

# Conversation with Gabriela Carrizo, Peeping Tom Company

By Laurine Mortha, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017

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*Gabriela Carrizo, co-founder of Peeping Tom alongside Franck Chartier, presents her new creation Moeder (Mother) on European stages. In the extension of Vader (Father), Moeder is the second part of a triptych of family portraits of the father, the mother and the children.*

## **How did Peeping Tom emerge?**

Franck Chartier and I met as performers at Alain Platel (founder of Ballets C de la B). There was right away an artistic connection between us, a common language and a common desire to develop stories. In 1999, we created *Caravana*, a performance in a camper, with a few dancers from Ballets C de la B, including the lyric singer Eurudike De Beul who still accompanies us today. The name "Peeping Tom", a reference to voyeurism, came from this play, where the public looks through the window of the camper and plunges into the heart of intimacy of the characters.

## **What topics inspire you and what are the recurring themes in your work?**

We like to work with family relationships and the mental worlds of the characters. The space and the set are also structuring starting points for our creations. In the trilogy *Le Jardin* (2002), *Le Salon* (2004) and *Le Sous-sol* (2007), for example, we traversed a house buried by the time. This physical space gave us a very strong dramaturgical basis: the house, which encloses family histories. We place the characters in an immediately identifiable context and a hyper-realistic scenography, often in a 'huis clos'.

## **The psychological dimension is indeed very present in your works, which always seem to follow an oneiric path, in a floating time proper to a dream. How do you work the structure and the development of your pieces?**

Some plays are more narrative than others, but the course of action rarely follows a logical or chronological course. We represent the time of dreaming and of the subconscious, the time of a mental world. While we are discussing together at the moment, your thought may escape for a few seconds, before returning to our conversation. It is this kind of time that we try to stage, stretching it, letting the story fork to follow a character in his thoughts, then return to his object. This process allows you to zoom in and amplify certain sensations or memories.

## **What was the starting point of the new *Vader-Moeder-Kinderen* trilogy?**

After our first performance *Caravana*, Franck and I created the trilogy *Le Jardin*, *Le Salon* and *Le Sous-sol*, which already told a family story. In the plays that followed (*32 rue Vandenbranden* and *A Louer*), we shifted from the family scale to that of a small community. With *Vader* (Father), *Moeder* (Mother) and *Kinderen* (Children), we return to these family figures, in a necessity to go as close as possible to what the father, the mother and the parent-child-relationship is.

### **What is *Moeder*, your new creation currently on tour, about?**

*Moeder* is not about one mother, but about several mothers. We talk about motherhood, the absence and the lack of it. The play searches the memory and the subconscious to reveal what the mother carries as desires, fears, sufferings or violence. For this play, I wanted a set that could represent several spaces at the same time, depicting the multiplicity of mothers. The action takes place in a museum, but can also be seen as a private exhibition space, where family pictures and photos are displayed. A vitrine-like recording room at the back of the stage represents a funeral hall at the beginning of the play, then a maternity room, or even an incubator. *Moeder* opens on a funeral and then winds up the thread of memories. Due to the aseptic and museum-like handling of the staging, and the distance between the characters, we also evoke the process of distancing in the memory, especially in intense moments of life. *Moeder* is not a catharsis, but it is certain that I have projected much of myself, also unconsciously. The idea of a museum is in particular a reference to my mother's funeral, where we had exhibited paintings.

### **In *Moeder*, you put into practice a specific work on the sound, due to live recording of a soundscape and sounds made by the performers. Where did this idea come from?**

My sister, who is a poet, had dedicated to my mother at the time of her funeral the words "My Mother, first sound in me". I started from this idea and made a research on sounds with a Foley artist. This work is particularly interesting because it amplifies certain things that happen on stage or evokes others that are absent. It also allowed me to introduce water on stage with the sound of liquid, an element which is very related to the mother. Sometimes the memory crystallizes certain sounds and the sounds take us to certain worlds. The staged and amplified sounds express the memories of the characters. This research is part of the general development of cinematographic procedures in our work. We use more and more tools from the cinema in our scenographies and in our dramaturgical constructions. The cinema makes it possible to make close-ups or to pass from one scene or space to the other. On stage we try to reproduce what the camera does, to bring us closer, to slow down time, to zoom in on this story of father or mother.

### **How is the process of artistic creation generally?**

We start by thinking about the space and the set. We imagine an atmosphere and a place, we develop models and we research on material. Sometimes we are inspired by photographs or paintings. Gregory Crewdson's photographs, which show very theatrical interior universes, had inspired our first creations. We like to represent uncertain spaces, where something has happened or is about to happen. In the case of *Vader*, for example, we sought to root the action in a place that was both a retirement home and a party hall with a small stage. A window placed in height disrupts the link between this retirement home and the outside world. After this first work on scenography, we enter a period of choreographic research of about three months, with a very organic approach. We work on compositions with dancers and actors: we suggest them an idea, they think ten minutes and come back with an improvisation. Finally, we finish with a 'montage'-period where we build together the play. It is a complex moment, because one has to step back, and choose what wants to be shown and told, by arranging different compositions, which sometimes create unexpected associations. We also have to give up some good parts because we cannot fit them into the whole ( – *but you need to kill your darlings!*). We also work on the sound, the music and the light at the moment of putting together.

**Until *Vader*, you had created all your works in duet with Franck. Why did you choose to work separately for *Vader* (composed by Franck Chartier) and *Moeder* (which you created)?**

We had availability constraints related to our external projects (with the Nederlands Dans Theater or the Residenztheater in Munich, where I worked with actors on a play entitled *The Land*). But we also wanted to try to change the dynamics and see how we operate on our own. This mode of collaboration makes it possible to get nourished by the other's gaze, which is more external, because the other is always there. Nevertheless, we worked together on the composing. All in all, it seemed interesting to us that Franck works on the subject of the father and I for that of the mother.

**Who will work on *Kinderen*? Will there be children on stage?**

We will see how we will work on *Kinderen* (Children) - logically, it takes a father and a mother to conceive them! We also have a daughter, who may be able to intervene in the creation, if she wants to. We have not yet started thinking about *Kinderen*, but we would like to give children a place in this creation, perhaps on stage or by involving them in choreographic research, in order to better express their point of view.

**What are your creation projects?**

*Kinderen* of course. But before that, Franck will work on a new creation for the Nederlands Dans Theater, which's premiere is scheduled for the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2017 in The Hague. This new creation with the NDT will be the third part of a triptych initiated by *The Missing Door*, which I created in 2013, and *The Lost Room*, which Franck created in 2015 and which was rewarded in 2016 by the first Zwanen Award from the Dutch Dance Festival. We also have a residency project at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, with a more experimental and longer-term artistic research approach.