

POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE

8 SELF-PORTRAITS OF A CAPITAL CITY HILDEGARD DE VUYST



GENÈVE / GENEVA 2007 – VERDEELPUNT POSTKAARTEN / POINT DE DISTRIBUTION CARTES POSTALES / POSTCARDS DISTRIBUTION POINT

Postcards from the Future (*PftF*) is a project initiated by three Brussels based artists who originate elsewhere and operate together under the name C&H: Heike Langsdorf, Christophe Meierhans and Christoph Ragg. The first trained as a dancer and choreographer, the second is a musician and composer and the third is a set designer. They started working together several years ago and, using nothing but sound, space and movement, created performances that were as abstract as possible. The highly associative title of their first piece was *Mites got no problems*, in which they wanted to have done with any form of story, interpretation or message. This preference for the conceptual can still be seen in their present work; at a certain level C&H make pieces about 're-presentation'. But there is more than this: in *PftF* they will for a whole season (let's say two seasons, including the preparations) be launching into an exploration of Brussels and co-operating with the inhabitants of those invisible cities that lie hidden beneath 'Brussels'.

This is intended to result in a unique project that links theatre to art and tourism and socio-artistic work. It is quite ambitious, even though at first sight

the idea seems really simple. For the audience it starts with a postcard. You can get hold of them in various ways: sent with your KVS tickets, for example. Or pick them up at one of the *PftF* stands set up around Brussels (see the list of distribution points). On the front there's a picture, and on the back a date, a time and a place. If you go to this place at the appointed time, the image will unfold live before your very eyes. In other words you have been given a picture of something that still has to take place. Which is why they are postcards from the future.

Langsdorf, Meierhans and Ragg explain the underlying concerns: 'Postcards are normally like tourist snapshots. They often only show cliché images, symbols or monuments that identify a city superficially. We are opting for a different image of the city: people and /in everyday situations, the ordinary rather than the extraordinary. We like to overturn stereotypes. The images are so unusual that you ask yourself why they appear on a postcard.'

The approach is different for each card. In fact each one is an individual production; eight are planned, one for each month of the 2010-11 theatre season. The project is being launched with a press conference which will be announced by a postcard showing the press conference. The main purpose of the first

Postcards distribution points

ARGOS, BEURSSCHOUWBURG, BIP, BOZARSHOP, COOK EN BOOK – WOLUWÉ, DE PIANOFABRIEK, FLAGEY, HALLES DE SCHAERBEEK, HOB, KAAITHEATER, KRIEKELAAR, KVS, LA BELLONE, LES TANNEURS, MCCS, MICROMARCHÉ, RECYCLART, VUB CULTURCAFÉ, WIELS...

8 postcards-with-performances

in Brussels, 2010-2011

1. MOLENBEEK (19.09.2010 – 13:13)
2. PLACE FLAGEYPLEIN (24.10.2010 – 14:00 > 18:00)
3. ST GILLIS / ST GILLES (11.2010)
4. NOORDSTATION / GARE DU NORD (12.2010)
5. EUROPESE WIJK / QUARTIER EUROPÉEN (03.2011)
6. ANDERLECHT (04.2011)
7. BRUSSEL CENTRUM / CENTRE-VILLE (05.2011)
8. NAAMSEPOORT / PORTE DE NAMUR (06.2011)

WWW.POSTCARDSFROMTHEFUTURE.BE

card is to introduce all the 'actors' and explain the 'rules'; they show a financial backer (Bruno De Lille, Brussels minister), a critic (Pieter TJonck, De Morgen), a producer (Jan Goossens, KVS) and the members of C&H themselves: 'It's a formal act, a sort of self-representation. By taking part in the act, the partners get a much better idea of all the consequences.' The re-enactment takes place in the Foyer of the KVS at 7.15 pm on 10th September, just before the premiere of the new production by Wim Vandekeybus, which launches the new season at the KVS.

The second postcard is from Molenbeek and is the responsibility of Christophe Meierhans. 'Molenbeek is often identified with the antagonism between young Moroccans and the white indigenous population. I come from Berlin, where this sort of tension doesn't exist, but I notice that even for myself the mutual distrust in Molenbeek is very infectious. At first I considered staging a robbery and playing on the cliché of criminality. I hung around in the streets and got talking to some of the youngsters. But it didn't go so easily and I soon realised I wouldn't have the willpower to push that idea through to the end. So I started working through the Maison des Cultures, which gave me much easier access to the district. The postcard for Molenbeek was born out of a workshop on cliché images: the rue du Mar-



GENÈVE / GENEVA 2007 – "MAKING OF"



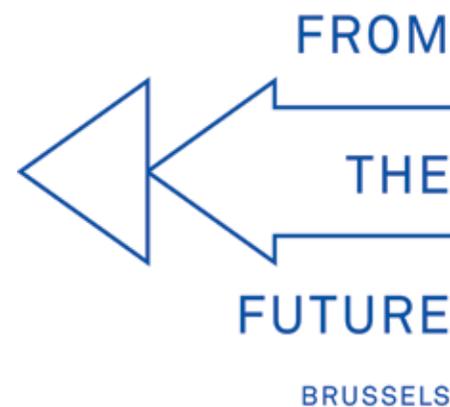
GENÈVE / GENEVA 2007 – PERFORMANCE

roquin was turned into a sort of souk. 'Marroquin' is a specific way of treating leather, but it sounds like 'Moroccan'. In the same way, the art nouveau church at the Parvis suddenly looked suspiciously like a mosque. We love the exotic clichés of palm trees, mules and djellabas, as long as they are at a safe distance. While the residents can't emphasise quickly enough that there's nothing Moroccan about their street, they are still proud of their migrant culture. With this one postcard you touch upon a whole set of identity issues.'

From Molenbeek we go to Elsene, where Heike Langsdorf offers an alternative view of Flagey Square. The postcard shows six images from a short choreographic work that 40 people perform repeatedly on the square for 4 hours. It's based on ordinary movements and actions, and lays a wafer-thin film over everyday existence. The pictures were taken from six different flats which will also be accessible during the re-enactment. It is an invitation to tour Flagey Square, trying out the different perspectives: passer-by and resident, ordinary and specially prepared. And to reflect on public space: should it create a void, or actually be used intensively, and by whom? And how? Ought you to sit on the tiles, or only the benches? Heated debate has continued since the refurbishment of the square.

Christoph Ragg views Sint-Gillis through the eyes of a blind man. The reason is partly personal – an encounter with a blind performer – and partly inspired by an exploration of the district, with its many streets in star patterns, which by coincidence is also home to the Braille League. There is no image on this 'blind' postcard, only a description: a place in Sint-Gillis, probably one of those crossroads, described by a blind man. This description will also appeal to other senses (smell, hearing, touch) and may be detached from reality. Ragg says: 'A blind person may think the sky is green, or the road yellow. In the re-enactment the view of the blind will be made visible once again. So I shall be trying to make that sky green, or colour the road yellow. This card doesn't have a visual image, only a mental image of something that will happen in the future. At the moment I am also mainly curious about what direction it will take.' Ragg disputes the idea that the postcard from Sint-Gillis is the odd-one-out. 'In fact all the postcards contain a script for a re-enactment. You have a build-up that works towards a certain fulfilment of expectation, but there will never be a one to one relationship between card and re-enactment, there will always be a tension between the two.'

POSTCARDS



SEPT. 2010 - JUNE 2011

For later in the season, a postcard is being composed that originates from the North Station, in cooperation with La Maraude and a number of people who live on the streets, and also a card from the European Parliament, which requests that institution to suspend and freeze its activities for one minute and thus possibly 'listen' to a call from citizens of Brussels. There is also an Anderlecht card under development, involving either football or the abattoir. And also a picture of an apocalyptic road intersection in the city, with advocates and opponents of the car, and lastly a card with Chéri Samba's 2002 painting *Porte de Namur! Porte de l'Amour?*. This re-enactment should end up with a great party.

C&H does not have just one single vision of the city and urban life. It is more a question of an anti-vision: the various approaches are playful and anti-spectacular. There is nevertheless an underlying sensitivity that ties all the work together: 'It revolves around 'invisibility'. How receptive are you to 'reality'? You look at what you know. You have your points of reference. And there are lots of things they don't see. This is very extreme in Brussels. Which is why it's perfectly suited to this project. Or why the project is perfectly suited to the city. We are trying to make these gaps visible. To look at the things you don't see. In that sense the postcards are a tour of the invisible cities of Brussels.'

The greatest challenge is to get access to certain places. C&H: 'All one's experiences as a performing artist are meaningless once you step outside your own little circle. You may be able to put forward all sorts of references, but it all means nothing when you're 100 metres out of your normal circuit. We are discovering that to some extent we have to surrender our own idiom and autonomy. In this city you can hardly make connections on the basis of your own personal merit. And it's essentially the same in Molenbeek and the European Parliament. We are just a small collective, so why would the European Parliament listen to us? You always have to find bodies that 'mediate' for you. On the European postcard, this conflict between the individual and the institutional is taken to extremes, but it's the same everywhere. The aim of the project is precisely to develop that personal link, to bridge the gap. We want to penetrate into this city because we live here and want to work here. We are now learning what that means.'