

Último helecho

NINA LAISNÉ / FRANÇOIS CHAIGNAUD / NADIA LARCHER

Mineral queer



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Sometimes a scenery alone announces an entire cosmology. In 'Último helecho' (Last Fern'), a collaboration between director Nina Laisné, dancer François Chaignaud, and Argentinian singer Nadia Larcher, the world that materialises is mineral, mythical, and unmistakably queer.

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Hybrid bodies move in 'Último helecho' through and around an enormous stone constellation, resembling a primitive cave, a cosmic fungus, a baroque ruin, and a dormant giant's face. This *creature-landscape* is upheld by a Corinthian column, already destined to collapse. There is no time to stabilise what you see; with the textured unreality of a video game, the performance pulls you into its seductive world where myth feels reborn. The boundaries between living and inanimate, masculine and feminine are immediately destabilized. Nothing stays fixed long enough to truly process or name it.

From its first tableau, a mineral phantasmagoria takes hold: dance and music play out a distinctly South American mythology (chiefly Argentine and Peruvian folklore and fables) intertwining without any hierarchy. It follows the associative logic of a European operetta. Laisné and Chaignaud extend the radical fusion of '*Romances inciertos, un autre Orlando', their former collaboration that dates back from 2017 but Is still touring. This work is even more unruly. Folklore interlaces with European baroque ornamentation; dances such as vidalas and malambos tangle with canarios and flamenco; the stage becomes a chamber where histories reconfigure one another. Time seems porous: past and present coexist in a queer temporality that resist linear narration. It is a truly oxymoronic work: any clear signifier easily slips from perception almost as soon as it forms. It is also a work that demands the spectator's imagination to take the lead; its meaning is deliberately fluid, open to whatever multiform one is willing to project into it.*

Queer virtuosity is the most potent quality of this performance.

Chaignaud, *the first polymorphous creature to appear looks as if washed ashore:* a body gasping in a net of colourful garments, pierced by a stick or a weapon resembling a sceptre. He manipulates the stick with precision, crumpled on the

floor before balancing on his head. In the next sequence, yellow light bathes the rocky structure: an ancestral altarpiece. **Larcher** emerges like a **mineral sorceress,** clad in the same outfit as Chaignaud. Her voice is warm and full, with a slight *grain de la voix*. What we sense is a prophecy, buried in sediment, now taking shape in an unfamiliar form. Throughout, Chaignaud and Larcher embrace each other's genre, both singing and dancing.

The music excavates these geological layers. the repertoire spans the entire period between the 16th century and today, opening with a somber *marche **funèbre***-like atmosphere and ending in a cabaret-like celebration of life and art. The variety of instruments is a confusing mix of sackbut (an early version of the trombone), teorbe, sachaguitarra, and the percussive, melancholic patterns of a bandoneon. The hybrid movement vocabulary mirrors this multiplicity: a gesture may suggest flamenco only to dissolve into baroque footwork; folkloric forms mutate into something unclassifiable. This is where the performance reveals its most potent quality: *queer virtuosity*. Not technical virtuosity, but as a structural refusal of the very taxonomies that make style, tradition, or gender legible. In a sudden flash, Chaignaud becomes a conquistador-flamenco-drag apparition, golden boots gleaming, slipping smoothly between genders and species. This is virtuosity as impurity, a contamination that inhabits the in-between: between the sacred and the popular, the living and the mineral.

Mocking solemnity

Camp is the common thread running through the work. An undercurrent of irony, stylised exaggeration, and gentle mocking of solemnity is omnipresent (for instance, when Larcher sits on Chaignaud's butt). Sometimes the performers appear as gnomes, or as Papageno and Papagena from Mozart's 'The Magic Flute'; elsewhere, like baroque operetta characters who have wandered into a science-fiction ritual. As Susan Sontag notes in 'Notes on "Camp' (1964), camp is a certain type of sensitivity, a mode of seeing that transforms seriousness into style, an aesthetic artifice. Here, camp extends to a utopian outlet, imagining a future without hierarchies. It also creates a subtle Brechtian distance, a shimmer of play that reframes myth as a negotiable, queer body-and-sound archive.

'Último Helecho' swims in currents of imagination and resistance.

One visually striking scene crowns the performers with stone headpieces, transforming them into ceremonial bulls, or perhaps fossilised divinities. However, their head-butting duel feels childlike and playful. And when the Corinthian column collapses onto Larcher, the gesture condenses the dramaturgy: baroque iconography falling into a prehistoric dreamscape. Musicians circle the fallen column in a medieval-like procession. The dancers transform, don in long tunics in orange and yellow. Everything tilts toward excess and kitsch. The tone turns almost Almodóvarian: ironic, luscious, excessive, queerly tender. Chaignaud's climactic *malambo*-flamenco outburst concentrates the entire cosmology into his body: frenetic footwork, circling limbs, a choreography burning with intensity. Malambo, a vigorous Argentine folk dance historically performed by men to showcase skill and virility through stomping (*zapateados*) and brushing (*cepillados*), here becomes a form of a male *travesty*: an androgynous being. The stage shifts from yellow to black, from sunburst to eclipse, as shadows perform a mineral carnival of theirs.

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sedimented in each form and style. History appears layered, fractured, glittering, unstable. A dancing body reads these strata differently; costume generates new anatomies; virtuosity becomes an act of refusal; myth can be camp, tragic, playful, and sacred - all without contradiction. It is an ode to the theatrical vitality that emerges in-between forms and hybrid fusions as a truth worth seeking. A world where stone breathes, genders fall like crumbling columns, and bodies begin anew in a mineral dawn yet-to-come.