

Lucifernum

**Confessions of a
celestial observer**

Bekenntnisse eines himmlischen
Beobachters
(translated from German)

First edition



Confessions of a celestial observer

based on true experiences

Les observations du Roi des Damnés
et ses Princes des Morts

for Jonathan

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'But he warned man: You may eat of all the trees in the garden, but not of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Because if you eat from it, you will die.'
(Genesis: 16)

Relevant

'Hamlet 0.2' is written on the poster of the Royal Municipal Theatre in Bruges. Theatre icon Jan Decorte is pictured with his regular sparring partner Sigrid Vinks. Within the black area of the image, we recognise Jan Decorte's face above his white shirt with the profile of Sigrid Vinks at that height and her hands as the end of outstretched arms covered by a black cloth. Hamlet always catches my attention because it is such an exaggerated classic from Shakespeare's oeuvre. You must have seen it.

For the construction of this neo-Renaissance theatre, a dilapidated jumble of houses had to make way. No doubt many citizens will have frowned at the demolition of those old, rather meager houses, shabby bathhouses and grubby brothels. But when in 1869 the richly decorated stucco gilded in gold leaf allowed itself to glow in the light of the majestic crystal chandelier that fills the theatre hall and is assisted by similarly moody candlesticks, which cling to the shafts of the slender Corinthian columns and when, finally, the wine-red rideau rises under the canopy, For anyone who has nestled themselves in the red plush, the romance with this imaginative temple can begin. At the centenary of this theatre, the designation 'Royal' was added and in the meantime the building has the admirable reputation of being one of the most beautiful and best preserved in Europe in its genre. My girlfriend and I have agreed to meet up with my uncle and a few friends for an evening at Hamlet. When ordering tickets, I sometimes asked if the saleswoman could find out on which seat a naked man or a woman had sat during the photo session of Spencer Tunick in 2005 and whether everything was properly disinfected after this group sexual assault. Not that I'm that prudish, but I usually find people more attractive when they're dressed. Although my medical knowledge is not weighed against that of a doctor, it is more than enough to know which juices can flow out of the body while you are naked, together with about seven hundred dogged fellow sufferers in those all-absorbing seats

and velvet, waiting for the right snapshot. The architect could never have imagined such a rape of his art temple.

Anyway, we're going out. And if we go out to a stylish place, we go in stylish evening wear. B.C.B.G. or bon chic, bon genre they say in the ò so beautiful French. It has always been a surprise to me that even people who are fond of the arts dress so badly these days. As a result, we are at most the only company in the room that is still somewhat in tune with the décor. It frustrates me immensely.

After we have left our cloaks with the hostesses of the cloakroom, we are escorted to our reserved seats on the balcony. When we take a seat, we notice that we have a good view of the scene. On the same stage, an older, somewhat devoured man in a bare torso, wearing black shorts, a black bustier and white sneakers. He tells the people at the front of the ground floor that he is crazy. Maybe that's true, maybe that man is someone from the company or maybe someone who ... I left it all in the middle. The hall also has a striking number of young people. Young people who probably come to watch this evening performance on behalf of the lessons. The décor is set up by three walls in a U-shape. On the furthest décor wall there is a white. The famous urinal *Fontain R. Mutt* by Marcel Duchamp from 1917 is seen as the starting point of conceptual art and Duchamp as the progenitor of modern art. It is one of the most influential works of art of the twentieth century, an image that can compete in terms of fame with Picasso's *Guernica* or Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe* series. For me, Duchamp's urinal stands as the symbol par excellence for what we call modern art.

The lights are slowly extinguished. The chatter in the half-full hall wanes and a little later Jan Decorte reports on stage. Yes, for the second time. He was the dirty old man who had shown himself before and who, after the words: 'I'm a madman', made his way to the artists' quarters from behind. He makes a small bow as one of the suspenders of his bra

slides off his fragile shoulders and sits down on a chair to the left of the stage under a slightly hunchback. His pale skin, the skinny arms resting on his fragile knees, his hands folded. Then suddenly, two young and one not so young, but three naked women wearing only a white loincloth, storm onto the stage and start covering the room with talcum powder. They wallow in the powder, smear themselves with it and our old director-actor sits on his chair staring at them. It lasts and lasts. It gets long-winded and the audience is a bit hungry. You can hear coughing and fidgeting in the hall. The modern ballet continues while the three women make almost spastic twists that require enormous control and skill, but which is so crazy to watch and keep watching. Suddenly, one of the women opens her mouth and says: 'To be, or not to be, that is the question.' One of the women turns out to be Hamlet. The audience is startled and resumes attention. The women continue to curl across the stage and suddenly the other shouts: 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.' And then nothing for a while. A woman in front of us with a Dutch accent turns around and asks me: 'Sir, what do you think, shall I shout 'boo' loudly, get up and leave.' I whispered to her that she had better serve the sentence. Suddenly Jan Decorte let out screams, his voice skipping. We are not going to make a fuss about that now. After which he stands up and whispers hoarsely: 'It hurts, it hurts, ...' So impossibly quiet that my uncle has to ask me if I understand what he is saying. Then Decorte goes back to his chair, limping slightly. He peeks further at the naked girls. The girls curl on, make faces until Ophelia 'drowns' herself in a bowl of water. What we have all expected is finally taking shape. A panel shows a projection of a film in which the same company depicts a Pietà and where Decorte plays for Jesus, naked. The woman in front of me gets cranky, turns around and tells me: 'I knew that old man would go naked.' To stir her up a bit, I couldn't resist referring to the newspapers that at that time were full of the alleged sexual assaults on dancers that his colleague Jan Fabre was said to have committed, classified under the so-called #MeToo movement. The performance ends with the hands soaked in red paint with which they depict the death of

Hamlet, and then Decorte comes to his conclusion by connecting the three ladies with a red thread. Whether the falling and then rolling of the bobbin from the stage was in the script is doubtful, but the fact that the stumbling instrument just thundered to the ground was certainly an accident. The curtain closed, the chandeliers of the theater shed their light on the rich décor and polite applause followed. None of this spectacle was on the poster that had lured us to the performance. We got rid of this. For the first five minutes, everyone kept their mouths shut. Is this art, degenerate or have we not seen something?

Well, this is just not relevant anymore. I repeat relevant. It's about relevant, so I repeat. It was good and once innovative, even found to be strong. But now it is no longer relevant. The success for this kind of abstract theatre lies in the seventies of the last century. At that time, our friend Decorte was young and completely up to date. He made headlines in art magazines and passionate reflections of an up-and-coming talent. But today, a few decades later, it is no longer relevant. Even though our old friend had been replaced by a desirable alternative, a young boy, even then the play was no longer relevant. But I look further in my plea and I find. The only relevant thing in the play was the fact that he sat there like an old peeping tom, assaulting the audience with the #MeToo movement dumped in their stomachs. May I be generous with compliments and state that there was another relevant aspect in it. The fact that Hamlet was presented as a woman will not be due to the scaling back of subsidies on art, but it will be yet another mockery of how society should deal with and get used to: gender equality.

But the core is the urinal Fountain by Marcel Duchamp, signed by R. Mutt 1917. He who is mentioned in all history and art books as the founder of modern art and who has left behind Duchamp, who has left little spectacular except for that statement, has been able to link R. Mutt to his name for more than a century. Here I am talking about history, not about whether or not it is relevant. It is about history and the

following clues are not unimportant for a reflection of our contemporary entanglements. We are talking about 1917, the United States of America, the year in which the monarchy fell in Russia by means of the most cowardly games and in the meantime the First World War reduced the European continent to ashes in the most insane way. But then, it becomes relevant again because recently a number of art historians are collecting evidence to state that R. Mutt was not coincidentally the Frenchman Marcel Duchamp, but his German girlfriend ^{Bonne} Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. The uncovering of this female crown, with the weight that her work of art has placed in the scale of the arts of the twentieth century. For years, the work was in the name of Duchamp, her boyfriend. This fits perfectly into the so-called women's emancipation of the post-war years and in today's gender equality polemic. Duchamp, who moreover often profiled himself as a cross-dressing through his female alter ego Rose Sélavy and continued to hold on to his brilliance, the urinal *Fontain*, until years after the death of the baroness, immediately becomes a terribly slippery man. It is he who by means of the lie assaulted her name. It is he who wanted to elevate himself in the art paradise with the urinal. He plays Adam while she has bitten from the apple. He wets his chest and protects her from the wrath of Life that is to come. Because after the submission and the accompanying interest in the destructive philosophy that the work brings, the arts, just like society, of which it is a reflection, take a completely different path. Averse to all applicable traditions. "It's in an art exhibition in New York, so it's art," was the message. The democratization of art had begun. Anyone could now submit a work. Everyone an artist, as long as you had original ideas. The bomb exploded and the arts took on movements that we had never dared to suspect. Everything was possible and everything was allowed. Anyone who could prove that he understood these arts set himself up to be an art connoisseur and thus also a little intellectual. Whoever in his humility had to honestly confess that he was not quite there, that something was wrong or even lost, kept quiet. Or he was called conservative, old-fashioned and no longer relevant. Art

is not allowed to be good, because times are not good. It has to be flat and populist.

Naked! People like that. Offensive to the point of your deepest intimacy, you suddenly saw someone poop on stage. Beauty? No, that's over. The stage is no longer a beauty contest, it is a reflection of the average person. Just like the work of Spencer Tunick, where he put the theater audience in the nude. As the sliding game pushes the older generations - who had been brought up with the classical arts - into the abyss, the word relevant also shifts by. The up-and-coming generations are spoiled and wish for the best. Hamlet can no longer be reduced to a performance with six adagia. Hamlet, one of Shakespeare's masterpieces, asks to be spoken. The group of young people who still visit the theater and are not endlessly gaming want content. They want Hamlet and not an almost perverse exhibitionist entertainment that sends them home with more questions than answers have been given. No, dad, we want answers to the many questions we have been taught to ask and that concern us every day. We look for something to hold on to in a changing world. We are young, but we are afraid. We want to know what we are doing here, what we have to do. We want to understand why we are here and how it will evolve. We search for the meaning of this life or is it just a and an escalation of bad morals on stage?

For a few years now, the Art3F exhibition has been running in the Heysel Palaces in Brussels. The exhibition provides an overview of French contemporary art and is definitely worth a visit. It is a beautiful representation of how French contemporary art no longer carries a unified style cadence, but presents styles that are tailored to each individual. It proves that we Europeans are no longer a real community but have become a society of individuals. Various styles, techniques, applications, compositions are presented. Where Duchamp's urinal is the cornerstone of. It is no longer a school like the Flemish Primitives or the Pre-Raphaelites. It is no longer the painters of the Baroque or Romantic periods, who can be recognized from afar by their style and placed in