

Sacre as a solo

Former Pina Bausch performer, the Australian Meryl Tankard, returns to Lyon with *The Oracle*, a solo in which she offers us her vision of *Le Sacre du Printemps*. A startling work, it derives all its power from dancer Paul White, hitherto unknown in France.

Nijinsky's version of the *Le Sacre du Printemps* was first seen in public in 1913 in the Théâtre des Champs Élysées. In that show the movements of Nijinsky's body presaged his drift towards madness. The audience was scandalised as much by the violence of the choreography—depicting the fertility rites of a pagan Russia—as it was by the complicated music, which made rhythm the central element of the piece.

Meryl Tankard restages *Sacre* in the novel form of a solo, using only Paul White's body as the material for a work in which the choreography is in harmony with the stage design. The choreographer installed a screen behind the dancer and video images, inspired by the work of the Norwegian painter Odd Nerdrum, appear on it. Dark, apocalyptic, disturbing, with strong sexual connotations, Nerdrum's paintings are reinterpreted here through the eyes of photographer-video maker Régis Lansac, who creates imaginary surroundings evoking the dances of *Sacre*—young women and men whose dancing begins in joy and changes into savage fighting, and the sacrificial victim who dies in a trance under the eyes of a willing tribe. Thus the piece begins against a projection of kaleidoscopic images in which we observe a moving body, shattered, gradually becoming smaller and disintegrating. Parts of the body can be seen, sexual shapes, arms, legs, momentarily forming into individuals who are either monstrous or in the grip of madness.

Covered in long black diaphanous material, the dancer Paul White appears as a human part of this projected hell or, more precisely, as the flesh from which the violence seen on the screen has been extracted, and which presents the scenes of *Le Sacre* to us in a different way. He plays with the fabric, revealing parts of his body, concealing the life beating within, and with power and fluidity, making the space around him his own. He is also an animal caught in the luminous circle of the tribe, seized with compulsive movements, which he reveals to us as he unfurls his body, often in a vertical direction.

Paul White is an extraordinary dancer with a presence reminiscent of Nijinsky, a virtuosic body, outside normal conventions, from whose muscular mass all the dramatic intensity of the piece is derived. Meryl Tankard did well to choose him. Unusual, indefinable, he draws us into every convolution of his body which, as powerful as it is, is still capable of lifting itself up lightly, giving the impression in very end that he is outside of himself, like a soul transported.

Martine Pullara

Meryl Tankard's *The Oracle*. From 16 to 18 November, at Le Toboggan, Décines.

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