

## AND...

## THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

*The artist within decentralisation* with in particular Caroline Guiela Nguyen, – Association des Centres dramatiques nationaux, July 11 at 14:30  
 Site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon  
*What cultural diversity on european stages* with in particular Caroline Guiela Nguyen / *Alternatives théâtrales*, July 14 at 11:00, Cloître Saint-Louis

## TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- November 7-11 2017, MC2 : Grenoble
- December 6-7, Comédie de Reims - Centre dramatique national
- January 12 to February 10 2018, Odéon-théâtre de l'Europe
- February 21-23, Centre dramatique national de Normandie-Rouen
- March 6-9, Théâtre Dijon Bourgogne CDN
- March 13-14, La Comédie de Valence CDN Drôme-Ardèche
- April 4-7, Théâtre de la Croix-Rousse, Lyon
- April 25-26, Centre dramatique national de Besançon
- May 15-18, Théâtre national de Bretagne
- May 29 to June 2, Théâtre Olympia Centre dramatique national de Tours

## SURTITLES - ELECTRONIC GLASSES

For the show *SAIGON*, the Festival d'Avignon and Panthea/Theatre in Paris, with the support of the Ministère de la Culture offer a service of individual and multilingual surtitles on electronic glasses in French (translation Duc Duy Nguyen, Jérémie Scheidler) and English (Emily Pollak).

Also available for the following shows :

- *Antigone*, by Satoshi Miyagi, from Japanese to English, French and Arabic
- *Sopra*, by Tiago Rodrigues, from Portuguese to English and French,
- *Ramona*, by Rezo Gabriadze, from Georgian and Russian to English and French.

Information and booking location@festival-avignon.com

## SAIGON

Like the actors that portray them, the characters of *SAIGON* are French, Vietnamese, or French of Vietnamese descent. Whatever their age, they share landscapes, faces, songs, and a language that, for some of them, no longer exist but in their memories. The play takes place in a location subject to the same nostalgia: a restaurant stuck in a space-time somewhere between the France of today and the Saigon of the '50s, where the characters have become used to bumping into one another, meeting for lunch, singing, drinking, dancing, loving, and trying to celebrate life in spite of everything. The result of a long work of immersion in both France and Vietnam, this polyphonic story invents the voices of men and women marked by history and geography. They all carry within themselves the marks left by the changes of our world. *SAIGON* is a wounded land, there's always someone missing, someone to mourn, and it is the journey of the tears thus shed that guides us. With the help of those eleven actors, Caroline Guiela Nguyen conjures up a vision of France as it exists beyond the limits it has been given, beyond its own borders.

## CAROLINE GUIELA NGUYEN

After studying sociology and the performing arts, Caroline Guiela Nguyen joined the Conservatoire d'Avignon in 2004. In 2005, she enrolled in the school of the Théâtre national de Strasbourg to study direction. She founded the company Les Hommes Approximatifs in 2009 with Claire Calvi, Alice Duchange, Juliette Kramer, Benjamin Moreau, Mariette Navarro, Antoine Richard, and Jérémie Papin. After adapting a few classics, they started working on plays of their own, about missing stories and missing bodies, those you don't usually see on theatre stages. Since then, they've never stopped populating the stage with the world around them. Since 2015, Caroline Guiela Nguyen has been working with Joël Pommerat and Jean Ruimi at the Maison Centrale in Arles, notably on *Désordre d'un future passé (Disorder of a Future Past)*. Caroline Guiela Nguyen is associated with the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe, with the MC2: Grenoble, and is part of the artistic collective of the Comédie de Valence, Centre dramatique national Drôme-Ardèche.

71<sup>st</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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#FDA17

# INTERVIEW WITH CAROLINE GUIELA NGUYEN

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## How did you work on the fictional elements in *SAIGON*?

**Caroline Guiela Nguyen:** It's a long process. In 2008, after directing several classic texts, I realised that some stories and people were missing from theatre stages. I wanted our shows to carry the noise of the world and I thought some voices were missing. So in 2009 I founded the company Les Hommes Approximatifs with Alice Duchange (scenographer), Benjamin Moreau (costume designer), Jérémie Papin (lighting designer), Mariette Navarro (writer and playwright), Antoine Richard (sound designer), and Claire Calvi (artistic collaborator). Since then, our preoccupation has been to figure out which are the stories that tell us about who we are today, and over all who are the people who have to inhabit our stage. For *SAIGON*, we had to cross our own borders, and go looking for faces all the way to Vietnam. Over the past two years, we gathered testimonies. Periods of immersion in Ho Chi Minh City and in the 13<sup>th</sup> arrondissement in Paris allowed us to hear again stories, words, and languages that had become inaccessible to me, like my grandmother's limited French, or my uncle's pidgin. I was then able to write a book I gave the actors on the first day of rehearsals. That book isn't the text of the show, because it was the actors themselves who informed me about their own language, their own way of speaking. For instance, Hiep speaks French, but it isn't her native language. She uses it differently from Pierric, for whom French has always been there. That's the reason why I want to keep writing with the actors, based on what they say. I can't run ahead of them. This book is therefore a sensitive landscape that was the basis for the stage writing I did with the actors during rehearsals. It's in a way the subtext to *SAIGON*. It's a dream that amplified and expanded during rehearsals.

## You've said that the city also influenced your project...

Whenever I left Vietnam after spending some time in residence there, I told myself: "Don't forget Saigon." Up until now in my work, it was the actors who told me where the story should go. Working on a show in a foreign city made me realise that the city itself could also give me functional indications. Ho Chi Minh City is full of stories of departure, of exile, it is full of people who are missing in their own families, and it is that absence that creates fiction. Paradoxically, the more the memories we have of someone else are in danger, the more we feel the need to remember. That's how we create lies, myths. There's always someone to mourn, and our show is about finding this journey of tears again. Melodrama is omnipresent in the daily lives of the Vietnamese. Karaoke and its popular songs marked by exile, love, the importance of flowers... There is in Ho Chi Minh City a permanent presence of nostalgia and pain, probably because it is a wounded city with its own ghost, Saigon.

But Saigon is a dead city, full of stories and myths. When we talk about Saigon, what are we talking about? France? Vietnam? Martin Sheen at the beginning of *Apocalypse Now*? The 235 restaurants that bear that same name in France? It's not only about the Vietnamese, or about the French who left for Indochina, it's about our collective memory. Saigon belongs to all of us.

## SAIGON is a city, a colonial imprint, a story at once French and foreign. Where would you place the play, given how much its title means to you?

Colonisation is something we care about, we work on its history, its big and small events, the context of its development, but we do that among other things, because if we didn't Vietnam would be what, nothing more than a former colony? I'm the daughter of Viet kieu<sup>1</sup> but *SAIGON* isn't a show to settle the score with France. It would be at once too easy and too general. If you insist, I'd say that the colonial question, if treated like a "topic" about which the show *has to* take position, would become most harmless. I don't want speeches about people, I want the people themselves, their faces, their landscapes, their bodies, their languages. People are the reason why I start writing, like the first time I realised my mother speaks a version of Vietnamese that no longer exists because she was forced to leave her country when she was 11 and speaks the language of a stateless person. Or like that man from Indochina who insults his Vietnamese wife because the times, in spite of the great love he feels for her, authorise him to think that there are superior beings on one side and indigenous people on the other. That's where colonisation is, within the very hearts of those human beings. And so if it makes sense to tackle the colonial past of France through individual destinies, sometimes broken, sometimes split, sometimes displaced and forever exiled, it only does so as a way to make people hear the insistent rumble of the forgotten and the invisible. That's how I want to respond to that question as an artist: by inviting Vietnamese people, Frenchmen and –women, and Frenchmen and –women of Vietnamese descent to write our show with us so that people can see them, hear them, and for our world to broaden thanks to their presence.

Interview conducted by Francis Cossu  
and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

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<sup>1</sup> Viet kieu: literally "Overseas Vietnamese," a word with no official legal definition used by the communist regime to designate the Vietnamese living outside Vietnam, foreign nationals of Vietnamese descent, and Vietnamese refugees living abroad who haven't yet become citizens of their host countries.