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Ten humans in the race

[Photo caption:] "Menske": a savage comedy for and by ten dancer-actors from multi-cultural backgrounds"

- **Wim Vandekeybus and the ten dancer-actors in "Menske" probe the darkness and rose-tinted side of humanity.**
- **An energetic creation, choreographically exciting, at times a little wordy.**
- **Original music by Daan.**

The place for going and checking without knowing. What? Nothing. The memory of happy days, perhaps. *"Where do I have to sign? Of course I have a name!"* A few sweeps with a broom. A profession of faith in sex. Accumulating rubbish bags that will soon be used as missiles. Shoes thrown into the air and not coming back down. A dreamed-of city – a new New York – with sky scrapers in the form of a uterus. Persistent insomnia. An umbrella opening up amidst the rubbish. Survival. Apocalypse. Self-derision. The game.

With its very evocative title taken from the Flemish dialect, this new creation by the Ultima Vez dance company deals with a whole range of topics centred on the human being. A small society – so vast and yet so narrow – of ten individuals with sturdy characters inhabits on the stage. A universe that is both urban and lost, around a lamp post with intertwined cables that will be put to great use on stage.

"Menske" (a diminutive of man, human, person...) questions dominant values, secure truths, established norms and firm beliefs, and turns them all on their head. And observes. Resignation and anxiety, comfort at any price and the race for change, disrupted habits, man's legendary ability to adapt. Naturally Wim Vandekeybus avoids neither the frictions nor the clashes: he cultivates risk, questions precarious balances, puts opposites back to back. There is no side-stepping of crises here; at times they are provoked, and rarely resolved unless through the outlet of crazy energy. A singular and invaluable type of catharsis.

Carnal engineering

Put into words – with the help of the dancers themselves, to whom the choreographer has given free rein, if perhaps a little too much so – this act of challenging accentuates a degree of clumsiness, this heaviness that sometimes outlives wanting to "make sense" too much. But fragility is strength too. And the power of dance, to be specific, is stoked intensely by the vulnerability of the bodies being flung, suspended and hurled together. This calculation of resistances, this type of carnal engineering, the unwavering importance of confidence, of instinct, of abandon and of control (principles of the staging as much as the themes being staged): this is what never ceases to move and fascinate us in Wim Vandekeybus's work.

KOOLMIJNENKAAI 34 QUAI DES CHARBONNAGES
1080 BRUSSELS - BELGIUM
T +32 (0)2 219 55 28 - F +32 (0)2 219 68 02
INFO@ULTIMAVEZ.COM - WWW.ULTIMAVEZ.COM

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A man of images as well (although no film is used in this piece), the choreographer also creates a set which is both raw and full of sudden developments, ingenious but without flourishes. When the panels encircling the space turn and come together, an image emerges of a double corridor, empty and shining. A disturbing set of a savage masquerade, a Kafkaesque box of a comical hospital. Black comedy. Violent too when the bodies go on to offer themselves up for battle, carrying other bodies as casualties or weapons or shields. From uncertainty, as the crumbling concrete of a community plagued with doubt, to turmoil, but linked by its differences. In the image of these ten creator-performers, all from very different horizons and backgrounds.

The Made in Belgium sound track, meanwhile, is original except for "Smoke Sucker" and "Woods" which have been reworked for the occasion. Daan blends electronic and acoustic music, breathing vicious and subtle moods into a work that has close – and palpable – links with the stage. Generous, energetic and delicate.

Marie Baudet

(Translation On the record)