

A Garden of Unrest



Constanza Macras on fairytales that spell disaster

Interview: Beatrix Joyce

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there was a prince who taught jazz dance and a witch who put pizzas in the oven ... For “Stages of Crisis”, Argentinian choreographer Constanza Macras fuses traditional fairytales with the world’s deepening economic and ecological crises.

Beatrix Joyce: “Stages of Crisis” was inspired by your 2013 production “Forest: The Nature of Crisis”, a four-hour performative walk through Berlin’s Müggelwald. How did you use fairytales for the piece back then?

Constanza Macras: As it was set in Germany, I took the fairytales of the Brothers Grimm, and married them with historical events, such as the beginning of credit and the advent of paper money. I reworked the stories of Hansel & Gretel and Snow White into monologues that, although they were still recognisable, were clearly speaking about the economic crises. The jazz teacher and the pizza master are derived from archetypal characters we all know, namely the prince and the witch. This was entirely random! I think humour is created in a combination of the familiar and the strange: it is absurdity that has no explanation, meshed with the obvious.

BJ: What has changed since staging “Forest: The Nature of Crisis” in 2013?

CM: Previously the stories I told in the piece were past states of crisis projected into the future – now those speculations are happening. The pandemic has had a huge impact on the global economy, particularly on developing economies. The gap between rich and poor is getting bigger, shops are closing and delivery platforms are taking over. It’s the end of small business.

BJ: Shops falling into abandon is a motif clearly visible in the work, namely in the stage design that looks like an empty Hong Kong supermarket. This set has been

recycled from a previous work, where it was a waiting room. Where did the idea initially come from?

CM: In Argentina, during the crisis of 2001, there were riots on the streets and people would go to main supermarkets and loot them. In the piece from 2013 there was the story of a Chinese Kiosk that was completely vandalized: they took everything they had, even the Christmas tree. This was all over the media, and the picture of the owner of the shop, crying in despair, became ‘the face’ of the crisis. People were hungry; in social unrest society is reduced to survivalist mentalities and extreme racism against immigrants. Nina Peller, who designed the stage based on the former script, took this story as her base. It gives you the idea of a small shop that could belong to any minority across the world.

BJ: How does the theme of the abandoned supermarket play into the piece’s themes of fairytales and a romantic, idealised view of nature?

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CM: It would be weird to copy nature on stage. Milk comes from a cow, but in a supermarket it’s in a bottle; you don’t see its original source. Everything comes from nature; we just forget about it. The supermarket, like the woods, is a place of transformation: from nature into emptiness. This is the failure of ultra-capitalism. The piece explores a scenario where our resources have been depleted, or our production and supply chains have collapsed.

BJ: How is the crisis of the pandemic reflected in the piece?

CM: During the pandemic I saw a lot of city-dwellers globally seeking an escape into nature. That’s when we saw how we are no longer fit to survive in nature – it’s an illusion we have. It’s easy to think we will befriend nature when we

need to. But nature will not befriend us! The empty shelves, which we saw when everyone was inexplicably stocking up on pasta and toilet paper, are a metaphor for this ‘every man for himself’ mindset. And individualism like that can become critical. It is not uncommon for suicide waves to occur in patriarchal societies, where the head of the family cannot provide any more and takes his own life, often carrying his family with him.

BJ: After its online premiere in May at HAU1, “Stages of Crisis” will be shown at the Gärten der Welt in Marzahn. This park brings together ‘gardens of the world’ from different places and cultures, and includes temples and farm animals. The arena, where you will perform, is oddly futuristic, and visitors can also enter the park by cable car. What are your thoughts on the location for the performance?

CM: When the Gärten der Welt was proposed to me as a site, I went there by bicycle. Marzahn is an urban wilderness: there’s all this generic ‘Plattenbau’ that looks to the future but is stuck in the past. The whole area is in Berlin’s former East and hasn’t changed as much as other parts of the city. I felt I was in a dystopian, 70s sci-fi movie. And then, amidst this austere architecture, there is the Gärten der Welt, this strange fantasia. A lot of people say: “Oh it’s my favourite place in Berlin!” There are horses and it’s child-friendly (according to parents who secretly go there more for themselves than for the kids). It’s at the same time absurd and playful, and people want to know what it is. I think the piece will work well here, and the expedition through the unexpected corners of Marzahn beforehand is definitely a plus. 🐘

**Constanza Macras |
DorkyPark
Stages of Crisis**

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Bühnenpremiere vor Publikum