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Theatre. Is the 'Edge of the World' far away?

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With his puppets, Ézéquier Garcia-Romeu leads the spectator into an unsettling world filled with questions about the present and the future.

Champigneulle (Meurthe-et-Moselle). Special Report – The world above and the world below. Two parallel worlds. With no interaction between them. Until... Le Petit théâtre du bout du monde, opus 1—conceived, directed, and built by Ézéquier Garcia-Romeu—immerses the spectator in the uncertain, dark, and gray realm of a place somewhere on the planet. A place where, in any case, it is far from certain that misery is any more bearable than elsewhere. For in the world he envisions—ravaged, for instance, by the rampant pollution of plastic bags—is there any hope left?

The answer is very vague. Alternating with Issam Kadichi, the creator of this "poetic performance in the process of being invented and written" also explains that his little theater "stages a series of characters whose portraits bear a strange resemblance to us."

For some, yes. Like those puppets that come to life in turn—manipulated discreetly, unfolding, sometimes even collapsing with no hope of redemption. All of them inhabiting this underground realm cluttered with a motley assortment of objects and mannequins that seem unfinished, preserved in the semi-darkness.

For others, no. Take, for instance, that animal with luminous eyes, a sort of marten or mutant creature, beautifully furry, worn like a glove on the hand of the puppeteer with whom it converses. A curious animal that ponders—sometimes with amusement—the lives and solitude of the creatures around it.

This "little theater"—with a second installment already in the works for next season that is expected to incorporate a significant amount of new interactive technology—already involves the audience, using methods from the last century. For instance, a corded telephone allows the operator to call the first spectator willing to pick up and ask them to manipulate a specific line, lowering, for example, a dim lightbulb closer to the performance area.

Presented as part of the 7th edition of the Géo-Condé International Meetings in the Nancy region—described by Philippe Sidre, director of the Théâtre Gérard Philipe de Frouard, as a "festival of imagination and inventiveness"—this first installment truly invites us to encounter parallel worlds. It features "peculiar people (...) who spend their time waiting for time to pass,"

notes Ézéquier Garcia-Romeu.

Set against a melancholic backdrop enhanced by a perfectly attuned soundscape (created by Samuel Sérandour), this show—which holds further surprises in store—speaks volumes, even though it remains entirely wordless.

The tenth-anniversary edition of the Géo Condé Festival, held from April 21 to 29, featured 22 different shows and 40 performances by companies from France, as well as Germany, Russia, and Italy.

Gérald Rossi



Theatre World Brno 2018: The Whole World Wants to Be Opus or a Small Theatre from the Edge of the World

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<https://krith.phil.muni.cz/festivaly/divadelni-svet-brno-2018-cely-svet-chce-byti-opusem-aneb-male-divadlo-z-konce-sveta>

The unconventional imaginative puppet theatre of the Théâtre de la Massue, Ézéquier Garcia-Romeu company surprises with a mysterious, subtly humorous piece. The story was created and directed by Ézéquier Garcia-Romeu. The audience, invited into the slightly poetic world of puppets, controlled by buttons, experienced a lovely and entertaining machination in which no words are needed.

A smaller structure built on the stage of the MdB drama stage was the setting for a very creative piece called Opus I, which, in my opinion, attracted both young and old audiences. After arriving on the stage, visitors could sit around a smaller two-story structure, next to which there were massive white benches, around which they could walk freely. The structure, consisting of two parts, the upper stage and the viewing box, formed two microworlds lying on top of each other. On the upper stage sat about half-meter-tall puppets of an old grandmother with a black scarf over her head and a grandfather in a brown coat with a beret. Other puppets represented an elegant woman with a hat and a man in a light traveling coat. A wooden house under the stage resembling a peephole, surrounded by windows, full of various props became the main staging space, because the mover of this small world was located right here.

On the ground on the lower floor, an actor lies motionless with his face covered by a dark puppet. After a few quiet buzzing tones, he begins to rise from the ground. The figure comes to life, long and light arms and legs, a dark head with a body. The puppeteer turns on the little man's eyes, small blue lights being the only thing peeking out from the small dark face. They look around together through the viewing box, the puppeteer turns his little puppet's head and then the opposite happens. They explore the space, switch the knobs on the wooden apparatus, the lights on both floors turn on and off. The theater resembles the play Samorost with its creativity, and the puppet resembles the character Nine (the animated film No. 9) with its appearance.

The poetry of movement is intertwined with the creativity and ingenuity of the plot. Monkey – as Romau revealed after the performance, that is the puppet's name – rang the other puppeteer, who was standing next to the little house, on his mobile during the show, called the other puppeteer, standing next to the house, on the phone during the performance. During

the play, he opened the door and invited a girl from the audience in. He served her tea and let her leave with a letter, which she was to leave in the mailbox located on the upper stage. It was as if he were connecting the upper and lower worlds. The letter was received by a woman with a hat on the upper stage. The waiting man with suitcases was the sender, who was then moved closer to the woman along a narrow board. However, he does not reach her directly, which creates a feeling of distance between them. Immediately, after pressing buttons too much, both main actors blow their fuses and the entire scene finds itself in darkness. Monkey bravely manages this artificially created situation with the help of an artificial tube pushed through the window of the house to another spectator. The woman corrected the fictitious lack of electricity by taking a short ride on an exercise bike located behind the benches on the right side of the stage. Thanks to these magically humorous experiences, the production felt immediate and slightly interactive.

The performance was accompanied by several repeating sounds and melodies, such as the slow rhythmic strumming of a guitar, the sound of a gramophone record, and the humming of a television. All these rhythms, such as the switching of lights and the slight movement of large puppets, divided and advanced the plot. The chirping of birds, in turn, separated the imaginary outside and inside. A strange machine with a single propeller and lots of speakers flew above the upper stage, emitting the sound of a helicopter. The puppet world was illuminated by various lights and lamps. The semi-darkness created a pleasant, intimate atmosphere, allowing even the most subtle gestures or sounds to be perceived.

The theme of the show was inspired by audio clips played in English during the performance, consisting of three extracts from the newspaper *Le Monde* dating from 2014–2015. While listening, the puppet that was playing held its chin thoughtfully, thus reacting to the texts coming from the small old radio. However, Monkey did not pay much attention to them and after a while pressed buttons or explored the space around him. The titles of the excerpts are as follows: New Era, New Art; Researchers from Around the World Invent Toilets of the Future and Extinction. Each of these articles and its meaning or inspiration could certainly be debated more. The discovery of a male puppet sitting on the toilet with a newspaper was the element that most closely corresponded to these themes. Perhaps he was reading the aforementioned newspaper *Le Monde* or drawing attention to the new toilet of the future. In any case, the situation provoked a reaction in the form of laughter. What I appreciate about this type of puppet theater is that the viewer could understand without words, participate in the performance, or just uncover the meanings of the action being experienced.

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