

Retro Cat

Who: Tori Wrånes, Carte Blanche, and the Bergen International Festival, in collaboration with BIT Teatergarasjen

What: World premiere at the Bergen International Festival

Where: Studio Bergen

When: May 23 – June 2 in Bergen, before the show goes on tour

The first sound we hear is a loud noise that could be a cat purring. But it could also be a humming machine. On the stage lies something big and round, two or three meters tall. The tail lies calmly on the floor.

The large body breathes almost imperceptibly. Somewhere further in the darkness, the rest of the cat might be found. If it were to rise up and turn towards us, we in the audience would become tiny beings in comparison.

When I see the performance, it is the dress rehearsal, the day before the world premiere. But because I have taken advantage of Carte Blanche's open offer to attend the rehearsals along the way, I know that inside the large body there is a lot of metal and mechanics.

Cats at work. PHOTO: ØYSTEIN HAARA

And I know that the dancers and Tori Wrånes, who is responsible for both choreography and scenography, have thought, fantasized, and played their way to the final performance together.

Now the expression is more organic. The dancers slowly emerge from the fur. They are small creatures with strange heads, hunchbacked bodies, and peculiar feet.

It is impressive how they manage to make me believe they are part of the large animal before they seem to fall out of the fur and become individual beings.

It is more beautiful than disgusting. It is a little scary too. When the sound of a dog barking breaks the harmony, the creatures flinch and huddle together.

In another sequence, the large tail lifts to the side, the cat's anus opens, resembling a glowing cathedral the small creatures can enter.

Glowing cathedral at Studio USF. PHOTO: ØYSTEIN HAARA

It is indeed comical. But I don't realize that until I try to explain it to others. While watching, I think a glowing cathedral made of a cat's anus is the most natural thing in the world.

I recommend Carte Blanche's open working process for the public. It is quite wonderful to follow what the result becomes when the large cat machine has gotten fur while the dancers have been equipped with advanced masks that surely make it extra hard to breathe.

For those familiar with Wrånes' mystical and magical creatures from past performances in Paris, Berlin, or elsewhere in the world—or her art exhibitions—it is especially exciting to reflect on how the visual expression evolves in this performance.

But even if you are not familiar with Wrånes, you will still have an almost meditative experience. You will have time to ponder how the world can be perceived from the perspective of what we usually pick out of a cat's fur.

The performance is like a small fairy tale. It is a good piece of quality art and definitely suitable for both children and adults.