

Youth and the “living world”

If there is one theme that consistently emerges from a number of recent artistic creations, it is that of the « living world », our connection to nature, to its fauna and flora, to the landscape... and even the sacred nature of the link between humans and their environment. These projects are driven by the artists' commitment to sustainable development, the fight against global warming, and respect for biodiversity. You might imagine them as militant statements coming out of a resolutely political vision of theater. However, the reality is quite different. In addressing childhood experiences, the artists explore a subject with a strong poetic dimension as well as an opportunity to connect to other disciplines, especially research. The health crisis accelerated this movement and allowed projects that would have taken years to see the light of day to emerge in a way that is as unexpected as it is joyful, according to those involved.

SELF REFLECTION

Before adapting the play *Pister les créatures fabuleuses* (*Tracking Legendary Creatures*, Bayard), Pauline Ringeade remembers being a passionate reader of the book of the same name by Baptiste Morizot, a teacher and researcher in philosophy, lecturer at the University of Aix-Marseille and tracker in his free time. The idea of “tracks” emerged and crystallized in the director's mind during walks around her house and in the woods with her children aged 7 and 10 during the first confinement. “I saw how the attention we paid to tracks could transform our walks,” she says, “and how much the children were fascinated by them, giving them a real and beautiful attention, joyful attention.” Through this idea, she explores “that which goes beyond the natural world, that which allows us to dream. In order to do justice of a sort to the natural world.” Like a return to oneself, unexpected and redeeming, at a time when nature – by its proximity or its distance – has found a new place in everyone's life.

One might think they are just a fad. But these recent shows being created for young audiences are actually part of a movement. – Cyrille Planson

Annabelle Sergent had planned to direct “Givrée”, a burlesque tragedy written by Karin Serres in 2008 and never performed onstage. “But it is first and foremost a story about confinement,” she observed. “Do we as artists and do our audiences want to dive back into that after more than two years of public health crisis, the hardship of repeated lockdowns? Honestly, no,” says the director. Instead, Annabelle Sergent let herself be guided by dreams that surfaced during these periods of doubt and covid confinement. Images of nature and great plains emerged... Exploring these connections to the living world with the author Karin Serres, led to the creation of *Sauvage* (Savage) at the beginning of March. This marks the actor-director's return to the one-woman show. “The play gives voice to a girl who invokes her imagination in order to survive, to free herself and to rediscover her animal instincts. She conjures magic, the marvelous, the wild and a form of eco-feminism,” she explains.

A SHARED HOPE

Artist Valentina Arce did not set out to explore ecology either. It was young people's interest in the subject that led her to create an entirely different project than she had originally imagined. The collection of their thoughts and feelings is the foundation of her work. In 2020-2021, after the first covid confinement, an artistic residency in a middle school immersed her in the students' philosophy workshops. With them, she began to write a new show that explored the idea of change. The oft-debated questions of modern culture around identity and gender expression came up, but Valentine Arce quickly noticed there was another important subject that kept appearing. *"I met young people who shared with me their anxieties about ecology and climate change. I found their questions to be urgent, powerful, necessary and worth exploring in a way that could bring them hope."* She discovered an essay by the philosopher Jean-Philippe Pierron: *I is a we – a philosophical study of our interdependence with the natural world* (pub Actes Sud, untranslated), that brought up *"reflections on the natural world, flourishing, vivifying and poetic."* It introduces the concept of ecobiology, which revealed to the Franco-Peruvian artist a hidden part of her own history, forgotten, buried in her memories. *"My father was born on the edge of the Amazon Rainforest. That is no doubt why the song of that forest resonates so deeply in my memory,"* she says. *"Today, immersed in city life, I think about it more than ever."* As artists explore how to create for young audiences, it brings up the question of what they want to convey to the next generation. In this uncertain world, with its many disturbing events, these artists are united in their desire to transmit hope and enthusiasm to younger generations. For Valentina Arce, this project needed to *"stay far away from disaster-mongering, from statistics and hasty conclusions and be a window open to our sensitivities and to our senses."* Stéphane Michaka, author of *L'Île des jamais trop tard* (It's Never Too Late Island), which recently debuted at the National Theater of Brittany in Rennes, explores the theme of ocean conservation, the collapse of biodiversity and rising sea levels. *"I really thought a lot about all this",* he remembers, *"I even reread and rewrote my ending. In the first version, my heroine, Sarah's, island is submerged by the rising water. Her house, her parents all disappear. We reworked that ending. The idea isn't to lead children to despair but rather to bring their attention to the topic. To make them activists. I really want young people to leave the show with the feeling that they've heard a story that galvanizes them, that makes them want to leap into action."* Hope for the future.