

AND...

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon

The Lessons of the University, UAPV, with Emma Dante, July 19 at 13:00

Dialogue artists-audience with Emma Dante, July 21 at 11:00

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- October 13-22, 2017, Teatro Argentina di Roma (Italy)
- October 27-November 5, Teatro Biondo, Palermo (Italy)
- November 7-11, Teatro Stabile di Catania, Catania (Italy)
- November 2, Teatro Ariosto, Reggio Emilia (Italy)
- January 18-19, 2018, Théâtre Joliette-Minoterie, Marseille
- February 3-4, Teatro Petruzzelli, Bari (Italy)
- February 6-25, Théâtre du Rond-Point, Paris
- March 28, Teatro Sociale, Trento (Italy)
- March 30-31, Anthéa - Antipolis théâtre d'Antibes
- April 3, MA Scène nationale, Montbéliard
- May 8-20, Piccolo Teatro di Milano - Teatro d'Europa, Milan (Italy)
- June 13-17, Teatro Valle Inclán, Madrid (Spain)

BESTIE DI SCENA

For a long time now Emma Dante's language has been made up of dialects, gestures, and accents. It is a southern language, trivial and popular, which the Sicilian director ennobled with metaphors and pushed to its limits within surrealist situations. Words, bodies, and rhythms which highlight, not without imagination, the brutality of the human comedy and which stand up to remind us of the social and political engagement of a community, whether a family or the community of the theatre. With *Bestie di scena*, Emma Dante continues her quest for honesty. No text, no set, no costumes, no music. But actors. Actors left to their own devices, actors up to the challenge. From backstage, objects, clothes, words come flying at them in unexpected ways. Forced to survive just as the group falls apart, they start transforming over and over again: into animals, children, idiots... For Emma Dante, who creates here a true poetic art in her quest for "the juice of drunkenness and torment," actors are on the frontline of this attempt to break down the conventions of theatre. We are all those "imbeciles, without structure and without mask, facing the tragedies of the modern world."

EMMA DANTE

Emma Dante grew up in Catania before returning to Palermo, her home town, at the end of college. For one year she attended the class taught by Michele Perriera, a theorist of the literary movement Gruppo 63, considered a neo-avant-gardist. In 1987, she enrolled into the National Academy of Dramatic Art in Rome, before joining the company *Gruppo della Rocca* in Turin five years later. Having travelled north through Italy, she returned to Sicily at the end of the 1990s to found her current company, *Sud Costa Occidentale*, which has had for headquarters for the past fifteen years a cellar rechristened *La Vicaria*, after an old prison where women accused of witchcraft were judged. This is where she writes the texts her faithful actors will perform throughout Europe. A comedian, dramatist, director for the theatre and the opera, author, and film director, Emma Dante sees theatre as a means to "uncover the unease and the problems people tend to suppress." The body plays a central part in her aesthetics, which revolves around transformation and is strongly influenced by the insularity of her home island. In 2014, she directed *Le Sorelle Macaluso* at the Festival d'Avignon, a play currently still touring Europe.

71st
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.



FESTIVAL-AVIGNON.COM



#FDA17

INTERVIEW WITH EMMA DANTE

The title *Bestie di scena* [literally Stage Beast] includes the word “stage.” How would you define the space of the performance?

Emma Dante : The space of the stage is the world, and everything that it can contain. So in some ways, it is an empty space, a blank space I try to fill. But since I can't put everything in that space, say everything with it, I work on a stripped-down version, to let the audience's imagination take over. It's important for the audience to see much more than is actually represented on the stage. There's no text in this show. There's no story, no beginning, no middle, no end. The actors don't say anything that could be put together to make a story. All the words they say emerge from the situations they're in. On the stage, there's a succession of events to which the actors react. In some ways, I worked on the negation of all the elements that make up a show, that make up theatre. I went looking for what I see as pure theatre.

In your shows, there is always this incredible dramatic and popular energy. Your actors talk, sometimes in Sicilian dialect, they sing, they dance. The body is a central dimension of your aesthetics of transformation. How did the actors react to this proposition, which upends the codes they're used to?

I told my actors that this time I wanted to talk about their condition as actors. We started by working with texts by Shakespeare, on the preparation of the actor faced with his character, the story, his costume, in the goal of giving back to the audience what he's learnt. But I quickly understood that I wasn't interested in telling people about the work of the actor. What fascinates us all at the theatre is elsewhere, it's something else. It's this short circuit that happens on the stage and that allows the actors and the audience to share a common experience. So I thought about showing a community of actors who live on the stage, having given up on everything that usually allows them to have a life on the stage. They give up on material things like clothes, the text, the story, the scenography, the roles even. They give up on everything that serves to define theatre. They've been cast out of Paradise, as if it had become impossible for them to perform, to represent. They don't know what to say, what to do, how to do it. They're stuck in an almost primitive situation of great suffering, they're uncomfortable before the audience who is watching them standing there naked, literally and figuratively.

No text, no set, no music: *Bestie di scena* unsettles the actors, deconstructs the space, reformulates the relationship to the audience. In many ways, this play feels like poetry...

Bestie di scena is a complex reflection about the theatre, about what it allows, what it means, about its necessity. About what it should mean today to make theatre. If I know how to direct a play, how to direct actors, I'm trying first and foremost to find the juice of theatre. That thing that causes both a

form of drunkenness and of torment. I believe that a show should serve to change the world, to transform those who make and those who watch it. I want the audience to feel responsible for this community of “imbeciles,” of “primitives” who, looking them straight in the eye, tell them about the world and what we live through today: tragedies, terrorist attacks, refugees drowning in the Mediterranean, earthquakes... I hope the audience will see themselves in those naked bodies, stripped bare before them. That they will look at them with compassion, because to me, we are all those beasts on the stage. Those actors on the stage, they're us. They're us as “imbeciles, without structures or masks.”

You're a popular director in Italy. Tell us a little about how you discovered the theatre, about the context in which you work.

I never went to the theatre as a child, or even to church. After graduating college in Catania, where I grew up, I moved back to Palermo, my home town, to study literature and law, and I signed up for a class taught by Michele Perriera, a theorist of the literary movement Gruppo 63, considered a neo-avant-gardist. His approach to theatre was very different from what existed back then, it was very modern. I can say it was an awakening. I didn't think I would become a dramatist or a director. That came later, when I was about thirty. To get over all that frustrated me as an actor, I brought together a group of actors to work freely in a studio. I started by having them walk. The truth is, my career as a director started there and then, with that walk. I smoked and they walked! They walked and I screamed because they weren't rigorous enough about it, because they couldn't keep the rhythm. That's when I understood that rhythm would be a key part of my work. I see rhythm as instinct breaking out, trying to break free, it's the beginning of life and of the stories I tell. That's when I moved from one side of the stage to the other. I started working with the actors on things based on my own stories. *mPalermu*, which I consider to be my first show, was born of that realisation of my status as a director and of that initial work with the actors. The play was about a family about to go out who never manage to go beyond the threshold of their house, that is, the threshold of the stage, and that of the theatre, and that of life... Since then, I've always tried in my work to look at society, at people, at the notion of family. That look ends up being political because watching a society also means having to think about the moral and ethical organisation of that society. When I first started out, emerging artists were supported, it was easier to produce a show. There was more interest for innovation. But innovation often rhymes with failure. In Italy nowadays, people don't want to think about failure, they're looking for certainties. Theatre has nothing to do with certainties. Yet I feel privileged today because thanks to productions by the Piccolo Teatro in Milan and the Teatro Biondo in Palermo, I was able to create a show like *Bestie di scena*, which echoes something at the heart of my research.

— Interview conducted by Francis Cossu and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach