

Encounters between art and dance in 'Encounters/Ontmoetingen' at the MAS

A danced exhibition

In the exhibition 'Encounters/Ontmoetingen' the choreographer and dancer Pé Vermeersch uses dance performances to build a bridge between the art works and the spectator. Over a period of three months, performances by different dancers from the company Radical HeArts enhance the total experience of the exhibition. The choreographic circuit that the visitors will be able to see four times a week is a work of art in the making.

For the exhibition 'Encounters/Ontmoetingen' at the MAS, Pé Vermeersch created a choreographic circuit for a changing cast of dancers who take on new challenges to animate the space in different ways at each performance. A choreographer and a dancer, she leaves room for inspiration and unpredictability through the power and sensibility of the dancers evolving among over a hundred art pieces from all over the world.

The challenge of the dance is to breathe life into the exhibition through the body in motion, sometimes in a one-to-one meeting with a particular work of art, sometimes in a relationship with many pieces brought together by the curator. All in the details, the dance is trying to compose with the sensibility inherent to each work of art rather than narrating or illustrating its essence. The dancers from various origins and backgrounds (from contemporary dance to flamenco and sport) don't share the same technique, but focus their work on imagination. Composing from the natural body, they incorporate the art works in a unique and personal manner. During the three hours of the circuit, the visitor is free to walk around and to choose the highlights of performances that catch his eye, following dancers who become sensible guides throughout the exhibition.

The innovation of the exhibition 'Encounters/Ontmoetingen' lies in the symbiosis between the visions shared by the choreographer and by the curator Paul Vandebroek whose approach investigates the power of works of art beyond time and cultures. Since the creation of her solo 'Blondes have no soul' (2001) that toured all Europe, Pé is looking to develop a relationship with the visual arts by exploring dance as an abstract painting and by questioning the conditions in which it is exposed.

She invites the dancers of her company to express themselves in a body language nourished by inspiration, empathy, sensibility surrendering to time. The result is a dance within everyone's reach intuitively grafted to the human body. The exhibition and the dance thus manage to transgress time, space and cultural limitations.

"I look for the unpredictable strength of the dancers – like a storm raging over the sand on a sultry summer's night – and I lead the dancers through images and blind work to an empathetic sensibility. This work is then transposed into a choreographic composition in space and time."

To accomplish this choreographic circuit based on the dialogue and encounters, Pé Vermeersch brings together an international cast of dancers coming from Belgium, Canada, Italy, Japan, Mexico and the United States. Angela Babuin and Mira Walschot have been working with the choreographer for more than 10 years and are present in most of the productions. Some are also totally new to the process, others have been engaged in the work for 3 to 5 years. A very special encounter is the one with Naoka Uemura, with whom Pé studied together more than 15 years ago in Tokyo.

A philosophy graduate, Pé Vermeersch has worked for different theatre companies since she was young. She specialised in dance after studying traditional dance theatre forms and specific figures from the Japanese butoh, an avant-garde dance movement with which she is often associated in Flanders, but from which she is distancing herself, at least in its stereotypical form. The iconic dancers Akira Kasaki and Min Tanaka, for whom she danced in Japan and the United States, became essential to her artistic career. These collaborations allowed her to build a refined body language with infinite possibilities. She never looks for the comfort zone and always takes on the risk of 'the here and now' in performance, since "beauty is in the intention rather than in perfection".

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Pé Vermeersch & Radical HeArts

Choreographic circuit : Pé Vermeersch

Assistance : Angela Babuin

Dance :

Pé Vermeersch (1969), Belgian living in Kortrijk, choreographer, dancer, visual artist, writer

Naoka Uemura (1969), Japanese living in Tokyo, dancer, dance teacher

Angela Babuin (1982), Italian living in Buenos Aires, dancer, choreographer

Mira Walschot (1978), Belgian living in Ghent, art historian, teacher

Mirella Martinez (1972), Mexican living in Lima, dance teacher and therapist

Rebecca Rosseel (1989), Belgian living in Antwerp, dancer, dance teacher, theatre technician

Ilya Krouglikov (1981), Russian living in Montreal, dance dramaturg, interpreter, mathematician

Hanne Schillemans (1988), Belgian living in Ghent, dancer, choreographer

Federico Ordoñez (1981), Spanish/Italian living in Brussels, flamenco and contemporary dancer

Anna Llanes Lawson (1983), American living in Ghent, flamenco and contemporary dancer

Costumes : Anita Evenepoel, Pé Vermeersch

Stylistic advisor : Elisabeth Van Parijs-Debock

Soundscape : Peter Clasen (Neven group)