

ANGELIN PRELJOCAJ

The current director of the National choreographic centre of Aix-en-Provence, Angelin Preljocaj is a central figure in French dance. After training with Karin Waehner, herself a pupil of German legend Mary Wigman, he went to New York to work with Merce Cunningham, another giant of the discipline. Back in France, he moved to Montpellier to dance for Dominique Bagouet, the great French reformist, and created his first play, *Marché noir (Black Market)*, which was then followed by forty-eight works at the crossroads between contemporary music, visual arts, and literature. He who once said "I will never be done questioning the body, movement, and human passions," has created a body of work at once sensual and abstract, and always in touch with the world. His creations are now part of the repertoire of many prestigious institutions (among them La Scala in Milan, the New York City Ballet, and the Ballet de l'Opéra national in Paris...). In 2012, he evoked social violence and the body as victim with Laurent Mauvignier's *What I Call Oblivion*. He is collaborating with Laurent Mauvignier once again for this creation in the Cour d'honneur.

LAURENT MAUVIGNIER

Born in 1967, Laurent Mauvignier is a graduate of the École supérieure des Beaux-Arts of Tours, his hometown. In 1999, his first novel, *Loin d'eux (Far from Them)*, is published by the Éditions de Minuit, which will remain his publisher throughout his career. In 2011, he publishes *What I Call Oblivion*, a novel based on a true story, which has already served as the inspiration for a ballet by Angelin Preljocaj. His texts, translated into several languages, reject silence and never forget "the wounded beings who try to resist the flow of History" (Marine Landrot, *Télérama*). *Autour du monde (Around the World)* is his latest novel.

Retour à Berratham by Laurent Mauvignier is published by Éditions de Minuit.

ADEL ABDESSEMED

French artist born 1971 in Constantine, Algeria, Adel Abdessemed lives and works in London. This year, his work is part of the 56th Venice Biennale, Italy (previously shown at the 52nd in 2007, and 50th in 2003). He will open a solo show in October at Musée de Vence. His work was the subject of major solo exhibitions at CAC, Malaga; Mathaf, Doha; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, the Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art, London; Ontario College of Art & Design, Toronto; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts; San Francisco Art Institute; P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York; and the Mamco, Geneva. Author of a multifaceted body of work, Adel Abdessemed shows, with the innocence of an active witness, the convulsive movements that go through our modern world with all their energy and violence.

RETOUR À BERRATHAM (RETURN TO BERRATHAM)

A young man returns to Berratham, a place he left just before the war, leaving Katja behind. He is obsessed with the idea of keeping the promise he made her to come find her again. But he doesn't recognise the place where he spent his childhood, now little more than ruins, or the people still living there, left to their own devices... With this creation, Angelin Preljocaj returns to the Cour d'honneur of the Palais des papes, for another collaboration with novelist Laurent Mauvignier. Writing the *libretto* of this choreographic tragedy, he asks fourteen performers, dancers and actors, to be the witnesses of the repercussions of war on consciences. This is not the first time the choreographer, born in France to Albanian political refugees, marries love to violence in one of his ballets. From *Romeo and Juliet* to "N" to *And Then, One Thousand Years of Peace*, his work is haunted by the dark metaphors of history. A theme that artist Adel Abdessemed knows perfectly well, too; his artistic practice, sometimes deemed radical, is a permanent questioning about violence and its cognitive power. For this work, he has come up with a zone able to multiply the dramatic intensity of those places where the men and women of Berratham need nothing more than a glance to survive.

The show will premiere on July 17, 2015 at Cour d'honneur du Palais des papes, Avignon.

Glasses will be made available with French surtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, and with English surtitles for non-French-speaking audiences.

INTERVIEW WITH ANGELIN PRELJOCAJ

How did you come up with the idea of a text for fourteen performers, dancers and actors, haunted by love and violence, two themes you come back to over and over again?

Angelin Preljocaj: It started with a quip. After *What I Call Oblivion*, I told Laurent Mauvignier that I wanted us to work on *Le Cid* together. I wanted to work on something epic again. When Olivier Py offered me the Cour d'honneur of the Palais des papes, I immediately asked Laurent to write a modern tragedy. But I didn't want it to be too dramatic, too theatrical. I didn't want it to be nothing but dialogue, for instance. I wanted to keep a form of narration. When the Young Man comes back to Berratham to look for Katja, he is seen as an immigrant, but also as privileged, because people see him as having been spared from violence. I believe we only exist in other people's eyes. Some scientists argue that if mankind wasn't there to think up the Universe, it wouldn't exist. I think it works the same way with people: if you don't exist in someone else's eyes, you disappear. In the play, the Young Man hopes to escape the violence of war and its repercussions by trying to find the woman he once loved and see himself reflected in her eyes.

So you asked Laurent Mauvignier to write for you. Why?

In *What I Call Oblivion*, I got carried away by this long sentence of sixty words that only ends at the end of the story. I wanted to work on this text about the execution of a petty thief by four security guards in the backroom of a grocery store, but we couldn't get everyone's schedule to work. So I thought about Laurent Cazanave, whom I had seen working with Claude Régy. My job was to find a way to get him to dance. There is of course the dramaturgy of the text, but also another form of dramaturgy that appears when this man starts talking with those who surround him and, progressively, joins them to become an

active player. At the beginning of the show, he's just the narrator, but by the end he becomes the victim and his body joins with that of the dancing entity. There is a transmutation from the text to dance, from voices to bodies. That is why I wanted to build something with Laurent Mauvignier, the same way I had with Pascal Quignard. I wanted to experience this again with Laurent Mauvignier. To work alongside him during the show's creation so that the text could be adjusted to fit the dancing perfectly, could be enriched by the dramaturgy of my direction, and vice versa.

With this story, what states of the body are you trying to provoke, what sites do you want to see emerge?

Thanks to this new collaboration, I was made to realise that my job is to create rituals. In this particular creation, bodies are there to personify events, to give them memory. It's as if we were trying to heal the wounds of the mind. Bodies might almost be seen here as a physical anthology of wounded memories. They take part in mysterious semantics, appear in a quasi-cosmological space. Rather than try to define exactly where and when the story takes place, I try to tie together those elements of consciousness that appear on the stage to show the physicality of the tragedy that plays out in Berratham.

The visual artist Adel Abdessemed worked as a scenographer on your show. Violence plays a central role in his work; to him, "we are all archaic and tragic beings." Is his point of view, which could be deemed radical, what drew you to him?

I came to him intuitively. At first, I wanted to work on the postwar atmosphere, on remnants, on the memory of walls... I don't like the idea of scenery, of theatre sets, I would much rather talk about space. In fact, I always ask scenographers to create locations. I gave him some structural elements, what I thought I would need. He came back with a scenography made up of elements that can change the space of the stage to multiply points of view. He used wire fences as a sort of barrier to create a no man's land and give more transparency and tragic intensity to those locations. It's also a way to bring to mind those invisible walls that exist within our minds. His scenography works perfectly with the theme of the play: it's an image of what happens in the collective minds of a people devastated by war.

Whether it's the libretto of a ballet, a fairy tale, a mythological story, a philosophical interview, or a poetic documentary, whether it's an underlying influence or a presence on the stage, the text is a constant in your approach to dance.

It is. I read a lot on my projects issues, even for those of my shows that are devoid of text. When there is one, there are different levels at which it can play a role during the creative process. For *And Then, One Thousand Years of Peace* (2010), for instance, the dancers improvised around excerpts from the *Book of Revelation*, but we ended up cutting the text. There are also plays in which the text is treated as aural material, like in *Petit essai sur le temps qui passe* (*Short Essay About Time*, 1995). I've always found it interesting to write for the body when faced with a human voice, a voice that wouldn't be singing, but rather talking. In *Paysage après la bataille* (*Landscape after the Battle*, 1997) the soundtrack is made up of radio interviews with Marcel Duchamp, with his incredibly poetic voice. The same is true of John Cage, who read fragments from Henry David Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* for *Empty moves* (2004/2014). At times, the text helps to introduce a dramatic break within the show, such as

in *Personne n'épouse les méduses* (*No One Marries Jellyfish*, 1999). As to the direct relationship between a text and dance, I think there were four important moments. The first was *L'Anoure* (1995). I had asked Pascal Quignard to write a fairy tale to revive the tradition of the ballet *libretto*. Although I was deeply moved by what he wrote, I didn't have the audacity to read his text on the stage. Instead, it was played as a voice-over, like in a movie. Then came *Le Funambule* (*The Tightrope Walker*, 2009), a solo based on the eponymous text by Jean Genet. At first, I planned on dancing with an actor, until I realised it was a text about loneliness, about a specific relationship to artistic creation, and that I had to take the risk of being alone on the stage. That was my tightrope: to say this text about the body, about the physical commitment of the dancer. Finally, there was my encounter with Laurent Mauvignier, first with *What I Call Oblivion* in 2012, then with *Return to Berratham* today.

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Interview conducted by Francis Cossu / Translation Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

AND... THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Site Louis Pasteur de l'Université, free admittance:

– 20 July at 05:30 pm, *Dialogue artists-audience* with Angelin Preljocaj and Laurent Mauvignier, encounter hosted by the Ceméa

Site Sainte-Marthe de l'Université, free admittance:

– 15 July at 11:00 am, *Teaching of the University* with Angelin Preljocaj

CONVERSATION with Angelin Preljocaj / 13 July at 02:30 pm

Conservatoire du Grand Avignon-Auditorium Mozart, proposed by the SACD

FICTIONS FRANCE CULTURE Musée Calvet, free admittance:

Laurent Mauvignier, *Paroles de femmes* / 15 July at 08:00 pm

ENCOUNTER FAITH AND CULTURE Chapelle de l'Oratoire, free admittance:

With Laurent Mauvignier / 18 July at 11:00 am

THE NAVE OF IMAGES Église des Célestins, free admittance:

Paysage après la bataille, choreography Angelin Preljocaj / 18 July at 02:30 pm

TOUR DATES FOR *RETOUR À BERRATHAM* AFTER THE FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

– 17 to 19 September 2015: Grand

Théâtre de Provence, Aix-en-Provence

– 23 September: Théâtre Olympia,
Arcachon

– 29 September to 23 October: Théâtre
National de Chaillot, Paris

– 29 and 30 October: Grand Théâtre de
Luxembourg

– 9 and 10 March 2016: La Comédie de
Clermont-Ferrand

– 18 and 19 March: Théâtre de

Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines

– 31 March: Scène nationale de Tarbes
Midi-Pyrénées

– 11 and 12 April: Théâtre André
Malraux, Rueil-Malmaison

– 26 to 29 April: La Criée, Théâtre
National de Marseille

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