

Review
Theatre performance
By JELA KREČIČ

Director: Jure Novak
Glej Theatre

Guilty in the Name of Art

The semi-documentary performance *At Her Majesty's Pleasure!* is dedicated to six artists who were subjected to court and police prosecution and other persecutions because of their works. The director establishes the framework of the performance by short theatrical acts in which we follow primarily the relationship between the king (Rok Kunaver) as the representative of the law and the jester (Vasilij Vaško Polič) as the representative of artistic freedom. A sort of a counterpoint to this theatrical representation is created by the acts of the prosecuted artists themselves, who present to the audience their real encounters with legal institutions. The third actor (Maruša Kink) appears in the role of the creative team of the performance and warns the audience in its name that all the persons in it are fictional, etc.

The various contributions of the artists tackle the encroachment of artistic freedom in various ways. The appearance of Matjaž Pikalo and Breda Smolnikar, the writers who had to defend themselves in court against people who recognized themselves in their works, which allegedly caused them grave psychological distress, is telling especially because it confronts us with the operation of the legal system, which understands art as a copy of reality. But not only this, it demands of this copy to be as faithful as possible, true. In short, in the eyes of the representatives of the law, the order of fiction does not exist, which Smolnikar particularly convincingly showed by reading the allegedly controversial excerpts from her book.

Similarly, the resentment of the police because of the bad words which the main character of *Čefurji raus!* Marko Djordjić (Aleksandar

Rajaković – Sale) uses to insult the representatives of law and order comes across as quite bizarre, which the performance captures well in the filmed sketch in which the writer Vojnović and his character from the incriminated novel defend themselves against police interrogation. The policeman, whom we can only hear, with his questions actually proves that he cannot distinguish between both levels.

If the first “sketches” produce comical effects, especially because of the absurdity of the accusations, the second part of the performance substantially changes in its tone. In it, the spectators could throw eggs and granite cubes at the special guest, Janez Janša, while being filmed from the stage by the director’s camera, or watch a strong performance by body artist Ivo Tabar who ripped open his stomach wound and pulled out a bullet. In this part, we should particularly point out the appearance of the director who explained why we would not be seeing the contribution by duo Eclipse. His explanation of this creative misunderstanding nevertheless leaves a certain aftertaste; it cannot erase the scruples and doubts related to this censorship as the director himself named it and also declaratively took responsibility for it. It seems that the attempt to patch the missing scene intentionally or unintentionally, for the first time, produces the object of the performance – the prohibition of artistic freedom.

To sum up, at the level of the form, which mixes the fictitious and the real, the performance addresses precisely the incapability of some of the defenders of the law to distinguish artistic fiction from reality. Although the idea seems interesting and, in certain scenes, successfully realised, on the whole, this mixing is not carried out to the full. The theatrical part with the king and the jester seems too didactic and actually redundant; for example, a young woman’s warnings that we are in the space of fiction would have sufficed. On the other hand, the various artists’ acts do not form a consistent conceptual whole; it is not clear whether the purpose of the performance is the condemnation and the ridicule of certain institutions in the name of art or the alleviation of the pain of the affected artists or does the performance want to produce something outrageous, something real that would again bring the police to the scene of this new artistic “crime”?