

Ornament is a crime

I would like to focus on object theatre created by *frieda* members, and more specifically on how the objects themselves evolved over time.

The first two performances (*En lang en gelukkig* and *Lampe*, which we have been performing at *TJP Strasbourg* this week), feature puppet protagonists, made by Tina Heylen. Each puppet is controlled by two or three puppeteers.

In a later play, *De Bomma's* (made by Nikè Moens and Vick Verachtert) the physical presence of the characters was left out. Nikè and Vick tried to tell the story only by use of objects: ordinary, prosaic items that were not designed with an artistic purpose but carry stories of their own nonetheless. On stage, these simple objects are controlled by two performers. We see coffee being served in a cup, a potato being cut, a TV turned on. Simple, mundane actions. We don't get to see the performers; they shun the stage lighting, allowing the objects to take precedence. However, through the movements of these objects, through their specific characteristics, the characters reveal themselves. Faced with a display of someone's every possession, the audience cannot help but envision the person to whom they belong. We attempt to give our audience the tools they need, just enough to have them imagine characters, within the borders we set by selecting objects. *De Bomma's* does not force the characters on the audience, they are gently steered into a certain direction.

Something similar appears in the next project, *X tot de zoveelste*. Nikè and Vick attempted to find and create the essence of the characters. The main character in *X tot de zoveelste* is an old woman. Nikè and Vick made a sculpture of a woman that moves when manipulated, but left it purposely unfinished. All you see is legs. As a matter of fact, you do not actually see legs, you see wooden beams attached to each other with hinges, transparent panties and a pair of red slippers. But they represent legs. And those legs represent a certain kind of old woman. They become a theatrical symbol, full of meaning. Instead of restricting the viewer's imagination, these symbols are designed to feed it. They allow for the freedom to envision one's own "old woman", albeit within borders set by giving her, for example, red slippers.

The sculpture used in *X tot de zoveelste* is not hidden, as it is in *En lang en gelukkig* and *Lampe*, earlier plays featuring fully dressed puppets, covering underlying structures. For *X tot de zoveelste*, however, it seemed more interesting to stick to bare materials. For that reason we prefer to call them sculptures rather than puppets. Exposing the mechanics of moving sculptures adds to the performance, as does the beauty of the materials themselves.

In the words of the Austrian architect Adolf Loos: Ornament is a crime.

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