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Dance / At the KVS, Wim Vandekeybus revisits his choreographic career

A VIBRANT FACE TO FACE

By Jean-Marie Wynants (translated by Heidi Ehrhart)

Spiegel brings together twenty years of creation in a masterful performance of strength and vitality.

The stone flies above the stage, then plunges at full speed downwards. A male dancer stretches his arms, grabs it and continues on his way before throwing it again. Another now catches it and it's his turn to throw it, in this infernal circle which remains a great moment in the twenty years of creation by Wim Vandekeybus. We rediscover this masterly scene in *Spiegel*, the new performance by the Flemish choreographer, which is made up of extracts of previous shows, assembled and reworked in order to question the language invented by *Ultima Vez*. A sort of face to face, with himself.

For all those who discover the universe of Wim Vandekeybus for the first time, *Spiegel* will be like a wallop. The rolls, the jumps, the fights, the throwing of bricks (in fact now blocks which are a bit more manageable), the bodies suspended in mid air have lost nothing of their vital energy, their force at the edge of rupture. For those who have followed the career of the choreographer and his ensemble, *Spiegel* allows one to relive some great moments, but also to observe the real coherence of the physical work within *Ultima Vez*.

Wim Vandekeybus reminded us himself: at the beginning he had no choreographic baggage. He thus started on the ground, and rose up gradually. *Spiegel* begins the same way. Bodies roll on the ground while the feet of other dancers thunder down a few centimetres from them, like menaces from above. Basic movements, not yet very elaborate, but already perfectly coordinated, mastered. And then, the interaction of bodies. They avoid each other, brush against each other, the movement of one determining the movement of the other. Very quickly these relations become more complex. The bodies right themselves, leaning on each other in improbable balance.

Thus another constant appears in Vandekeybus' universe: this interdependence of bodies which sometimes appear to help each other, then appear to fight. Like certain martial arts, one uses the force and weight of the other to get an advantage, create balance or pull the other towards a fall.

Soon the bodies open, the arms are stretched. Then the hands take the relay, aerial, in the middle of new confrontation. The bodies turn, whirl, throw themselves on the other, avoid each other by a few centimetres, support each other to jump over obstacles, oppose each other in permanent tension. Until the moment when they all find themselves suspended in the air like pieces of meat in a butcher's storeroom.

At the back of the stage is a curtain which is the same red as the blood which one can only be rid of by abandoning all human effects, before leaving for new adventures, naked as the day they were born,

Even if one recognizes scenes from previous shows, *Spiegel* manages to make one forget the 'collage' side of the performance and forms a compact, tight, coherent whole. A whole in which one often has the impression one sees Wim Vandekeybus himself, even though he isn't

on stage. But one finds him back in the particular bearing of the Ultima Vez dancers. Such as in the sequence when they come to the edge of the stage, facing the audience, legs spread, solidly planted on the ground, arms hanging, hands turned towards the public, chin raised and with a challenging look. A look which addresses in the first place the self, facing this pitiless mirror: the audience of a theatre.