

Review

Peeping Tom at the height of gore

Nightmare at the Théâtre des Abbesses! A snowstorm pours down onstage, unveiling what seems to be an infant's body. A woman covers it up again, carelessly, with the back of her foot. We swallow.

An hour and twenty minutes after this nauseating beginning, the lump in your throat won't go away. The Peeping Tom Company has once again pushed boundaries of horror with *32, rue Vandenbranden*. This newest work of the Brussels-based collective achieves new heights of virtual gore without relinquishing its consistently gripping theatrical writing. It's the talents of Gabriela Carrizo and Franck Chartier: to dare darkness and cruelty without fear (or dying of fright!) in order to experience a theatrical electroshock.

Two mobile homes are parked in the mountains. Six inhabitants live in a vacuum, stuck in a loop. An extreme situation with equally extreme consequences: inbreeding, racism, hatred, sex, etc. A hopeless place – the central theme in the work of Peeping Tom since the company's inception in 1999 – is the surest way to set off an explosion in a broth of dark impulses.

To simply detail the violence that you see or hear on stage does not do justice to the performance, neither to its psychological complexity nor its dramatic strength. Even less to its unforgettable bizarreness. More than ever, gloom takes the place of beauty, realism of fantasy, crudeness of majesty. The subconscious and the irrational have the upper hand in this game, opening the door to mind-blowing scenes, and, at times, bringing you to the point of laughter. Just when these fantasies are fulfilled on stage, they burst, sabotaging the imaginary. With Peeping Tom, the worst is always yet to come. The aesthetic impact of *32, Rue Vandenbranden* stems from its cinematographic craftsmanship. Their main source of inspiration was *The Ballad of Narayama* (1983), by Shohei Imamura, but the end result goes well beyond the original idea.

Shoulder-Strap Wife

Right away, you feel like you're in front of a film: a hyperrealist decor of sky and mountains opened 180 degrees, framing the many characters behind their shack windows...

Using classical musical scores like Stravinsky's *Firebird*, the sound team of Juan Carlos Tolosa and Glenn Vervliet creates an anxiety-provoking atmosphere. Fantastic effects emerge. Shutters slam like a deranged drum set, the mobile homes tremble, characters levitate, a woman vanishes into thin air. Until the dancers' bodies go through physical transformations. Except that, make no mistake, you're at the theater, and the value added by the performance lies in the fact that you're seeing this live.

But, once again, it's the virtuosic, almost savage dancing of Peeping Tom that takes the upper hand. A man hangs his wife from a shoulder strap in order to

describe that the passion has died; another falls into a trance that seems to empty his body, leaving behind nothing but the skin...Physical feats don't count.

Even without Carrizo and Chartier on stage, their performers (among them the ever faithful singer Eurudike De Beul) continue to be as outrageous as they. They are all, on average, in their thirties and come from Belgium, England, Korea. They are Seoljin Kim, Hun-Mok-jung, Marie Gyselbrecht, Jos Baker, and Sabine Molenaar. Their talent is terrifying.

Rosita Boisseau

Article appeared in the 3/30/2010 edition of Le Monde