

'RULE OF THREE at Ref17: the undisciplined talent of Jan Martens returns to the Romaeuropa festival', Giannarita Martino, danzaeffebi, 05.12.2017. <http://www.danzaeffebi.com/rule-of-three-ref17-talento-indisciplinato-jan-martens-torna-al-romaeuropa-festival/>

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La recensione



## RULE OF THREE a REf17: il talento indisciplinato di Jan Martens torna al Romaeuropa festival

### REVIEW

On stage at the Teatro Vascello in Rome, 22-23 November, the new work by Jan Martens, a guest at the Romaeuropa festival for the third year running. With RULE OF THREE, the artist explores the triad, the structural parameter which combines the elements of drama on stage.

As a frequent guest at Romaeuropa, **Jan Martens** returns once more this year to REf17 with ***RULE OF THREE***, bringing his unruly talent to the audience in Rome. His previous visits to the festival were with ***ODE TO THE ATTEMPT*** in 2015 and ***THE DOG DAYS ARE OVER*** in 2016. This year, the Belgian choreographer is working for the first time with live music provided by the American producer and drummer **NAH**, who effortlessly interweaves punk DIY, extreme noise, avant-jazz and hip hop in his performance.

This work confirms to an Italian audience how the indomitable 33-year-old is steadily pursuing his destructured path, following first the solo piece ***ODE TO THE ATTEMPT*** (*a solo for meself*). Like a self-portrait, the artist's moments of life and dance set out to counter pervasive narcissism and individualism, moving headlong towards digital subjection.

The following year came the powerful ***THE DOG DAYS ARE OVER***, an ironic, manipulative work on the body's resistance, choosing the leap as a constant in movement. A piece which its own creator described as 'hardcore', it was difficult for its audience to endure because of the uninterrupted physical pressure on the dancers. Nonetheless it was also an entertaining piece, playing with the dynamics and with the spectators themselves, challenging them to tolerate it.

***RULE OF THREE***, staged at Teatro Vascello in Rome on 22 and 23 November 2017, starts from the use of the 'third' as a disruptor, a multiplier and a winner. The perfect, sacred number three, celebrated in numerous disciplines, from mathematics to philosophy, becomes the building block for this work, in which *three* dancers, dressed in yellow, blue and red, deliberately intended to represent the *three* primary colours, move from scene to scene, exploring brief, perceptive stories.

Just as the rule of 3 in the art of storytelling increases the reader's engagement, so that trios of protagonists and events in a story are more expressive, ironic and effective, Jan Martens uses his three performers – the renowned **Steven Michel and Julien Josse**, along with the wonderful newcomer **Courtney May Robertson** – like Tetris blocks, slotting together with the other three elements which carry the narrative: movement, music and light.

In a gloomy, nightclub-like setting, against harsh, distorted sounds which at times slide towards a softer vibe atmosphere, or into neo-punk trance, we are zapped with frenetic, self-consistent visions. In rapid, regular, choreographed movement, images stream in repetitive, obedient, abstract, dramatic dynamics. As if in prey to an agonized post on a social network online, we refresh ourselves with figures which transfigure brief, often unfinished tales.

What is the effect on our consciousness of an information flow which operates from an evaluation overflow, with no break for judgement and with no interpretative caution? Our subjection to continuous, diverse but simultaneous input means that we become inured to the ravenous, frantic,

erratic processing of data, no longer able to select what is truly stimulating from the rest. The staging of *RULE OF THREE* represents this voracious process, stressing the bodies (as previously in *THE DOG DAYS ARE OVER*), swinging between reason and feeling. While never abandoning a geometric aesthetic which embeds every tiny gesture, it harnesses characteristic sounds, attuned to the repetitive sequences. But in this work, the dancers have greater freedom to create their own, improvised path among variable choreographic structures, so quickly and naturally moving from 15-second tracks to 15-minute scenes.

Until, in a keen silence more deafening than the previous drumming, we reach the climax of the show: the triad now naked, under a dazzling light, not avoiding the audience. The bodies are instantly human architecture, snapped together, frozen under the spotlights; faces become expressive masks leaking no emotion. It is a making and unmaking sequence, a beginning which always precedes an end, and an end that anticipates the beginning. And at times the spectator wonders whether the mechanism is just proceeding to an endless ad lib, as the bodies continue to express their need to be just a piece of the puzzle.

**Giannarita Martino**

Twitter @giannarita

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