

## AND...

### NAVE OF IMAGES

- Excerpt of *Méduse* by Les Bâtards Dorés (2018)
  - Excerpt of *Le Radeau de la Méduse* by Thomas Jolly (2016)
  - *Le Radeau de la Méduse* by Romeo Castellucci (2018)
- July 20 at 14:30, église des Célestins

## TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- November 15 and 16, 2018, Mix'Art Myrys, Toulouse
- March 7 and 8, 2019, TEAT Champ Fleuri THEAT Plein Air, Sainte-Clotilde
- April 16 to 19, T2G, Gennevilliers
- April 24 to 27, Le Centquatre, Paris

## MÉDUSE

The castaways of the frigate *Méduse*: a human tragedy and a high-stakes trial at the top of the French state against the background of colonisation. Two hundred years later, what do we know of this now-symbolic tragic event, beyond Théodore Géricault's painting? Using statements made by two survivors they meticulously read and analysed, the collective Les Bâtards dorés invite us to experience the 1816 trial judging the violent fight that pit officers and soldiers against one another, and the cannibalistic acts of the survivors. Abandoning the traditional opposition between the room and the stage, they draw the audience into an immersive experience, making them part of the action as witnesses and judges of the events. "*Méduse explores humanity in extreme situations. When standing on the edge of the abyss, how does man reveal his true nature: by sharing, competing, or reverting to animalistic behaviour?*" Les Bâtards dorés give centre stage to the very essence of human relationships, stripped bare by terror and survival instinct. Are we the allies of those communities currently drifting away? Are we but powerless watchers as our age comes to an end?

## LES BÂTARDS DORÉS

*Méduse* was awarded both the Jury and the Audience Prizes during the Festival Impatience in 2017, and the collective Les Bâtards dorés are giving the audience of the Festival d'Avignon the chance to discover this second creation. For their first show, *Princes* (2015), the five actors and the lighting designer, graduates of different drama schools—the Epsad in Lille, the Ensad in Montpellier, the ENSATT in Lyon, and the ESTBA in Bordeaux—already loosely adapted Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* to tell the story of a lost community. They love to use non-dramatic texts exploring human nature to place the reader/audience at the very heart of the dramatic act, of the decision-making process.

72<sup>th</sup>  
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 LES BÂTARDS DORÉS

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## Tell us about the story of your collective—Les Bâtards dorés—and about your creative principles.

**Lisa Hours:** Les Bâtards dorés was founded in 2011 by five artists who trained in different drama schools. Today it also includes a lighting designer. For the creation of our first show, *Princes*, we began to experiment with the idea of stylistic break: both in the performance and in meaning. Our sources are rarely dramatic in nature, which gives us more freedom but also forces us to work longer and more deeply on the material we've chosen. We begin by writing the texts and discussing the dramaturgy, and only when that's done do we start working on the stage. *Méduse* uses as its primary source an account written after the trial of two survivors of the wreck of the frigate *La Méduse* in 1816, Alexandre Corréard and Jean-Baptiste Savigny's *Le Naufrage de la Méduse* (1817). France was trying to regain control of its trading posts in Senegal, occupied by the British during the Napoleonic Wars. Louis XVIII had decided to send settlers to the territories Britain had returned to France. The transcript of the trial confronts contradictory truths about the events of the wreck, which made our work extremely hard. We were particularly interested in the question of survival, as well as in that of the audience and of their place in the action. Formally speaking, we've recreated a tribunal, along with the different figures present at the trial: judges, jurors, clerks, sailors, officers... The audience become at once judge and party in the trial, we create both physical proximity and an unusual relationship to experimentation. The show is made up of two parts that are closely linked together but with their own distinct aesthetics. The formal aspect of the tribunal in the first part transforms to allow us to directly experience what the survivors on the raft were going through. The spectators are separated before the show even begins; some are made officers, others simple sailors, some will be jurors and thus take an active part in the dramatic process, since we're giving them a chance to speak at some point in the show. We've deliberately chosen to immerse the audience in a complete experience, supported by every single artistic tool at our disposal: light, sound, dramaturgy, but also video and images.

## What motivated your research into the scandal of *La Méduse* and the subsequent trial?

**Lisa Hours:** At the genesis of *Méduse* is a literary banquet revolving around the theme of the sea which was commissioned by the theatre La Manufacture Atlantique in Bordeaux. That's where we got the idea to stage the play as a trial. *Princes* was also an experiment in immersive theatre: the show would begin in the lobby of the theatre with a party to which the audience were invited, which would blur the line between the "before" and the beginning of the action and of the performance. This research on the immediate immersion of the spectator can be found in both shows: in *Méduse*, the purely geographical involvement of the first part turns into a quasi-shamanic physical experience, similar to Jean Rouch's concept of visual anthropology.

To leave the space of the trial, the judge and the clerk try to make two witnesses go into a trance, which allows for the transformation of one location into another, a move from a classical mode of representation to another based more on sensations and images. The framework remains, of course, the idea isn't to turn it into forum theatre. Rather, it gives the audience freedom to approach it however they want—that is, to shift their gaze from one event to another whenever they like. They can choose to focus on the painter who works live, like a courtroom sketch artist, or to observe the clerk's reactions. They aren't simply subjected to the temporality of the show, they keep theirs close at hand. Action surrounds the audience, and it is made up not only of major actions, but also of minor events. It forces them to accept the events of the trial, as they are both watching and being watched.

## The initial question for you was: is it possible to judge without experiencing something firsthand? How did you then organise your work?

**Lisa Hours:** Yes, we asked ourselves: what would have I done in their place? Would I have been able to prevent a mutiny, to stop them from resorting to cannibalism? Am I in a position to judge them afterwards, with only incomplete sources at my disposal? Who am I, and where am I speaking from, to judge so? The first step for us was to go back to the facts and try to understand what might have happened. We're also questioning the very legitimacy of the trial, whether it wasn't a sham; history is almost always seen from the point of view of the victors, and the wreck of *La Méduse* is part of the history of colonisation. People at large don't know the details of the story, except as a painting by Théodore Géricault. Our goal was to shine as exhaustive a light as possible on the facts, while letting the audience make up their own minds and come to their own conclusions. There's no real resolution to *Méduse*. We wrote *Méduse* based on written accounts and on technical transcripts of facts dating back to 1816, which we used to create improvised scenes until we'd collectively written an entirely new text. In our creative process, each one of us plays all the characters, before we decide who plays what role. There are still moments of improvisation in the second part, possible moments of freedom for the actors within the existing framework. *Méduse* is the creation of a microcosm, which echoes the way our collective works.

**Romain Grard:** This play exists in continuity with *The Idiot*, which also includes this idea of a shipwreck, of sailors not coming back, and also tackles these questions about life and survival. *Méduse* explores humanity in extreme situations. When standing on the edge of the abyss, how does man reveal his true nature: by sharing, competing, or reverting to animalistic behavior? The subject allows us to explore wide questions and to anchor them in a dense theatrical material, relatively open both in terms of form and content. How do we reveal ourselves to ourselves in unknown situations?

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