

On GRASPING THE FLOOR WITH THE BACK OF MY HEAD

Interview with Kasper Ravnhøj

By Annette Max Hansen, journalist.

Who are your role models and why?

I don't have any role models as such, but I am definitely inspired by different artists. I have to say, I have had a long period with DV8. Right now I am obsessed with the work of Peeping Tom from Belgium – I think they have taken on the legacy of Pina Bausch. They are capable of combining theater, dance and performance in a very engaging way. And of course Ohad Naharin, the choreographer from Batsheva Dance Company in Israel.

What is Grasping about?

We had one focal point, a key statement that we wanted to illustrate with the performance: "Through the ages, mankind has continuously created their own hell". In other words, I am not very fond of the thought of having to die. Or rather, the thought of not being here anymore. We only have this life, and it is just plain stupid that we keep making it worse and more difficult. It's not a performance that delivers answers or solutions. It's more like a portrayal of a spiral of problems – a physical, musical and visual brainstorm, you might call it – put together as a number of scenes that tell the same story, each in their own way and with different layers. You might say that it is a very concrete tale, told in an abstract way.

Why is there a dwarf in the performance?

There is no because-she-is-a-dwarf-reason. I met Sigrid at a master class that we taught, and fell for her immediately. She is so powerful, hard working and super talented. I don't think it's the last time you'll see her on a stage!

If you could choose anything, what would be your greatest wish for Mute Comp.?

I don't have one wish, I have many. Create bigger productions. Travel more, learn more, see more. Collaborations across art forms and national borders. And I would like a huge rehearsal space that I could fill with eggs if that's what I wanted – a place to make noise and bang on the walls.

How do you work on developing a performance?

It's different every time. This one was a long time coming. My research led to 90 scenes that I found in pictures, small pieces of text or situations that illustrated the subject – so quite concrete. I stumbled upon the Major Arcana of Tarot, which is a collection of 22 cards whose titles symbolize things you should learn as you go through life. They have acted as a kind of dramaturgy and inspiration. If you draw a card upside-down it represents the opposite of its original meaning, which leaves us with 22 reasons to make life extremely inconvenient! So basically I distributed the cards onto the 90 scenes, cut away a lot of them and invented new ones based on the upside-down meaning of the cards. However, the Tarot cards have mainly been a tool in the process, and you have to be very clever to actually see them in the performance.

I also worked with pure movement – something very abstract. I tried to interpret all my input and my ideas and translate it into movement – one quality. Then the dancers joined me. In the first stage we worked on the quality of movement while also working with every single scene on a conceptual level. The material was put together, and then it was just a matter of carrying it out with all the participants, that had been contributing and trying things throughout the entire process. The musicians interpreted the theme and the scenes. And all the way through we worked closely with the dramaturge, the set designer and the lighting designer who have all contributed with input and

ideas that often led to new ideas. We have had long talks, made posters from old photographs, picture books – we even held a holiday photo Tarot competition.

What inspired you in the creation of Grasping?

Many, many things. The research goes back a long way. But as I said, the Major Arcana of Tarot. Mythical Nordic songs and legends. And of course the music and lyrics of Valravn. I was a fan of their work long before we got this project off the ground. The paintings of Bosch, a rap video by Atmosphere, Dante's Divine Comedy, lots of myths, the Prophecy of the Völva*, the Bible, my own stupidities and attempts to improve that have usually resulted in the complete opposite.