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Nomad Soul: Between shamanic poetry and totem puppets [Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes]

Once again, this year, the Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes (World Festival of Puppet Theaters) has invited Magali Chouinard. Her show, Nomad Soul, is a silent, black and white visual poem. A complex work about space, forms, scales and techniques, for the viewer it is above all a journey on which they embark with tutelary figures. An invitation to daydream and to allow the echo of whatever touches them to resonate within. Its plasticity is all at once very beautiful, sensitive, soothing and refreshing. A wonderful and light interlude midway through the festival.

Magali Chouinard had already introduced the White Woman character at the 2013 Festival, in a show with the same name that was also a creative research focused on a poetic, black and white visual universe. The show had an expressiveness that went without words or even faces, since the artist performed with a mask and maintained this appearance from the moment she entered the room to her final bow and exit.

Nomad Soul is therefore part of the refining process of such ongoing creative research. Here, she finds herself drawn far away, within strange and poetic territories, where reality fades gently and blends into a long reverie.

It's hard to recount the story told in this show. The writing is neither linear nor narrative-oriented: it is much more preoccupied with sensations, and with triggering a kind of quiet meditation, an inner journey within each viewer. If this is the show's intention, then it was a complete success: never a dull moment despite a rather slow pace, the audience is gently drawn into a trance that leads each viewer to overlap their own inner landscapes with the ones presented on stage.

Obviously, in light of what we just wrote, this show is eminently visual. Many techniques are used and their objective, beyond their undeniable aesthetic value, seems to be to conjure up and blend various levels of reality in an effort to inspire viewers to *let go*. Various techniques such as mask, shadow theatre, video projections, full-body puppetry and costume changes blend into one another while the audience never truly knows what it is seeing: Is the woman behind the veil Magali Chouinard, or a projection of her image? Are we watching a very fine animated film projected in one area of the set, or the shadow play of a puppet manipulated in front of a projector? This confusion blurs reality and allows for disconcerting zoom effects where a full-size character can seamlessly transform into a miniature version of itself on film, and then finally into a puppet.

The set design and stage direction are therefore designed to allow for these mergers and confusions, and reveal the results of her search for an achromatic aesthetic. Paper (cloth?) cubes are piled up in the foreground. These rocks of sorts in fact conceal accessories that will be useful to the show. Above all, at centre stage, stands a cubic structure that can be deployed. It is made of white veils that can either hide or reveal the performer, as needed, and serves as a screen for the projection of live action or animated films, images and shadow theatre. The whole undeniably elegant.

A beautiful show that is unique and poetic. It invites viewers to gently immerse themselves in a symbolic environment borrowed from indigenous culture (totemic wolf that takes on a human form, raven).

A must-see for anyone tempted by the journey!

There are still tickets available for the Sunday, September 24th performance.

Magali Chouinard: Performance, stage direction, and animated short film and video direction

Julien Robert: Soundtrack design

Richard Morin: Contributing stage director and rehearsal coach

Claudie Gagnon: Stage manager and technical assistant

Olivier Bochenek: Contributing video editor and image advisor

Myriame Larose: Contributing scenic writer and manipulation advisor

Karine St-Arnaud: Dramaturgy advisor

Johanne Benoît: Movement and mask advisor

Visuals: © Jean-Guy Lambert