

## NO51 MU NAINE VIHASTAS

Images are at the heart of our lives. There are images we barely glance at but that stay with us, and images that watch us. There are images we create and collect, without knowing how to sort and where to store them. There are images that our memory hoards, more or less consciously. And then, there's the image we have of ourselves, the one we try to project to others... In *NO51 Mu Naine Vihastas* (*NO51 My Wife Got Angry With Me and Deleted All The Pictures From Our Holidays*), Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo, two Estonian artists, tell the story of a man alone with himself, after his wife and children have left. Following an argument, his wife destroyed all the pictures they'd taken while vacationing on a paradise island. With the help of a group of people he brought together, the husband begins a strange and desperate attempt to recreate his own memories and reconstitute the pictures that have been erased. Locations and characters change, but he goes to great length to recreate the pictures' framing, composition, and meaning. The audience watches this odd attempt to contract time and space in a hotel room turned giant photo studio. A way to stop the world from turning, to assert one's existence, and to show the importance of what we've been through.

The show premiered on May 10, 2014 at Theatre NO99, Tallinn (Estonia).

## ENE-LIIS SEMPER AND TIIT OJASOO

Ene-Liis Semper, set designer and video artist, studied at the Estonian Academy of Arts. Tiit Ojasoo, a theatre director, graduated from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. Their meeting gave birth to Teater NO99, that will end its existence around 2024 or 2025: when they created their company in Tallinn in 2004, Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo began with their first show, *NO99*, a countdown that will end with *NO00*. They are now halfway through. In February 2015 they created *NO46 Savisaar*, which takes the form of a Greek tragedy to attack populism, in the form of Tallinn's mayor, Edgar Savisaar. In one of their previous productions, *NO75 Unified Estonia*, they went as far as to create a fictitious political party whose founding "convention" was attended by over 7,000 spectators! But some of their shows, like *NO51 My Wife Got Angry With Me and Deleted All The Pictures From Our Holidays*, are more intimate. Experimenting with different "formats," they pay particularly close attention to art history and to social questions. Theatre NO99 often shows its productions at international festivals and venues, but rarely in France. The public is now invited to discover their work.

## INTERVIEW WITH TIIT OJASOO AND ENE-LIIS SEMPER

**You founded your company in 2004. How old were you then?**

Tiit Ojasoo: Twenty-six.

Ene-Liis Semper: Thirty-four. I already had a career as an artist, Tiit was on the rise. I had done many international exhibitions, I had travelled a lot. My experience went further than just the world of the theatre, but Tiit's vision matched mine. We felt that by working together, we could explore the art of theatre more deeply.

T.O.: Ene-Liis's experience with video and with galleries led us to the creation of NO99.

**You are the first Estonian artists to be invited to the Festival d'Avignon. What does it mean to you to be Estonian and to play for the audience here?**

E-L.S.: Estonia is a small country, of only 1.2 million people, in Northern Europe, not too far from Finland. Estonian doesn't sound like any other language, except Finnish. But the means of expression of contemporary theatre allow us to overcome this language barrier: we have travelled a lot with our ensemble, and at all festivals, were enthusiastically received.

T.O.: Actually, being Estonian can be summed up in these two things: our unique language, and the omnipresence of nature. You can walk for hours and not meet anyone. On the other hand, Estonia is ranked fifth in the world when it comes to the creation of start-ups. A while ago, an Estonian team created Skype, and electronic voting and online entrepreneurship are the reality of Estonia today. The latest innovation is the creation of the e-residence, which allows any foreign citizen to become an electronic entrepreneur and to perform a great number of operations from anywhere on the planet.

**In your theatre, which incorporates video and installation, what is your relationship to the Estonian language? Aren't your shows difficult for foreign audiences to grasp?**

E-L.S.: Actually, we have always paid close attention to the communicative aspect of our productions, including outside of our own linguistic space.

When we have to translate traditional dialogue, we use surtitles, to make understanding easier.

T.O.: The fact that actors are speaking Estonian isn't an obstacle for the audience, and the shows that have been the most successful abroad have often been the ones that feature original texts created during rehearsals.

**You say that the name of your theatre, NO99, can be understood as a "countdown," that it implies the idea of a series. Was this idea part in your original project?**

T.O.: One could see in the name of our theatre a philosophical view on the finiteness of life. We are counting down with each new show, getting closer and closer to our own programmed end. When we get to *NO00*, we'll part ways to work on other projects.

E-L.S.: The idea is to make possible the creation of all forms of theatre productions, from the most poetical to the most politically-charged. We try to diversify our work, so as not to get bored. We are currently working on show

NO43, and we founded NO99 ten years ago... We never thought this project would lead us this far. We wanted every show to be special, so as not to fall into a routine. Every new show is a challenge.

**You have chosen not to let yourselves be boxed in by formats, to go from a production like NO75, which is a sort of mega-show about political parties, to an improvisational show in front of a hundred people. The production you are presenting at the Festival d'Avignon, NO51 *My Wife Got Angry With Me and Deleted All The Pictures From Our Holidays*, is more intimate. How do you combine those different forms of public representation?**

T.O.: You have to accept the moment: to be able to play with the same concentration in front of eight thousand people or in front of ten. It all depends on what you are talking about. If the show is about alcohol addiction and aimed at teenagers or young adults, then we'll play it in schools, we'll go into classrooms. One of our projects that revolved around the theme of money, we played in banks, in front of people whose job has to do with money in a very direct way.

E-L.S.: *NO51 My Wife Got Angry With Me and Deleted All The Pictures From Our Holidays* is a show about images, so to reach a more powerful level of intimacy, we are creating and photographing a number of images in front of the audience, in real time. Intimacy comes progressively, as the photographs are taken. The audience begins to feel closer to the actors, as if they were part of their lives. Everyone can see themselves in those photographs, because in the end, our lives look a lot alike, and so the photographs we take to save the key moments of our lives look a lot alike.

**Yet the images shown onstage are very different: holiday pictures turn into a summary of the history of photography. Do you think there is still such a thing as individual memory, or have stereotypes taken over completely?**

E-L.S.: Some people can be so influenced by the images surrounding them that their memory reproduces the images. On the other hand, someone who has lots and lots of vivid memories will create his or her own images. Where is the border between the general and the personal nowadays?

**Would it be accurate to say that theatre, often at the intersection between theatre and visual arts, has become the visual art of the 21st century?**

E.-L. S.: Visual arts have this kind of raw energy they transmit, which isn't the case of traditional theatre. To be able to establish a parallel between visual arts and theatre, actors have to produce energy onstage, and not just say their lines.

T.O.: Theatre, to me, is the art of emotion. That is what makes it a visual art. It doesn't have to be rational. If it limits itself to its intellectual dimension, it is little more than reading. That is why I think that, nowadays, the text isn't the only possible starting point for a show.

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Interview conducted by Jean-Marc Adolphe / Translation Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

AND...

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

- 9 July at 11:00 am, *Lies, fiction, and politics* with Ene-Liis Semper, Tiit Ojasoo, and others / Organised with the Centre national du Théâtre

Site Louis Pasteur de l'Université, free admittance

- 9 July at 02:00 pm, Encounter Research and Creation: *Plot creation* with, among others, Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo / Organised with ANR Cloître Saint-Louis, free admittance

(please sign up on [recherche-creation-avignon.fr](http://recherche-creation-avignon.fr))

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