

Report - LLB Creative Crossroads, Ofelia Jarl Ortega

About the process:

Despite the pandemic I was fortunate to be able to work on my piece *Hegemony* that premiered October 21st 2020. *Hegemony* was co-produced by several venues, among them were STUK in Leuven and MDT in Stockholm through the LLB Creative Crossroads network.

Hegemony is a group piece for three male dancers, Darío Barreto Damas, Andrius Mulokas and Paolo de Venecia Gile. Both STUK and MDT provided us with residency support as well as a co-production fee. I managed to schedule the residencies one after the other, in order to focus the work and travel less. We started in August at MDT with two great weeks on stage focusing on music and the space together with the composer Jassem Hindi. From there we went to STUK where we had two weeks technical residency at their black box, a very valuable time where we could work more with the lights.

Since before I had a two week residency planned at BUDA in Kortrijk. I managed to place it in relation to my weeks at STUK, with a week at Pianofabriek in Brussels in between, in order to stay in Belgium for a total of five weeks, instead of traveling back and forth with the whole team. Staying at three different venues in Belgium over five weeks was a great experience. I had the opportunity to invite friends and colleagues to our open showings and got to know the Belgian scene a bit closer. I also got great feedback on the presentations which was valuable for the process too.

The longer stay in Belgium made it easier for people to get to know my work since we could invite people to join our rehearsals or showings during a longer time with more anticipation, which was also a must due to the pandemic and the limited amount of people that could meet.

Some thoughts on the work:

I think all my work deals with power in some way. In previous works of mine I've used the gaze as a tool to manifest or explore power dynamics. In *Hegemony* the gazing isn't as present, even though it found its way in there too. The dancers are exploring power dynamics within the group, and the audience is mostly a witness and sometimes addressed, but not to be examined by the performers more to be reminded of the situation, and what they're witnessing.

It was a big thing for me to work with only male performers. It was the first time I was not on stage myself in my work. For once I would work with male performers, while still proposing Ofelia-esque practices, movements and concepts on other bodies than female or myself.

I had some preconceived ideas that I would deal a lot with notions around femininity on male bodies, but once we got deeper into the piece I realised that was secondary, that queer femininity anyhow is at the core of my work. Objectifying male bodies was different from objectifying the female body. They weren't as exposed and made me want to work on other notions around power games which led to them exposing each other instead. I was more interested in them as performers than specifically male performers, and which specific group dynamics *this* group could work with. In that sense Darío Barreto Damas, Andrius Mulokas and

Paolo de Venecia Gile are very much responsible for the course of the piece, in the process and on stage. I cherish the way they've received the work and made it theirs too.

I wanted it to get really risky with the power play, and for that I also needed to make it all good: I focused on trust and care, but also to pay well, rehearse well, give the piece a fair chance and make the best circumstances for the work. That's always the case, but not always doable. Here I had the benefit of being outside and could work in a different way, having the overview, looking at the development of the music alongside the dance and light, the choreography of it all, imagining the audience and what I needed as a choreographer and what I wanted to see in a piece.

I worked closely with the composer and sound designer Jassem Hindi throughout the whole process. The music is like a fourth dancer. The lighting designer Mira Svanberg came later in the process, but this piece didn't need as much lighting as it needed music or bodies to exist. But I'd like to work more with light and more with Mira in the future.

I produced it almost completely on my own, and have had a sticky finger in every little part of it, yet I feel everyone in the team has had their own agency and that the baby is ours.

Now I hope that *Hegemony* gets to meet an audience soon again.

Ofelia Jarl Ortega,
Stockholm, January 2021