

342 Mountains Between Us

FEMKE GYSELINCK & ANUSHKA CHKHEIDZE

Moving mountains to hold hands.



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Sometimes arranged marriages work out well. *342 Mountains Between Us*, by dancer-choreographer Femke Gyselinck and musician-composer Anushka Chkheidze, seems to be one of them.

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The backdrop is a commission from Europalia Georgia for the two artists, previously unknown to each other, to create a work together. Performance as perfect couple therapy: mutual respect, active listening, giving and holding space, going on adventures together, a mixture of spontaneity and planned activity, shared risk-taking, all seem to be contributing to the vibe of this delicately poised but powerful piece.

Very early on there is a silence and motionlessness, suspended in the air, weighted. It's like how the world becomes after heavy snow fall, before an avalanche perhaps, and it makes your heart beat faster. Gyselinck stays stock still, in an elongated, lizard-like crouch on the floor. There's a faint whirring from the sound desk, almost like helicopter blades in the far distance. Chkheidze strolls out from behind her music console into the space. Is she stepping forward to rescue Gyselinck?

Together the two performers' bodies create a visual poetry that overlays the sound.

From then on Chkheidze's sound and Gyselinck's movement co-habit and criss-cross, sometimes completely in step, at others, one leading the other. Their connection is intimate and has a playful touch, they often smile complicitely and make eyes at each other. Sometimes Chkheidze joins Gyselinck in the space, their hands meet, tracing a figure that points to, or measures, a distance. Although the number 342 is not mathematically correct, the title of the piece evokes the enormity of what they both, symbolically and geographically, see that separates them. The Georgian mountains are also present in the set: swaths of taupe coloured cloth, draping the space, like parchment with ancient stories written on them. The lighting consists of several long bars of neon placed above and behind the parchment mountains. Depending on how many are lit up and

their intensity, they shift the atmosphere from ethereal nature to stark socialist era office lighting, to a techno club ambience. Their stylish costumes: trousers and a kitted halter-neck for Gyselinck, a long, fitted dress for Chkheidze, are patterned with faint splodges. I discern maps marked out on their bodies.

Chkheidze's sound is electronic, but within its depth the kernel of traditional Georgian music is firmly planted says the composer. Gyselinck' physicality also reveals her different tones of influence from yoga, to break, to release, to Rosas referenced suspensions and arm swings.

The dancer's figure, small, almost childlike, yet whose moves contain the fluid energy of a rapidly following stream, contrasts with the music maker's statuesque steadiness. Together the two performers' bodies create a visual poetry that overlays the sound. At one point we hear a text, it's a repeated loop of a story of a brother and sister falling a great distance, one from a tree, the other from a cliff, together but separately, as an act of love. It feels like a key.

After our enthusiastic applause, the two artists still the audience and Gyselinck indicates that Chkheidze has a text to read out. It is a statement that offers her support to Georgian artists whose freedom, she explains, is compromised by the country's political regime. In the context of a Europalia première, this was a shared risk that probably demanded a high level of bravery to take. Strenuous, if somewhat strained applause also followed.

Upcoming performances : 30.11.2023 pilar Brussel, 16.12.2023 December Dance Brugge