

Mother (Moeder) review at Barbican Theatre, London – ‘uncanny dance theatre’



A scene from Mother (Moeder) at Barbican, London. Photo: Tristram Kenton
by [Anna Winter](#) - Jan 25, 2018

There’s nothing comforting about *Mother (Moeder)*, by Gabriela Carrizo and her company Peeping Tom. In this strange and unsettling piece of dance theatre, laced through with deadpan humour, the mother figure isn’t a specific source of succour and maternal wisdom. She appears in various guises, and gore – the squelching stuff of life – is often attendant (emphasised by onstage foley techniques involving cloths and buckets of water).

Yet Amber Vandenhoeck’s set simultaneously evokes the aseptic interior of a museum – and thus the way that we memorialise the institution of family. The clean grey walls are lined with paintings of family figures, including one of the ultimate impossible matriarch herself – the Virgin Mary.

In one startling sequence, a woman sticks her hand into a landscape painting, the canvas giving way like a soft mucus membrane – when she pulls her bloodied arm out, there’s a man’s head at the end of it, his jaw clamped around her fist.

There's a lot of ooze emitted here – it's a clever body-horror that explores the visceral fears, rather than the cosy ideals, that surround motherhood. A pregnant nurse with a pair of elongated plastic arms is taken over by a juddering, boneless physicality – contorting into deep back bends, she then scuds across the stage with seemingly sponge-like ankles.

Carrizo touches on the reversal of roles that comes with age, as a son guides his elderly chuntering mother. Elsewhere, a baby in an incubator becomes a nude adult woman crammed into its plastic confines. It's a riveting Freudian field-day.

Verdict

Riveting, imaginative dance theatre that explores the uncanny side of motherhood

