

What a Theatre Dreams at Night

Reportage Schwalbe The mime collective puts on a performance that runs from midnight until 6 o'clock in the morning

By our correspondent
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If a theatre could dream, it would look like this," says a spectator at the conclusion of *Schwalbe performs a time* in Utrecht's Theater Kikker. In this production, the mime company Schwalbe builds up and breaks down old theatre sets under dreamy sodium lamps for an entire night. The sets come from renowned Dutch companies and thus they previously have been seen often at performance venues. Now they are ghosting around in the night one more time.

Wearing work gloves and protective boots, the performers tinker together a total of 11 sets between the hours of 23:59 and 6:00. Careful thought was put into the selection of sets beforehand. "They are all different in terms of material, appearance and building methods," says Floor van Leeuwen, one of the five female performers. The company borrowed a little house from the production *Bambino*, assembling it like a do-it-yourself kit with panels, hooks and hammers. But there are also hundreds of tin cans, which they meditatively scoop out of large sacks, from the production *Freetown* by Dood Paard.

As the night goes on there is a noticeable development from concrete to more abstract and poetic images. But there is no storyline or plot nor are there any words. "We don't have any surprises or secrets up our sleeves, either. It is what it is," says Van Leeuwen. "We offer a space with lots of images, for which the spectators themselves can create their

She herself sees the production among other things as "a detached look at the medium of theatre in which new worlds are always being built," and "an ode to the transitory nature of those worlds".

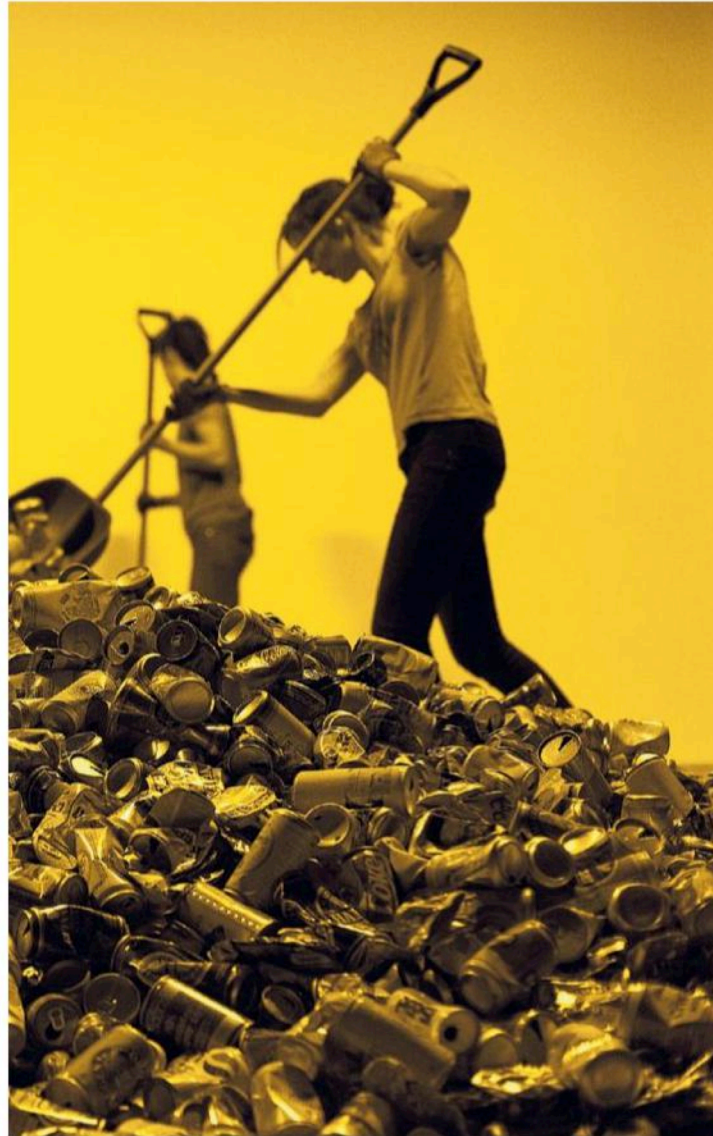
Some of the sets will trigger particular memories for regular theatregoers, she expects, while stimulating the imaginations of others. The duration of the performance plays an essential role, says Van Leeuwen. "After 20 minutes you understand the code: we're not going to do anything else but lug sets around the whole night. Only then do you start watching

Beer and sandwiches are available for the audience

really carefully."

"Because you have to sit for so long," adds performer Kimmy Ligtvoet, "you start concentrating in a different way, doing less thinking and more free associating." At night, the makers believe, tiredness intensifies that effect even more.

The uncompromising, extremely simple form ties in with Schwalbe's earlier work. In 2008, the idiosyncratic collective graduated from the Mime School in Amsterdam with *Save them*, in which the company danced to a repetitive techno beat for an entire show. In *Schwalbe performs on their own*, they didn't do much more than



Hundreds of tin cans from the Dood Paard production *Freetown*

keep the lights on. And in *Schwalbe is looking for crowds* (VSCD mime prize 2014), they ran around in circles for more than an hour with a big group of volunteers. Schwalbe can count on a lot of appreciation from a small group of enthusiasts. Their audience may grow larger after 2017, when they start working under the umbrella of Theater Rotterdam.

A new aspect introduced by the production *Schwalbe performs a time*, says Van Leeuwen, is the big role given to material objects. "Our previous productions were much more physical and explosive."

The relationship with the audience has also intensified. "We want to abolish the boundaries between makers and spectators in the theatre.

Everywhere we are, we are there with all of us," says Ligtvoet. "Pieces of the sets are everywhere, even right next to the box office. In the hall there is a refrigerator with beer and sandwiches that you have to toast yourself, as if we are throwing a party at home. We also take breaks ourselves."

In future, the makers also want to include the audience in their often extensive preliminary research. "We want to share that intermediate phase more, even make it the central focus," says Van Leeuwen.

At the end of *Schwalbe performs a time*, the last remaining spectators are invited onto the floor to talk. "A strange sort of croissant-with-beer moment," Ligtvoet calls it. Meanwhile, the very last set, consisting of a mixture of chalk and water, is drying out on the floor.

Schwalbe performs a time is playing on 1 April in Theater Ins blau in Leiden. For other dates see schwalbe.nu

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