

la terrasse

**« Le Petit théâtre du bout du monde – Opus III »,
Welcome to the imagination of Ézéquier Garcia-Romeu**

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It's a show, an installation, a wander, theater, puppetry... Above all, it's not to be missed!

No matter the form, it's the experience that counts. Welcome to the imagination of Ézéquier Garcia-Romeu, whose artistry has been proven by the first two productions of his Petit Théâtre du Bout du Monde! The audience always holds a special place, moving through the heart of the set design, which is dotted with models, landscapes, and, of course, puppets—each one more astonishing than the last. In a sort of post-industrial society, the notion of ruin guides the viewer's gaze, fueled by workers' memories that weave together stories intertwining words and objects. Thus, a gallery of portraits is revealed, in all its beauty and brutality.

Nathalie Yokel

« Le Petit Théâtre du Bout du Monde » : unreal journeys into cruel worlds

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From March 13 to 15, 2026, Théâtre 71 Malakoff presented (as part of the MARTO festival) Opus II and Opus III from Ézéquiél Garcia-Romeu's **Le Petit Théâtre du Bout du Monde** (Théâtre de la Massue). These are striking, world-like plays—almost wordless and seemingly without a narrative, yet heavily laden with meaning and filled with dazzling, beautiful imagery. A highly unique aesthetic and dramaturgical approach, resulting in a fascinating experience.

It's for me if:

- *I love raw aesthetics, visible materials, and theater where everything is out in the open to be seen*
- *I love world-scale shows with astonishing proportions, the play on scale that makes it feel as though you're flying over an entire landscape*
- *I'm always open to discovering realistic (or dystopian!) plays that still allow for moments of fragile beauty amid the darkness*

A Unique Relationship with the Audience and the Space

One of the first things that strikes a viewer venturing for the first time to see one of the Opus productions at the Petit Théâtre du Bout du Monde is the highly distinctive stage design employed by Ézéquiél Garcia-Romeu: whereas Opus I is presented in a sort of giant puppet theater—a cube around which the audience can freely move—Opus II uses a massive landscape-table made of assembled wooden planks, with its hollows, bumps, and hills, while Opus III is performed on the floor and on tables previously covered with a large piece of fabric that resembles snow-covered ground. The performance never begins immediately: thus, the audience members have plenty of time to explore the space, identify the best viewing angles, and get comfortable with the freedom they've been given. In Opus III, they don't even know where the performance will take place as they discover the venue and the performers.

In fact, many of the puppets and props that will be used in the performance are on full display—in cases that serve as a sort of cabinet of curiosities for Opus II, and on tables arranged around the perimeter of the future performance space for Opus III. Ézéquiél Garcia-Romeu gives the audience as much mental freedom as physical space: everything—or almost everything—is done in full view; no mechanisms are hidden, the puppeteers perform as close as possible to the audience—to the point that you sometimes feel you might bump into them during Opus II—and few effects are not produced openly and in real time—even if a few microphones and sound sources remain concealed, and the subtle lighting design, which is an integral part of the dramaturgy, reveals

itself only to those who pay close attention. The result is, of course, a sort of Brechtian alienation—yet the scenes are so gripping, the images so powerful, that one finds oneself immersed in the performance ten or twenty times in a row without even realizing it.

At the Edge of the World, all the puppets are gray

It seems clear that Ézéquier Garcia-Romeu favors long-distance manipulation, which takes full advantage of the possibilities of performing in a large space completely free from the physical constraints of the stage. For example, his arsenal includes puppets with very long strings, manipulated from the side of the stage, similar to those used by Aurélie Hubeau in *Alcools*. These are puppets that allow the audience to watch the creature without the puppeteers appearing in the frame, even though the controls remain visible. The effect produced is fascinating: the slightest tremor in the puppeteer's hand is visibly reflected in the puppet's body, which is slender, suspended, barely grazing the ground despite its weighted feet... And yet it is simultaneously burdened by a terrible metaphorical heaviness: a walking stick whose resonant taps set the rhythm for the puppet's advance as it opens *Opus II*, a weight dragged along by the slave puppet in *Opus III*.

We also come across a few mammal skeletons, marionettes with strings of varying lengths and degrees of articulation, and one or two glove puppets—in short, all these techniques coexist without any particular hierarchy, each one employed for the dramatic possibilities unique to it. Thus, the glove puppet brings the puppeteer closer to the character, allowing for an interplay between creator and creature. The *Petit Théâtre du Bout du Monde* also incorporates a number of machines—in the sense of objects driven by an internal force, such as an electric motor—often to evoke industrial machinery from elsewhere, suggesting their immense scale through the play of proportions and rendering their mechanical sounds through various metallic elements used as percussion. The sounds produced by the puppets and machines on the wooden panels of *Opus II* or the sheet metal panel of *Opus III* are important elements of the dramaturgy, as they project the material into space, allowing it to be heard even if it cannot be touched.

This requires a wide range of technical skills from the performers. They demonstrate versatile abilities and succeed in infusing every scene and every movement with great intensity through the concentration with which they attend to the slightest positioning and the slightest movement, transforming each interaction into a ritual rich with meaning. This holds true even in *Opus III*, where each scene culminates in a violent break from puppetry conventions, with the puppeteers overturning the sets and hurling certain puppets across the room. Respect for the puppet on stage does not preclude irreverence toward the object, which loses its sacred character once it is no longer performing! Thierry Hett, Alicia Malialin, Roxane Merten-Pallanca, Iroslav Petkov, Inbal Yomtovian, Ézéquier Garcia-Romeu, and Simon T. Rann—they're all amazing.

Filling the World with Presences

The bulk of the works consists of figures rather than puppets—that is, sculptures of various scales and materials, more or less roughly hewn, but always featuring a face with unmistakably human features. These may be simple busts or standing figures, fashioned from all sorts of materials, either painted or left in their raw state. But they share the common trait of being non-articulated and posed rather than manipulated—and this approach, which reminds us of François Lazaro, in no way prevents the (re)positioning of these silent figures—sinister observers of the landscape in which they are set—from being charged with meaning and dramatic intensity. These handcrafted figures, produced in large numbers, can form crowds or processions—an effect that is used more

extensively in Opus II than in Opus III, which gives much more room for the performers' acting.

Thus, the stage spaces—initially completely empty—host wordless yet highly meaningful scenes that unfold one after another without a specific narrative thread to clarify their meaning. The images created, and the meaning conveyed through movement and staging, are thus left open to the audience's free interpretation. There is ample room for metamorphosis—and metaphor—in this **Petit Théâtre du Bout du Monde**. The puppets change in appearance, or the meaning of what they do: a pile of gravel dug into by a character is adorned with a cross, and a grave appears. This principle of shifting meaning through physical transformation even extends to the performers when Roxane Merten-Pallanca finds herself changing clothes and accessories at the end of Opus III, as if it were up to a human to find a final meaning in a performance that resembles a succession of scenes from the Anthropocene. This is also true of the set design, which is often suggested rather than depicted: metal baskets become a city's skyscrapers in Opus II, and tin cans become a landscape of industrial ruins or an ocean liner in Opus III. It brings to mind children's games, where they build castles out of cardboard boxes—except that these are adult games, and they are both more political and darker.

The Edge of the World and the end of the world

The precise meaning of each scene is rarely explicitly defined, and great trust is placed in the audience and their ability to interpret what they are shown. The overall tone, however, is clear: the exploitation of people and natural resources, surveillance, indoctrination, mechanization—one senses the dark corruption of totalitarianism and ecocidal capitalism. A giant human head, which appears in Opus III and is placed on the downstage left, overlooking the stage, stands as a representation of Sapiens' hubris—as humanity sets itself up as a demiurge, a creator rather than a creature, a being of pure intellect that has freed itself from its body—and thus from its sensations and its animal nature. The images presented are powerful and poetic, and the fleeting appearances of certain creatures sometimes bring a touch of lightness, and even a hint of humor—always of a dark variety.

These performances are disconcerting—in the positive sense of the word, in that they challenge the passive consumption of the performance by spectator-consumers, replacing it with a fruitful discomfort that sometimes arises from the themes, sometimes from sounds that are barely bearable, and generally from the fact that they force the audience to stand, preventing their bodies from slumping limply into a plush armchair. They are open enough to interpretation that viewers can project onto them whatever they wish to see: where one person might see in Opus II an evocation of Soviet totalitarianism and the gulag—and thus a vision of the 20th century—another might see a warning about the near future of European societies in particular, an interpretation made all the more tempting by the fact that the performances took place over a weekend of municipal elections. It is up to each and every one of us to form our own opinion, then. In any case, it's clear that *Le Petit Théâtre du Bout du Monde* is a condemnation, a silent cry of alarm, and that it's best not to come to a performance expecting to find much hope there—it's not Dante's *Inferno*, but it is an uncompromising look at some of humanity's worst inventions.

With a raw and unique aesthetic, and a choreography of image and movement as precise as a scalpel, *Le Petit Théâtre du Bout du Monde* draws on a few recognizable influences, yet its style is unparalleled. Perhaps one could venture to call it a masterpiece—in any case, it offers audiences an unusual, powerful experience that is well worth taking the time to experience.

Mathieu Dochtermann