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Resilience and Beauty

Dorothee Munyaneza and Stéphanie Coudert
on their collaboration

Interview: Jean-Marc Adolphe

Choreographer, musician and author Dorothee Munyaneza and visual designer Stéphanie Coudert discuss “Mailles” and the beauty in adversity.

Jean-Marc Adolphe: “Mailles” brings together six black women, who are African or of African descent, whom you met, Dorothee, on your artistic journey or during your travels.

Dorothee Munyaneza: Yes. I sought to create a congregation of artists who touched me, and whose work inspires and moves me. I speak as much about their artistic work as about their commitment to society. They live across the globe and are all African or of African descent*. Even before we started the rehearsals, we exchanged on banal everyday things as well as on what was happening in our respective countries. We shared readings, music, images ... I asked myself: what connects these women? Economic power has dug deep inequalities between people; some have been discarded, separated. Where are we today, in a world of political cacophony, in the era of what I call ‘post-power’? There is, everywhere in the work, a remarkable feminine force that makes space for creation, life, stories and convergence.

Starting from the stories and practices of the women united in “Mailles”, it is a question of finding the universal within our mixed stories. As a mixed group of women we express ourselves through these different moulds, these skins, these spaces in which we live with our stories, our words, our songs and our movements. We will talk about things that cannot be ignored, politically, socially, intimately, and we will also create a space where contemplation, poetry and sweetness can exist.

Stéphanie Coudert: For “Unwanted”, a previous work by Dorothee that approached the subject of rape as a weapon of war, I designed a jacket with pieces of leather and wax, which Dorothee sometimes used as a percussion instrument. There, as the piece speaks about

Dorothee Munyaneza, Cie. Kadidi

femininity, I needed to think about the quality of the material. But I also wanted to reserve the freedom to bring different cultures into an unexpected dialogue, with this mix of a Japanese kimono design and an African fabric. I need to feel things, without them being didactic. The set allowed me to deploy a palette of materials, colours, patterns ...

JA: There is a certain choral strength to “Mailles”, embodied by these six women, each of whom carries a strong singularity. Can we imagine that the work of Stéphanie Coudert contributes towards giving the performance this sensation of a heterogeneous choir?

DM: Certainly there is this desire to gather these singular voices, not in unison, but as a symphony with several layers. We are connected by a storyline, and Stéphanie’s gestures help to sew this seam. It’s a portrait of several women, with at its core perhaps the same woman; a female body composed of several bodies. It is the celebration of a fight that we lead to exist in spaces where we are rejected, and how we enhance ourselves to be stronger than those who denigrate us.

I’m reading “Insoumises”, a book by Conceição Evaristo which brings together 13 stories of Black women in Brazil. All have gone through great hardships, and despite all the obstacles that articulate their lives they still end up showing dignity, strength, perseverance and beauty. That’s actually what I want to celebrate: the beauty of these women.

Beauty exists in disobedience and adversity, and in the reappropriation of something that has been denied.

JA: In your creative work, how do you define this research of beauty?

SC: Exactly 20 years ago, I was awarded a prize at the Festival de Hyères. My collection was titled “Métal irradié”, and I wanted to show how different volumes could be nested in one another ... In my presentation; there were no hangers,

each garment was suspended from butcher’s hooks. I called it ‘force fields’. At the time, I was influenced by the work of Jean-Charles Blais. But when I received the award I had to improvise a little speech, which I started by saying, “I think I wanted to show my idea of beauty”. I immediately saw the members of the jury roll their eyes! I realised that this idea of beauty did not interest the fashion world, which detests it and prefers to talk about deconstruction. This is probably why I don’t quite feel comfortable ... So, beauty? I see it emerging as something that escapes from someone. Something that can happen in the performance, where the presentation of a collection is codified. And in relation to what Dorothee said of the women she gathered in “Mailles”, I would say that beauty is a way of sublimating rage.

DM: The women gathered in “Mailles” are women engaged in everyday life; that’s what makes them beautiful. For me, beauty exists in disobedience and adversity, and in the reappropriation of something that has been denied. Beauty is this lively place that is aware of the deep strength that exists in each of us and that refuses to resign. 🗡️

*A note from Dorothee in July 2021: “When this interview took place in June 2019, it was before COVID-19. Since then, Zora Santos from Brazil, Hlengiwe Lushaba Madlala from South Africa and Keyierra Collins from Chicago have not been able to join us. But without meeting them this work would have been different. So in a way they are still there with us, even if they are not physically present on stage. The current performers of “Mailles” are Haitian, Rwandan, Danish-born Somali, Ethiopian living in the Netherlands and British.”

EK SPECTING SPECTRA OF INFRA SOUND :|| ON_TEXTURE

Dorothee Munyaneza

Text: Arlette-Louise Ndakoze

Taking two plus one to witness
Add salt :: To wounds :: In :||Forming :: Attentions :: Barely
speaking in :: Shreds in
Flashes
Are you
Are you speaking of meshes
Parts of flexion :: Departures of re II:
Maybe,
Maybe, Maille Par Mal,
Sans Mal \ Cleaning the Floor for Heats of Flexion to Tie the
Micro Verses Levelled Up There is So much to Say About
Flushes of Infra \ Whales and Elephants, Imagine me here
now,
Comes the day the light flashes in
For \: Fleshes of Moves of minds moves of mentes in
movementes \: Forces of Cosmic Move
Up :/ Down / Belles / Suns of Drum set
Beyond --
Echoes -- Replace Love :: With Live

A child, children || Where were you in 1994
Woman, Women, Wanted [That long ago? It seems
Seams off shores -- Not yet, time –
It's ringing ° Member, that ° You seem not to go into, rippling

around it] This is what you do with wounds → Where to start,
then?
~ With the cheer
Glass on Glass Brass on Brass To Hold the Down Spirits Apart
On the Move
Upwards ° Setting the Tones of
Flesh on Bones
Meshes of Flush
Flashes of Rush
The choreographer takes her time
Slows it down down down
Bass Drums down
Raindrops down
Rings membering
Souls singing
Ripples Fading
It is
The Beginning
Is Never / Easy // Who Are You talking to
Gather the sounds still rippling the air, you will find me there
It's been a while, reflections of Samedi Détente,
Dancing on thin ice
Delays not Unwanted
In The middle you join,



There could be ways to say it straight, but nothing straight in
the move of dusty stars and
Lightning planets, you move them on, you get along

Words loaded, no way to Force
The cargo of Shifts to take,
Shreds of elated potentials
What do you do when
Them missing // Ellipsis of Flows

Heat of White_on Red
Veins of Said
There could be ways to say it right,
But, What do you do, When the B-side of your knee can't take
it \ :: Ellipses of Flows

When, in 2014, the word came out in moves,
Moves reminiscing
“Samedi Détente”,
choreographer Dorothee Munyaneza inscribed herself in the
meshes of time-space, confronting reflections of pain,
Facing the pains of going back to the quiet sounds of unsaid
That could not prevent nor undo,
One character, incorporated by dancer and choreographer

Nadia Beugré,
One body, perpetrating violence and suffering from violence,
altogether, one body,
joining the thin line between human's faculty of creating, and
destructing,
Joining the lives of potential joy, and destroy
Testimonies of the living,
joint in the particles able to level up to monticules

“Because, somehow, when you look down the line, we can
find some real link. We can't say that, 'my life is detached
from yours or from someone else's story'. If we are ready to
take time to review our collective memory or our individual
memory, somehow we will find the link between us,”

expressed Dorothee Munyaneza in the 2018 interview “The
Body Is An Instrument”, on Radio Future Africa, regarding her
first piece “Samedi Détente” that she had just performed at
the Festival Theaterformen in Braunschweig. Created in 2014,
“Samedi Détente” is the piece that inaugurated her dance/
performance company Kadidi. After years carrying the
unbearable with her, the trauma of a child witnessing the
1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

“As an artist, I seek to find those spaces where – individual stories, or – my story is linked to someone else’s story, and therefore create a performance, or a piece, that is not just about me. That is about us. That is about our humanity, our dignity, the violence, the beauty, and the bad, the violence, and the light, hope and despair. These areas that are occupying my mind, occupying my artistic language, are anchored, again and again, in how to tell these stories, how to convey these stories, how to relate these stories.”

Unwanted, her following manifestation of the living, created in 2017, joins the tensions and fractures of earthly moving, through the vocal chords of composer, performer and vocalist Holland Andrews, who became the second half of the piece, a standing ground of vulnerabilities and strengthening energies. Holland Andrews’ wide and deep vocal scale assured Dorothée Munyaneza to change the initially conceived solo piece “Unwanted” into a duo – accompanied by the steady sonic textures from composer Alain Mahé, the in/tangible presences : echoes of Dorothée Munyaneza’s physical movements since “Samedi Détente”,

It was about time that

Where to move from, when the heart loading the white and red blood cells,
White as the dress of beyond
Red as a dress on Alive

“Not healing, but finding a space where violence doesn’t have the last word. Because I’m still here. The dead don’t speak. The dead are laying somewhere. They are silent now. And it’s because I’m alive – It’s because I’m able to move, I’m able to reason, I’m able to speak – that I can totally embody that which has been and that which is happening”,

was already the rhythm that initiated Dorothée Munyaneza’s piece “Samedi Détente”, the piece tied by experiences and directions towards the spaces in-between, the potentials of regenerating, setting the tone to “Mailles”, all along.

‘Mailles’, the meshes, have always been there, somewhere, have always been in, with and through the composition’s poet Asmaa Jama, whose voice and prosody draw the depths of the ties.

holding on,

between the scratches and sonoric feedbacks, compositions by and with Ben Lamar Gay, Alex Inglizian, Alain Mahé and Dorothée Munyaneza – sounds as evidences of ungraspable living,

“finding ways that these stories are going to resonate within the physical body.
So, the physical body becomes an extension of this language, this vocal, this verb based expression.”

holding on,

between the scratches, feedbacks and bass drums that resonate the soil under the conjointly moving performers Nido Uwera, Ife Day, Yinka Esi Graves, Elsa Mulder, and Dorothée Munyaneza before all six moving energies crescend and ascend in violining, trumpetic, snaring

heats, reacting to each other,
as magnets do, attracted to gravitational forces,

that dare to spell, not to repel

To fluid,

One Maille per day

Une Maille par Mal

Dare to spell, not to repel

Across

Fleshing riptides

Setting the Tunes in

Compelling altitudes

***i dreamt i stood on your body and made language an ocean /
remember hope is everywhere/
we are multitudes /***
(Quote from “Mailles”, the script)

Full-length essay and interview on www.tanzimaugust.de

Dorothée Munyaneza, Cie. Kadidi
Mailles
Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz | 14.+15.8., 19:00