

HOKUSPOKUS / ALMADA FESTIVAL

PERSINSALA

di Francesco Chiaro -

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THE ILLUSION OF US

*After two weeks of jam-packed stalls and thunderous applause, the 39th edition of the Almada Festival finally comes to an end and, in a successful attempt to go out with a bang, artistic director Rodrigo Francisco offers a memorable parting gift to its loyal audience: visionary Familie Flöz's latest effort, **Hokuspokus**, a quirky tale of creations, creators and the illusions we fabricate in this box of wonders that is theatre.*

Believing in the illuminating power of laughter and failure, Berlin-based Familie Flöz is an international theatre company capable of creating ingenious archetypal characters that speak an universal language comprehensible across all cultural and language boundaries. Originating from the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen, «the only public education facility for physical theatre in Germany», the company began its rediscovery of masks back in 1994, refining it through the years and acquiring the transversal gazes of many «theatre makers, actors, musicians, dancers, directors, costume designers, dramatic advisors and other good souls from ten nations».

Theoretically, masks should provide fixity to the character, a stable and recognizable feature behind which the actor/ress can rest its weary face, letting the immovable expression do the deed. In **Hokuspokus**, however, masks are naught but the starting point for dynamic revolutions, oneiric deviations and psychological pockets where the human soul silently hides. The result is a play that is still capable of jerking a tear and a laugh with the same movement of the hands.

Indeed, in this 80-minute feat of silent yet extremely clear communication, we go through an extensive array of emotions of rare purity as we follow the mishaps (perhaps) of the first lovers' fall from Paradise (the real one, up in the clouds). These newborn Adam and Eve «dare to take their first steps together as a couple, seek shelter from nature and, thank God, find an affordable apartment. Fate quickly pulls the young couple into the roller coaster of life. With each child, the centrifugal forces grow and threaten to tear the family apart». Trapped inside a box within a box, our main characters are constantly surrounded by discreet technicians going about their theatre-making business

who, as the play unravels itself along some rather predictable twists and bends, increasingly join in their own creation's struggle, providing with a quick sleight of hand the tools that they need in order to proceed.

The hands, the incarnation of the art of saying everything without a single word. The backstage, the theatre behind the theatre. The technicians, the bedlam of faceless professionals who make the world go round and round. In **Hokuspokus**, everything is false, but nothing is fake. Nothing is more real than these masks, more lively than the embalmed mummies and walking corpses that so often populate the stage. Familie Flöz gives life to a meta-theatrical delusion that is poetic and innovative, atavistic and experiential, physical and magical at the same time. An hymn to transformism, a fair of music, colours and costumes. A show that very well deserves the audience's standing ovation and that gingerly closes a packed two-week of theatre, art and culture on the other side of the Tagus river.