



# SILENT LEGACY

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## INTERVIEW WITH MAUD LE PLADEC

**Your new creation brings together two dancers: krumper Adeline Kerry Cruz, eight, and Audrey Merilus, an adult contemporary dancer. What was the idea behind *Silent Legacy*?**

**Maud Le Pladec:** *Silent Legacy* is made up of three parts: Adeline Kerry Cruz's solo, the encounter between the two dancers, and Audrey Merilus's solo. The central part is like a baton pass. It echoes a question I've been exploring throughout my shows about transmission. This very simple structure allows the audience to interpret each of the solos in relationship to the other. Directing those two performers means creating a confrontation, a dialogue onto which spectators can project whatever they want, depending on their backgrounds, cultures, or beliefs. Adeline Kerry Cruz and Audrey Merilus are two very powerful personalities and identities. Hence the need to create a space of sharing on stage that would be like a clash of cultures. But I don't want it to be a didactic demonstration. Their encounter unfolds in a metaphorical and almost metaphysical way, or at least with an undeniably choreographic, sensual, and visual approach through a game of shadows at some point in the show. This central part is sandwiched between two very physical solos.

**How would you describe their respective dance styles?**

Adeline Kerry Cruz is a child of Montréal. She's a practitioner of krump, a dance that arose in the impoverished neighbourhoods of Los Angeles in the early 2000s, and which exists somewhere between restrained violence and interiority. As for Audrey Merilus, she uses dance to create a space of freedom influenced by her extensive training, with all the styles and techniques it supposes. But when I see them dance, they're both astonishing! The way they move through space is like a gift, although they never stop training and practicing. And if it's a gift, it makes its lineage difficult to identify. Adeline Kerry Cruz wasn't born on the west coast of the United States, and she never experienced the oppression of the communities where krump was first developed. Yet her mentor, internationally-known Canadian krumper Jr Maddripp, is always just as surprised as I am by her precision, her virulence, her engagement! As for Audrey Merilus, she is stunning in the way she embodies movement, in the intelligence of her gestures, but also in her ability to deconstruct what she's learnt and inherited about dance.

**Doesn't their meeting in the Cloître des Célestins add to their uniqueness?**

I'm very happy to be able to perform in that venue with them. One could think that the two trees make the place impracticable, but I see them as very meaningful, bringing a form of reality into the space of the theatre. This at once concrete and symbolic dimension, this grounding in the very earth, allows us to draw a link between the two solos and an encounter that doesn't take place on the level of the flesh but, as I like to say, "from one soul to the other." *Silent Legacy* is about the truth in the story of those two performers as much as it is about the invention, the creation of an imaginary space they can share. Through those two portraits, I see this creation as a poetic manifesto.

**How do you plan to explore this idea of legacy, brought together with that of silence here?**

*Silent Legacy* is the continuation of a choreographic work that aims to cover different generations, communities, and identities. The first time I asked myself this question of legacy, of emancipation, of the construction of the self as a person and artist in my relationship with private, cultural, and social issues, was for my solo *Moto-cross*. In it, I explored my personal history and that of my family, from 1976, the year I was born, to the creation of that solo. It was about showing who I was as a dancer, a person, and a woman. The idea of narrative came up, in a spirit of autobiography or autofiction. I had to talk about it. I continued that exploration recently, bringing together singing and dancing with great physicality in *counting stars with you (musique femmes)*. For *Silent Legacy*, I did away with all words, either said or prerecorded. It's also a continuation of my collaboration with producer, DJ, and composer Chloé Thévenin. We've been thinking together about the way music is going to dialogue with the dance of each of our performers. Our influences will likely be as diverse as krump beatmakers and minimalist composers. We've also

been thinking about how to include voices and soundscapes, such as a forest, or plain silence. Moments of silence are fragile in this venue, absolute silence is impossible. There's always sound, vibrations, noises! The "silent" of the title also hints at what we inherit but cannot name, be it a "supernatural" gift or a transgenerational debt.

### **In your shows, you like to bring together high and low culture, both when it comes to dance and music...**

I reject any opposition between them. My recent musical work had to do with bringing them closer, with electro and contemporary music for instance. The composers who caught my attention are always working on taking down those borders. Fausto Romitelli, Julia Wolfe, or Francesco Felidei managed to overcome those divisions, through the instruments they use as well as their relationship to the materiality of sound. What interests me in dance is this mixture of cultures and styles. I'm trying to bring about a confrontation between different histories of choreography. There's also in my approach something of the gift, of the debt... In contemporary dance, "to inherit" means to inherit certain histories and techniques—which can sometimes be styles. Audrey Merilus built her body through specific techniques and dances that are all part of contemporary dance. For her and for many other dancers, to dance is to give what she inherited back to the history of dance. I could say something similar about Adeline Kerry Cruz. While krump is about improvising, there is a "glossary" of steps, of gestures. But Adeline Kerry Cruz, given her age, is still in a learning phase. I'm interested in those moments between learning and unlearning.

### **Isn't there in krump a form of "ungendered" representation of the body, in opposition to hip hop?**

Fluidity and a deconstruction of gender, but also a more spiritual or animal approach to the body, are part of the very DNA of krump. Although one can't help but notice that, in spite of all that, gender equality in the practice of krump is still an uphill battle! There are still very few women or girls who practice krump. Adeline Kerry Cruz is one of very few prodigies on the international stage. I'd liken that dance to butoh. Krump is a purely emotional dance, a dance of the internalisation of images. What it shares with butoh is that it was born of the trauma of a whole community of men and women and of the need for them to regain control of their own history, culture, or identity. Some only see in it a spectacle of hate, rage, or anger. But learning about it lets you see its subterranean architecture. This dance is created through narratives. Adeline Kerry Cruz makes up stories, or the community she joined in Montréal gives her scenarios, and she *krumps* them. We don't want to say what the stories which serve as basis for the solo are. What matters is that they feed the dancer's imagination. But they are necessary: given that a krump improvisation lasts anywhere from one to three minutes, creating a 20-minute solo requires a true organisation! You need to find lots of stories to tell and imagine. Krump fascinates me because it's an emotion factory. In that way, it's very close to the work of an actress, or to outsider art—and there's a link to trance as well. This dance transports us somewhere else entirely. When she dances, Adeline Kerry Cruz isn't "performing," she is fully present in what she's doing! So we decided with Jr Maddripp to let her "grab" onto Chloé Thévenin's beats for her solo, and my only role is to propose arrangements.

### **Does your refusal of neutrality for Audrey Merilus's solo betray a political vision of contemporary dance?**

One can ask a dancer to "give back" a legacy through dance or to develop a form of neutrality on stage. With my previous show, *counting stars with you (musique femmes)*, I wanted to break the "fifth wall" of contemporary dance. For years, performers learnt "to be neutral." Which means "depersonalising the body," making it more abstract. Such a conception of dance requires a specific training of the body and face. I try to go against this neutrality. We're working with Audrey on a technique called "release." I'm interested in that technique—which has also become an aesthetics linked to postmodernism in dance—for the model of the body it's built, at once inclusive and as a rejection of a form of diversity in terms of identity or culture. I have a lot of both respect and mistrust for some legacies of contemporary dance, and right now I'm interested in exploring those in a concrete way. I believe in a sensorial politics. And I want to see it embodied in my research. Dance should touch in us something that has to do with the physical, the personal, the emotional—and thus the political. Questioning our legacies, exploring the links between high and low culture, deconditioning dance to help performers find their own dance, such are my main interests and, therefore, the pillars of my choreographies.

Interview conducted by Marc Blanchet