

PERFORMANCE ART at 13th INFANT Shoulder to Shoulder with the Main Programme

The International Festival of Alternative and New Theatre (INFANT) taking place in Novi Sad each year offers performance art as part of its programme. Although its performing character brings it in close relationship with theatre, performance art differs as being used as means of expression mainly by fine artists. They have succeeded in expanding their own expressive medium by employing a specific acting concept, and the theatre got impetus, inspiration and “competition”, which INFANT placed shoulder to shoulder with the main festival programme this year, perhaps at the expense of classical fine art.

The Selector of 13th INFANT (25th June – 2nd July 2007) Nela Antonović, theatre author from Belgrade, chose as many as 13 original works mainly from our country – only one coming from Montenegro. So, 13th INFANT offered an interesting array which can give an excellent review of the current state of affairs on the domestic performance art scene. What was also important for 13th INFANT was the fact that the performance artists, so typical of themselves, showed us a series of concrete artistic actions, with concrete topics, levels of meaning and form, which, one must admit, is not always the case, nor is it the aim of theatrical performances, thus enriching the main Festival programme, even though the quality of the performances seen was not balanced.

The first thing standing out in the classification of what we have seen is the fact that certain performances were actually “smuggled” plays, or at least the thin line between these two categories could not be seen clearly, which is not an imperative anyway. The most striking of them was “Judith 1” by Ksenija Đorđević - a very well thought out, yet instinctive artistic play in which the Biblical story of the widow Judith is treated in the manner of postdramatic theatre and deconstruction. With its pronounced vamp aesthetics and provocative “vulgarity”, the performance/play by Ksenija Đorđević to the same extent re-examines the concept of (fine) art and criticises the banality of the perception of “nice” and “ugly” stories.

“Cowbells in Space” by the Clear Brooks Family is also theatre, but the strong features of their work – humanity and anti-capitalism, the deliberately and consciously danced/singed rituals, place it beyond the realm of theatre - acting as a professional vocation aimed at interpreting dramatic characters. The “performance” More and More of Less and Less by DžastArt stands out as the penultimate in this series. It is the life itself told in seven linear, but stylistically different pictures. A Hundred / Spoons / Characters for Atmosphere by the DDT troupe is a dance performance of vivid colours, movements and acting of (female) identity.

As a separate category one can single out performances of the “Odzak” circle, performed by Radoslav B. Čugalj (“Elements”), Aleksandar Jovanović (“Under the Skies of Novi Sad”) and Nenad Bogdanović (“An Everyday Situation for a Nicer Picture”). While the first two take the distinct religious content and the story about spirituality, using predominantly Orthodox Christian iconography, Bogdanović in his performance problematises classical fine art and its basic medium – the painting.

Morijan Lagartia (Montenegro), with his performance “NovelGo”, introduces a completely innovative approach to the promotion of his artistic work. Not without self-irony and humour, Lagartia connects his prose (novel “Adventures of Felix Dodo”) and

the artistic design of a board game (“Go”) in a direct “market” interaction with the participants, audience i.e. consumers. A similar contact/reflexive distance can be attributed to Ivana Koraksić, playing a clown in the performance “Sunshine’s Flame”. Using the tenderness of a human story on the one hand, and classical skills of a clown on the other, she comes close to evocating universal human stories about duality, difference, loneliness...

“MP_per_KEEP_MOWING”, the work of the MP Art duo, deals with concentrated emotions of light, sound and words, enthroned through the stage/life relationship between two people. “Enastaza of an Erestisist” by Dobrica Kamparelić deals with the problem of war hell, wittily realised with a projection of Francis Ford Coppola’s “Apocalypse Now”, followed by “combat” warning interventions by the author. Gabrijel Savić Ra in his performance “Capital” contemplates the harms brought about by the global West-East division whose axis is, in his opinion, Karl Marx’s “Capital”- the book and of course the ideology of an inhumane category of “money”. Ra, much like the “Odzak” circle performers of the conceptual school, uses clear and precise symbolical and metaphorical means of expression, most prominent being the colours – black and red. The freshest and most extensive work in the domain of performance art at the 13th INFANT was Nebojša Milikić’s work “Friendly Criticism or a Self-portrait of a Petit Bourgeois”. Indeed, his work requires intellectually engaged audience, but the very manner, performance and meaning of it is meticulous to the detail. In his performance Milikić shapes a sociological study of a transitional society or of an individual who is undergoing the middle-age transition. Giving away clothes (mainly sweaters his mother had made), remodelled in various style-conceptual manners, Milikić takes photos to document the transfers and follow the destiny of the things given away, later scanning all that with a theoretical camera of his own (self-)consciousness, thus reaching a meta-textuality whose story is followed by the author’s sense of humour and unpretentiousness achieved by yet another game – the change of identity.

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