

THE Arts

The New York Times

SATURDAY, JANUARY 22, 2011

A Visit From Europe's Do-It-All Artist

Jan Fabre is a monumental artistic personality, a distinctly European type that hardly seems to exist in America. He had an exhibition of his drawings, sculptures and installations at the

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Louvre; he covered the Hall of Mirrors in the Royal Palace in Brussels with the wing cases of nearly a million beetles; and he was an artistic adviser to the Avignon Festival. He has toured the Continent in the various guises of theater director, opera director, choreographer, performance artist and playwright.

For all that, he and his dance and theater company, Troubleyn, based in Antwerp, are hardly known in the United States. Mr. Fabre performed in New York at the Kitchen in 1986, but since then, the few appearances of his work have mostly been at Montclair State University in New Jersey, which presented three different Fabre pieces at its Peak Performances@Montclair series

"Prometheus — Landscape II" will be performed through Jan. 30 at the Alexander Kasser Theater, Montclair State University, 1 Normal Avenue, Montclair, N.J.; (973) 655-5112, peakperfs.org.

ONLINE: VIDEO

An excerpt from "Prometheus — Landscape II":

nytimes.com/dance

between 2006 and 2008.

On Thursday night Mr. Fabre and Troubleyn returned to Peak Performances at the Alexander Kasser Theater with the premiere of "Prometheus — Landscape II," taking the Aeschylus play "Prometheus Bound" as loose inspiration for 90 minutes of theatrical fantasy and mayhem.

The problem with seeing Mr. Fabre's work only every few years — or perhaps for the first time — is that you never know whether you will encounter his thrilling and visually brilliant side or his gratuitously excessive and annoying one.

Unfortunately, "Prometheus" falls on the side of excess, with a leaden yet hyperactive exposition of its frequently overblown (although sometimes poetic) text by Mr. Fabre and Jeroen Olyslaegers; a few overused theatrical ideas (sand, axes, bondage); and a surprisingly plodding pace. But it does offer the visual spectacle for which Mr. Fabre is known, with Prometheus (the

muscular, nearly naked Kurt Vandendriessche) strung high above the stage, staring impassively forward as an enormous fiery globe alternately swells and subsides on a screen behind him.

One by one, various characters (some, like Hephaestus, Oceanus and Io, present in Aeschylus's play, some not) confront Prometheus, until he too eventually speaks, bitterly defiant of the gods who have inflicted punishment upon him for his theft of fire.

Around the actors, the ensemble (10 performers in all) engage in fetishistic, repetitive behaviors; occasionally sing bits of fire-theme pop songs ("Come on Baby, Light My Fire"; a bit literal, no?); or engage in frantic copulation. (Their underwear stays on; you wonder why Mr. Fabre draws the line there.)

Despite the almost immediate sense that "Prometheus" is both overthought (I sense dramaturges nearby) and overwrought, nothing Mr. Fabre does is ever exactly uninteresting. There are brilliant, if repetitive, visual effects from fire extinguishers and sand; the performers show unflinching commitment and occasionally (kudos to



JULIETA CERVANTES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Prometheus — Landscape II Kurt Vandendriessche, strung up, as Prometheus in Jan Fabre's production, part of Peak Performances@Montclair at the Alexander Kasser Theater at Montclair State University.

Lawrence Goldhuber, who plays Epimetheus) make you feel their characters as both mythological and personal creations.

But Mr. Fabre undercuts himself in "Prometheus" with his predictable structure (the ending is

particularly anticlimactic), his reliance on nudity and sex as shockers, and a consistently clichéd score (solo piano over low humming and rock beats) by Dag Taeldeman. "Prometheus" shows the unabashed maximalism and

relentless obsessiveness that make Mr. Fabre an interesting artist. It's a pity that the show doesn't make the story, or its metaphors of heroism and artistic and personal freedom, nearly as intriguing.