

BILDER & NACHLESE: A DAY AT CULTURA NOVA

THE CULTURA NOVA FESTIVAL OF THEATRE IN HEERLEN IS FAMOUS FOR ITS DIVERSE AND UNUSUAL PROGRAMME. IN ITS 29TH YEAR, IT ONCE MORE BOASTS A NUMBER OF PROJECTS WHICH PERFECTLY EMBODY THE FESTIVAL'S OUTSIDE-THE-BOX THINKING.

One of the best days to experience the Cultura Nova effect is 29 August, when two particularly fascinating performances can be seen on the same day:

Museum of Stillness

So, what exactly is a museum of stillness? How can you stage an exhibition about stillness? Is it even an exhibition in the conventional sense?

Well, in many ways it isn't. You could describe the various stopping points in the installation, which takes you through the European [STIL.centriphery](#) project, as a journey for the senses.

The Museum of Stillness is opening for one hour each day, as part of Cultura Nova. Visitors will be split into groups. Once you've entered the basement of the SCHUNCK building, where the installations and performances await, talking is forbidden. A voice over the loudspeaker guides the individual groups to the various stopping points.

The introduction confirms what everyone already senses: essentially, silence does not exist. The mere absence of deliberately created sounds does not create silence. The fact is, life makes sound. The first stop consists of two boxes, lit in pink and orange. One contains heated wall panels, the other is lined with foam and plush fabric. The group steps into the two boxes in a state of reverence, touching the materials. Some people close their eyes. The absence of loud noises alone seems to have heightened the senses.

Next stop: a mural, with Romanian illustrator Livia Coloji painting in front of it and headsets for the visitors. On Livia's right index finger is a small microphone which transmits the sounds of the paintbrush in her hand directly to the visitors' ears. In this moment, initially the only sound

to be heard is the gentle stroking of the paint-laden brush on the wall. Then comes a recording on top of this sound: Livia Coloji introduces herself. She talks about her paintings and the stories they tell. The longer she paints and the more she fills in the painting, she says, the calmer and emptier her head becomes. In this vacuum of mural, paintbrush sounds, and her voice, this is very relatable.

Before the visitors all fall into a deeply relaxed meditative state, it's on to the next stop - which, initially, is empty. After a few minutes, dancer Bart Beijns appears, with his dance partner Leroy de Böck. Bart can see, Leroy can't. He became blind shortly after he was born, Bart later explains. The two dance in the midst of the group of visitors, who draw back. Bart dances with his eyes closed, the two of them gauging the other's position by means of clicking sounds. The choreography involves a huge amount of physical contact between the two, and with the audience. They both feel their way, take stock and allow their senses to work.

Finally, the last stop before all the groups are reunited: the black box. This is a room painted entirely in black, with black ceiling and black floor – and devoid of any light source. Before entering, all the visitors were asked to leave light-emitting objects (mobile phones, watches etc.) in the cloakroom, as even the tiniest glimmer of light would be visible in this space. It's very strange to see absolutely nothing with your eyes wide open. Only the sound of people breathing to the right and left can be heard. These sounds are soon joined by the movements of the blind dancers. They are dancing in the dark room, in which everyone is now blind. Only their rustling clothing and their clicking sounds can be heard. Then a soft whisper: 'Come with us, please. Trust us.' Gradually, everyone is guided to the middle of the room, where they form a sculpture. Each person places his hands on the shoulders of the person in front of him. Nobody can see the sculpture but, presumably, everyone is trying to envisage it.

Then the journey is over. All the groups reconvene and have a drink together, a very spicy and delicious ginger concoction. Everyone seems lost in thought, reverent, a little tense. And everyone is still silent. Even after the voice over the loudspeaker announces that the doors are now open and we can all go back upstairs, the silence is not broken until one of the dancers starts talking.

Centriphery has succeeded in reducing people to silence for a whole hour.

MY LAND

With heightened senses, we move on to the smaller auditorium in the Parkstad Limburg Theatre, the Limburg auditorium. The piece 'My Land' by Hungarian company Recirquel is about Gaia, the Earth goddess, surrounded by six men who are fighting to lead the country. The performance is a unique blend of contemporary dance, acrobatics, and juggling; even the order of the scenes calls to mind a circus revue. The stage set is a gigantic illuminated table covered in sand. On this, the dancers put on a display of stunningly beautiful contortions and nimble choreography. The programme is accompanied by imposing, dramatic music.

At the end of the breathless performance, the audience gives an enthusiastic standing ovation.

Photos: Bjorn Frins & Greta Arntz