



No A pavilion filled with video projections Comment

The four Dutch colleges of stage design have each delegated two bachelor students to the PQ. Monitored by Peter Missotten, they have designed a pavilion that is filled with video projections.

The student pavilion is a piece of teamwork by eight students of theatre design. The audience enters through a sloping platform which leads to the first floor of the pavilion. In that space, without any straight angle, the visitor is expected to lay down on his belly and look through a gap in the floor into a kind of well, filled with water. In this water basin he sees persons floating in a flooded landscape, looking back at him. These are projected images of the students. Her Majesty Beatrix, the Dutch Queen, plays a prominent part in the installation through her picture on the facade of the pavilion. An orange strip is covering her eyes, through which spectators on the outside can observe the audience lying flat on their belly.

The pavilion is a self-operating, autonomous installation: an empty space in which the audience performs as co-actor. Student Karin Post: 'After exploring different ideas and themes, each of us worked on a form concept. Out of those eight, mine was chosen unanimously as the starting point. From then on we have been working as a team, in particular the content is made by all of us. I still find it amazing that we have been able to create this exhibit with eight completely different students, each with their own background and method of working.' Hanneke Schrijver, one of the other students: 'Once we had chosen for the general idea, all new ideas had to lead back to this. This gave a firm structure, and speaking for myself, I felt happier when the project became more concrete. Apparently I am better at thinking in concrete terms. To me, the final result is surprising, it is a mixture of us all. I would never have expected this a year ago.'

Constructing the pavilion involved hard work. Dirk Sonneveld: 'In this project I was mainly engaged in the technical design. How will we build this colossus, how do we get it in Prague at the umpteenth floor of a museum. This required much consultation with the workshop chief and the constructor, and many technical drawings, made in SketchUp, in 3D – something which Peter Missotten insisted on. There were so many drawings that the artistic meetings on the content some-

times had to remind me that the installation would not be finished once it had been built physically. Fortunately, making a test film in a tub filled with cold water under an early February sun helped a lot.'

Team Work

Peter Missotten looks back with pleasure at the working process. 'The unique aspect of this exhibit is that everything has come about jointly. No work by individual students can be seen. Theatre is and will always be a team sport.' For the students, meeting and getting to know each other was an important part of it. Hanneke Schrijver: 'The project started in June last year and it was not so easy to work in a team of eight students, all with their own background, training, preferences and ideas, and Peter Missotten. There were lots of ideas, but we wanted to come up with something that was really good enough for the PQ. Reaching decisions was tough, because who was to make the decisions? What was 'good' and what was 'bad'? I realised soon enough that if your ideas were to be taken seriously, you had to explain them in an open and well argued way. In this stage Peter Missotten was a good 'filter.'

There also was a lot of debate amongst the students on society, arts and politics. Karin Post: 'Our assignment was to make a statement on the future of theatrical arts in the Netherlands. In the first months we worked rather individually, so that everyone could work out ideas in his or her own style. At the meetings everyone presented his ideas, which were then discussed in detail. And we also discussed the state of political affairs, the current theatre scene, various artists.' The exhibit can be viewed and experienced in many different ways, but the portrait of Beatrix and the floating persons surely can be seen as a political statement.

Peter Missotten: 'One may ignore what is currently happening to the arts in the Netherlands – and being Belgian it strikes me how hard people try to do so – but this country is cutting 25 percent on its culture budget. The exhibit is called *No comment*, but it might just as well have been *The Tears of Beatrix*.'

Starting from Form

Missotten's objective in this project was to induce the students to think autonomously as designers: 'I work inside-out. I never start from the content, I do not read the play in detail beforehand. A good scenographer does not try to illustrate the meaning of the play. He tries to build a workable machine that will generate meaning in the minds of the spectators, together with the play and the actors. I try to create an interesting space, out of the form. It is as if designing a park. The park is never guilty of what happens, but allows it, at the most. Starting from form, I work towards possible layers of meaning. For this exhibit, we started with the design of the pavilion. The design imposed choices for the video projections. Out of this came an autonomous installation, in which the images speak for themselves.'

Dirk Sonneveld: 'At the academy we are taught to start with meaning, which is then cast into a form. Peter's method is radically different. He works from what is technically feasible, and then explores if the image invites you to give meaning to it.' ◀

The eight participating students in the project are Sofie Doeland, Lisanne Hakkers, Dirk Sonneveld, Hanneke Schrijver, Lena Käuper, Anna Schurau, Karin Post en Pieter Angeneind.

The students were delegated from the four theatre design academies in the Netherlands: the Hanze University Groningen, the Zuyd University Maastricht, the Utrecht School of the Arts, and the Amsterdam School of the Arts.

Peter Missotten is a performance teacher at the Zuyd University Maastricht and also works as an opera conductor. In Holland and Belgium he is known for his earlier design work with Guy Cassiers.



Visualisation of the pavilion by Lisanne Hakkers