

## AND...

### THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon

Dialogue artists-audience with Madeleine Louarn, Jean-François Auguste and the team of the show, July 9 at 16:30

The Lessons of the University with Madeleine Louarn, July 11 at 12:30

## TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- October 4 to 11, 2018, Théâtre national de Bretagne, Rennes
- January 31 to February 8, 2019, MC93  
Maison de la Culture de Seine Saint-Denis, Bobigny
- February 13, La Ferme du Buisson, Noisiel
- March 20 and 21, Le Quartz Scène nationale de Brest

## THE GREAT THEATER OF OKLAHOMA

*"I struggle; no one knows it; some may feel it, that can't be avoided; but no one knows it. I carry out my daily duties, one could accuse me of being somewhat inattentive, but only a little."* Franz Kafka

With Madeleine Louarn, Jean-François Auguste, and the handicapped actors of the Catalyse troupe, living for beauty and poetry requires work, it is a struggle. Making theirs Kafka's last and often little-known writings, they offer an exploration of that effervescent mind. The path Kafka always trailed with such clear-headedness becomes a playground where the actors' joy and surprise clash with mankind's destiny and our intrinsic insignificance. A spontaneous journey through this network of writings, *The Great Theatre of Oklahoma* shines a light on our blind spots and our strivings for assimilation, to find our place among others...

## MADELEINE LOUARN

It is as a special needs educator that Madeleine Louarn discovered theatre in a centre for the mentally handicapped in Morlaix. There, she created the Catalyse workshop, dedicated to amateur performance, and became its director. For the past thirty years, she has directed plays by authors as diverse as Lewis Carroll and Christophe Pellet, Shakespeare and Beckett, Danil Harms and Frédéric Vossier. With the unique and exemplary actors of her company, she chooses texts which always question the concepts of the actor's performance, truth, and presence.

## JEAN-FRANÇOIS AUGUSTE

After graduating from the Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique, Jean-François Auguste founded the company For Happy people and Co in 2007. Using texts by Thomas Middleton, Frédéric Vossier, Marc Lainé, Sade, Loo Hui Phang, Christophe Blain, and Lewis Carroll, he created *Alice or Wonderland*, which he co-directed with Madeleine Louarn and which was performed by the actors of Catalyse. Since 2015, the company has explored the question of different "humanities" in several shows. *The Great Theatre of Oklahoma* is a continuation of that work in the world of Kafka.

72<sup>th</sup>  
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 MADELEINE LOUARN AND JEAN-FRANÇOIS AUGUSTE

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**Between the Théâtre de l'Entresort and the Catalyse troupe, you have quite the unique background.**

**Madeleine Louarn:** The Théâtre de l'Entresort is a company, Catalyse is a drama workshop within an ESAT (a social institution for handicapped workers). Let's talk about the people first, then. The company was created around a project I had with women and men who worked in an ESAT. It focused on contemporary theatre. The actors being handicapped leads to certain choices in how we write for the stage, how they act and perform. How to embody a character is a question that has a somewhat different meaning for them. Either way, there's a shift, a metamorphosis. By their unique quality, those actors create a scenic event. They're constantly calling on their own imagination and forcing the audience, but also everyone else in the company, to face the unexpected. The goal of our work isn't therapeutic; the question of aesthetics was the first we asked, and it remains our priority.

**Jean-François Auguste:** I met the Catalyse troupe in 2003. Back then, I was working on a creation of Oedipus Rex with a company I did a lot of work with as an actor, Le Théâtre des Lucioles. As part of that residency, I led a ten-day workshop with the Catalyse actors. Together we worked on Jean-Pierre Vernant's *The Universe, the Gods, and Men*. The question we asked ourselves was what made Oedipus's family crippled. They made for beautiful Gods and Goddesses... Later, Madeleine invited me to work with them again. I tried to find a theme that would fit them. With Catalyse, it's the actors who guide the creations, and when you pick a text, it's the actors you have to think of first. That invitation became a production, and we created *Alice or Wonderland* in 2007.

**When and why did you think of exploring the world of Franz Kafka?**

**Madeleine Louarn:** Starting with forms that aren't already written for the stage gives a lot of room for improvisation, and Kafka's texts opened up amazing potentialities. Kafka had a very contentious relationship with the idea of "fault." It's a question that deeply touches the Catalyse actors. So does the question of responsibility, which doesn't take anything away from their lust for life, their desire to sing and dance. There is also in Kafka a constant critique of norms, a difficulty to accept them. We can all see how handicapped people can smash headfirst into social norms. All those relationships give their performance a specific tinge.

**Jean-François Auguste:** To create, artists often need to take a step sideways. Kafka himself says that "*to write is to jump outside the line of the assassins.*" In her analysis of that sentence, Leslie Kaplan says that "*the assassins Kafka writes about are, contrary to what one may think, those who stay in line, who follow the usual course of things, who repeat this bad life over and over. What are they killing? The very idea of possibility, all that could begin or introduce a break, a change.*" Working on Kafka's texts reveals new ways of responding to reality. The Catalyse actors prove it to us daily.

**Madeleine Louarn:** Kafka was torn by worry about making the right choices in his life. The attraction of literature was irresistible, and forced him to face never-ending dilemmas regarding any outside engagement (marriage, family, friends, etc.). Freedom to him was a path that starts inside and leads outside. He tried to stay upright on his own terms. By questioning our relationship to humanity, he recreated a world that gives us the power, the possibility to act while also revealing the pitfalls awaiting us. There is in Kafka's words a way to apprehend the world that is like a metaphysical journey. By using his texts for our own purposes, our goal isn't to tip the scales one way or the other, but to keep the ambiguity of his reflection and to see how his unique way of dealing with reality opens up a different way of thinking. This show is intended as anything but a conclusion or a moral.

**Jean-François Auguste:** There's also something paradoxical about his writing: if some of his texts are complex, they are never wilfully opaque. His thinking moves and awakens us. He doesn't leave you to wade in the muck, he guides you. With every reading, I discover new ways to understand him. It requires you to take a very active part as you're reading.

**How did you tell the actors about this author? How did you talk about his world and its complexity, and transpose it onstage?**

**Jean-François Auguste:** We decided not to tackle Kafka's greatest works, but instead looked at what he wrote towards the end of his life, which are very short stories. Except for the central structure of the show, which we borrowed from the last chapter of *Amerika*, or *The Man Who Disappeared*, his incomplete first novel.

**Madeleine Louarn:** We watched a lot of films like *The Castle* (Michael Haneke), *The Trial* (Orson Welles), or *Class Relations* (Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, based on *Amerika*). They gave us ideas on a collective level, and for each actor, we then tried to find how the text could be relevant. One of the first themes was that of the "artist." Before we started working, the actors were all plagued by this huge question: how to perform the text? But as soon as we started rehearsing, something very clear happened. Orality is one of Kafka's main strengths. He loved theatre, he would go all the time, he even tried writing a couple of plays. All of a sudden, as we're working with the actors, we encounter this aspect, and we know we're in the right place. The Catalyse actors never make assumptions, but they have this instinctual understanding which allows us not to lose ourselves in meaning.

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Interview conducted by Marion Guilloux and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach