



# PINOCCHIO(LIVE)#2

## INTERVIEW WITH ALICE LALOY

### What led to the creation of *Pinocchio(live)*?

**Alice Laloy:** I write most of my shows based on experimentation. It's a work of research, and like any real research, it's a long process, and you don't know where you're going to end up when you start. For *Pinocchio(live)*, it all started when I was commissioned to do a series of photographs for a puppetry magazine in 2014. I'd just worked in my previous shows on extremely realistic puppets, and I wanted to go further in my research: the thing border between the human and the object, between life and death, and on the troubling feeling it arouses. I naturally thought of the myth of Pinocchio, the puppet turned into a boy. And it's on that very moment of transformation, when you no longer know whether you're looking at a human or a puppet anymore, that I wanted to focus. What would it look like exactly? So I tried to transform a child's body, by covering it in make-up and tying strings to its articulations, and by using the technique used by the Dada or Jean Cocteau of painting eyes directly on closed eyelids. The photograph it led to, called *Pinocchio 0.0*, surprised me: instead of the child, something else had appeared. I then wanted to reproduce the experience, to better understand it. From 2014 to 2018, I made 70 pictures with 70 children in France but also in Mongolia, where I went to work with young contortionists as part of my research on disarticulated bodies. I always went through the same ritual: the arrival of the child, his or her transformation into a Pinocchio, then the taking of the photograph, and finally another metamorphosis in reverse as we took the make-up off... But soon I felt the need to go beyond this simple accumulation of experiences. With time, I began to see the limits of the photographic work which, though it was an essential step, only gave to see a fixed result rather than the process in its entirety. And there was something definitive about it that I found unsettling. I wanted to go further. To me, it meant using a medium I'm more used to: theatre.

### As a puppeteer, why tackle the myth of Pinocchio?

My conception of puppetry is fairly broad. In and of itself, the puppet in my work isn't so much a tool as a process of transformation and an object of fascination due to its inherent theatricality. It's an incredibly complex and magic object, which combines the power of life and the power of death—a very theatrical power. And to see a puppet start to move is a very powerful thing, like a birth. It therefore made sense for me to tackle the myth of Pinocchio: the fantasy of creation, this parenting relationship with the object is always there when you work with puppets. But more than just a rewriting, *Pinocchio(live)* is an extrapolation from a fragment of the myth. By focusing on the moment of transformation, it shines a light on the relationship to the fabrication of the object, an essential dimension of my work which I see as not entirely disconnected from the idea of tinkering with the human body. To breathe life into an object is the same, deep down, as dehumanising a body: the process is inverted, but the mechanism behind it is the same. Instinct of life, instinct of death, they go together. By turning the children into puppets, all I'm doing is reverting the puppeteer's process, without taking anything away from the power of the transformation. Moreover, I also wanted there to be more not one Pinocchio in the show, but a whole group of them onstage. This choice immediately led to the world of science-fiction. I pictured a dystopian society in which children would be subjected to a rite of passage: on what looks like an assembly line, puppeteers barely older than them paint them using paint guns, then dress them all in the same clothes to transform them into standardised dolls. But I didn't want to there. I'd moved from photography to theatre to showcase all transformations, including the one that gives the puppets their humanity back. It was therefore important for me for the children to take back their own bodies, having been dependent on the adults for so long. Hence that second transformation through movement.

**For *Pinocchio*(live), you worked with child dancers. What's the place of the body and of movement in this show?**

There's a great affinity between my work with objects and my work with bodies. In a way, I'm always trying to hybridise them, with the idea that the human body should stand in continuity with the machine it's working with, and vice versa. In the first two movements of the show—the transformation of the children into puppets, then their handling by puppeteers—the tool leads the movement. It's a very precise and clinical process, an almost scientific method. We also played with the very specific grammar of the disarticulated body, for which I invited two contortionists to work with us. But for the last transformation, when the children regain control of their bodies, it seems important to me to work in an entirely different register: I did not want to create an image from those bodies, but rather to give the children the means to convey themselves what they're experiencing. How to escape immobility? That's why I wanted to work with the vocabulary of dance, to enter a discussion, by calling on my sister, choreographer Cécile Laloy. Her process is about finding the path of an energy within the body rather than looking at movement as an end in and of itself. The idea was to use the children's experience as the basis for the writing: what remains when, after being manipulated for about thirty minutes by other people, they open their eyes and can move on their own again? It's not trivial, they enter a state which changes their relationship to their own bodies, it brings to mind the idea of trance. The instinct of life comes back to them in waves, in a rather crude, sudden, pure, and wild way. It's akin to a birth, something at once sublime and monstrous. The fact that we're talking about children's bodies is also meaningful to me. I've written four shows for younger audiences so far, and each of them has been an important adventure in my writing career, always with a form of interaction with the children. But here the collaboration goes further: I'm no longer writing for them, but with them. It's a crazy experience, something very joyful and uncompromising... and always moving.

**How would you describe the form and the writing of this show without words?**

One could see in *Pinocchio*(live) a relatively classic structure with a prologue, three acts, and an epilogue. But that doesn't mean it follows a narrative logic: to me, it's the experience that matters, not the story. My shows are a mixture of dramaturgic choices in which different ingredients overlap: sounds, objects, their context... The writing takes the form of a piling up of parallel narrative pathways all moving at different speeds, a little like a symphony, with different scores written according to a horizontal relationship. The work on music and sound is central here: it's a full-blown character, played by two teenagers who, armed with drums, play the role of taskmasters to accompany the transformation ceremony. They're the link between the audience and the performance. I wanted to put the audience right in the middle of the experimental approach of the show, with a traverse stage, a sort of *agora* surrounding the space of transformation. They have therefore the opportunity to watch not so much a theatrical performance as an experiment taking place here and now, in the time of the show. It's then up to them to recreate a story. Because my writing, if I had to describe it, is more poetic than narrative—and I'd rather not explain the part of poetry that exists in *Pinocchio*(live), to give the audience the freedom to interpret it as they like.

Interview conducted by Marie Lobrichon in February 2021 and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cleach