

# PRESS REVIEW

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## Ombre Claire

conception and interpretation

Claire Heggen





## Ombre Claire - Bright Shadow

### The pearl of the festival MY MIME

With this flattering nickname Adam Halaš said goodbye to Claire Heggen at the end of the second international Festival My Mime 2015, a prominent representative of the French Decroux's School and co-founder of the famous Théâtre du Mouvement.

The unobtrusive woman and at the same time one of the greatest artist in her field, brought us the wonderful performance Ombre Claire / Bright shadow, during which we could hear as a kind of heading several verses from the poem collection Les Contemplations by Victor Hugo.

It was not the first time that Claire Heggen came to Czech Republic with her creations. Probably the earliest of her numerous performances in our country dates back to 13th September 1996. Together with her partner Yves Marc they had played under the heading of Théâtre du Mouvement at the 3rd annual festival Gaspard's Memorial in Cologne (CZ). The program consisted of parts from their most successful repertoire of 1975 -1995. Here we could see the famous Mutants, As long as the head is on the neck, Precarious balance, Mind the step, and other examples, some of which still can be seen on YouTube and you can see that their way of creation and ideas are still alive and artistically surprising. I consider that the two had performed - as the first foreigners in our country - pure Decroux's style of corporeal mime, sensitively following the main principles of his theory and pedagogy. From that time I most remarkably remember resilient, rolling motion of their bodies with covered heads (Mutants) and the beautiful and witty etude of a mother with a baby on her knee dazzling its precise rhythms and witty approach of mask-play on her face and knees. Both of these etudes became part of the history of European mime repertoire (I saw them playing by other representatives of our field). Her most distinctive features apart the incredible flexibility is mastership of the play with masks, objects and various children-like models of marionettes. But this is more than just an abstract game of body and object, typical for other Decroux students. In her play Claire Heggen completes it with poetic metaphors. In addition, thanks to her wide technical and expressive abilities of her art, she masters even in solo performance to create dramatic structures, the best of which (in my opinion) evoke vivid and humorous situations of intimate family life of a mother and her children.

The show Bright shadow presented the art of Claire Heggen in a single sample to even greater extent than before, moreover, in an unusual genre form, which has much greater tradition in the French culture than in ours - namely tragic mime. Hugo's Meditation and Schubert's composition The Death and the Maiden, which are organic parts of the whole production, suggested in advance - regardless of the credits in the program - the wistful, meditative position of the performance. It was also enriched by Claire Heggen's acting and polite recitation of the verses and breathtaking physical gesture and mime which with its statuesque suggestion corresponds with the main principles of Decroux's teaching. The audience is mainly addressed with expressive emotionality, to me personally known only from Rodin's sculptures.

The performance begins with the arrival of a woman in white who sits on the edge of the stage - she makes a gesture with her hand resting on her forehead and she dives into memories. At the same time she spreads white color of mime and sadness on her face. What follows is a movement poem - danced passages with white veil spreading all over the stage, from which - as from a cloud flying above the ground - we read the vague shapes of events and people. Through those Claire Heggen brings us to her own theme of her piece through mime play evoking a stream of consciousness. Although it may not be very clear from my realistic retelling, it is a dramatic stream, from which gradually a small child emerges, which awakes to human life with its first movements accompanied by the gentle touch of the mother. A small sculpturesque doll gradually growing and daring to go into playful communication with its mother. Her small, gentle movements and caresses, with all stylization, suddenly appear to be quite real and precise observations of life. From here mother's joy and tenderness grow until the moment when the child frees from her care and descends to earth itself. Then motion on the scene again sinks slowly into the veil of mist to the departing point of meditation.

Beautiful, deeply human images of joyful and sad moments recorded in human mind deeply testify to the audience the most important moments in a woman's life, which grow up to the level of symbolic parable thanks to Claire Heggen's sovereign mastery. By depersonalization and exaltation of her narration to the level of physical poetry she bestowed the story with universal validity as well as individual sensibility and expressive form. Her exceptionally smooth and accurate movement and speech in the performance Bright shadow provided the spectators an unforgettable experience. It is a contribution to the human soul - the personal gift of the French artist to the audience and to those who would like to follow this high art.

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## Mime is not dead (No. 3)

An exceptional guest at The My Mime Festival 2015 was Claire Heggen from the french Théâtre du Mouvement who completed the mosaic of the possibilities of Mime Theatre with another - and I must admit for me a very likeable - piece, namely a poetic and symbolic performance on the border between expressive dance and Pantomime.

Theatre du Mouvement is a legend. Its protagonists „have been moving“ in the field of physical theatre and Pantomime for over 40 years and their work spins out of any clear characteristic. Yves Marc and Claire Heggen began to collaborate in the years 1974-1975. Their common goal was to explore the roots, the art of movement and the process of creation. Their work is based on clear methodology and rules as well as on individual disposition and phantasy; they combine the art of movement with the use of puppets and masks and objects as well as a mixture of mysticism and poetry. Based on the first projects (The Mutants 1975) and movement workshops they created the ensemble Theatre du Mouvement. It's fascinating that, even after several decades of their existence, their way of creation and their point of view is still alive and inspiring.

Claire Heggen came to the My Mime Festival because of two reasons. At first she guided a workshop called Between body and object and then she performed her solo-performance from 2013 called Ombre Claire.

So finally we had the possibility to see this artist alive at NOD/Roxy. Her performance Ombre Claire translated as Bright shadow is resisting any one-sided interpretation as well as the whole project itself. Both words shadow as well as light can create different combinations as shadow of the light, light shadow, shadow and light and each of them characterizes a subtle poetic version of the staging.

«This is a visual poem in memory of an angel  
This is an intense piece of music broken up by sustained silences  
This is a story that includes a journey and challenges that have to be overcome  
This is a color, white  
This is the story of a young girl who died at twenty years old  
This is my story»

Claire Heggen

According to the credits this staging is inspired by the story of Claire Pradier, the daughter of the actress Juliette Drouet and the sculpturer James Pradier. Claire Heggen furthermore takes inspiration from the verses of Victor Hugo (Juliet Drouet was his lover and she reported him about her daughter who died from tuberculosis) and she puts them into dialogue with Schubert's string-quartet *The death and the maiden*.

Until here facts. Claire Heggen who refers to the movement school of Corporeal Mime of her master Etienne Decroux drew in a kind of magic way a vision on the border of a dream, a mystical trance and reality. Excerpts from the performance can be looked up on the internet where Heggen dances in a church. I suppose however that the neutral space of NOD provided the spectators the possibility to focus more on the performer than to be dispersed by the architecture and this served the performance a lot. Claire Heggen speaks about the characteristic colour white which is the only one which appears on stage in different variations. This underlines and supports the visual impression of greatness, purity and a tint of supernaturality.

On a square of white tissue approximately 5X5 meters which determines the set, where more tissue in the back creates the illusion of heaven or being high up in the sky, we see a figure in white in a cone of light. Without wanting to point at the age of Claire Heggen I think that here it is used in a very clever way. She puts white make-up on her face in front of the spectators and we get the impression that a massive stone sculpture is growing in front of us. The make-up does not serve to underline the mimical traces, but it lets disappear all distinctive shapes in the face so we spectators can focus more on the movement. Observing the movement expression which is dance as well as Pantomime and which is structured importantly by pauses, the stop-times in between the single pictures, we can clearly see the influence of Etienne Decroux's teaching.

By the way of handling her body, Claire Heggen is proving technical perfection in the essence of Decroux's Corporeal Mime but at the same time she keeps a strong individual gesture. What we can see in the exercises of Decroux can seem funny and obsolete today, but Claire Heggen is transforming it to an unpretentious and subtle movement poem on stage, which is (without any abusive overtones) a female version of Corporeal Mime. During the performance she is more and more taking into the action the white tissue which seemed to be part of the scenography in the beginning. She literally undresses the set. In her hands the material changes into a partner, an obstacle on her way, the object as a challenge, the mother's womb from which the angel was born. Then suddenly a surprising moment. Out of the flood of white tissue Claire Heggen really conjures a child. Here as well she doesn't go for any other colour than white, a kind of neutral appearance of the puppet. We don't know if this is her alter ego as a child, an angel, an unborn or a desired child or the image of a soul. Nevertheless this child being whoever of the previous mentioned becomes alive in contact with her body. Claire Heggen is able to create the illusion that the mystic creature without face is moving independently from her, without giving the feeling that she, as performer, is moving it.

The sensation from the performance was peculiar. I really had the impression as if we had encountered or touched something supernatural. As if the breeze of waving angel's wings had passed over us.

**Jana Soprová**

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