pzazz



Wayqeycuna

TIZIANO CRUZ

A political ritual of self-reconciliation



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RECENSIEWORKSHOP

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In ‘Wayqeycuna’, a very personal solo performance presented by Kaaitheater in Brussels, Tiziano Cruz explores his darkest thoughts and his anger towards the world that triggers them. As an an artist from an indigenous community in northern Argentina performing in Europe, he seeks for peace of mind and reconciliation with his inner conflicts. Contradictory in essence yet thought-provoking, Cruz’s skill as a performer is without doubt.

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The sound of a distant cowbell behind a horizon of fabric mountains sets the scene while the public enters the room. A trip into the mountains of inner Argentina awaits. Tiziano Cruz, ringing the cowbell, appears from beyond, wearing a traditional garment over a white overall. He talks, looking straight into the eyes of the public. He speaks about his own objectification as an “exotic” performer, and about class and money. Yet, he is there to find again the sense of life. In his own words, this is “a desperate attempt to deal with the grief of my dead sister”.

The power of Cruz's proposal is anchored in his personal story, and the identification of social contradictions within himself.

Through a combination of political(ly charged) discourse and religious ritual, Cruz explores the marginalisation experienced by indigenous communities in the region where he grew up. He fights his own contradictions as an artist that exposes his culture in exchange for the money and praise of other social classes, which, knowingly or not, still promote a structural poverty cycle. He strives to understand the passion that capitalist consumption ignites in those that are exploited by the very idea of capitalism. He criticizes a colonial world in which no one makes an effort to understand the reality and motivations of indigenous peoples.

Even if Cruz's claims are of indisputable relevance, his use of epic theatre to confront the audience is unfortunately not always effective. The messages struggle to be conveyed by a political harangue. Nevertheless, Cruz manages to transmit them through emotions, which he lets flourish as the performance advances. The power of his proposal is anchored in his personal story, and the identification of social contradictions within himself.

Altar-table

A simple yet sophisticated scene setting helps Cruz to share his story. Through an artisanal pulley system, he raises the mountains and transforms them into a screen onto which his last trip back to his homeland is projected as a short documentary film, showing the stories that the mountains hide. He walks with his father in the mountains. He sings with the children of his community and teaches them songs of sorrow and pain, but he also portrays local traditions that are rooted in a colonial past, like Catholic processions and worship of saints.

Cruz becomes a priest giving a homily on his sorrow.

The use of film creates a divide between 'here' and 'there', and, at times, it feels like the performer is selling his origins as an artistic product or craftmanship, just as he condemns this very practice during the first part of the performance. However, the documentary approach also facilitates a better understanding of the mountains and the traditions that survive within them, and brings Cruz to an emotional state that gives rise to powerful, heartfelt storytelling.

In a turning point of the performance, from which political anger gives way to the story of how Cruz's sister died, the fabric screen spills over onto an altar-table. Cruz becomes a priest giving a homily on his sorrow. He brings animal-shaped bread, fruits and flowers to the altar, which he records with his phone from the top: an offering to the dead, and the sin of the world. These offerings are then distributed among the audience ("take and eat, this is my body"), who accepts them first with doubt, then thankfully.

Is this a collective eucharist to cleanse colonial and capitalist sins? Is this once again colonialism extracting resources made by marginalised communities? Is the audience the representation of a dead society to which only offerings can be made?

Contradictions

These questions remain unsolved as lively music with doomful lyrics swells and Tiziano Cruz waves goodbye, waiting for everybody to leave. Waiting for those that entered this auditorium and broke the peace of the mountains to take the goods that they have been given and leave him alone. Alone with his team, with his newly-found self: home.

Cruz's words seem to be at odds with his actions, even if he seems very aware of his own contradictions.

Tiziano Cruz presents with 'Wayqeycuna' a thoughtful journey to his politically interwoven psyche. He does not have an answer to the political and social dilemmas that he denounces, and a more compelling approach to them is

missed. His words seem to be at odds with his actions, even if he seems very aware of his own contradictions.

Charismatic and committed, he tells, shows, screams and cries. He combines theatre, lecture and performance, but is only able to achieve catharsis and visual power through introspection and religious references. Though not without its flaws, *Wayqeycuna* provokes questions, confronts inequalities and shows that political ideas have very concrete psychological impact of political negligence.