

AND...

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Dialogue artists-audience with Anne-Cécile Vandalem and the artistic team of *Arctique*, July 21 at 16:30, site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon

NAVE OF IMAGES

– Excerpt of *Tristesses* (2016) by Anne-Cécile Vandalem
– *Arctique* (2018 / 2h10) by Anne-Cécile Vandalem
July 21 at 15:00, église des Célestins

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- October 11, 2018, International Theatre Forum TEART, Minsk (Belarus)
- November 7 and 8, Le Volcan, Le Havre
- November 15 and 16, Festival Les Boréales, Caen
- November 21 to 24, Théâtre de Liège
- November 29 and 30, Espace Jean Legendre, Compiègne
- January 8 to 11, 2019, Célestins, Théâtre de Lyon
- January 16 to February 10, Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe, Paris
- February 14 and 15, La Comédie de Saint-Étienne

ARCTIC

2025, somewhere in the freezing international waters. Interior night. Cold. The reception hall of a cruise liner. Even colder outside. Disturbing boarding for seven stowaways, between Denmark and Greenland. This is no love boat, but a cruise ship drifting away in a hostile environment scarred by global warming. What are they doing there? A former minister from Greenland, her ex-adviser, an environmental activist, a journalist, a businessman's widow, the ship's captain, and a teenage girl try to understand who so mysteriously brought them together and why. Is this a political thriller? A prophetic piece of ecological fiction? A claustrophobic dark comedy? A deadly journey? Halfway between theatre and cinema, in a gigantic set with an equally impressive backstage area, Anne-Cécile Vandalem leads us on an epic expedition with icily precise tension, in which both global warming and vengeance are dishes best served cold.

ANNE-CÉCILE VANDALEM

Anne-Cécile Vandalem is an actress, writer, and director. Born in Liège in 1979, she trained at the Royal Conservatory. In 2008, she founded Das Fräulein (Kompanie) and created *(Self)Service*, *Habit(u)ation*, and *After the Walls (Utopia)*. She likes to mix genres and artistic forms. Her tragicomic world, inspired by cinema, is filled with personal tragedies, political fiction, and dreamlike stories. After *Sadnesses*, which met with acclaim at the 2016 edition of the Festival d'Avignon, *Arctic* continues a cycle about the failures of mankind.

72th
EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,750 people, artists, technicians, and organisational staff, have worked tirelessly and enthusiastically for months. More than half of them are state-subsidised freelance workers.

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INTERVIEW WITH ANNE-CÉCILE VANDALEM

The story of *Arctic* moves between simplicity and complexity, unity and interlocked elements. Can you sum it up for us?

Anne-Cécile Vandalem: The year is 2025. In Greenland, international corporations are dividing the last remaining natural resources between themselves and influencing the country's politics and economy. The story takes place aboard *Arctic Serenity*, an old cruise ship which was supposed to cross the mythical North-West passage in 2015, made accessible thanks to climate change and the melting of the ice caps. In order to develop a new form of luxury tourism, the liner was financed by a private consortium in exchange for exploiting rights to territories in Greenland. But the ship only ever made one crossing. During her inauguration, she hit an oil platform. The accident caused an environmental catastrophe and made one victim, a singer hired for the occasion. Ten years later, *Arctic Serenity* is towed to Greenland to be turned into a hotel for well-off tourists. After receiving unsigned invitations, Greenland's former prime minister, her ex-adviser, a reformed activist from an environmental association, a journalist, the widow of a consortium executive, the former captain of the ship, and a teenage girl all sneak up onboard the ship for reasons that remain secret. Along the way, the tow ship abandons them in the middle of international waters. The passengers then start drifting until the ship is trapped in ice and they find themselves the targets of a conspiracy to make them disappear.

Do the location and stakes of the action exist in a realistic context?

Absolutely. Climate change opened a route towards the Arctic circle and Greenland experienced a boom in the exploitation of its natural resources from 2009 to 2013, before it all came to an end when the price of oil fell. This region, long considered inaccessible because of the ice, is home to important resources that can now be exploited. The economic boom the mining and energy industry have enjoyed has dramatically increased the region's strategic importance. The money thus generated was supposed to be the condition for Greenland's independence. But since then, "prospectors" have left, the mines that were built aren't being exploited, and unemployment is growing. I travelled to Greenland to try to understand the situation. The Arctic is the epicentre of the phenomenon of global warming, which has repercussions on the whole planet. Greenland is seen as both victim and responsible for this situation, but that's not the case at all. I wanted to ask Greenlanders how they feel about this planet which has been pointing its finger at them for the past ten years, when it had long ignored them before that. The answers I received were unexpected, extremely pragmatic, and focusing on the short term. They see climate change as a chance. Politically speaking, it's a hope for independence, and on a concrete level, it has made their daily lives better. It's a just return to a faraway time when Greenland was a less hostile, greener, and more easily cultivable land. That Greenland was for me a sort of utopia, a virgin land. Those images of all-white landscapes have very strong echoes in our imagination, they're our very last hope.

When I saw there that it was on its way out, I felt like I was seeing the failure of any and all attempts to save humanity. Those are failures I talk about both through the events of the play and the backstory of the characters. This new economy which was supposed to help the Greenlanders turns out to have hurt them. We can see the political and ecological catastrophe that's coming. I felt the need to tell that story in the very worrying context of the region. Those are embryos of reflection, but I don't have the answers, even though writing and making theatre are for me synonymous with taking a political stand. But I don't make documentary theatre. All the material I gather (research, interviews, etc.) helps me create fictions which allow me to focus on a specific point of view on reality.

How does the scenography reveal the atmosphere of this "thriller"?

My team and I are now accustomed to creating unique atmospheres starting with banal situations. Fantasy arises from that banality. Fear is a narrative tool which allows me to play with emotions in a different way. I love horror movies and thrillers, especially Scandinavian ones. We created a disturbing atmosphere on the ship by turning it into a sort of vacuum where everything is possible. There's an atmosphere of anxiety which I think has much to do with our fear for the future. Like the characters, we don't know what's at the end of the corridor. But this show also mixes genres a lot. We move from thriller to comedy, to drama, to tragedy. At the start of every project, I always want to write a comedy, but there's always this sense of worry in the background, and the humour inevitably turns black. Music is just as essential to set the tone. Without it, the image is incomplete. Musical themes and sound effects are created onstage by the orchestra, and love songs are a key to the dramaturgy. Video allows us to access spaces the audience cannot otherwise see (hallways, cabins, the promenade deck, the hold, etc.). Just like it did in my previous show, *Sadnesses*, it creates tensions between the different spaces, a foreground and a background. On one hand the audience can choose what to look at on the stage in front of them, but on the other I impose my version through the gaze, the value, the position of the camera. And then there's a third point of view, the composition between those two images, between the space of the theatre and the space of the camera. This superimposition of two images tells the story of yet another one. The "background" is also symbolic, it's the mental space of the characters, which allows them to explore the past again. The audience isn't at all aware of this very real space that exists beyond the set. One could even think that the video was prerecorded, but it isn't, everything is performed live. I wanted here not to show how things are made. Half of the set is visible, the other isn't. I want to obey a cinematic code, in which we believe everything we see, or almost everything. We enter the story, we immerse ourselves in it. I wanted to keep the magic of cinema.

Interview conducted by Malika Baaziz and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach