

# THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

---

## A slippery meeting of man and wax

By India Stoughton

BEIRUT: Kneeling on stage, Christophe Beranger leaned forward, slid his hands beneath a sheet of translucent wax several meters across, and lifted it.

Below the malleable top layer, which had solidified into a white film, the paraffin was still wet and slippery. The surface of the wax curled upward, allowing the dancer to work his wrists, then the whole length of his forearms, beneath.

It was easy to imagine the sensation – the melted wax oily to the touch as Beranger carefully peeled it away, like a surgeon delicately separating an expanse of skin from the muscle beneath.

He eased his head and torso beneath the surface of the wax until it covered him completely, draping over his hunched form and clinging to the lines of his nearly nude body.

Wax became the third character on stage Saturday night in “Exuvie,” the penultimate performance in this year’s Beirut International Platform of Dance. French company Sine Qua Non Art staged the hourlong production at Masrah al-Madina, where choreographers and dancers Beranger and Jonathan Pranlas-Descours were accompanied on stage by musicians Yohan Landry and Damien Skoracki.

The performance was built around the desire to work with a substance that could not be controlled entirely by the dancers’ movements, but would react unpredictably, creating a genuine dialogue between dancer and material.

The audience that filed into “Exuvie” Saturday were greeted with a simple stage design. Ready for the musicians, two desks were set up on either side of the stage, next to two sets of large thermos containers. In the center of the stage, a large black tarpaulin was draped over a shallow lip to form a square pool. An inclined sheet of reflective black plastic formed the backdrop.

Once filled with liquid wax, the central pool reflected the stage lights that illuminated the black ceiling of the auditorium many meters above.

Clad in trousers, fitted tops and leather boots, Beranger and Pranlas-Descours crossed the stage and walked slowly into the pool. Ripples emanated outwards from each step, casting a hypnotic reflection on the ceiling above. As the wax began to harden, turning white, it ceased to ripple and reflect light. By the time the two dancers reached the back left corner, the surface was as smooth and pristine as a field of untouched snow.

Seemingly marooned in the pool of hardening wax, their boots held in place, the two men began a slow, sinuous dance, accompanied by the electronic drone and whine of live guitar music.

Moving side-by-side, close but never touching, the two enacted an isolated attempt at escape. Their movements gradually increasing in size and speed, they worked themselves up into a frenzy of spiraling torsos and whirling arms, until it seemed that every part of their bodies was in motion save for their feet, still rooted firmly in the wax.

It wasn't until they slowed their movements and for the first time touched, gently linking hands, that they succeeded in breaking free, sliding their boots through the viscous wax and across the slippery plastic beneath. One by one, they stepped out of their boots, leaving them in the wax. Now barefoot, they ran headlong in circles, circumnavigating the square pool, from which their boots still protruded like tree stumps from a salt pan.

At times, the dancers' movements were not riveting. A slow progression, "Exuvie" felt like a tease for much of the first half, during which the wax tantalized with its possibilities but remained largely untouched by the dancers.

The live music alleviated any tedium potentially felt by the audience. The ambient electronic sound created by the two musicians, armed with electric guitar, bass, keyboard and a laptop, induced a trance-like feeling.

Heavily percussive whirrs and electronic bleeps, the crackle of feedback and whines from the amplifiers gave the sound an experimental quality, and the presence of the musicians on stage allowed audiences to shift their focus away from the dancers.

Once Beranger and Pranas-Descours began to burrow beneath the wax, the wait became worth it.

The name of the performance was taken from the word "exuviae," Latin for "that which is stripped from the body," a term used to describe the exoskeletons left behind when insects, arachnids and crustaceans have molted.

Clad only in tight-fitting boxer shorts, Beranger and Pranas-Descours insinuated their way beneath the malleable surface of the wax, moving carefully so as not to tear it. As they gradually unfurled their bodies, raising themselves from a huddled fetal position to kneeling, and then standing, the wax clung to their heads and torsos and stretched taut in fragile sheets between their limbs.

Tailoring their slow movements to the wax, in a unique sequence dictated by the temperature and viscosity of the material, the two men created a breathtaking moving tableau.

Eventually, the wax covering their bodies tore, falling away from them in sections to lie crumbled on the stage like cast-off skin. Divested of their coverings, the two men would dive again beneath an untouched section of the wax, creating another unique interaction between man and medium.

At the end, the smaller Pranas-Descours climbed atop Beranger's prostrate body and the two rotated slowly, writhing amid the oily traces of the wax still left in the square pool.

The message might have had something to do with isolation and teamwork, conflict and resolution or dominance and submission. Whatever it meant, "Exuvie" was beautiful.

**Copyrights 2015, The Daily Star - All Rights Reserved**

27/04/2015