

AND...

NAVE OF IMAGES (screenings)

Le Début de quelque chose de Myriam Marzouki avec Radhouane El Meddeb (2013), July 25 at 14:30, Église des Célestins

Histoires d'espaces Saison 2, *Face à la mer*, film in 360° about the creation by Radhouane El Meddeb, July 10 to 26, Église des Célestins

FOI ET CULTURE ENCOUNTER

with Radhouane El Meddeb, July 25 at 11:00, Chapelle de l'Oratoire.

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- August 17-19 2017, Zürcher Theater Spektakel, Seebühne, Zurich
- August 22-23, Tanz im August, Radialsystem V, Berlin
- August 25-27, Internationales Sommerfestival Kampnagel, Hamburg
- September 29, Théâtre Jean Vilar, Les Plateaux de la Briqueterie, Vitry-sur-scène
- November 23, Arsenal - Cité Musicale, Metz
- le 29 mai 2018, Scène nationale d'Albi
- le 31 mai, L'apostrophe, Scène nationale Cergy-Pontoise et du Val d'Oise
- les 19 et 20 juin, La Villette, Grande Halle, Paris

FACING THE SEA FOR TEARS TO TURN INTO LAUGHTER

Men and women face the sea. They watch, talk to that space at once real and fictional, to that coastal culture which, from Lebanon or Tunisia, places people in front of this immensity that is celebrated, cursed, or dreamt... The sea we're watching, it's also those rows of spectators to whom we're talking without seeing them. *Facing the sea, for tears to turn into laughter* is the story of a man, both Tunisian and French, who tells of his complex identity. It is Radhouane El Meddeb's decision to go to Tunisia to create, with those who took part in the revolution, but also those who look with distrust at him who abandoned his homeland. To come back, to say the tempest of emotions he feels, to dance his anger at a country that abandons the poor to the extremists, such is the path the choreographer has chosen. Revealing a vision of modern Tunisia struggling with its ambiguous history, the show is about personal, but also universal, mourning. In the almost empty space of the stage, the presence of the text and of music tells of the way out that is water. Whether it be at the end of a long work day or before making a decision, it remains the place one contemplates, the place one talks to and to which one reveals its worries, uncertainties, and dreams of politics and absolute.

RADHOUANE EL MEDDEB

Trained at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Tunis, Radhouane El Meddeb has worked with Fadhel Jaïbi, Taoufik Jebali, and Mohamed Driss, before developing his choreographic world in France and creating his first show in 2005, *Pour en finir avec MOI (The End of MOI)*, a solo taking the form of an intimate introspective journey. After many dramatic collaborations, choosing to move from theatre to dance, he created several solos, such as *Quelqu'un va danser... (Someone will dance...)* and *Je danse et je vous en donne à bouffer (I dance and give you to eat)*. In 2010, he created his first group show, *Ce que nous sommes (What we are)*, before becoming artist associated with the Centquatre in Paris in 2011. He then created a solo in collaboration with choreographer Thomas Lebrun and, in 2014, a second group show, *Au temps où les arabes dansaient (Back when Arabs danced)*... In 2015 and 2016, he created *Heroes, prelude* and *Heroes*, as well as a tribute to his father. Tackling questions about exile, absence, and solitude, the choreographer felt the visceral need to explore his double culture and the rupture at its heart by creating *Facing the sea, for tears to turn into laughter* with Tunisian artists. Radhouane El Meddeb will be appearing for the first time at the Festival d'Avignon. d'Avignon.

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.



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INTERVIEW WITH RADHOUANE EL MEDDEB

Facing the sea, for tears to turn into laughter could be seen as an autobiographical show, from the point of view of sensations.

Radhouane El Meddeb: This show was born from a visceral desire to return to the country of my birth, to spend time there, and to work there with artists; it's the first project I've ever worked on with Tunisians in Tunisia. My personal history therefore mixed with that of the ten artists I worked with, while I tried to attentive to what has been happening in their country over the past few years. I haven't lived in Tunisia in 20 years, this spatiotemporal distance deeply changed my relationship to the country, and Tunisia itself has evolved a lot, socially, economically, and politically. I crossed a border, and so my status is that of a Tunisian who left Tunisia. I moved from theatre to dance, from Tunisia to France, and the knowledge people had of me before I left changed, as if I'd lost my place in the cultural and artistic space of Tunisia. I used to hear a lot about those who'd left when I still lived in Tunisia, about how leaving was in some ways an abandonment. I missed major political events, like the revolution, and it only widened the gap. I wasn't there either when my father passed away right before the revolution, he was one of the strong ties between here and there for me. This show can therefore be read like an emotional quest, similar to catharsis. I tried to understand this thing broken inside me, but also the experiences and changes that remain of the Tunisian revolution. I talked with the people in my neighbourhood, my family, and the artists I worked with to get a glimpse of the fear they may have felt, of their point of view. They talked to me about courage, about anger against the dictatorship, about their excitement in 2011 because they were ready for anything back then. It seems that the fight continues on today, in spite of the illusions and disappointments, because the middle class keeps getting poorer, the country is almost on its knees economically-speaking, and because the presence of extremism and fundamentalism is particularly strong. When I left Tunisia in 1996, with Ben Ali in power, it was weak there, and stronger in Europe. Salafis have a considerable power of conviction in terms of politics, they seduce the isolated and the poor, all those people who were left behind by the revolution. Nowadays, Tunisians are no longer afraid of talking and exchanging their point of view, but their economic, political, and social demands aren't being heard, far from it. I want to understand all that and to analyse the distance and pain that I feel.

How do you translate on the stage the bridge between your double French/Tunisian culture and the Tunisian history of your performers?

I started dancing in Tunisia, but it was in France that my dream of being a dancer and a choreographer came true. If you can see in me the marks of a French training, the culture of my memory is Tunisian. My work combines both those cultures and my relationship to the past and to the present. I question everyone's discipline and their relationship to the real, especially since they experienced the revolution in all its violence. And I tried to find a way for dance to tell all

those stories and sensibilities, and for my solitude to gather them together. The show is about several generations of Tunisian artists—dancers, actors, circus performers, musicians—who dream up a show together.

The title, *Facing the sea, for tears to turn into laughter*, is about a poetic space as much as a physical one.

I need to define the space, to place the body and choreography within a context, even if it is sometimes defined late in the creative process. In this project, the Tunisian body is "facing the sea," it tells of the Tunisia of the present, of the past and of the future, in its unique relationship to illusion and disillusion, looking at itself while also looking towards Europe, beyond the Mediterranean... Sorrow emerges, mine and theirs, and the causes for this sorrow are different. Onstage, the space is empty but vast, all the better to tell of this traditional and modern horizon, this symbolic open window, this tradition of a coastal culture. The Mediterranean basin was shaped by an enigmatic history, by political conflicts and economic mutations, by secrets and distress; the sea seems to be the protagonist of those troubles, a place of tragedy and dream. Tunisia, like Lebanon, enjoys a traditional relationship to water, it's a place of paradox: of purification and celebration. At night, the sea becomes a place where one can escape after a long day of worry, uncertainty, and political debates. The show is also about mourning: my own personal mourning and theirs, my tears and theirs, which leads to two explorations, one intimate and deep, the other open to the outside and, in a way, horizontal. I need to tell my hardships and my joys because they are a universal experience. The show ends with laughter as a tribute to the Tunisians who can, while facing the sea, tell each other about the suffering and disorder of their situation and immediately turn to laughter. *Facing the sea* is about this outpouring of laughter, tears, food, and words.

It's a show about exile and about coming back, about those who leave and those who stay, which tells of a transformation, or a mutation.

The Tunisian people are a mix of cultures and traditions, due to many movements of population. The country was built by those movements. There's no border to me, that's why I could so easily slide or "jump" from theatre to dance, from Tunisia to France. I can sometimes spend whole months working abroad. I want to understand the suspicion my return and my presence in Tunisia elicit. Separation doesn't exist for me, but for them, it's a tangible thing. Being put aside like that is harrowing. The way people look at the other, especially when his or her difference is clear, can be pretty violent, even xenophobic. That's why I want this show to have something of the ritual, in the openness to the other, and I want dream to have a clear part in it. It's fear that makes us turn to selfishness, that makes us reject others. My work has been about those questions for a few years now, both in terms of style and substance: how can the body tell those things?

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Interview conducted by Moïra Dalant and translated by Gaél Schmidt-Cléach