



Johan Simons

discourse of art-haters who say that art is a leftist hobby, that art is elitist and should therefore be written off. A society needs its elite.'

Simon's social and political engagement is obvious from his work. In 2015 he returned to NTGent, where he put the world on the stage with unemployment, illegal employment and the influx of refugees. He wants to shock his audience and shake them awake, to force them to engage in debate and to ask questions. As a consummate multitasker, Simons continues to achieve these ambitions in Germany, as well, as the artistic director of the Ruhrtriennale (till 2017) and of the Schauspielhaus Bochum (from 2018). As of 2017, he will do so again in the Netherlands, where he will be associated with Theater Rotterdam, a new theatre to be modelled along German lines. It is the perfect job for him. Because Simons is a man with a mission: to give art the place it deserves in society.

MARLEEN BROCK

Translated by Lindsay Edwards

Falling Down, Getting Up and Carrying On

Ann Van den Broek's Choreography

Confrontational, intriguing, daring and temperamental; these are just a few of the adjectives used to describe Ann Van den Broek's dance oeuvre. This choreographer (born 1970) finds the inspiration for her language of movement very close to herself. She unravels her emotions and then tests them against other people and the spirit of the age. The result of the impressions she acquires is a merciless analysis of universal themes such as compulsive behaviour, lust, solitude and vanity. Van den Broek looks for answers to such questions as: What sort of rhythmicality goes with fear? What are the different variations of restlessness? How do you translate sexual urges into movements?

The dance language that emerges from this is a compelling portrait of recognisable behaviour patterns. Don't expect a strict interpretation of the subject, but rather freedom of interpretation for the audience and the choreographer. And this is precisely the intention, because Van den Broek wants to communicate continuously with the audience so that they confront their own desires and impulses. The fact that the audience is important is also reflected in the name of her company - WArD/waRD - which is based in Antwerp. The word 'ward' is mirrored in an attempt to symbolise the mutual relationship between the dancers themselves and between them and the audience.

Van den Broek set up the company in 2000 to carry on her work under a single name. In the Netherlands she initially worked through the Korzo production company in The Hague, but in 2008 she decided to set up a WArD/waRD organisation in The Hague too. Working from bases in two countries has its advantages: she can develop a unique dance language without the restrictions of a single country. And WArD/waRD not only produces Van den Broek's work, but also engages in co-productions. Yet her unmistakable DNA always runs through all the productions.

Before Van den Broek became a choreographer herself, she explored the limits of her body by dancing with several companies. When she launched into her solo career in 2000, her focus was chiefly on body language, but live video, live sound and sign language gradually gained in importance. Ann Van den Broek's stage sets are always modest. It is mainly the patterns of movement that make it appear they are set in real-life surroundings.

Van den Broek danced her first solo as early as 1995. It was called *Skótoseme*, and in it she examined the limits of her inner motivations. In 2000 and 2001 this was followed by two solos: *Annexe and Hurry up Please, It's Time*. After these solos, Van den Broek was ready for her first group piece with Dansgroep Krisztina de Chätel, FF+Rew. This work was about the repercussions of an emotional blow, made intensely palpable by a repetition of movements. Because repetition allows emotions to be explored and refined. Falling down, getting up and carrying on. The title refers to the rewind and fast forward buttons on a cassette recorder.

Falling down, getting up and carrying on are movements that Van den Broek has already experienced often in her life. Her dance language is hard to understand without an insight into her personal story. She grew up in a family where life was not easy and her oeuvre is mainly influenced by Thomas, her brother, who suffered from psychoses for ten years. In *The Lady in Black* (2015), Van den Broek says: 'My brother set the tone of a lot of my work, because my pieces are always about the way the outside world deals with people who do not follow the normal path through life'.

The Lady in Black, a documentary by the director Lisa Boerstra, shows how the life and work of the choreographer, who always wears black, are interwoven. The viewer gets to know Van den Broek as an extremely dedicated and intractable choreographer who pushes her dancers' bodies to extremes. One of these dancers compares Van den Broek to a pit bull terrier that bites, chews and only lets go when it has got what it wants. And what she

wants is to show humans of flesh and blood. The technical aspect of dance is of less importance.

In a substantial number of Van den Broek's pieces the stage is given over to women. In *Quartet with One* (2002), for example, she shares the stage with the dancer Sophie Janssens and in 2003 she also performed a pas de deux in *Rest Room*, this time with the dancer Einat Tuchman. But the woman's perspective is only expressed fully in the piece *Co(te)lette* (2008). This work, which flirts with wordplay, as is often the case in Van den Broek's oeuvre, is a reference both to the name of the French writer and to a meat chop. *Co(te)lette* is a confrontational and disturbing portrait of female sexuality in which three women dancers move vehemently, feel themselves and repeat sexual positions. It makes one reflect on women's experience of sex.



Ann Van den Broek - WArD/waRD, *The Black Piece*, 2014
© M. Vanden Abeele



Ann Van den Broek - WArD/waRD, *The Red Piece*, 2013

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In 2008 Van den Broek also staged an auto-biographical work. In *I Solo Ment* a mentally isolated man is set opposite a woman who wants to get through to him. This piece is dedicated to her brother Thomas, whom she has in vain tried to help during his psychoses.

There is no question that Van den Broek is a dedicated choreographer. Having no longer danced in her pieces for ten years, she once again appeared on stage in *Ohm* (2010) and *The Red Piece* (2013). She does not want to lose the feel for dance itself. In *Ohm* she pumps up the rhythm by stamping on a sheet of metal. And in *The Red Piece* it is her heels that drive the tempo. *The Red Piece* follows the pulsing rhythm of a heart: impassioned, controlled and structured. In *The Black Piece* (2014) it is the rhythm itself that sets the tone. The performance is varied with highs, lows and interruptions.

In 2015 it was fifteen years since Van den Broek had set up her dance company. Her latest piece, *Pushing the Wheel* (2015), in which a retrospective section is linked to a look ahead to the future, was made on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of WArD/waRD. By means of flash-forwards, this performance gives the spectator an idea of the undoubtedly powerful future work of this talented choreographer.

LIZA NOTERIS

Translated by Gregory Ball

www.wardward.be

Marcelle Schots, *Protect / Perform, On the work of / over het werk van Ann Van den Broek - WArD/waRD, WArD/waRD, Antwerp*, 2015.

Visual Arts

An Echoless Organ Grinder

The Life Story of Felix Nussbaum

I am easily tempted. At the end of the millennium a couple of sentences in a biography of Stefan Zweig were enough to inspire me to write a book. Biographer Serge Niémetz quoted the young German author Irmgard Keun, elegantly describing a meeting between several important literary figures at a café in Ostend. The scene took place in the summer of 1936 and, besides Stefan Zweig, those present were a good-humoured Egon Erwin Kisch and an inebriated Joseph Roth.

It turns out that a large number of German writers stayed in Ostend in the summer of '36, most of them people of Jewish background. I wrote up this small but well-documented chapter of exile history in Ostend: Stefan Zweig, Joseph Roth, and the Summer Before the Dark (OT: *Oostende, de zomer van 1936*).¹ The cover showed the well-known photo of Roth and Zweig on the Belgian coast.

Shortly after the book was published in 2001 I saw a painting I would have preferred to have had on the cover, because it so perfectly captured the atmosphere of Ostend harbour during the interbellum as I had experienced it in much of the writing of 'my' exiles. The canvas presented Ostend Fish Market in 1936, its painter Felix Nussbaum. I was previously unaware that this Jewish artist had come to Ostend fleeing Nazism and I immediately wanted to know everything there was to know about Nussbaum. As I mentioned, I am easily tempted into a new book. Certainly in this case, as Nussbaum's life story, the way he completely disappeared under the radar after his death at Auschwitz and resurfaced decades later, seemed amazingly exciting, and the work he left behind intriguingly clever.

Although Felix Nussbaum lived with his wife Felka Platek in Belgium from 1935 to 1944, it soon became clear to me that he barely enjoyed any fame there. In Germany it was different. In 1970 more than 100 of his paintings, which had been rotting in a cellar in Brussels until then, turned up in the city of his birth, Osnabrück, where he grew up in a