



Artistic Practice with director Anja Behrens:

“Performing arts can bring us into contact with the emotions we are carrying within us.”

The artistic practice of theatre director Anja Behrens springs forth from the disturbing existential fundamental tones that we're not always able, during our everyday lives, to get in touch with. For this reason, her method involves working with rituals and visual abstractions that bring the body's intuition to light.

“I believe that art can give us an emotional contact that we don't always have in our daily lives. It can make it easier for us to accommodate difficult or dark aspects, as they are generated through art's filter, they become less threatening,” says Anja Behrens.

This is also why Anja Behrens insists that her contribution to artistic processes has to do with refraining from making intellectual analyses in the introductory phases, so that intuition and the visual aspect can open the sensory faculties – for her collaborators in the artistic process as well as for the audience.

The transformative potential of theatre

Through her extensive practice and through her staging of various performance productions in Denmark, Austria, Germany and Switzerland, the German-born theatre

director adheres to her persistent and tacit belief that both the work with and the experience of theatre can be transformative for human beings.

"For me, personally, the creation of performing arts requires of us that we create a shared space, where we can make mistakes and where we can flourish. When the work succeeds, I experience a beautiful synergy, where all of theatre's professional competences come together and find solutions. The visuality that we create with bodies, the scenography, the lighting, and the sound all generate the possibility for us, operating in collaboration with each other, to access a deep contact to the emotional," clarifies Anja Behrens, who is currently involved in staging several new productions slated for the autumn of 2023.

In the new film, ["Artistic Practice" with Anja Behrens](#), she poses the fundamental questions: *"What does despair look like? What does emptiness look like? What does the abyss look like?"*

For Behrens, these are questions that are not easily answered through concrete reality but can perhaps be more easily answered right there where the stage's visual abstractions can furnish the viewer with chances to be inside of life's difficult moments and to venture all the way up to the boundaries of the existential – without falling apart.

The universal questions that Behrens treats in her theatrical work often take their mark in a radical reinterpretation of classical narratives – such as Plato's Symposium; Homer's Odyssey; and the Fourier theatre trilogy, consisting of Phaedra, Electra, and Cassandra.

"Logen" – an experimental interdisciplinary collective

When she's not engaged with reinterpreting the classics, Behrens is, moreover, one of four members of the artist collective, Logen. Since 2014, Logen has been making its insistence on challenging the collective process, challenging the course of events in traditional classical productions, and challenging the intimate, ritualistic meeting with the audience.

The aim is, among other things, to create a laboratory where Behrens – together with the artist collective – challenges herself in terms of displaying artistic methods that push their way outside their own prescribed domains. This gives rise to visual, performative, and conceptual works that involve the members of the audience in unusual ways, as can be seen within the framework of the interdisciplinary experiment, "Toaster".

"Behrens's wide field situated between grand classics and ambitious experiments, engenders an intensified space, where universal human emotions are being put into play. She is a director who is telling stories with a powerful visuality, and with her distinctive interdisciplinary approach, she is a solid bid on how theatre can be carried into new territories – also outside of Denmark's borders," says Dina Vester Feilberg, Director of Arts at Bikubenfondene.

[Watch the new film "Artistic Practice" with Anja Behrens](#), where you will also meet Luk Perceval. While carrying on a conversation with Anja Behrens, as they move through the streets of Copenhagen, Perceval unfurls Behrens's working and artistic practice.

"Seeing Anja's work, I became aware that – although we both speak a different theatrical language – her universe is extremely personal and shows a sensitive and clear perspective. Her theatre is sensual and strong, shocking and tender, brutal and compassionate. Her position in the landscape is unique," says Luk Perceval, who is generally regarded as being one of Europe's leading innovators in the performing arts.

About Anja Behrens

Anja Behrens was born in Hamburg and graduated as a director from The Danish National School of Performing Arts in 2014.

Since 2014, she has been directing productions all over Denmark as well as in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. At the Royal Danish Theatre, in Copenhagen, she has staged "Symposion" [Symposium] (2019), "Odyssey" (2022), and "København" [Copenhagen] (2022), while, over at Aarhus Theatre, she directed "Ordet" [The Word], which garnered The Reumert Award in 2020.

In 2021, moreover, Anja Behrens directed the modern opera "Nordkraft," which was nominated for The Reumert Award in the "best opera" category. Also in 2021, she created the theatrical film work "Requiem for en tidsalder" [Requiem for an Era], which she made on the basis of a performance with Sydhavns Theatre, that was shown at CPH Stage that same year. This was Anja Behrens's first experiment with film.

A further selection of her directorial works in Denmark includes "Selvmordets Anatomi" [The Anatomy of Suicide] (2019) and "Den Kaukasiske Kridtcirkel" [The Caucasian Chalk Circle] (2022), both presented at the Republique Theatre, and "Underkastelse" [Submission] (2018) and "Sort Vand" [Black Water] (2017), both presented at the Betty Nansen Theatre, as well as the Reumert-nominated play "Rose" (2015), presented at Team Theatre.

In Germany, she has mounted the staged production, "Schrottplatz" [Scrap Yard] (2016) at Deutsches Theater and "Das Letzte Feuer" [The Last Fire] at Schauspiel Hannover (2023), while at Luzerner Theater in Switzerland, she mounted a production of the play, "Ödipus Stadt" [Oedipus City] (2016). Back in 2013, while she was still taking part in the educational program, her production of "Orestien" [The Oresteia] was also shown at the Fast Forward Festival in Germany.

Upcoming Productions

"DECAMERON", Teater Republique, slated to premiere on September 21, 2023.

"Kassandra," Husets Teater, slated to premiere on January 13, 2024.

"Under Dybet - en moderne ballet" [Under the Depth - A Modern Ballet], The Royal Danish Theatre, Opera House, slated to premiere on April 20, 2024.

"Furier Trilogy", Husets Teater, CPH Stage, 2024.

Read more about Anja Behrens' artistic work, here: <https://anjabehrens.com/om/>

About Luk Perceval

Luk Perceval (born in 1957) is a director. In 1979, Perceval completed his education, as an actor, at the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp. He initiated the theatre company, Blauwe Maandag Cie, and from 2009 to 2016, he was the artistic director of the Thalia Theatre in Hamburg.

Luk Perceval is considered to be one of Europe's most important theatre innovators, particularly because in the 1980s and 1990s, he put forward suggestions for wholly new systems for working with texts – based on improvisation and on finding solutions collectively – where the actor's "here and now" on stage was prioritized over being true to the playwright.

In Perceval's practice the actor co-creates in dialogue with the playwright's text. Key elements are the liveliness and authenticity of the person appearing on stage, and this inevitably entails abridgements, shifts, and manipulations of the text.

About Artistic Practice

Artistic Practice is a close-up-to-the-person and close-up-to-the-work film-portrait of an artist, an artist duo or an artist group, displaying a distinctively promising practice and potentials. As a link in an internationalization of Danish art, Bikubenfonden makes Artistic Practice available to artists. The programmatic objective is to contribute to elevating and strengthening the artists' visibility in their ongoing careers.

Artistic Practice featuring Anja Behrens has been produced for Bikubenfonden by Meeto Film. Read more about Artistic Practice, [here](#).

Upcoming artists in the Artistic Practice series:

Set designer Nathalie Mellbye
Set designer and artist Sif Freya Hestnes
Visual artist Jessie Kleemann
Visual artist Kristoffer Akselbo
Visual artist Hannah Heilmann
Visual artist Lina Hashim

Previous releases in the Artistic Practice series

Visual artist Linda Lamingnan
Visual artist Marie Munk
Visual artist Jens Settergren
Artist studio HOW TO KILL A DOG
Artistic director Marie-Lydie Nokouda
Visual artist Jakob Kudsk Steensen
The artist duo Astrup and Bordorff
Choreographer and designer Gunilla Lind
Theater director Sargun Oshana

Visual artist Alexander Tillegreen
Visual artist Hannibal Andersen
Visual artist and choreographer Jules Fischer
Choreographer Hilde I. Sandvold
Set designer and costume designer Ida Grarup

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