

## A MON SEUL DÉSIR

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Under their masks, shaped like the animals depicted on *The Lady and the Unicorn*, four dancers re-weave on the stage the six famous tapestries. Weave and unweave, since Gaëlle Bourges isn't content with simply calling on the most well-known side of this medieval work. Giving her show the title of the sixth tapestry, she sums up the distinctive ambivalence of the time and reveals the numerous interpretations intertwined in it. Take for instance the unicorn, that will only let pure beings approach it: always seen next to the young lady, it should be a symbol of her virginity. Yet its horn itself is subject to controversy; and that's without even mentioned the lion, the fox, the monkey... and above all the thirty-five rabbits that spread, against a red madder backdrop, values that aren't as pious as they seem to be. On the other side, the maiden who reaches for a jewelry box could very well be no maiden after all, especially since the sixth tapestry opens with a large horizon of, you guessed it, rabbits. Through precise gestures and the power of numbers, *A mon seul désir* revives both old images and the history of thought.

Show premiered on 2 and 3 December, 2014 within the Festival Les Inaccoutumés at La Ménagerie de Verre, Paris.

## GAËLLE BOURGES

Gaëlle Bourges studied modern literature and English, all while studying several forms of dance. After creating her first shows with the Compagnie K, she registered in 2000 at the Université Paris VIII in the performing arts department and co-founded the Groupe Raoul Batz, with which she created, from 2001 to 2005, a series of performances called *Homothétie 949 ou les contours progressifs de l'index 10* that already questioned, through dance, the relationship between our gaze, the representation of bodies, art history, and the history of scenic forms. After the dissolution of the Groupe Raoul Batz, she co-founded the association Os, and worked for a time in an erotic theatre. She used that experience to create *Je baise les yeux*, a conference/demonstration about the job of stripper, co-written with three faithful companions—Marianne Chargois, Alice Roland, and Gaspard Delanoë. The first part of the triptych *Vider Vénus* was then followed by *La belle indifférence* in 2010 and *Le verrou (figure de fantaisie attribuée à tort à Fragonard)* in 2013. Gaëlle Bourges also wrote *En découdre (un rêve grec)* in 2012, *Un beau raté* in 2013, and *59* in 2014.

## THE LADY AND THE UNICORN

Woven around 1500, *The Lady and the Unicorn* is a series of tapestries whose creator remains unknown and which were rediscovered by Prosper Mérimée in 1841. They have since then been exhibited in the musée de Cluny in Paris. Across the six tapestries, the pennants of the family who sponsored them, the Le Vistes, appear along with a depiction of the five senses—touch, taste, smell, hearing, sight—and of a mysterious sixth sense. Symbol of a renunciation of material pleasures or invitation to love, the last tapestry, which bears the words "A. mon seul désir I." remains a mystery.

## INTERVIEW WITH GAËLLE BOURGES

### Why this title *A mon seul désir*?

Gaëlle Bourges: It's the name of the sixth tapestry of *The Lady and the Unicorn*, which bears the mention "A. MON SEUL DÉSIR. I." The five other tapestries depict the five senses. In the sixth one, the young girl could be grabbing a necklace, or putting it in a chest: what sixth sense could it correspond to? There is no clear answer. I'm using the title "A mon seul désir" for its ambiguity: does it mean "to my will only," as a sort of gesture of renunciation to material goods, in order to reach a spiritual dimension? The sixth sense would be an "internal" one then, the heart, in the moral sense of the word, which would govern all "external" senses. Or should we stick to the first meaning of "désir" at the time, that is, "physical desire?" Isn't the entrance to the blue pavilion behind the young girl open, inviting her maybe to leave to dedicate herself to a more sensual occupation (and with whom)? Which interpretation is correct? Actually, everything coexists, because thought in the Middle Ages isn't only ambiguous, it is also analogical: it draws a connection between something that is visible, and something that is hidden. That is what I'm interested in. What is visible and what is hidden.

### Is nudity only used to represent virgins in your show?

I play on this possible representation of virginity: Eve in the Garden of Eden. In the Middle Ages, however, nudity is rarely represented. Except for Adam and Eve, images of naked bodies, in painting and sculpture, are tied to debauchery. To be naked to figure a work from the 1500s is therefore an anachronism, obviously deliberate, which could mean for an audience of the late Middle Ages that we are wild beings, or witches, virgins not in the sexual sense but as in devoid of any moral and religious principles. However, I'm keeping in mind this parallel between the figure of Eve and that of the wild woman, which still exists for modern audiences. Above all, it's the representation of those animals that led to this choice: associating masks and naked bodies seemed to me appropriate. Hairless bodies, even. I like very much that line by Jean-Luc Godard, from his latest film, *Goodbye to Language*: "There's no nudity in nature. Animals aren't naked because they are naked." One could say it doesn't make any sense, "not naked because naked," but it makes you think and it is a good starting point for a show. Human nudity is the stumbling block in the history of the representation of bodies – I am talking here about naked bodies exhibited in public spaces, like in a performance for example: that nudity is regulated and can not slip out of the net of "moral" or "immoral" categories - we use other terms nowadays but we still refer to those categories. Bodies articulate in relation to the law and within the law, respecting it or interfering with it: it's the barometer of what you can or cannot show. When you have naked bodies on a stage, whether you want it or not, you immediately create a connection to the history of representations, and to the history of law. I work *with* those connections, and I try to work *on* them.

### Ambiguity is at the heart of your show. How did you come up with the idea of having so many rabbits on the other side of the tapestry?

The rabbits are there because of the tapestry itself: there are thirty-five of them over the six tapestries (and that is not even taking into account the

fact that small pieces of some of the tapestries were cut off because too damaged). It's not something I just came up with. The figure of the rabbit doesn't also appear on the "back" of the tapestry, there are some on the "front" as well, that is during the first part of the show. There is just a whole lot more of them in the second part! Rabbits were seen in the Middle Ages as lecherous: the fact that there are so many of them here is another sign of the ambiguity of *The Lady and the Unicorn*: the unicorn seems to indicate that the young woman is a maiden, while the rabbits would seem to say something else... Which is why I decided to have this particular animal, and not another, show up so many times.

**The show seems to follow the concept of upheaval, with a "front" and a "back:" you talk almost scientifically about the tapestries and their history, before suddenly providing a very personal interpretation.**

My shows tend to be at the intersection between art history and fictional stories. The first step in my creative process is a very studious one; it consists in looking closely at a work I think is emblematic in the history of western art, and to learn as much as I can about it. A lot of the information I gather ends up in the play. I then add, by association of ideas or digressions, elements that at first glance don't have anything to do with the work itself, but have more to do with the intimate relationship I have built with it. That being said, I'm not sure that you could call the image we ended up with, in *A mon seul désir*, strictly "personal:" the original idea was to show a multitude on the back of the tapestry. Multitude means numbers, and it is those numbers that, in this play, lead to an upheaval. When there is four of you (the play begins with only four of us), it's easy to regulate the milieu you create on the stage; when you're six or seven times that, it's much more complicated, even though the choreographic score is just as precise, our movements extremely limited. Numbers lead to disruption, even though we still find ways to work together that seem to escape me.

**How do you see this sixth sense, in the sixth tapestry?**

The sixth sense, to me, would be a sort of becoming-animal. I'm referring to the concept invented by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the "becoming-animal" of man. It's a very complex concept, but to sum it up, one could say this becoming-animal is a "becoming-imperceptible:" instead of experiencing oneself as a subject, it's trying to experience something *beyond the subject*. Of course, it's got nothing to do with imitating an animal, or acting like one. In the show, we don't act like animals; we didn't work at all on "animality," for instance. We are more acting as a unit, our bodies coming together in spite of their differences, of how divergent they are from one another, to form one body and muddy our respective sense of individuality. That can lead to an upheaval. If the front of the tapestry is a place dominated by unique, perfectly legible figures—the young woman, the unicorn, the lion, the fox, etc.—then its back is a world dominated by multiplicity, where forms are imperfect and open-ended. The world of the left-handed, as Deleuze would say, of the diminished, of the inadequate; the world of rabbits, maybe...

## AND...

### CINEMATOGRAPHIC TERRITORIES

*Hors Satan*, directed by Bruno Dumont

Screening followed by an encounter with Gaëlle Bourges

17 July at 02:00 pm, Utopia-Manutention

### THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Site Pasteur de l'Université, free admittance

- 17 July at 05:30 pm, *Dialogue artists-audience*, with Gaëlle Bourges and the team of *A mon seul désir*, encounter hosted by the Ceméa

- 21 July at 11:00 am : *L'émancipation par la culture et l'éducation populaire : projet de société ?* with, among others, Gaëlle Bourges, encounter hosted by the Ceméa, organised with Secours populaire français

## TOUR DATES FOR *A MON SEUL DÉSIR* AFTER THE FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

- 16 October 2015: L'échangeur,  
Centre de développement  
chorégraphique de Picardie, Festival  
C'est comme ça !

- 3 March 2016: Espaces Pluriels,  
Scène conventionnée, Festival  
Résonance(s), Pau

- 7 April: Théâtre and Auditorium de  
Poitiers, Scène Nationale,  
Festival À Corps

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