

MONUMENT 0 : HANTÉ PAR LA GUERRE (1913-2013)

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The dances that haunt Eszter Salamon's latest show don't come from a history book. Because the history of those dances can be found in no book, is practiced in no class, is discussed by no one. It is therefore hard to know precisely where those popular or tribal forms come from, those dances that the choreographer dredges up from the depths of our collective memory. They exist—like those zones of conflict they refer to, without ever naming them. Dance and war, two terms that could seem antithetical and yet have one thing in common: they couldn't be any further from academicism. All we know is that those dances were "incorporated" and transformed by Eszter Salamon's six dancers, in order to avoid any form of contemplation. They are an unavoidable reminder of the West's ongoing attempt at dematerialising history, of its vast colonial project of normalisation and commodification of identity. *MONUMENT 0* would therefore be a sort of anti-commemoration, of anti-normalisation. This could be one key to understanding the first part in a series that aims to put the history of the 20th century and that of dance side by side to "create new symbolic spaces" and "fictions from which new interrogations" about the dance of the world can spring.

Show premiered on 8 August, 2014 at the International Sommerfestival Kampnagel, Hamburg (Germany).

ESZTER SALAMON

A performer, dancer, and choreographer, Eszter Salamon started studying traditional Hungarian dance at a very young age, before turning to ballet, then to contemporary dance, a comprehensive and demanding experience she first put at the service of Sidonie Rochon, Mathilde Monnier, or François Verret. She began her career as a choreographer in 2001 with the solos *What a Body You Have*, *Honey* and *Giszelle*, presented within the Vif du Sujet programme in Avignon. This put her unique personality immediately on the map. Since then, she's acted as an emancipator, multiplying projects and forms—musical plays, choreographic films, conferences, museum plays, autobiographical plays, etc.—that question the way dance creates stories. Convinced that dancing isn't only about bodies and their organisation within space and time, she's built her own system, using different media: the absence of bodies, texts, images, words, music, stories. Her goal? To create new ways to understand choreographic language, and to widen the field of what imagination can do. In 2014, Eszter Salamon began a series of plays exploring both the concept of monument and the practice of a rewriting of history. Since 2015, and for the next three years, she has been a partner of the Centre national de la danse.

INTERVIEW WITH ESZTER SALAMON

What is most striking about *MONUMENT 0: Haunted by War (1913-2013)* is that it's neither a monument in the original sense of the word, nor is it a show that would go for a sort of archeological meaning. Everything seems to indicate that this play has its own socio-anthropological dynamics, its own sense of memory.

Eszter Salamon: I am indeed not a historian, but an artist. And as an artist, I aim to tell other kinds of stories than those you'll find in history books. Other contents, other figures, other words. I'm not interested in calling again on stories that have already been written. What I want to do is to create new forms of narration, new symbolic spaces, fictions from which new questions can spring forth. In order to create those new spaces, I have proceeded by constantly changing my means of expression and questioning corporality, techniques of bodies and behaviour, and problematised aspects that might seem obvious, like gender, or the presence through movement, the image, the voice, narration, etc., which forced me to reconsider my relationship to the world and language of choreography. In this play, which is an exercise in inventing a story starting from the margins, our goal is to question our relationship to history, which itself has its own story. War, for instance, is a theme that dance-as-theatre has always used. I decided to tackle it as a continuation of my own choreographic interrogations about my relationship to history, in order to open up a new speculative space. I'm from Eastern Europe, I have lived and worked in France and Germany for the past twenty years, and in this particular part of the western world, the perspective in front (or behind) me is that of European and North American modern dance. But if I don't want to focus solely on this particular aspect of the history of dance, which has done away with so many physical paradigms and imposed a hierarchy of knowledge and aesthetics, what story can I turn to? What story should I draw attention to, what should I try to highlight? That was the goal of what I did: to bring dance and war together while focusing on the new perspectives I could bring.

In the show, wars aren't named, but identified by their dates. And there doesn't seem to be a one-to-one identification between wars and dances. So how did you pick these dances?

Working with a historian, I picked wars that all have two things in common: they didn't take place in Europe, and the West took part in every single one of them, even if it wasn't always official. I could have followed a historical or anthropological logic, but I decided to call on other territories through those war dances, the territories of implication and repression. Over the past hundred years, there have been about three hundred wars with those standarts. I knew I couldn't talk about all of them, that I would have to make choices. Some of the dates I use, if taken out of context, would not necessarily be recognised as wars. I don't want to explain this rejected history; what I'm trying to do is draw attention to a part of history that has been repressed and that I investigate through the use of dance as artistic matter, dance is also repressed because unrecognisable.

Most tribal or popular dances take the form of a circle. Here, that figure is conspicuously absent. What dances did you choose, how did you work on them, and according to what dramaturgic choices did you connect them to those wars?

I chose to connect those two kinds of history that seem not to have any inner logic—dance history, and the history of war—with war dances, tribal dances, popular dances. Dances with strong ties to the lands of peoples at war, and that have been deliberately ignored in the history of modern dance. I based my work on African and Middle Eastern dances; dances from Iraq and Iran, from Tibet and Bali, from the Philippines. Also voodoo dances from the Caribbean. It is actually the material itself which shaped our project according to our ability to make it ours, to connect it to the history of wars. Some dances would disqualify or invite others. I opted for a reflective dramaturgy, open to the potentialities within the audience's minds when they experience those dances. I chose not to include any circle dance, because those could have led to a certain form of contemplation, prevented a confrontation with the audience. Fortunately, not all tribal dances are circle dances. Since the basic idea wasn't to reproduce those dances exactly or to look authentic, we learnt them on our own, without any teacher. We wanted to "embody" them, to "cannibalise" them. Some necessary transformations therefore happened as soon as we started working on them.

This confrontation with the audience you are hoping for serves as a reminder that the dance of bodies doesn't only serve a martial function, but also a political one, which we experience here with a certain immediacy.

The show is about history, but it's not all in the past. It's very current. I chose 2013 as an end point, but history doesn't stop there. Wars go on, just like economic, cultural, and artistic neocolonialism. Standards imposed by the West continue to prevail in art to a large extent, and they do so by not letting the Other escape its condition as the Other. Here, through this process of incorporation and transformation, I'm trying to create an emancipated and emancipating form. I have spent a lot of time thinking about the history of classical dance, which was used as a tool for the colonisation of minds and bodies. Those tools are still at play in modern dance. Art isn't always a space of emancipation. It continues to impose its own history, to colonise imaginations, to create hierarchies and rankings among aesthetics. There are techniques taught throughout the world as emancipation tools that are nothing more than tools of standardisation that serve the capitalist project. And history repeats itself. Relationships of power do change, but not nearly enough.

Interview conducted by Francis Cossu / Translation Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

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