

AND...

PRESS CONFERENCE with the artistic team,
July 17 at 11:00, cour du Cloître Saint-Louis

CINEMATIC TERRITORIES

cinéma Utopia-Manutention

Leto by Kirill Serebrennikov, July 18 at 14:00

Le Disciple by Kirill Serebrennikov, July 19 at 11:00

OUTSIDE

"Life is a lie. Truth is a lie. When I take a picture, I'm naked..." Ren Hang Outside. Bodies. Mischievous, distant, disinhibited, nonchalant. Naked. Windows open on the roofs of the city. Chinese artist Ren Hang photographed both cityscapes and nature, unclothing bodies like so many stylised, dreamlike landscapes. With tenderness, humour, or detachment, he exalted the grace of Chinese youths, rebellious, beautiful, and free. His poems, darker, are suffused with sex and loneliness, love and death. A life pulverised, persecuted, fragile, and melancholic. A much too short existence, which moved director Kirill Serebrennikov deeply. Two artists whose personal histories and works echo each other. Banned and attacked, they nonetheless managed to create their own art, free to explore themes of identity, sexuality, and of the place of the individual in his or her environment. Art as provocation, as a disturbing wake-up call. Raw, poetic, and insolent, it attacks conventional morality and totalitarianism. A necessary weapon in the fight to regain one's freedom of expression...

KIRILL SEREBRENNIKOV

Born in Rostov-on-Don in Russia in 1969, Kirill Serebrennikov turned to theatre in 1992 after studying science at university. He adapted Maxime Gorki, William Shakespeare, Bertolt Brecht, or Mark Ravenhill for Moscow theatres and directed operas at the Bolshoi Theatre and in Europe. The winner of several awards for his work in television, he has also directed feature films (*The Disciple*, *Leto*). He has been the director of the Gogol Center in Moscow since 2012. His daring, impertinent theatre shows a great freedom and spirit of resistance. *Outside* is his third creation for the Festival d'Avignon, after *The Idiots* and *Dead Souls*. Since August 2017, he has been the object of a Kafkaesque trial.

REN HANG

A self-taught poet and photographer, Ren Hang was born in China in 1987 and lived in Beijing. Often banned, his subtle compositions feature bodies set against urban or natural backgrounds with a mix of eroticism, distance, and humour. His poetic images are known throughout the world for their great sense of freedom. Ren Hang committed suicide in 2017.

73rd
EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,700 people, artists, technicians, and organisational staff, have worked tireless and enthusiastically for months. More than half of them are state-subsidised freelance workers.

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L'AUTRE SCÈNE DU GRAND AVIGNON - VEDÈNE

INTERVIEW WITH KIRILL SEREBRENNIKOV

What interested you in the work of photographer and poet Ren Hang, in his very powerful images and poetic texts?

Kirill Serebrennikov : I saw some of Ren Hang's photographs in a book published by Taschen. I looked at them very closely, as if I were drawn to them. They surprised me. I'd already seen some of his photographs, but I hadn't been particularly impressed by them before. Naked Chinese people, okay, sure... But after taking the time to look at the entirety of his work, it became clear that they showed a very unique world revolving around the poetry of the human body. I had no idea Ren Hang was also a poet. I talked about him with the Chinese actress Yang Ge, who is part of the Gogol Center troupe. She then tried to contact him. She sent him a message on Instagram, and he miraculously responded. We were trying to get together to talk about a potential theatre project together. But two days before we were supposed to meet, he killed himself. 24 February 2017, on his birthday. It was a shock. It's terrible: you meet someone, you contact him, you've already agreed on everything, and he kills himself, throws himself out the window... It was a great shock for me. I felt like I'd just lost someone I knew, someone close... Yang Ge translated a few of his poems for me. I understood he was a great poet, that his poetry was perhaps more important, richer than his photographic work, with which the European public is much more familiar.

In *Outside*, you're exploring new artistic fields, photography and poetry, when you already have a career in theatre and cinema. What is it you like in tackling different fields at once, in those bridges between different art forms?

Art today isn't a ghetto, something closed off. It's extremely open and linked to all sorts of activities. It's connected to our human environment, to what's within itself, to the way man can transform himself. The very concept of multidisciplinary art doesn't exist because someone all of a sudden decided to artificially build bridges between different art forms like theatre and cinema, visual arts and dance, photography and music... No, not at all. It's simply because the very structure of art is very different today. For centuries, it was a completely vertical structure, a structure of subordination, with something totalitarian about it at times... And at some point, all those laws of totalitarian domination, all those patterns of oppression crumbled, the same way empires fall and disappear, the same way dictators grow old and fall into dementia. More and more horizontal links are appearing, links between people, and it's everywhere now. That's why art can no longer stay locked up in its ivory tower or floating somewhere above Earth. Art is like ripples in water. It's a wave on the surface that spreads in every direction, pulling within its wake the most unexpected territories of being, of human awareness and existence.

That's why over the past few years, the very concept of art, the concept of the relationship between the audience and the artist, between the artist and society, has gone through an incredible change. And it's impossible not to react to that, you can no longer pretend it doesn't exist.

There is in your theatre a dark, absurd humour, which seems a response here to the sweet, naïve, and melancholy humour in the photographs. Do you see it as a way to undercut serious subjects and moralising postures, or to the contrary a way to initiate a deeper reflection about our lives?

I think that Ren Hang's texts and images are indeed full of humour, of hidden paradoxes, absurdities, and joy. And I can see how much fun he and his friends had taking those pictures and how, through this vitality and beauty, they tried to overcome the depression that had held him in its clutches for years. Art is always ironic and sometimes sarcastic, unless maybe when it is cathartic. Of course, catharsis cannot be reached through irony, it's an ancient technique that requires precise and serious intentions. But Ren Hang's photographs and poems aren't about catharsis but about youth, beauty, poetry, sex, love, loneliness, about our relationship with cities and about freedom, freedom, freedom... That's the key word to understanding all his work, all his texts. At least that's how I feel about it...

Ren Hang always tried to stay away from any political discourse but couldn't escape it because of the topics he chose: questions about gender and sexuality, about the place of bodies in their environment... His works, seen as provocative and subversive, were often suppressed or banned by the authorities. The same is true of your own work. Do you think that there's always a political dimension to artistic creation?

I don't know, I think politics can always be found everywhere, but theatre is most often political. Someone once told me that if I wanted to stay alive and healthy, I shouldn't dabble in politics. I smiled and nodded, but I also heard in what they were saying that theatre itself is political. And in general, any artistic gesture is political because it isn't something abstract that exists in a vacuum... It's you and me, it's human life, nourished by our relationships to others, to our past, to family, by conflicts and history, love and hate, beauty and ugliness. And we could keep going with a list of dichotomies which I sometimes find tiring, but which I often can't escape... That's also why the most important thing is to go out and have drinks or have a smoke with friends, to go to the movies. Doing nothing can also be important... Going up to the roof and looking at the city bathed in mist... The bosom of a loved one might be more important than all this lousy politics. Or rather, the bosom of a loved one is the most important politics of all.

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Interview conducted by Malika Baaziz and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach