

TRILOGIE DU REVOIR

The group of the Friends of the Arts get together to discover the new exhibition curated by Moritz, the director of a museum lost in the wilderness. This confrontation with the paintings, and beyond that, with one another, soon reveals just how lonely and desperate everyone is. At the heart of Botho Strauss's *Trilogie du revoir* (*Trilogy of the Reunions*) lies the question of representation; the representation of the real offered by painting, by the theatre, by photography or literature, and the representation that each and every one of us builds of ourselves to face others, or draw their eyes. This reflection about images, and about the image we have of ourselves, is an opportunity for Benjamin Porée to explore again the intimate crises of beings who have lost their bearings. Beings who are "not quite nobody but not someone yet" and who, even when they are called on to act against a decision to censor the exhibition, are all too ready to compromise their principles. There only remain the voices of the poet and of the art fanatic, who remind us that seeing works of art we have already seen before is a struggle against oblivion and goodbyes. By increasing the photographic effects that structure Botho Strauss's play, Benjamin Porée gives the audience the impression that they are always moving, like the visitors of a museum leaning closer to a painting, or choosing the right angle to examine a detail more closely.

The show will premiere on 21 July, 2015 at Gymnase du lycée Aubanel, Avignon.

BENJAMIN PORÉE

After training as an actor at the cours Florent, Benjamin Porée founds in 2009 the company La Musicienne du silence. If he borrowed that name from Stéphane Mallarmé, it is the words of Arthur Rimbaud he first brings to the stage for his first show, *A Season in Hell*, performed by Matthieu Dessertine in 2006, and later by others. When he then decides to turn to a dramatic text, it is Jean Racine's *Andromaque*, directing it at the Théâtre de Vanves, of which he becomes a partner in 2012. There, he brings together a troupe of actors who went through the cours Florent to create Anton Chekhov's *Platonov* in 2012, which later played at the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe in 2014. With them, he also creates a choreographed duo, *Sublime ou Rien* (*Sublime or Nothing*), then, at the Loge de Paris, a play by Marius von Mayenburg for five characters, *Parasites*, and a solo with Edith Proust, *Georges*. Since 2015, Benjamin Porée has been a partner of the Gêmeaux Scène nationale de Sceaux. Borrowing effects of tightening of the frame or of stretching of time from the cinema, Benjamin Porée aims to make the theatre a place where the inner selves of the actors meet those of the audience.

BOTHO STRAUSS

Born in 1944, Bothos Strauss worked as a theatre critic, then as a playwright for the Schaubühne in Berlin, working with Peter Stein, before becoming famous for his plays (*Big and Small*, 1978; *Kalldewey, farce*, 1981; *The Park*, 1983; *Schlusschor* (*Final Chorus*), 1991), but also for his novels (*Devotion*, 1977; *Rumor*, 1980; *The Young Man*, 1984). The living German author the most played in the world, Botho Strauss exposes the flaws hidden by modern social systems. The individual, as hard as he may try to adopt fashionable postures, always suffers from his inability to truly open up to others.

Trilogie du revoir by Botho Strauss is published by éditions Gallimard. L'Arche is the publisher and the theatrical agent of the text.

INTERVIEW WITH BENJAMIN PORÉE

How did you decide to direct Botho Strauss's *Trilogie du revoir* (*Trilogy of Reunions*)?

Benjamin Porée: I've been working on this project for a while now. I first came across this play six or seven years ago. At the time I was really into Claude Régy's work, into his writings on the theatre, and I often inquired on the plays he had directed. That is how I came to read *Trilogy of Reunions*. Out of curiosity, if you will. I liked it a lot, and hesitated to put it on with my students at the Cours Florent. But eventually I moved on to something else. After touring for three years with *Platonov*, my previous play, I wanted to keep working with that same group, those actors who had given me so much. So when Olivier Py invited me to the Festival d'Avignon, I thought about this play, with its many characters.

Who are the seventeen characters that make up the play? What connects them to one another?

The characters are on holiday, invited, like every year, to discover before anyone else the exhibition put on by Moritz, the director of a museum lost in the wilderness. And so each year they get to see each other again, and to spy on each other, too. They are there to watch and be watched, more so even than to look at the paintings Moritz has selected. Within this small cultural elite, Botho Strauss chose to focus on seventeen characters. They come from wildly different social backgrounds, from the penniless writer to the politician, from public figures to members of the middle-class. Unlike the male characters, the women aren't defined by their jobs. They don't work. They're seen as props for their husbands. Throughout the play, they also show that they need to be watched by men to even exist. They ask for it. Botho Strauss, by showing how they suffer from this lack of attention, reveals their wealth.

This void, this feeling of loneliness, are they not shared by all the characters?

Despair is something they all feel. Something we all feel, in my opinion. It is a social, a universal plight. Right from the start, the unmoored quality of the characters is spelt out. Botho Strauss talks of "nobody in particular," of a "faceless multiplicity." One of the tales that punctuate the play is a symbol for that. The character of Richard tries to sum up the novel he just read, the story of a man who is "not quite nobody but not someone yet," whose name is Alias. We are all Alias. We all try, day after day, to become someone, to become what we think we want to become, labouring under the illusion that we have any control over it. The characters of the play act as mirrors for the others, but they're also mirrors that distort and accentuate what they are themselves. Some try to hide. But they are exposed, because this confrontation with works of art forces them to face their own truth.

Is the debate about the name of the exhibition, and about the one problematic painting, caused only by that sort of bitterness, of resentment?

This confrontation at the beginning, of the characters with the paintings, isn't only an excuse to set the play in motion. It is a very real reflection on art and

its power, led notably by the character of Peter, who reminds us how essential it is to display paintings, to look at them. Art is a way to salvation, a way to maintain the memory and intelligence of the heart. Peter speaks for Botho Strauss there. The other characters, usually entirely preoccupied by their own petty problems, feel compelled to act so that the exhibition isn't cancelled. The solution they choose isn't the bravest, since they simply change its name, from "Capitalist Realism" to "Imaginations of Reality." They save the exhibition by giving it this nuanced, cowardly title, and above all by removing the one challenging painting, a portrait of the bank director, Kiepert, with another man, in an unambiguous position. Their compromise might seem tiny but it is the most important of all, as it is their own freedom they compromise. As for Moritz, he decides to hang the painting around his own neck. It isn't just a symbol. His political engagement is physical, felt in his very flesh. Botho Strauss ends the play with that image, which is a very powerful gesture.

The play is punctuated by sequences Botho Strauss calls "diaphragms." What is your interpretation of those?

Those diaphragms are like respirations. Speaking of which, hyperventilation syndrome, which affects the diaphragm, is sometimes referred to in French as the "sighing disease." I thought it was a beautiful name, and one particularly fitting to those characters who cannot control their own breathing rhythm, who are victims of it. Beyond that, the word also brings to mind photography, which *Trilogy of Reunions* echoes on several different levels. Those sequences are like moments of focusing. The diaphragm itself cannot be shown, materially speaking. It is the element that controls the depth of field, the clarity of the picture. My aim is to give the audience the impression that they are among those few who are granted an early access to the exhibit. The pictures are projected onto the stage and move closer to the audience, as if they were taking a step forward to better look at the specific details of those paintings.

In what other ways does the play evoke to photography?

Botho Strauss makes use in *Trilogy of Reunions* of all the tools that speak to us of representation, of time, of the image. All that within the painting, so to speak, that is the theatre stage. He uses, for instance, narration. When Peter tells of how Pirosmani painted his last work, he points out that mimesis can never be complete, since any representation contains within itself the gesture of the one responsible for it, whatever the medium may be. Even photography, whose invention led us to believe we now had an instrument of perfect figuration, cannot seize the real without marking it with the stamp of the photographer. The young boy who takes pictures of the adults in the play is a similar tool used by the author. Thanks to him, he is able to add yet another level of *mise en abyme*. We're looking at the creation of a representation of the representation we're looking at... This child stops time thanks to a Polaroid camera, the most instantaneous of media. The image appears almost instantly. But it is also the perfect symbol for the ephemeral, since the unique nature of the picture highlights the fleetingness of the present moment and the impossibility to ever truly see it again.

AND...

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Dialogue artists-audience with Benjamin Porée and the team of *Trilogie du revoir*
24 July at 05:30 pm, Site Louis Pasteur de l'Université, free admittance

ÇA VA, ÇA VA LE MONDE ! - RFI

L'Oiseau Parker dans la nuit (Bird Parker At Night) by Yanick Lahens
Read by Mireille Perrier / 18 July at 11:30 am, Jardin du gymnase du lycée
Saint-Joseph, free admittance

TOUR DATES FOR *TRILOGIE DU REVOIR* AFTER THE FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

- from 9 to 20 March 2016: Gémeaux, Scène nationale de Sceaux
- 24 March: Théâtre du Luxembourg, Meaux
- 31 March: Théâtre du Beauvaisis, Scène nationale de l'Oise en préfiguration
- 13 April: Le Parvis, Scène nationale de Tarbes-Pyrénées
- 20 and 21 April: La Filature, Scène nationale de Mulhouse
- 4 May: Théâtre de Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, Scène nationale
- 11 and 12 May: Le Fracas, Centre dramatique national de Montluçon

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