

Step inside the theatre factory with a priceless burlesque trio

Three companies (tg STAN, de KOE and Maatschappij Discordia) hand in hand, three extremely likeable and finely attuned actors construct this tightrope of an *Atelier*, an incredible theatrical proposition which puts imagination, creativity and the theatre kitchen centre stage. Delightful and hilarious.

Tg STAN, de KOE and Maatschappij Discordia, three Flemish and Dutch companies which are very much at home at the Théâtre de la Bastille, like team-work and looking in on others. Hence their occasional hybrid, colourful and fertile association, a composite theatrical chimera derived from three different terroirs. It has given birth to *Atelier*, an imaginary immersion in the theatre factory, a burlesque show which jubilantly cultivates the precarious art of the catastrophe, a highly captivating and ludic exercise in proximity that says far more than one would think.

It is a compact bifrontal contrivance. There are stacks of crates on what promises to be the performance space, the playground of the mysterious protagonists of this preposterous construction, seemingly without rhyme or reason. Forget characters, a story line and badinage! *Atelier* is a production without words in which the three thespians – Matthias de Koning, Damiaan De Schrijver and Peter Van den Eede – set about conducting a dialogue with the material world in their own inimitable way. At the outset the crates become the base of the stage, the foundations of the boards they erect before our very eyes, a wooden raft which soon becomes the primitive stage of the theatre on which the actors learn to walk and stand up straight before they can reveal their world and make it credible for us. Then assembly gets under way, scaffolding made up of ropes, pipes, coat-hangers, etc. The set is constructed in full view as we look on; it is the dramaturgical nucleus of a performance which openly questions the creative act, the factory of the spectacle, the back of the scenery, that fascinating phase when the imagination fires on all cylinders and puts out feelers in every direction, that blessed time of searching when the result doesn't matter, when efficiency and productivity are irrelevant, when judgement doesn't have a place in this inner family kitchen, where trying is more important than succeeding, where childhood resurfaces at full tilt to deploy its ludicrous resources and crazy ingenuity.

The audience has a whale of a time observing these three troublemakers with their naive and tender expressions, these instigators of disorder, inventors of worlds littered with objects which belong on the waste tip or at a Sunday flea market. A subway car, the door of a house, a stove to warm oneself by, an improvised table... the humdrum unfolds before our marvelling eyes, along with pictorial scenes from the history of art (Caillebotte's *Parquet Planers*, the fresco from the Sistine Chapel, culminating in a rickety and magnificent *Descent from the Cross*). The classic clownish mechanisms work extremely well, which just goes to show that the best soups are made in old pots and that the theatre is all to do with childhood. The spectators laugh heartily, but they are also moved by this shambolic concoction of brilliant but simple ideas, staged so as to give us the chance to explore behind the scenes of the production, which is as magical as the production itself. And when the end comes, the spectators conclude that those three oddballs are very, very good.

Because they are so intelligent without showing it. So magnanimous without flaunting it. And because they allow us share the jollity.

Marie Plantin