**When the mannequins at the wax museum come alive**

*Torben Kastrup for danstidningen.se, 20/08/2018*

**Facts**

Title: *For The Time Being*

Choreography, concept, director: Boukje Schweigman

Sound design: Slagwerk Den Haag

Company: Schweigman&

Location: pakhus 11, Copenhagen; as part of *Metropolis Festival*

Frozen in the middle of a peculiar motion, a grotesque frown on their faces, the ten performers are standing stock-still around the unassuming room into which the audience has been admitted. It’s like walking through Madame Tussaud’s, as incredibly motionless as these performers, each in their own spotlight, manage to keep themselves. We, the audience, can get up close and study them from nearby in the midst of their frozen movement. Only the sweat beading on their skin reveals that these aren’t mannequins but real-life people.

And sweat is what they do, as it’s incredibly hard to keep one arm up in the air or stand on one foot, while keeping your eyes wide open or mouth agape, for several minutes straight. From the first glance you find yourself deeply impressed by the Dutch company Schweigman&’s performance *For The Time Being* (2017).

Suddenly the ‘mannequins’ come alive and start running at random, full-speed, all over the crowded room. The audience is forced to pay close attention and get out of their way quickly if they want to avoid collisions. We’re all performers here, the audience, constantly in motion, included; and we’re all getting sweaty in this crowded space we have invaded. Suddenly the performers freeze again, solidifying once more in uncomfortable and absurd poses. And now it’s pay-back time for them. Several of them have ended up right in front of us audience members, staring us in the eye in the same way we’ve been freely gawping at them earlier on. Can we ourselves stand being the object of such an invading, inquisitive scrutiny? Some of the performers even get into direct physical contact with the audience. One of them freezes with his head resting on the shoulder of a spectator, another one folds himself, dripping with sweat, into some audience members’ arms, while a third one keeps a clinging hold onto another audience member’s leg.

It’s as if there’s someone back stage, outside, holding a remote control and pushing ‘on’, ‘off’, ‘rewind’ and ‘repeat’; making the performers either freeze in the blink of an eye, get into lightning-quick motion, move backwards or crawl about robot-like. It’s a fascinating but also slightly frightening experience, as it reminds us how we let ourselves be steered and manipulated by outside influences and mechanisms.

*For The Time Being* is always moving on the fine line between comfortable and uncomfortable. For what will these unpredictable, robot-like characters think up next? When the lights are turned off and we find ourselves in a moving darkness, only able to *hear* the performers dashing around, we wonder what they can be looking at now. Could they be standing right in front of us when the light comes back on, a scary frown on their faces? These living, uncontrollable mannequins seem capable of anything.

At last, the performers pick up some readily folded moving boxes and hand them to the audience. We accept and collect them diligently and effectively, so the performers can stack them into a circular wall which further diminishes the floor space. The lights get dimmed, but through the cracks between the boxes comes a pleasant, soft light.

The rhythms and sounds produced by the percussionists quiet down as well, as we get seated on the floor with the performers who scoot closer as if wanting to rest together with us. The mood is comfortable and meditative. However, once again the performers take us by surprise when they carefully shove a cardboard box aside, crawl out and close the wall of boxes up behind them. They leave the audience by itself while starting to shove in the cardboard walls from the outside, so the space inside becomes even smaller - we have to huddle close together in order to still fit in. We have been fooled, we have happily assisted with building our own prison, where we now are abandoned by those otherwise so obliging mannequins. But before we leave this prison we created ourselves, we have been cooperating and in close contact with total strangers on a tiny floor space. An unusual experience in our part of the world. And we have learnt a lot about seduction and manipulation.

For the artist behind *For The Time Being*, Dutch Boukje Schweigman, the performance started with the question: can we stop time? With this performance she wanted to create a kind of vacuum where time would become fluid, suddenly accelerating, slowing or coming to a full stop without warning. But *For The Time Being* is about much more than time and our fast, stressed-out world. It can also be viewed as a critical comment on our living with computers, cell phones and robots, stealing and taking over our lives, in a way that estranges us from each other and from the world. What kind of audience is involved will certainly be of influence too, just like what kind of interaction arises between audience and performers.

*For The Time Being* is a truly unparalleled performance. Innovative, philosophic and unforgettable; and last but not least, enormously entertaining. Of course, the work could not have been realised without outstanding performers, and it will be hard to find any better than those presented by Schweigman&. A performance like *For The Time Being* is not something you’re lucky enough to see every season.

*translation: Maaike van Rijn*