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'Spiegel' by Wim Vandekeybus

THE TWENTY YEARS OF THE TENDER AND VIOLENT BODY

Brussels — Twenty years ago, Wim Vandekeybus held a dance workshop in Madrid. The result, *What the Body Does Not Remember*, was the starting shot for *Ultima Vez*, his company. It was an exceptional moment: with that piece, Vandekeybus wrote instant dance history. In *Spiegel* he looks back at the route since then.

By Pieter T'Jonck (translated by Heidi Ehrhart)

What surprised the world in 1987 was 'the dangerous and combative landscape' of the *The Body*, as the Bessie Award report put it so nicely. Apart from Jan Fabre, no one had ever done what Vandekeybus did: introducing real danger to the stage. Everyone who was there remembers the scene which has been revived in *Spiegel*. Dancers who race around the stage throw stones at each other. In the nick of time they always manage to avoid an accident. Yet it's no circus. Here Vandekeybus explores a concept of dance, or movement art, that no one else has. Bodies 'think' before our brains go into action. Even stronger, if the dancers would rely on their brains, that would mean disaster. Thus: '*they do not remember*'.

Complex, without chaos

Instinctive movement doesn't only exist with physical danger. More dangerous than falling stones are people. In *Stamping*, laying dancers are barely spared from deadly injury inflicted by stamping ones because they roll away at the last moment. With this scene *Spiegel* begins. It's not a coincidence. Since his second performance, *Les porteuses de mauvaises nouvelles*, what Vandekeybus presented again and again was a violent confrontation between people. In *Girls*, a scene from *Immer das Selbe gelogen*, a man lugs a lifeless woman to the stage in his arms and just drops her. In *Air*, from "*Inasmuch as Life is borrowed...*" a man pounds mercilessly on a woman's chest. Neither scene shows the reason or emotion, but instead the hard confrontation, with concrete facts: you can't carry a 50 kilo body endlessly; in a fight the one who hits hardest wins.

But why do people fight? Why are they aggressive, and, especially, erotic with each other? And how can you show that literally without creating chaos? Vandekeybus has already wrestled with that question for twenty years. Sometimes he works out complex stories – *Sonic Boom* is a masterly example – and sometimes he takes refuge in film. With one constant: tenderness, or desire, and violence flow together in one movement. *Spiegel* bursts with memorable images: *Sheepskin solo*, *Oranges* or *Blood*, for example.

Own voice

Spiegel is thus a *plain man's guide* to Vandekeybus. But even if you have followed the work all these years, it strikes you how with his present ensemble he can call up the strength of the earlier work in its pure form. And that is, regardless of the extraordinary quality of the present ensemble, more than remarkable. Here is someone at work who has never forgotten, or lost, their own voice.