

## *MOVING MASKS for a CLOUD OF THOUGHTS*

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Immediately after the decision on March 15, 2020 of the French government to impose a sanitary quarantine on the country because of the COVID19 virus, the lack of hygienic masks preoccupied the media and public opinion. But- I had a large stock of paper masks *Made in China* stored in my basement... So I decided to launch the artistic project "CLOUD OF THOUGHTS".

I am an artist with a practice in experimental animation. In 2008, I exposed in an ancient pilgrim's church hundreds of paper masks with hand drawn animation, symbolizing questions and hopes of the families of sick children, who had gathered during centuries in this sacred place, praying for spiritual help...

And now, in spring 2020, suddenly there was the moment to continue with this project- not out of opportunism, but because *it was in the air*.

"*Language! It's a virus!*" sings the American poet and artist Laurie Anderson. Panic was everywhere, provoked by the insistent catastrophe storytelling of the media. Words and language transmitting FEAR turned out as an efficient virus invading the collective mind. How to communicate secret worries, private hopes or even forbidden thoughts, in this fear-stricken atmosphere where words and ritual security mantras induced a paralyzing state in face of an invisible danger threatening life?

The sanitary mask seems to offer protection against the viral attack, pretending to shield from a possibly dangerous neighbour. It covers the mouth and muffles the voice, making us talk to ourselves instead to others. It hides half of the face who becomes anonymous and inexpressive- but it also offers a surface which can transport a visual message.

Having found people all over France, students or amateurs who wanted to participate, I mailed a package to each of them, containing 40 paper masks (*une quarantaine* means "around 40" in French) and some technical instructions how to create a short animated sequence. Every participant came up with his or her personal idea to express a personal emotion through drawing in movement.

Interestingly, some people refused to draw on the masks, feeling they would commit some kind of sacrilege. Being rare goods, even expired and totally useless masks had become symbols that were psychologically taboo...

After transferring the animation drawings, everyone took photographs wearing the masks. The images then were reframed and mounted to create the animated sequence, underlined with a soundtrack. Nearly 3 months later, 12 people have sent back their masks, 5 more are expected to finish soon, and my personal contribution will be added as well to the collection.

I hope to expose the films one day together with all the hand drawn masks in a CLOUD OF THOUGHTS. Since we will probably be living every day with masks all over the planet for a while, perhaps more people will be inspired to take part in this artistic adventure...