

DeMorgen

Drowning in your own obsessions

by Pieter T'jonck *(translated by On the record)*

It takes a while for *Menske*, the new play by Wim Vandekeybus, to get up to speed. After all, he wants to introduce ten characters. They are wandering around a drab neighbourhood, dominated by an electricity pole with a tangled jumble of wires. That image recaptures a brilliant photo that Vandekeybus once took on a trip and now adorns the poster. It is also a lovely metaphor for a technological society adrift.

The characters in *Menske* aren't so sure about things any more. They are gradually drowning in their obsessions. A man is persistently carrying on an inner monologue with an old friend, a woman keeps changing her clothes relentlessly, another woman wants to convince us that an extraordinary new urban project has been created here. And then there is this man, who in a décor already strewn with litter, is lugging around his own bin bag.

The introduction is the least successful part of *Menske*. But once his pawns are in place, Vandekeybus is in grand form. First in the well-known way: couples perform duets in which it is never clear of it is love or hate that is driving their tugs of war. But it is recognisable. The music by Daan adds power to the physical outpourings.

Suddenly the performers whip the panels around that up to then were like fences around the pole. They are lined up in a row. Together they form a photo of hospital corridors. You immediately land in a film by Buñuel. Valéry Volf, as the only one with his clothes stripped off, stands there vulnerably naked in front of the bizarrely dressed actors. They start laughing when he does what they ask and sits on a chair. The psychiatric scenes that follow are hallucinating. However strange it may be, they have the iron logic of an authentic dream.

After this long scene, it seems that everything that happened before is the delusion of a couple of lunatics. Or is it the other way round? We'll never know. But the closing images, with the surrealistic allusions to film and media are priceless. Men are using women as firearms and everyone rushes off a ladder. When Vandekeybus pokes fun at the last moment with his own fit of images, you just know the play's a hit. (PTJ)

Menske, until 23/11 in KVS, Brussels. After that on tour.

Date published: 2007-11-21

Section : **Encore**

KOOLMIJNENKAAI 34 QUAI DES CHARBONNAGES
1080 BRUSSELS - BELGIUM
T +32 (0)2 219 55 28 - F +32 (0)2 219 68 02
INFO@ULTIMAVEZ.COM - WWW.ULTIMAVEZ.COM

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