

Wonderland - Ecole des Maitres – Matthew Lenton

The *Ecole des Maitres* will be based on collective creation – the development of a work through improvisation, play and shared adventure of sixteen actors, led by the director.

The Ecole will begin with a very simple starting point: the idea of a young woman leaving home and embarking on a dangerous journey.

One key source is a documentary tracing the journey of a young European woman to America where she hopes to become an actress in the adult entertainment industry. Using other sources as wide ranging as *Alice in Wonderland*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, fairy tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, Gregory Crewdson's mysterious photography, as well as a backdrop of contemporary popular culture (reality TV shows, modern architecture and music), the group will work using improvisation, play and performance to build a scenario for a theatre work.

The unifying idea for this work is 'Wonderland'. This obviously alludes to the world that exists down the rabbit-hole in *Alice in Wonderland*:

'In another moment down went Alice, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again'

It is also a reference to the modern prize of becoming a 'celebrity' and fracturing oneself from the 'ordinariness' of life. But at what cost? Once you have left everything you know and entered into this 'wonderland', how in the world will you ever get out again? What will you have sacrificed?

Finally, 'Wonderland' is a reference to our own, shared creative process. Like Alice jumping down the hole, we on the *Ecole des Maitres* will be embarking on our own unknown journey, using our curiosity as a starting point. We don't know exactly where it will lead us. We know there will be puzzles to solve, we know there will be inspirations and difficulties. We know that a work will emerge.

Crucially, the exploration of this material will go hand in hand with the development of improvisation techniques and practices, which feed and support this creative process. The work will focus on physical and visual, rather than spoken language, on sounds and on silence.

From project to project, aesthetics, processes and subjects change. Each rehearsal room is different, there is no formula, but my approach towards the responsibilities I have as a director remain the same:

The players create the story of the game. They play in front of the spectators, score goals, tackle and defend. The manager decides the way the team plays and develops an approach that suits his tastes – the passing game or the long-ball game, aggressive attack or deep defence. The way the manager works with the players, the emphasis he gives to training, the sense of discipline and commitment he

instills, is important. There is an expression in football – ‘to read the game’. A good football player can read the game – can see possibilities, pre-empt the movement of another player across a diagonal, can understand the timing of a run, the simultaneous shifting of the positions of other players on the pitch.

A good actor, working in a collaborative process, develops a similar understanding of the possibilities available to him or her. This understanding becomes intuitive, impulsive, spontaneous and allows for the creativity of other actors. This is the understanding we work towards as a creative collective. We work through play but also through discipline. So, working together in a rehearsal room, a group of actors must engage with a set of rules. The rules are there to serve the creation of a piece of new work. Like players entering a pitch, when an actor enters the rehearsal room, life is left behind. The rehearsal room is a working space, a playing space, a creative space. In this space work will take place, a game will be played, a story will be told.

The stories that emerge will emerge from the actors and objects in the rehearsal room. Curiosity is the starting point. Working together, we will discover where our curiosity leads us.