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**Miet Warlop unleashes disasters in 'Springville'**

**Of disasters both great and small**

By Liv Laveyne

Springville: it sounds like a charming springtime place, but when the theatre-maker Miet Warlop is involved, nothing is ever what it seems. 'There are five characters performed by six actors: someone plays a table and I am a box.' In her latest performance Warlop pours her fascination for objects and slapstick into a variety of disaster situations.

This weekend, a refreshing breeze is once again blowing through Kortrijk, brought by the seventh Fresh Festival, where a variety of creations nurtured under the wing of the Buda Arts Centre are being shown. But for Miet Warlop, a storm was threatening a few days before. 'My house just doesn't want to fold open', she informs us. Between dream and reality, certain laws get in the way and practical difficulties – Elsschot has already written about that – but this experience has never held Warlop back.

Since finishing her 3D studies at the Ghent Academy, she has been stubbornly following her own creative course. The theatre installation *Huilend hert, aangeschoten wild*, which included a crying woman buried beneath handkerchiefs, was evidence of a strong visual aesthetic and drama and led immediately to victory at Theater aan Zee in 2004. In the physical performance *Sportband/Afgetrainde klanken* she worked her actors and musicians to the bone. During 'De bank', a two-year residential project at Ghent's Victoria theatre, she made a series of intriguing object performances under the title *Berg/Hoop: Propositions*. Chair legs with trousers became real legs, armrests arms, and garden chairs came to life and went on a pub-crawl. With a strong sense of humour and poetry, Warlop turned objects into people. In her new production it's time for a move in the opposite direction.

'Morning glory'

In *Springville*, Warlop allows people back into her work for the first in a long time. Even if it is only to turn the actors back into objects again. 'I originally wanted to make a solo where I would transform from one character into another. But I quickly realised that my work needed oxygen, other people's input. I didn't want to suffocate myself through isolation.' For the first time, Warlop used someone else to help her to write the story for this piece. 'Film-maker Nicolas Provost collaborated on the scenario and taught me the importance of montage and timing.'

In *Springville*, Warlop exposes her objects/actors to disasters great and small. From the toppling of a cardboard box to a tidal wave. She shows on stage what a hurricane does in a natural setting: with destruction you breathe new life into and give a new logic to your environment. 'Characters and objects perish in *Springville*, but I don't show it as something negative, I also want to show the beauty of it. To have a sort of clean break at the end, an 'end

of the world' feeling, not shown as a dark apocalypse but as a sort of morning glory. In the same way that the sun sets in order to rise again every morning.'

Doom scenarios: Warlop doesn't occupy herself with gloomy thoughts, on the contrary, she likes laughter. It is no coincidence that the films of Buster Keaton, Jacques Tati and Charlie Chaplin were a great source of inspiration. 'I love the slapstick and the pleasure and the emotion that sometimes hide behind failure. As humans, we clearly also find that funny: to see someone fail time after time, to see falling and getting up and falling down again and all that clowning around in between. For example, there's *One Week*, in which, as a wedding present, Buster Keaton is given a house that he has to construct himself, but on top of this he is continuously confronted with unexpected difficulties, ranging from a storm to a train crash.'

### Empty box

It's no coincidence that in Springville, Warlop plays the role of the cardboard box herself. 'A box is nothing, it's no more than what is inside it at any one time. I can identify with this. I don't want to be a slave to a single concept, I think about pictures and shapes, and only fill them in later', says Warlop. 'It's much more than just a fascination, it's a genuine affection that I feel for objects. I can never see objects as purely and simply functional, I also look for the emotion behind them. How you can breathe life into an object like that and then kill it again and in the process also expose yourself to risk. For example, like climbing onto a pile of ten buckets in *Berg/Hoop*.'

Is it a child's imagination that sees a man with wide open arms in every corkscrew? 'I have always had the feeling that there's something in the world, something that I don't know, while others do. And I'm glad that I still don't know it. I try to keep myself as naive as possible. Not unworldly, because even naivety demands a consciousness of what's happening around you; even if it's on another level. But I want to keep that childlike sense of wonder.'