



How do you transcribe the notion of exile onto the stage?

“Here, it is I who am an exile. From that which I would like to become.” *Ma Colombine* by Fabrice Melquiot

Exile is a theme that carries many different meanings: migration, literal exiles and exiles of the imagination, the exile of our ancestors in search of a better life. It’s a notion that young audiences can easily relate to because childhood and adolescence in themselves constitute periods of exile where we are searching for our place in the world.

The novel *Le Bleu des abeilles* (*The Blue of Bees*, not translated) by Laura Alcoba as adapted by the Cie Shabano presents different facets of exile. The main character is a child who is forced to flee to France because her parents are pursued for political reasons in Argentina. The novel describes the difficulty of an exile in which the child is propelled by the choices of adults, but it focuses particularly on her struggle to “find her place”. This is the struggle I have chosen to depict through my stage direction, the struggle of a child to find her own ground to stand on, her own homeland carved out sometimes in spite her parents’ desires.

When we talk about exile, we see arrival in the new country as the ultimate goal, when, in fact, it is only the beginning of a long journey. I bring to the stage the point of view of a young child in the middle of this journey, starting with the internal crisis imposed on her when she arrives in France where people speak a language she only partially understands. Then, when everything seems to be pushing her towards the margins, she succeeds in making the language her own, freeing herself through it. As Laura Alcoba so eloquently puts it “through the French language I felt like I had put down new roots, brought closure to my exile”. The language became both her method of survival and her new homeland.

The link between language and putting down roots resonated with me, having been immersed since childhood in two languages and multiple cultures, the different cultures of my Peruvian roots, as well as French culture. Learning French so young and being bilingual separated me from the other children, giving me the impression of being exiled in my own country. It is possible to live in one’s native country but not feel “at home”, but that’s another story.

So, how could I transcribe the notion of exile onstage? The lightness of paper became a way to transpose this new homeland made of words. The transparency of paper, the way it can

become a screen for projection or transform silhouettes allowed us to reconstruct the mental images of the child, as well as awaken the past through the letters father and daughter exchanged during the years of exile. As we staged the play, it became a veritable melee of enormous pieces of paper; paper become a proper scene partner, a collision between words and materials that expressed our vision of exile.

For the Shabano company, every creation is the beginning of a conversation. One of the most beautiful experiences we had with this show, was when we were able to give voice to compositions written by middle school students about their own experiences of exile. In situations like this, the Cie Shabano sees the role of an artist like a ferryman for emotions and vibrations that continue to resonate long after the end of the show.

Valentina Arce

Originally from Peru, Valentina Arce is the founder and director of the Théâtre du Shabano, a company of storytellers, passing on tales and legends from around the world to young audiences. In *Le Bleu des abeilles* (The Blue of Bees), now in its 7th version, Valentina Arce shines a light on the subject of exile through a scenography that is poetic and dreamlike, blending shadows and paper puppets.

2 Questions:

What does missing Meli'Mome in March/April 2021, bring up for you?

URGENCY. That's the keyword for me when I think about missing Meli'Mome again for a second year, because it highlights our vital need to meet our audience, to breathe together in the same space, to create a shared experience. The URGENCY to find solutions in the current context within strict norms, in order to render possible the existence of live theater during pandemic times. We cannot continue to passively accept being deprived of culture and education in the name of health. Live theater, even in large performance halls, has been extremely respectful of sanitary precautions. It is vital to keep the health of young audiences in mind today. Canceling the Méli'Mome festival deprives audiences, professionals in the business and theater companies of an important meeting place, one of the ambitions of which is to elevate the thinking of young people by putting them touch with important and challenging works of art.

Health is a priority, but we have known since the time of the Ancient Greeks that health includes both the body and the mind. Let us not forget, that a healthy mind is essential in order to live in a free society. A society that does not look to the well-being of its young people, that does not stimulate their capacity for critical thinking and their creative power, cannot be considered a healthy society.

Do you think you will create art differently once the covid crisis has passed?

We have already started to create and think about our creations in new ways, to put the emphasis on our encounters with young people, on giving them a voice, even co-writing with them. This period has allowed us to ask ourselves what is the most essential part of our mission. Things will never return to the way they were before, and in some ways, that's a

good thing. We are currently faced with a big question about the future of our planet, our way of life and the way we use resources. Artists are not exempt from this global project. On the contrary. We have to interrogate the notion of change in order to help us all out of our global paralysis! For those of us in the field of live performance, it is essential to continue to create, to tell stories, to share experiences with our audiences. The current context is not simply a passing problem; it allows us to find new art forms; it is another challenge that we will meet with open arms.