



Olivier Frégaville-Gratian d'Amore, « Karine Ponties, visuals and movement magician », Blog L'Oeil d'Olivier, 8th March 2020, http://www.loeildolivier.fr/karine-ponties-magicienne-dimages-et-des-corps/?fbclid=IwAR1Sfm-tcxSAExJic14faODJ0JwCJWqK8ep_NGDIFDqQwvCfe15V-Vl6Uqk

L'OEIL D'OLIVIER

Artistic Chronicles and Cultural Encounters



Karine Ponties, visuals and movement magician

Published on March 8th 2020

At Festival In Movement at les Briggittines in Brussels, Karine presents her latest piece *Lichens*, inspired by an animation film, before bringing it on tour at Théâtre Jean Vilar in Vitry-sur-Seine (France). Curious, passionate, the choreographer hailing from Castres revisits her path, her attraction towards dance and the scenic arts.

How did dance become part of your life?

Karine Ponties: I started dancing when I was about 8 years old. We lived in Spain then. I already studied music, but I was a hyperactive child, and needed to move. So, one day, I asked my mom how I could channel this extra energy. She signed me up for dance classes at **Juan Tena** and **Ramon Soler's** school. First and foremost, it was somewhere to get it all out. Until at some point, I don't know how, I became more disciplined and started taking it very seriously. I quickly decided this is what I wanted to do later. I was very determined. At 15, I was hired to dance in rock opera *Evita* in Barcelone. Being the youngest company member, my father had to sign a parental agreement with a judge. From then on, I made a pact with him; I could keep on dancing if I did well in school. I danced 200 shows – twice a day – then the project went on tour in Latin America. Unfortunately I was a minor, and my parents refused to let me go so that I could continue studying.

What is your path, in just a few words?



Karine Ponties: In 1985, I enrolled at Mudra, **Maurice Béjart's** school in Brussels, with the goal of becoming a professional dancer. Then, I worked with many choreographers, most notably **Frédéric Flamand, Michèle Noiret, Nicole Mossoux / Patrick Bonté** and **Pierre Droulers**, before founding my own company in 1995. In 1996, I presented my first piece *Planta Baja* at Théâtre Public. To this day, I have created over forty pieces, some award-winning.

What inspires you?

Karine Ponties: A lot of things! Mainly, painting, cinema, literature, photography, and above all, animation. Dance only rarely. Illustration and animation have always occupied a place of their own in my pieces. Since always, **Jan Svankmajer, Stasys Eidrigevicius, Yuri Norstein, Alexandre Petrov, Gianluigi Toccafondo, Albin Brunovsky, Vladimir Kokolia, Stefano Ricci, Thierry Van Hasselt, Stefan Zsaisis** are endless wells for my research, and often are its starting points. Illustration opens me up to very singular universes. It fascinates me, because it is a thought in movement. And a story of perspectives and gazes. It often is a means of expression common to many creators, and also a certain universal language present in all cultures. Its greatest strength is the fragility of the line, which pushes us towards our imaginations, and its intimate character allows to dive into it. These works contain secrets, folds revealing the extraordinary and the extravagant, in which we snuggle or take time. Works of art of an apparent lightness but that also call the eye, the gaze. Illustrations overflow with materials that are very much alive. Animation films capture, in my opinion, the magic of movement. They feel somehow very similar to choreographic work. In animation cinema, like in all of my choreographic research, poetic reality comes to life as we oppose realities through editing and metaphors.

How did Lichens come to life



Karine Ponties: I inaugurated the work on this piece from film “The Tale of Tales” By Yuri Norstein, upon which I “stumbled” about ten years ago. Since then, I have watched it and rewatched many, many times. It’s a jewel of animation that touches me profoundly. Rigor and modesty, infinite tenderness and an outcry against human folly make of Norstein’s animation film a moral parabola full of compassion. This work is a layer upon layer of myths, poetical elements and sound rhythms, shots where everything is alive, where the gaze has the time to wander, to forge itself, to be itself. Norstein’s work absorbs the tender and the tragic, poetry and pain, intertwining our past with the present, into a fantastic synchronization. It’s a film on the memory of a generation whose childhood coincided with the war, and whose current conscience is branded by the entire polyphonic quality of History. It isn’t a simple film about memory, though. It is a film built like memory itself, like the structural texture of our conscience. His obsessive, meticulous work on atmospheres, reminiscences made of a

succession of tableaux that, little by little, become stories of humanity. The unique quality of this film is how it manages to make us feel, beyond any factual element, the magnificent fragility of our being alive. The “Tale of Tales” works as revealed sensations. This film also touches me as in **Norstein**’s work the level of art does not depend on the scale of the event that is represented. And when he evokes grave subjects such as the war, it is through striking detours.

How did the choreographic writing come to you?

Karine Ponties: It comes in puddles, flashes, as if continuously threatened by extinction in the devising itself. An aesthetics made of multiple singularities, of a plurality of exceptions that allow us, through discrete entry points, to be sensitive to what’s nomadic, vagabond, unclear, impure, mixed, colorful. These same entry points also allow us to tackle the theme of “anti-stories,” substituting linear narration with peculiar associations or “fantastical” logic. Inviting us to open our “inner traps,” to journey through the depth of things.

Why this title, Lichens ?

Karine Ponties: On the surface, it’s unrelated, but in fact... When looking at *The Tale of Tales*, you discover a special relationship with time, with temporality. The passing of time brought on by events and sensations. A connection between present, past and future. There are seasons, but also a stillness in time. Lichens are living organisms, created by the association of two elements; unicellular algae and fungi that mutually complement each other’s nutrition. Together, they create a symbiosis; strictly speaking, it’s a very close relationship between two partners that remain in close and quasi-permanent physical contact, without prejudice to the nature of their relationship. But lichens are also an inscription in time. A texture, a print of two different extremes: softness and ruggedness. Lichens make sense in this context because they find shelter on/in rocks, those unattainable surfaces. Lichens are natural indicators. They are resistant, and resilient. They hold on to survive and live symbiotically.

How do you work with your performers?



Karine Ponties: I work very comprehensively, systematically recording footage of every guided improvisation supplemented by extensive rehearsal notes. I collect, this way, for every performance, between 50 and 80 hours of potential material that I watch several times and from which I carefully select what will be the foundations of the piece. This research requires time and a dialogue between all those who accept to commit to it. It is a rough process of creation, one of labor and toil, characterized by a certain difficulty, and stamina, because the material to hone is often in opposition, contradictory. From this material at odds, our goal is to ambush opposites into possible bonds. Like a scientist, an alchemist who finds accord in a nano-scaled mix of unstable substances. Then comes the time for writing. We need to relearn what emerged from these, often very long, guided improvisations. That’s when the body lets go, that moment of grace.

And with the other company members?

Karine Ponties: My, our work of creation is actually a work of full and complete collaboration. Because what we achieve, on stage, is a work of assembly, of mounting, a combination of competences which create singularity. Creating collectively means refining raw material. It means taking full advantage of the fact of being together to sharpen this material. It means making the best out of the many perspectives on the subject by sharing our similarities, of course, but mostly by profiting from our differences. The relationships between movement, sound, light and set design are still too often vertical. We look for the opposite. The dimension of light and sound holds a place on stage as fundamental as the body’s. This is why I need to have them in the room from the beginning of the creative process. **Guillaume Toussaint Fromentin**, who is a partner in crime in the

development of the dramaturgy and lights, follows all the improvs, feeding the discussion. He is present during the choreographic writing process, and when he starts building the lighting design, I also give him feedback. It's a continuous exchange between us, quite organic and intuitive. It's quite similar with **David Monceau** who composes the music. For more than ten years, I have been sharing my process with them, as well as with **Eric Domeneghetty** (performer, global stage awareness). On *Lichens*, we started a collaboration with **Gaëlle Marras**, who has created the costumes. We share a fascination for the human body. As much by the way it is built as by the way it transcends its own structures. The body is like a cloud; constantly transforming, an infinite source of inspiration. We strive to find shapes, emotions and to make them appear, to reveal them to the audience.

Do you have other projects?

Karine Ponties: First and foremost, cultivating our repertoire shows, like *Same Same, Every Direction Is North* or *Fovea*, that are on tour at least until the end of 2020. I also teach Scenic Movement to first year students in Theatre at the École supérieure artistique de Mons (Belgium) and direct a few "Movement" projects with the MA students. Finally, with **Pauline D'Ollone**, young director and actress, we will be staging *Phèdre*, a dance and theatre project. With a diploma from l'INSAS, hers is a very physical theatre, deeply rhythmic and musical. That's what I like of her work, and that's why, with the company, we have decided to coproduce this show.

Interview by Olivier Frégaville-Gratian d'Amore

Lichens by Karine Ponties

Les Brigittines 5th-7th March 2020

Théâtre Jean Vilar

***1, place Jean-Vilar
94400 Vitry-sur-Seine
13th March 2020***

Duration 50 min

Choreography by Karine Ponties

With Ares D'Angelo, Eric Domeneghetty, Vera Gorbacheva, Liesbeth Kiebooms, Nilda Martinez, Jaro Vinarsky

Artistic Collaboration and Lighting Design Guillaume Toussaint Fromentin

Artistic Collaboration and Stage Management Quentin Simon

Original Music by David Monceau

Costumes by Gaëlle Marras

Photos by © Andrea Messana and Portrait Photo by © Andrey Stepanov