

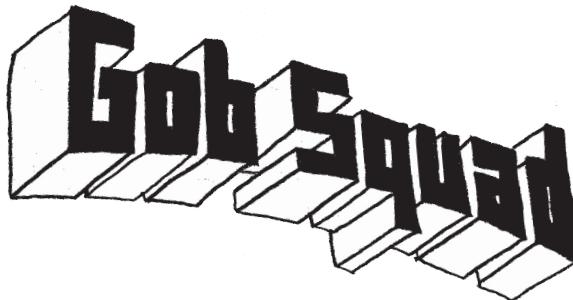
**creation**  
pictures for Dorian

PRESS PACK



PHOTO: JADE MAINADE

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## About the group

*"This feels like one of the most impossible, beautiful, courageous and epic theatrical experiences you can imagine"* The Guardian

Gob Squad is a seven headed monster, an **arts collective** with seven bosses. Gob Squad has a schizophrenic identity and a multiple split personality: hermaphrodite, binational and bilingual, both a patchwork family and a social utopia. Gob Squad have been devising, directing and performing together since 1994, working where **theatre meets art, media and real life**.

For over 20 years, Gob Squad have been searching for **new ways to combine media and performance**, producing stage shows, video installations, radio plays, interactive live films and urban interventions. The use of audio and video technology plays a prominent role in their work, with the result that **alienated forms of intimacy** have become a central theme. They try to scratch beneath the shiny, pixelated surface of the 21st century, seeking out the dark corners and hidden desires of contemporary culture.

Always on the hunt for beauty amidst the mundane, they place their work at the heart of **urban life**: in houses, shops, underground stations, car parks, hotels or directly on the street, as well as in theatres and galleries. **Everyday life and magic, banality and idealism, reality and entertainment** are all set on a collision course and the unpredictable results are captured on video.

Motivated by a desire to elevate the everyday and empower audience members to step beyond their traditional role as passive spectators, Gob Squad set up often absurdly **utopian scenarios** where meaningful collective experience and genuine **encounters involving passers-by and audience members** are suddenly possible. Audiences seem to like the feeling that anything might happen during an evening with Gob Squad. They might be asked to dance, sing or even kiss one of the performers. They might play guitar in a band, play the part of a lover or liberator in a semi-improvised film, or be asked to explain the complexities of the world to an unknown future. Or they might just simply be asked to sit and bear witness to the organised chaos unfolding on stage before them.

Gob Squad was founded in **1994**, whilst its members were still at Nottingham Trent and Giessen universities. **Berlin** has been the group's creative home since 1999. **Core members** are Johanna Freiburg, Sean Patten, Sharon Smith, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Bastian Trost and Simon Will. Other artists are invited to collaborate on particular projects. The group is managed by Eva Hartmann.

Gob Squad's international reputation has grown steadily since coming to prominence at documenta X in 1997. Their productions have been shown on all the continents apart from Antarctica where projects such as **SUPER NIGHT SHOT** (2003), **GOB SQUAD'S KITCHEN** (2007, winner of New York's Drama Desk Award), **SAVING THE WORLD** (2008, winner of the Goethe Preis at the Impulse Festival), **BEFORE YOUR VERY EYES** (2011, selected for Germany's Theatertreffen) and **WESTERN SOCIETY** (2013) have received wide acclaim.



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PHOTO: GARRETT DAVIS/CAPTURE IMAGING

# creation Pictures for Dorian

## About the show

***"It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors."***

Oscar Wilde: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

**Creation** is the realm of gods and artists, who create beauty through sheer will and their own bare hands. But who decides what is beautiful? And what are the concealed mechanisms of power that lie within the triangular relationship of artist, object and viewer?

Gob Squad Arts Collective have travelled the world for the past 25 years and now find themselves well and truly middle-aged, with no desire to exit the stage just yet. In *Creation (Pictures for Dorian)*, they are joined onstage by a diverse group of local performers a generation younger and a generation older than themselves. Their aim? To peep behind the vanity-mirror and search for answers to questions of beauty, morality, ageing and power, and to playfully ask why they so crave the eye of the beholder.

The project is inspired by Oscar Wilde's character, Dorian Gray, who meddles in the domain of the gods with the aid of a magical painting. He suspends the process of ageing and remains young and beautiful forever, at a terrible cost. There's probably a little bit of Dorian in all of us. What happens when he is denied the limelight forever?

## Credits

**Concept and Direction:** Gob Squad

**Performance:** Johanna Freiburg, Sean Patten, Sharon Smith, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Bastian Trost, Simon Will and local guests

**Sound Design:** Sebastian Bark, Jeff McGrory

**Video Design:** Miles Chalcraft

**Costume Design:** Ingken Benesch

**Set Realisation:** Lena Mody

**Lighting Design and Technical Management:**  
Chris Umney

**Dramaturgy and Production Management:**  
Christina Runge

**Artistic Assistant:** Mat Hand

**Costume Assistant:** Claudia Gali

**Set Realisation Assistant:** Julia Buntzel

**Production Assistant:** Ben Mohai

**Directing Interns:** Patty Kim, Amina Nouns

**Gob Squad Management:** Eva Hartmann

**Touring Manager:** Mat Hand

**UK Producer:** Ayla Suveren

### **First performance**

May 2nd 2018 at HAU Hebbel am Ufer Berlin, Germany.

*Creation (Pictures for Dorian)* is a production by Gob Squad and HAU Hebbel am Ufer Berlin. Developed with support from Center Theatre Group, Los Angeles, CA. In co-production with Münchner Kammerspiele, Schauspiel Leipzig, Wiesbaden Biennale, Schlachthaus Theater Bern. A LIFT, Brighton Festival and Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts commission. An Imagine 2020 (2.0) project, supported by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union. Supported using public funding by Arts Council of England.

*Creation (Pictures for Dorian)* is funded by the state of Berlin, Chancellery of the Berlin Senate for Culture and Europe.

Gob Squad is regularly funded by the state of Berlin (2015 – 2019), Chancellery of the Berlin Senate for Culture and Europe.

# creation Pictures for Dorian

## Self-Portrait

### AN INTERVIEW WITH GOB SQUAD

*Gob Squad has existed since 1994. Can you still remember how it was in the beginning? Was there the feeling at that time that you wanted to make alternative theatre? Could you perhaps briefly say how you came together?*

— For me, at the time when we met in England, it was very liberating that the starting point for the work was not text. Text was developed as well, but it wasn't like in Germany where theatre is very strongly connected to text, actually a theatre of literature. Because we went out to real places from the start and had the possibility to frame daily life and occupy it artistically, we approached it with a strong visual way of thinking. In the early work we didn't use video at all. However, it was still a very visual approach and it totally satisfied me.

— We referred to it as Live Art. When we participated in the Diskurs festival at the University of Giessen for the first time they swapped the 'v' for an 'f' and translated it as 'Life Art'. We liked that.

### WORKING COLLECTIVELY

*Was Gob Squad always six people? That probably emerged as a good structure?*

— I think it has more to do with the relationships with each other. It is like being in a relationship, like being married to five people.

— I can't imagine it with more than six or seven.

— It would be hard just to get everyone round a table to meet. There are always decisions that can only be made with all of us present, such as when it is about making a

change of direction, initiating something new for the future or changing the basic principles that we agreed upon.

— In Work, our second professional piece, there came a point for Sarah and I [Sean Patten] where we decided that we actually wanted to form a group and work as a collective. Although we had already written the concept we didn't want to take on the artistic direction. That wasn't our dream. Our dream was a collective.

— Working in a group can be really hard work.

— I don't think very well on my own. I need to talk to people to develop my ideas. When we don't have the time to work collectively during the conceptual phase I find it awful. You might think it would be more like 'at last I have the chance to do everything exactly as I want,' but actually the opposite is true. Of course, when working in a group you also reach points where you've had enough. There's sometimes a moment of frustration and you think, 'Why don't we just do what I think is obvious?' but in the end, working collectively is something we all very much enjoy.

— Being a collective means that all of those who participate in the production of a piece of work have a personal relationship to its material and its making. Everybody feels a responsibility for the work as a whole and everyone has a right to their own interpretation of the work, as does the audience so even they can become part of the collective when they see a show.\*

— You realise that everyone has a mutual interest, that everyone is passionate about the work, motivates each other and that each person feels responsible for the collective project.

*Have different skills emerged over time?*

— Of course we have different abilities that we try to utilise. That is also true in the theatre business, but there there's this classic hierarchy whereby a director makes the pool of ideas his own and his name appears on the programme in the end. Personally, I find this an unsatisfactory way of collaborating.

*Is the aesthetic concept of performance and your work as a collective inseparable?*

— Yes, because the roles of the author, the character and the actor come together in the role of the performer. We have to test out our ideas ourselves and put ourselves on the line for those ideas. As a collective, we reflect the multiplicity and complexity of the culture in which we live. We don't have six identical positions and tastes.

— We always tend to make ensemble pieces. There's never really a lead role in a Gob Squad piece. There's never a lone hero, heroine or protagonist.

*...continued on next page*

# creation Pictures for Dorian

## WILL THE REAL MR G. SQUAD PLEASE STAND UP?

— Almost all of the creative industries are dominated by the idea of individual artists and this idea perpetuates itself, so people often get confused by the fact that Gob Squad has no director. Press officers often ask for a picture of him.

— As a collective, we are committed to the belief that a non-hierarchical team made up of many people can often create a more complex work than a single artist. We thereby counter the model of conventional theatre which postulates and celebrates the cult of the genius of a single director, author or artist.

— In Germany, or anywhere in the art world, there is a longing for genius. The genius of the individual. Being in a collective somehow relieves this incredible pressure. I realise, however, that it is a bit alienating not only in the theatre scene but also in the art scene generally. People don't really know how to deal with it.

## STARTING POINTS

— The starting point for a piece of work can originate from many sources. A request from an institution might spark an existing idea, or the desire to work in a particular place, or to respond to a particular moment in time which might result in the beginnings of a new idea. The goal is to find an idea so clear that you can sum it up in one sentence. This is a fundamental concept. Then we begin accumulating images and moments and look for rules and structural principles. The pieces learn from one another. Often, the things that are abandoned, the 'waste' produced in a working process, become the beginnings of something new.

## REHEARSALS

— The more we work with interaction and open structures the more we need a test audience and test runs in order to try out our ideas. For several years now these open Try-Outs have become part of our rehearsal and creative process. In this way we have learnt (in front of and with an audience) to evaluate our rehearsals and Try-Outs. The feedback from these semi-public evaluations is really valuable in the long term even if in the moment it can be painful.

## THE FOUR R's

— We usually work with structures that combine visual choreographed moments, elements of improvisation and the unforeseeable. A large part of the rehearsal process consists of finding the balance between those three elements. How much can you leave open for improvisation, at the mercy of reality and the unforeseeable, and how strict should the framework be? Then you try to set out an order of events. We start to develop initial, sketchy structures relatively early on even though the individual elements are not at all clear. It is simply a way to be able to proceed without a script.

— Much of Gob Squad's work is based on a dramatic structure that makes it possible to show the pieces without, as is usual in theatre, reproducing the same sequence of events again and again. A Gob Squad cue list is used more as an arrangement to improvise between the performers or gives a framework for the moments of interaction with the audience or passers-by. It is always our aim to find a running order that gives space to both set events as well as the unforeseeable. Our main dramaturgical work is to balance reality and form, developing strategies to be able to react to random events within a dramaturgy.

— With the benefit of hindsight you could say that we have a rule of 'Four R's': Rules, Rhythm, Reality and Risk. Those are the four key ingredients whether in the theatre or out on the streets. You have to have something of each.

— Risk has become an integral part of our work. The unforeseen and those elements that we don't/can't plan and aren't able to predict make up a large part of what interests us about Performance and Art. In our work we often seek out encounters with passers-by, an interaction with the audience, and the conditions and contingency of the street. We do this because we want to surprise and challenge ourselves and because we want to grow and develop as artists and performers.

*Published in Revolver 21, Franz Müller in conversation with Johanna Freiburg, Sean Patten and Bastian Trost on 3.6.2009 in Berlin.*



PHOTO: GARRETT DAVIS/CAPTURE IMAGING



## PRESS QUOTES

### ON GOB SQUAD:

*Gob Squad is the one company of whom I'm a fan first, and a critic second. They're more like a band than almost any other theatre company.*

**WHATSONSTAGE.COM**

*This feels like one of the most impossible, beautiful, courageous and epic theatrical experiences you can imagine.*

**THE GUARDIAN**

*Gob Squad virgins, please stop reading now, and go get your tickets!*

**TIME OUT NEW YORK (on WESTERN SOCIETY)**

### ON CREATION (Pictures for Dorian)

**THE GUARDIAN**

★★★★★☆

*A woosily beautiful meditation on intention, perception, what we see and what remains invisible... [Gob Squad] suggest that while youth and beauty stop us in our tracks and make us stare, the ravages of decay and time bring something beautiful, too.*

**THE STAGE**

★★★★★☆

*Unforgettable... sly yet sumptuous, playfully experimental yet heady and deeply human. The result is a transfixing and revealing meditation on youth and age, art and life, visibility and invisibility, and the power triangle of art-spectator-subject... It is sly yet sumptuous, playfully experimental yet heady and deeply human... This theatrical triptych encourages you not to grasp at youth but to savour ageing – and makes a powerful artistic case for more multi-generational theatrical meetings.*

**ARTS JOURNAL**

*A hugely engaging deep dive of a piece... The experience of the older volunteers is what makes them shine: they're beautiful not despite the lives they've lived, but because of them.*

### LOS ANGELES TIMES

*Humour and unexpectedly honest personal revelations from each of the nine participants transform heady theoretical and philosophical explorations into relatable, entertaining, strikingly human theater.*

### TAGESSPIEGEL (Berlin)

*Gob Squad zappen sich munter durch die Kunstgeschichte und betreiben überhaupt eine ausgesuchte lustvolle Selbstbespiegelung*

*Gob Squad zap through the history of art and make a particularly pleasurable self-portrait*

### INFO RADIO RBB

*Es ist eine eher stille, ziemlich kluge Meditation über Jugend und Alter, Kunst und Schönheitskult, Unschuld und Berechnung.*

*A quiet, rather clever meditation on youth and age, art and the beauty cult, innocence and reckoning.*

### die-deutsche-buehne.de

*Humorvoll, schräg und vieldeutig... vielschichtig, selbstkritisch, politisch.*

*Humorous, weird and ambiguous ... multilayered, self-critical, political.*

### BERLINER ZEITUNG

*Gob Squad heben das Leben in ihrer Kunst, die Kunst im Leben und das Sprechen darüber auf eine neue Meditationsstufe performativer Komplexität... Die Tableaux vivants rappeln sich vom Albernen zum Komplexen, vom Kitschigen zum Nackten. Naiv ist das erst, aber am Ende weit und groß.*

*Gob Squad bring life into their art, art into life and talk about it with a new level of meditative performative complexity... The tableaux vivants scramble from absurdity to complexity, from the kitsch to the nude. What seems naive at the start, is deep and pervasive by the end.*

### LEIPZIGER VOLKSZEITUNG

*Ein zu Recht bejubeltes Wahrnehmungsspiel um die Dreifaltigkeit aus Künstler, Kunstwerk und Betrachter... Gelingt es Gob Squad hier doch, einen Raum zu schaffen, einen Schutzraum der Kunst, in dem man gerade wegen der lustvollen Maskerade und artifiziellen Selbst-Inszenierung ganz ohne Maske von Verlusten, Diskriminierung, bösen Kindheitserinnerungen, Ängsten sprechen kann... Sie agieren mit einer angenehm ironisch-nonchalanten Leichte, die auch in den emotionalen Augenblicken des Abends wunderbar dessen schwelende Balance zu bewahren versteht.*

*A justifiably acclaimed game of perception about the trinity of artist, artwork and viewer... Gob Squad manages to create a safe space of art where the joyful masquerade and candid self-portrayal makes it possible to talk about loss, discrimination, fears and bad childhood memories... They operate with a charmingly ironic and easygoing lightness of hand, keeping a wonderful balance even in the emotional moments of the evening.*

# creation Pictures for Dorian

THE GUARDIAN

07.06.18



A woozy walk on the Wilde side



PHOTO: DAVID BALTZER [left-right: Naomi Odhiambo, Parisa Madani, Christopher Adams-Cohen, Simon Will, Berit Stumpf]

**Beauty**, creativity and decay are neatly entwined in this latest show from the Anglo-German company Gob Squad, who riff on the triangle of relationships in Oscar Wilde's *A Picture of Dorian Gray* between Basil the painter, Lord Henry the spectator and Dorian the subject or artwork.

If that sounds a mite dry, well, yes, sometimes it is. But it is also slyly funny. As Johanna Freiburg, Berit Stumpf and Simon Will are joined on stage by a group of guest performers ranging in age from 19 to their late 60s, all of whom are used to being gazed at, this becomes a woozily beautiful meditation on intention, perception, what we see and what remains invisible.

The guest performers become the art objects: arranged and wheeled across the stage in heroic poses; left gazing into mirrors or a video camera as if searching for their own souls; repeatedly taking their bows on stage.

What makes this poignant is the sense that it is personal for everyone involved. The trio of drama students, still unmoulded by life, put their best side forward to the camera as they search for identity and happiness. The older group know that there is more behind them than in front, and that they are heading towards their final exit.

Stuck in the middle of this endlessly reflecting triptych, which turns the stage into a metaphorical hall of mirrors, is Gob Squad. They are no longer theatre's radical young iconoclasts, but middle-aged and facing up to personal and professional challenges. You could think of this show as their midlife crisis, but it is an artful one that melds post-dramatic theatre with ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging, to suggest that while youth and beauty stop us in our tracks and make us stare, the ravages of decay and time bring something beautiful, too.

Lyn Gardner

# creation Pictures for Dorian

THE STAGE 08.06.18



The faces of theatre past, present and yet to come are brought together in this unforgettable new work by British-German collective Gob Squad.

A devised riff on the themes of Wilde's The Portrait of Dorian Gray, it recruits six Brighton performers – three over 60, and three Sussex University drama students – to work alongside three middle-aged members of the once radical young Gob Squad. What all share is a love of the limelight – plus an ability to be quite exquisitely natural and open beneath it.

Using cameras, frames, rotating plinths, and mirrored screens that ripple darkly in memory of Narcissus, Gob Squad positions its recruits in a series of baroque poses. The company members want to project their pasts, and apprehend their futures. The guest performers are 'material', casually manhandled into conceptual artworks with titles like And You Can Never Get It Back. Comic parallels are drawn with Ikebana, the ancient Japanese art of flower arranging, and the modern soul-selling art of Instagram.

The result is a transfixing and revealing meditation on youth and age, art and life, visibility and invisibility, and the power triangle of art-spectator-subject.

It is sly yet sumptuous, playfully experimental yet heady and deeply human. Creation (Pictures for Dorian) is also more calculated than it appears: a slightly baggy middle section speaks to Gob Squad's experience of touching 50. This theatrical triptych encourages you not to grasp at youth but to savour ageing – and makes a powerful artistic case for more multi-generational theatrical meetings.

Bella Todd



PHOTO: DAVID BALTZER [left-right: Sean Patten, Christopher Adams-Cohen]

# creation Pictures for Dorian

LOS ANGELES TIMES

OCT 20, 2018

## Mixing old, young, and those in-between, Gob Squad's improvisational antics at REDCAT demand to be seen.

Less glamorous than youth and less revered than old age, the middle age years are often overlooked. For some, it is a contradictory time: interminable and fleeting, depressing and invigorating. For the British-German performance collective Gob Squad, who are now in their middle age years, they are facing it head on and cracking some jokes along the way. "Creation (Pictures for Dorian)" is the latest piece of witty, improvisatory video-art theater from the self-described "seven headed monster" troupe, who has performed together for a quarter of a century. This weekend, they are back at REDCAT — where they previously presented "Western Society," "Super Night Shot" and "Kitchen" — with this U.S. premiere co-presented with Center Theatre Group.

Drawing inspiration from Oscar Wilde's ageless tale about refusing to age, the focus here is less on Dorian's hedonism and its consequences, and more on the passage of time and the complex relationship between artist, artwork and viewer. To tell their jam-packed, hyper-conceptual, nonlinear, non-narrative art story, Gob Squad uses locally sourced material, namely six Los Angeles actors. The average age of three of the actors is 22. The average age of the other three L.A. actors is 80. Three Gob Squad members with an average age of 49 — Sarah Thom, Bastian

Trost and Sean Patten on Thursday night — complete the cast of nine. They're three sets of three representing three phases of life; triangular and triadic relationships are a recurring theme. "It gets you out of binary thinking," Patten remarked as he and Thom rattled off a list of things that come in threes: "Past, present, future."

"Father, Son, Holy Ghost."

"Gin, tonic, ice?"

Snappy, dry British humor and quippy banter propels Gob Squad's sometimes self-indulgent but always visually and aesthetically engaging exploration of art theory, the human experience of aging and the desire — especially by actors such as themselves — to be seen.

If "Creation" sounds like navel-gazing art-theater made by art-theater people for an art-theater audience, that's because it is. But humor and unexpectedly honest personal revelations from each of the nine participants transform heady theoretical and philosophical explorations into relatable, entertaining, strikingly human theater.

Throughout 90 well-executed minutes, Thom, Bastian and Patten primarily play the role of artists-creators. Sparse pastel costumes, floral arrangements, picture frames and mirrors are the only props. For material, they look to the three young and three older actors, using their bodies and talents to create still life and portrait "paintings," sculptures, performance art, storytelling and, as they call it, "one of those long video pieces you see in a museum that loops and you can't tell if it has a beginning or an end."

As we watch them create (and discuss and dissect the process of creation), universal truths about

youth and aging reveal themselves effortlessly. Seemingly off-hand comments give us insight into the details of each actor's real life: "My son just moved out of the house." "My mother died last year." "When I recovered from my prescription pill addiction, I got married again."

Nic Prior, a young actor and performance artist, dreams about what middle age might be like. Prior pictures success, maybe a MacArthur genius award, a loving partner and children, and enough money to fund art projects, airy lofts and billowy denim fashion ensembles. The youthful optimism is tangible.

One of the older actors, Dan Guerrero, spends most of his time on stage dancing and performing beloved routines from glory days gone by. If you missed one of the best performances of his life — singing "Soon It's Gonna Rain" in a 1964 production of "The Fantasticks" in Saratoga Springs — you can catch a reprisal here. And this iteration might be even better than the first.

In the end, nine actors asks us to look at them, to applaud them, to see them and admire them. None do this more poignantly than Thom, who strips off her stage clothes and puts her naked body on full display. It's a cliché, she says, a theatrical trope. In fact, she's been naked on this very stage before.

Earlier in the night, Thom noted that as a middle-aged woman in society, she often feels invisible, disappearing. But as she casually lifts up her left breast and tucks her mike pack under it for safekeeping, she reminds us that whatever the gaze — male, feminist, artist, viewer — the middle aged female body is not to be ignored. But now we're all looking. She will never be invisible again. No matter their age, everyone has a story to tell.

Catherine Womack

# creation Pictures for Dorian

BERLINER ZEITUNG

03.05.18

## Auf Dorians rutschigen Spuren : Gob Squads große Kunst der Selbstspiegelung

Die alten Japaner hatten vielleicht recht. Nicht ob etwas „schön“ sei oder „hässlich“, sondern ob es „meisterhaft“ gemacht ist, war entscheidend. Meisterhaft in der Balance zwischen Arrangiertsein und doch ganz Natur. Die Performerin Sharon Smith steht im Dämmer der HAU2-Bühne und steckt ein paar Blumen und Zweige zu einem Gesteck. Ikebana, erklärt sie, ist die perfekte Verbindung dieser zwei: Blumenleben und Blumenkunst. Und wie sie dann die Schere ansetzt, wird unverkennbar, dass sie noch einige Dekaden braucht zur Meisterschaft darin.

Die Blumenkunst spielt trotzdem eine zentrale Rolle in den zwei witzig-ernsten Stunden, in denen Sharon und ihre Gob Squad-Kollegen Berit Stumpf und Simon Will ihr mittlerweile 25-jähriges Performativtheater als eine Art menschliches Ikebana zerschnipseln und wieder zusammen stecken. Oder besser gesagt: wie sie das Leben in ihrer Kunst, die Kunst im Leben und das Sprechen darüber auf eine neue Meditationsstufe performativer Komplexität heben.

## Ärgernis im Kulturkampf

Wer nun schon wieder den Kopf schüttelt über so viel Selbstbezüglichkeit, der irrt. Es ist hohe Zeit für lockere Bespiegelungsabende wie diesen, denn dass das Performance-Kunst hartnäckig als banale Authentizitäts-Show oder bloße Realitätsverdopplung von Ich-Performern missdeutet wird, gehört zu den Ärgernissen gegenwärtiger Kulturmärkte.

Es stimmt zwar, auch Gob Squad treten nicht in fiktiven Rollen auf, sondern erst Mal als sie selbst. Doch ist dieses „Selbst“ immer das schillerndste Rollenkostüm, das sich denken lässt. Genau damit jonglieren die Performer in ihren offenen, durchdachten und riskanten Interaktion. Wie weit entfernt dieses performative Sichaussetzen einer solchen Spielsituation von bloßen Ich-Shows ist, demonstriert auch dieser Abend eindrucksvoll. Und was wäre besser dafür geeignet, als auf den rutschigen Spuren des Grenzgängers Dorian Gray zu tappen, den der Großmeister der Ich-Illusion Oscar Wilde zum tragischen Romanhelden machte zwischen seinem lebendig werdenden Portrait und seinem künstlich einfrierenden Leben.

## Angst vor dem Ich

Die Angst des Künstlers vor zu viel „Ich“ treibt also auch die drei Gob Squader an. Bevor sie nun versuchen, ihr „Material“ nach ihren Vorstellungen zu formen, verstecken sie sich selbst unter Strumpfmasken. Ihr „Material“ – das sind natürlich Menschen: drei betörend junge und drei sichtbar vom Alter gezeichnete Performer mit fantastischen Kopfbedeckungen, die nun in Posen und Portraits, als Spiegel- und Sinnbilder, Metaphern und Geschichten in Rahmen und Räumen arrangiert werden. Abbilder? Nein, nie und doch immer. Die Tableaux vivants rappeln sich vom Albernen zum Komplexen, vom Kitschigen zum Nackten. Naiv ist das erst, aber am Ende weit und groß.

Doris Meierhenrich

# creation Pictures for Dorian

ARTS JOURNAL  
08.06.18

## Propwatch: the flowers in Creation (Pictures for Dorian)

Beauty. Beautiful. Beautifully. It's just possible I overuse these words. Here's the thing, though – to me, beauty isn't all that. When the British Museum held an exhibition about the body in ancient Greek art called Defining Beauty, I didn't have a sliver of interest. I'm not beautiful, so how would it speak to me, other than making me drift past chiselled statuary, perving over aloof marble? Stage a show called This Way Ugly, and you'll have my attention.

Still, my adjectives betray me. I may not have applied them to how people appear – the instances I've found seem to describe choices, not faces – but I'm clearly not immune to the idea. Nor are Gob Squad, the Berlin-British performance collective who brought Creation (Pictures For Dorian) to London as part of LIFT. It's not so much an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, more a deceptively relaxed conversation about art, and how we invest in it as participant or spectator.

### Time comes for beauty

As we enter the Purcell Room, Sean Patten is perched on the front of the stage, sketching audience members he finds interesting, while Sarah Thom is arranging flowers at the back. This isn't mere decoration, she tells us, but the Japanese art

of ikebana ('I did a three-hour workshop'). It's an art of balance and composition, a process in which beauty builds over time. And time comes for beauty – especially when, as here, Thom trains a camera and a heatlamp on her floral composition, to see what blooms, what fades during the 90-minute show.

In Wilde's novel, Dorian's beauty makes him a work of art – on canvas, but also in life, as he preserves that deathless attraction by a supernatural pact, in which the hidden portrait ages while he remains immaculate. The middle-aged performance warriors of Gob Squad (Thom and Patten are joined by Bastian Trost) also try and arrange life into art, using two trios of volunteers – three student actors aged around 20, three senior performers upwards of 70. They're all dressed, posed, filmed; asked to speak and then modify their speech. When the Gobbers are (briefly) satisfied they trundle a gilt frame in front of them, give the tableau a title which scrolls in cursive over the screen at the back (photo by David Baltzer, top). But, after a moment, they remake the scenario or propose a new one – beauty isn't stuck here, but fleet, on the move, wriggling out of reach.

A midlife show, if not a midlife crisis, Creation takes the frets of adulthood – a body that feels older than the mind, a shuttle between feeling wide-eyed and weary, a destabilising mismatch between the person the world sees and the one you feel yourself to be. The company's warmth ushers you into reflection; it's a hugely engaging deep dive of a piece. In my own misfit adulthood, I felt protective of the younger trio, enchanted by the older one, involved in the

Gobbers themselves (I can't tell you how much I want Thom to be my friend).

Gob Squad's show is also a kind of welcoming morality play. For Wilde's antihero, experience is inimical to beauty. Every act a line, every emotion a wrinkle. Every sin a livid deformation. But the experience of the older volunteers is what makes them shine: their resolve, their reverses, their continuing curiosity. It's lovely to follow Claudia Boulton's rackete chronicle of the passing decades, or Stuart Feather's unquenchable poise. Smiles break out when birdlike Lieve Carchon recreates an off-kilter number from her performing past to close the show. They're beautiful not despite the lives they've lived, but because of them.

Towards the end of the show, we return to the flowers, who have been enduring time's hot passing. Some buds have wilted on the stem; a brazen bloom refuses to wither; the stick is still a stick. It's not quite the arrangement it was. It feels more, far more, beautiful.

David Jays

# creation Pictures for Dorian

WIESBADENER KURIER

04.09.18

WIESBADEN - Und immer wieder prallen bei der Biennale 2018 die Kontraste aufeinander. Das funktioniert auch mit theatralischen Mitteln – obwohl das Theater ja derzeit nur noch ein „nachgenutztes“ ist. Aber auch in dem gibt es solche krassen Doku-Performances wie „Cock, cock... who's there?“ von Samira Elagoz, die damit ihre eigene Vergewaltigung aufarbeitet. Und gleich im Anschluss die charmante, gelassene und sehr weise Produktion des Performance-Kollektivs „Gob Squad“ rund ums Thema Altern. Mit ihrem Abend „Creation (Pictures for Dorian)“ gastierten Johanna Freiburg, Sean Patten und Berit Stumpf im gut gefüllten Malsaal.

Was hat Dorian Gray mit Ikebana gemeinsam? Bei Dorian Gray, der janusköpfigen Romanfigur von Oscar Wilde, da geht es um Bilder, die zu unseren Stellvertretern werden: Ein Porträt altert für ihn und zeigt dabei zunehmend seine innere Verrohung – während er selbst jung bleibt und makellos. Konsequent filmen „Gob Squad“ 90 Minuten lang das Bühnengeschehen, versehen dort entstehende, fein choreografierte Bilder

– beispielsweise von ebenfalls verwesenden Ikebana-Gebinden – mit poetischen Titeln wie „Die Welt gehört dir einen Sommer lang“ und arrangieren sechs nur für diese Vorstellungen rekrutierte Menschen aus der Region ebenfalls zu erstarrenden, künstlich schönen Posen. Was auch mal beklauschte, tagesaktuelle Aufforderungen enthält, wie: „Mach uns doch die Erdogan-Statue.“

Das Material Mensch, mit dem die drei subversiven Chronisten der tragischen, aber unvermeidlichen Lebenswirklichkeit vergänglicher Attraktivität ihre präzise komponierten, oft fast barocken Bilder formen, sind drei junge und drei ältere Menschen. Jeder hat dabei quasi seinen Spiegel – und tatsächliche, folienbezogene Rahmen wiederum lassen immer wieder jung und alt miteinander in einen Dialog treten.

„Wer unter die Oberfläche taucht, der tut es auf eigene Gefahr“, heißt es dabei. Aber er findet: Vor allem drei wunderbare, lebenserfahrene Akteure, die in der Produktion mitspielen. Mit welcher Grazie der elegante Damenimitator aus seinem Leben in Variétés erzählt. Oder der 92-jährige Schauspieler, der sich eigentlich geschworen hatte, nur noch bis zum 90. Lebensjahr auf der Bühne zu stehen – und sein „Come-

back“ an diesem Abend bravourös meisterte. Es sind Lebensgeschichten wie diese, die deutlich machen: „Wir sind unser eigenes Kunstwerk. Wir sind noch nicht fertig. Wir wollen immer mehr.“ Das sah das Publikum auch so und zollte dem Ensemble reichlich Beifall.

Birgitta Lamparth

# creation Pictures for Dorian

Info radio RBB  
03.05.18

Mit ihrem neuen Projekt *Creation (Pictures for Dorian)* - inspiriert von Oscar Wildes Romanfigur Dorian Gray - will das deutsch-britische Künstlerkollektiv Gob Squad in und hinter den Spiegel der Eitelkeiten blicken und nach Antworten auf Fragen von Schönheit, Moral, Altern und Macht suchen. Ute Büsing war bei der Premiere im Berliner Theater Hebbel am Ufer.

Es ist eine eher stille, ziemlich kluge Meditation über Jugend und Alter, Kunst und Schönheitskult, Unschuld und Berechnung.

## Bin ich noch jung und schön genug?

Im 25 Jahr ihres Bestehens rücken sich Gob Squad einmal mehr selbst in den Mittelpunkt, betrachten sich im Spiegel. Simple Frage: Bin ich noch jung und schön genug, um zu performen, mich dem ungnädigen Blick der Öffentlichkeit auszusetzen? Sinfällig aufgestellt wird das magische Dreieck zwischen Künstler, Kunstobjekt und Betrachter. Zunächst übernimmt Ikebana die Bühne, das Blumenbinden zwischen abgestorbenem Alten, und jungen Frischen. Eine der drei Performer in schwarzer Attentäter- oder Bankräuberklut will sich ganz dieser uralten zen-meditativen Kunst hingeben. Gemeiner Weise wird eine Wärmelampe angebracht, die während der zweistündigen Aufführung den Prozess des Verwelkens beschleunigt.

## Was passiert, wenn die gängigen Marktmechanismen nicht mehr greifen?

Wie der im echten Leben abläuft, wird dann ausführlich anhand lebender Kunstobjekte durchdekliniert. Gob Squad holen sich jeweils eine weiß gekleidete Dreiergruppe junger Künstler um die 22 und älter, jenseits der 70, auf die Bühne. Zunächst spiegeln sie sich selbst wie einst Dorian Grey im Zauber ewiger Jugend und richten die jungen Darsteller blumenbekränzt in aparten Posen an, lassen sie Schaulaufen wie auf dem Modesteg. Diese Vorgänge werden gerahmt und gezielt ins Bild gesetzt, durch ihre mediale Verdoppelung und die Projektion auf große Leinwand. Was passiert, wenn die gängigen Marktmechanismen nicht mehr greifen, demonstrieren dann allein mit ihrer veränderten Physis die alten Künstler. Zusammen mit den Jungen werden sie wiederum zu Bildnissen angeordnet. In einem komischen Moment zur Jungfrau mit dem Kind, das an der entblößten Brust trinkt.

## Das Private wird immer mitverhandelt

Kurz vor Schluss zeigt eine entkleidete Gob-Squad-Performerin um die 50, wie ihre Brustwarzen beim Milchgeben gelitten haben. Man muss sich schon ohne Scheu einlassen auf diese sich allmählich entwickelnde Vorstellung, in der Englisch überwiegt und bei der - das gehört wie die mediale Vermittlung zu Gob Squads Markenzeichen - immer auch das Private mitverhandelt wird, beispielsweise wenn die alten Darsteller erzählen, was sie früher angetrieben hat und heute noch auf die Bühne treibt.

Schließlich gruppieren sich die Gob-Squad-Akteure wiederum zu Bildnissen zwischen den Jungen und den Alten. Sie nehmen ihre Positionen in der Mitte des Lebens an und lassen keinen Zweifel daran, dass sie eitel genug sind, weiter im Rampenlicht stehen zu wollen. Das eingeweihte Berliner Premierenpublikum beklatscht das.

Ute Büsing



PHOTO: DAVID BALTZER [left-right: Sharon Smith, Berit Stumpf, Simon Will]

# creation Pictures for Dorian

LEIPZIGER VOLKSZEITUNG

14.06.18

## Kreisen im Dreieck

Alle guten Dinge sind drei. Zweimal schon hat das deutsch-britische Performancekollektiv Gob Squad in den letzten Jahren Arbeiten am Leipziger Schauspiel gezeigt. Jetzt waren sie ein drittes Mal zu Gast – und das erstmals auf der großen Bühne des Hauses, wo sie am Dienstag und gestern mit „Creation (Pictures for Dorian)“ ein zu Recht bejubeltes Wahrnehmungsspiel um die Dreifaltigkeit aus Künstler, Kunstwerk und Betrachter entwickeln. Erneut haben sich Gob Squad dafür ihrer Theaterkonzeption der Publikumsinteraktion verschrieben. Also einer performativen Form, die bei den bisherigen Leipziger Gob-squad-aufführungen („Super Night Shot“, „War and Peace“) bestens zeigte, wie und warum so ein Konzept ausgesprochen schnell zur intellektuellen und formalen Leerlauf-masche werden kann.

Aber das soll jetzt nicht das Thema sein, weil *Creation (Pictures for Dorian)* alles andere als Leerlauf ist. Offenbart sich diese Produktion doch vielmehr als ein suggestiv konzentrisches Kreisen in einem spitzwinkligen Dreieck. Und das auf einer Guckkastenbühne!

Auf die haben sich die Gob Squad Performer Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom und Bastian Trost sechs Gäste geholt. Nicht spontan, nicht wie so häufig unmittelbar vor oder während der Aufführung, sondern schon vorher per Casting. Ausgewählt wurden drei junge und drei alte Menschen, allesamt mit verschiedensten Bühnenerfahrungen, allesamt aus Leipzig. Drei junge, die vornehmlich in die Zukunft blicken, weil sie das Leben vor sich liegen haben. Und drei alte, die vornehmlich zurück schauen auf das Leben und deren Zukunft ähnlich überschaubar bemessen ist wie die Vergangenheit der jungen.

Zwischen diesen beiden Polen (oder dramaturgischen Eckpunkten) platzieren sich Stumpf/Thom/Trost nicht nur als Spielmacher, sondern auch als die, die altersmäßig in der Mitte des Lebens stehen. Und somit den Scheitelpunkt darstellen innerhalb dieser theatralen Trigonometrie, die so gesehen erst einmal nur eine der soziologischen Versuchsanordnung wäre. Also langweilig. Doch kommt genau an dieser Stelle Oscar Wildes „Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray“ ins Spiel. Und „Spiel“ ist sehr wörtlich zu nehmen, gerade weil der Plot der Geschichte hier eben keine weitere Rolle spielt. Es also nicht um die Hybris eines Hedonisten geht, der dank dunkler Kräfte ein Porträt von sich altern lässt, um selber jung zu bleiben. Aber um diese Sehnsucht dahinter, um die geht es schon. Um die Möglichkeiten eines Überdauerns, die die Kunst uns inmitten ununterbrochener Vergänglichkeit suggeriert. Um die Verzerrungen der Wahrnehmung dessen, was wir sehen beim Blick in den Spiegel, um die „Creation“ die wir auch in unseren eigenen Augen sind. Um die Schönheit, die dahinwelkt wie die Träume von der Zukunft und die Jahre gelebten Lebens. Ganz ähnlich jenen Blumen im Ikebana-gebinde, die hier gleich zu Beginn per Rotlichtlampe und von einer Videokamera beobachtet dem Verwelken anheim gegeben werden.

Zur so simplen wie starke Allegorie fügen die drei Gob-squad-spielmacher mal launig plaudernd, mal insistierend ihre sechs Mitspieler zu einem Tableau vivant nach dem anderen. Und als folge man dabei einer ganz eigenen, geheimen dramaturgischen „Line of Beauty and Grace“, entwickelt das gerade aus dem Gestus des Skizzierten und auch Improvisierten eine überraschend ästhetische Wirkung, die über Skizze und Improvisation weit hinausreicht.

Das funktioniert ähnlich der Musik, die in ihrer oft pulsierend minimalistisch repelow-budget-filmen titiven Struktur genauso auf den Barock als das „alte Schöne“ verweist, wie die Outfits der sechs Leipziger Darsteller wirken, als

hätte sie, samt üppiger Blumengebinde oder Fledermaus auf den Häuptern, ein trunkener Caravaggio geträumt (Kostüme: Ingken Benesch).

Im Kontrast dazu sind Stumpf/Thom/ Trost gekleidet wie für den Straßenkampf gegen die Vergänglichkeit des Lebens. Sturmhauben inklusive. Martialisch treten sie deshalb noch lange nicht auf. Im Gegenteil agieren sie mit einer angenehm ironisch-nonchalanten Leichte, die auch in den emotionalen Augenblicken des Abends wunderbar dessen schwebende Balance zu bewahren versteht.

Denn es gibt sie, die Augenblicke, in dem dieses Bühnenspiel vom Spiel des Lebens erzählt. Gelingt es Gob Squad hier doch, einen Raum zu schaffen, einen Schutzraum der Kunst, in dem man gerade wegen der lustvollen Maskerade und artifiziellen Selbst-inszenierung ganz ohne Maske von Verlusten, Diskriminierung, bösen Kindheitserinnerungen, Ängsten sprechen kann. Zur Nabelschau wird das nie – eben weil es immer Kunst bleibt. Und dabei ist es oft von jener Schönheit, die man vielleicht selbst in welkenden Blumen noch erkennen mag.

Steffen Georgi

# creation Pictures for Dorian



PHOTO: DAVID BALTZER [left-right: Naomi Odhiambo, Sean Patten, Sarah Thom, Susanne Scholl, Dieter Rita Scholl, Dietrich Novak, Bastian Trost]