

Deceit in Venice

Vandekeybus presents premiere of *booty Looting*

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Booty Looting is a production that shoots in all directions, both in form and content, but it does succeed in its aim of tricking the world.

High heels on warm gravel and sienna red walls alongside age-old water: there are worse circumstances than under the evening sun in Venice in which to give the world premiere of your dance performance. This is what Wim Vandekeybus and his Ultima Vez company have done with *booty Looting*, a title that means something like 'looting the loot' or 'stealing what has already been stolen'. The setting for the Venice Dance Biennale, a historical barracks complex, certainly creates the goodwill among the audience to deceive them subtly out of two full hours.

The cast of *booty Looting* looks unusual: four young dancers, two performers, the musician Elko Blijweert, the photographer Danny Willems and a photocopier. Together they amount to a choreographic work full of blood, sweat and electricity. It should come as no surprise that Vandekeybus pushes our noses right in it within the first five minutes: the performers race across the stage like panting coyotes to the rumbling of Blijweert's electric guitar. The photographer skips like a consummate paparazzo amongst the dancers to capture live the way they jump on each other and sink their teeth into each other's buttocks. The photos are projected life-size later in the performance: for once Willems' voyeurism is not only from the angle of the audience.

Re-enactments

Vandekeybus' intention with the live photography is to focus attention on the memory: will images stick in the mind? The ones the photographer took or the scenes that made an impression on us personally? And are the images we remember really the right reflection of the performance we have watched? Our recollections of *booty Looting* will make it clear over the next few days.

The superficial thread Vandekeybus offers us is the life of the actress Birgit Walter, a tragic figure who saw her career destroyed by the responsibility for a family. In the end she murders her children like Medea and even puts their eyes out. But however much we would like to believe this construction, the protagonist of *booty Looting* is not Birgit Walter. Nor is it the performer Jerry Killick, who for two hours loses himself in sometimes hilarious re-enactments of happenings such as those by the artist Joseph Beuys. The four energetic dancers, who change their roles as often as their underwear, are also only a catalyst for what is actually the subject of this production: trickery, deception and distraction.

Booty Looting succeeds outstandingly in this. The substance of the production shoots off in all directions: an indirect gibe at the media who 'mould the truth', a list of useless information, energetic dance passages, but also meaningless scenes where the performers loaf about aimlessly.

These are the weakest moments in *booty Looting*, because they very soon undermine the momentum the dance and narrative scenes have built up.

Tricked

And yet when it's all over you're left with the feeling of having been tricked. That you have played along for two hours in a deceitful game in which, like an emotional yoyo, one moment laugh at sketches and the next are downcast by the performers' tears. The key to *booty Looting* lies in the first five minutes: Jerry Killick re-performs Joseph Beuys' historical happening *I love America and America loves me*, in which he had himself shut up in a cage of coyotes in a New York gallery for five days. It was a critical reference to the tense relationship between the American authorities and the Indians. The leading role was given to the coyotes, which onstage in Venice tore everything to pieces. It is no coincidence that for the Indians the coyote symbolises the 'holy deceiver', a deceitful animal that is able to steal others' booty by means of its clowning.

As we learn from Google, 'shamans do the same with their performances and surprise techniques'. In *booty Looting* there's someone who tricks his audience by means of artistic clowning. The brilliance of it all lies in what we do not see during the performance, in the meaningful associations our memory makes the following day. And so the booty loots itself. Vandekeybus will no doubt filter out the superfluous material in the course of the summer. Then only the best memories will stick in the mind.

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