow spiritually, intellectually, and artistically?**

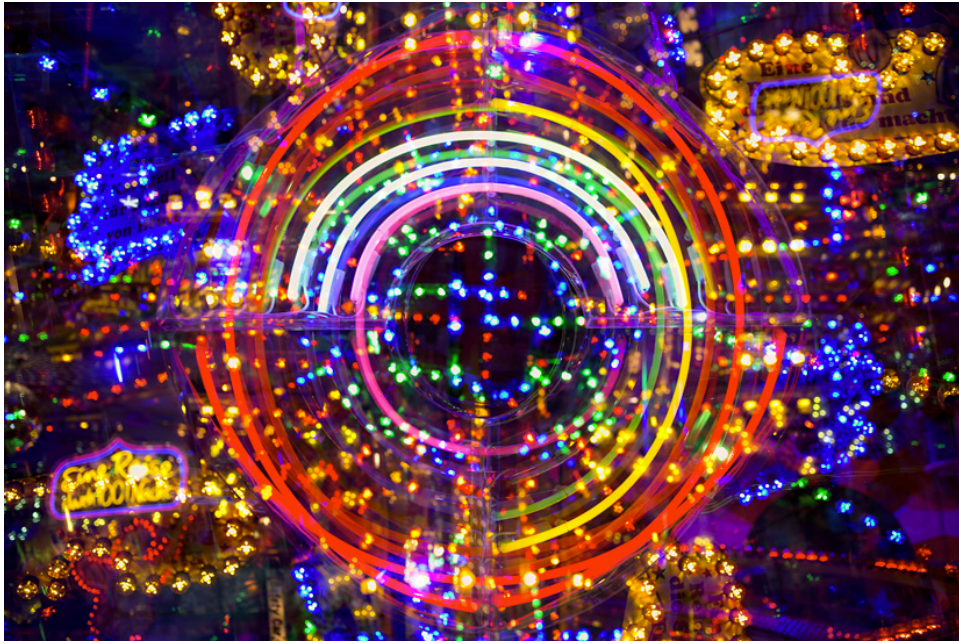
N&T: On the artistic level, we help each other in different parts of the production process. Nabiha is the one for the "bigger picture" – the first contact to the "outside world". She organizes everything and then talks the details through with Thom – who then makes his suggestions. Nabiha does the first picture editing – Thom usually makes the final decisions. When there are texts to write, Nabiha is very fast to put words on paper, then Thom slowly refines it. We also show each other works by other artists that we like, talk about technique, colors, impact.

Intellectually one can say that Thom is the one who knows a lot – and Nabiha is the one who feels a lot. Thom is the database and Nabiha is the navigation system. Accepting each others weaknesses and assimilating each others strengths is what lets us grow.

It feels like we help each other become his/her true self – and at the same time we become more like the other.

**Prox: After all this time, what do you think the two of you can accomplish together, that you can't do alone?**

N&T: True happiness.



"Doors of Perception"

**Prox: Who are some of your favorite contemporary artists?**

Robert Venosa, Android Jones, MC Escher, Mike Allred, Anton Corbijn, Moebius, Björk, Anoushka Shankar,

Viktor Vasarely, Max Ernst, Dali, H.R.Giger, Lady Frieda Harris, Pamela Colman Smith.

**Prox: Favorite hobbies?**

Nabiha: Pictures, music, inline skating and other forms of exercise, organic gardening, reading, writing, and painting.

Thom: Philosophizing for endless hours. Meditation and hypnosis, Science Fiction and RPGs.

**Prox: Tips for aspiring artists?**

N&T: Love what you do !

We believe that doing what you really love is the only thing that truly makes sense. Why would you not do what you love? Because you think others might think you should be doing something they think is right? Forget that! This is your life and our time here on this planet is limited. Every day lived is one day closer to your death. Being conscious of this is good for making decisions. Make the most of it!

Often you will be asked and questioned „... and you can live of your art?“ and indeed – finding and creating an environment that supports your creative flow is hard. Sound thoughts about your financial basis are crucial. We have met many young artists who support their artistic work with jobs like waiting tables, selling insurance etc. and often we feel it might be better to try to work in a job that utilizes at least some of the skills needed for their art, like teaching painting to

children, playing music at events or doing commissioned work.

**Prox: Information on upcoming releases and projects?**

N&T: After some turbulent months with many shows, we are looking forward to producing new work and also to the philosophy artist residency with the Consciousness Network – which we will do in late summer. There is also an exhibition in India coming up in the Winter.

**Prox: Final Thoughts?**

N&T: Celebrate Life!

and

Thank you, dear Prox, for this opportunity to share our thoughts and work!

You can learn more about Nabiha & Thom and follow them, [here](#).

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2016

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