

## **Valentina Arce, a journey towards the living world**

This Ile-de-France-based theater company takes to the classroom to explore ecological questions without disaster-mongering, evoking memories through the senses

*Scenographer Jane Joyet imagines a set design that will bring nature inside the classroom*

For the past 20 years, the theater company Théâtre du Shabano has created multidisciplinary performances with all the tools at its disposal (text, images, sound, marionettes, shadow puppets...). While on tour with the company, often in contact with audiences of children, director Valentina Arce observed how in school *“there is little room for sensory experience, for physical and emotional expression”*. Giving voice to students became the foundation of her new project. In 2020-2021, just after the first covid confinement, her artistic residency in a middle school allowed her to exchange with young philosophy students. With them, she began to imagine 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.”* For Valentina, whose show *Le Bleu des abeilles (Bees Prefer Blue)* is touring this season, this new project needed to *“stay far away from disaster-mongering, from statistics and hasty conclusions and, rather, open a window to the senses, in the vein of our philosophy workshops.”*

### **Classroom Immersion**

In researching for this project, Valentina came upon an essay by the philosopher Jean-Philippe Pierron: *Je est un nous - Enquête philosophique sur nos interdépendances avec le vivant (I is a we – a philosophical study of our interdependence with the natural world, pub Actes Sud, untranslated)*. The text launched her *“reflections on the natural world, flourishing, vivifying and poetic.”* In it, Pierron, ex-president of La Minoterie where he collaborated with Christian Duchange and the Artifice company, invents the concept of ecobiography. For Valentina, this concept brought to the forefront an obscured part of her history, her own repressed 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 had almost forgotten the forest of my youth.”* She imagines her performance as a *“sensory stage experience, visual, olfactive and auditory. I would like to see this simple theatrical format break into the classroom and immerse the students so that, together, we can experience a new way of cohabitating with the natural world.”* Her objective is to explore primitive emotions, sensory experiences conjured by a soundscape created by the sound engineer/soundmaker. A lightweight set design integrates the classroom furniture. The show inspires student participation through the scenography and through the experience of “soundpainting.” The performance and accompanying pedagogical resources will center the ecobiography of each individual, their relationship to nature in their personal and family histories. The Shabano theater company is backed by the Théâtre Halle Roublot and the Théâtre Antoine Watteau in Nogent sur Marne but is still

looking for financial partners for production and advance bookings for this creation that will debut in December 2023-January 2024.

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