

right?

C: L'œil qui voit draws from the great literary avant-garde movements at the beginning of the 20th century, notably Cubism between 1910 and 1920 as well as Dadaism and Surrealism which inherited greatly from this movement and succeeded it in the current of World War I up until the 1930s.

S: It's a sort of cabaret. A "cubisto-dada" cabaret. The actors are a kind of lecturer and create the spectacle like Hugo Ball and other Dadaists did in their famous Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916.

C: The texts chosen in L'œil qui voit create the performance before everything else. Not only the sense, but the images, sounds and rhythms as well. Picasso wrote that "it is necessary to reveal the paintings which exist underneath the paintings."

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I: Is it a collage of texts?

S: Yes, but a literary, pictorial and musical collage. The avant-garde artists created many collages; they fragmented reality.

C: In L'œil qui voit, Tristan Tzara, Blaise Cendrars, Louis Aragon, Pablo Picasso, Gertrude Stein and even Erik Satie, each in their own way, warn against all the different kinds of stereotypes, provoke... They teach us how to see differently.

S: Moreover, in this era people questioned the particular role of the artist. Erik Satie wrote "My Name is Erik Satie like Everyone Else," and we learned from him, how to listen differently. He also said that he was born very young into a very old world.

C: Stéphane did a lot of research on Satie.

S: Yes, I like Satie a lot. I researched his scores, read his texts... The titles of his works are quite humorous and ("Morceaux en forme de poire," "Préludes flasques pour un chien," "Air à faire fuir"...) show a rupture with classicism. John Cage, a great admirer of Satie, performed "Vexations" years later in New York. This work has 840 reprises. The concert lasted 18 hours and 40 minutes!!!

C: Stéphane showed me a text by Erik Satie called "Ce que je suis" ["What I am"].

S: Satie was a great provocateur; he wrote that he was not a musician but a "phonometrographist." Thereafter, Man Ray wrote "What I am" – with the help of Erik Satie, which we integrated into the performance. Man Ray reuses the same phrases that he uses in painting. Like Satie, he is not just defined as a painter but a "photometrographist."

C: Humor was a great determining factor in the choice of texts for the L'œil qui voit! The texts by Man Ray and Satie were among the first selected. We could play with the bilingualism. All the performances that we create with NYU Paris actors are bilingual. But our works do not just arbitrarily go from French to English. It is necessary

to find coherence. Thus the writings of Gertrude Stein became an obvious choice. She was American, a friend of Picasso, living in Paris and at the heart of the avant-garde movement! Stéphane suggested performing Avant-dernières pensées by Erik Satie over Stein's texts and this worked very well. The repetitive side of Stein's syntax was highlighted by the music. It became very sensorial and almost hypnotic...

S: The Stein-Satie combination evoked a cubist painting for me... we looked at one object from different angles, and we projected it in a veritable kaleidoscope.

C: Yes. There are no longer characters but forms. This is what gave me the idea to have the actors wear masks.

I: There is a great amount of creative liberty in everything that you do...

C: Yes, but in a creative process, there are always constraints and those also can be enriching. For us at NYU Paris one of these constraints is bilingualism. The age of the actors is another. The student actors with whom we work are twenty years old.

I: Stéphane, for L'œil qui voit did you compose the music according to the actors?

S: The young American students with which we worked have been greatly influenced by musical comedy. The song thus becomes the principle vehicle of musical expression. L'œil qui voit ends on a song for three rhythmically different voices that I composed based on a phonic poem by Hugo Ball. For some, it was really difficult, but Cécile and I thought it "set the bar even higher" for our work.

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I: Are the student actors at NYU Paris ever musicians?

S: Yes, that happens sometimes. For each performance in Paris, we had a trumpeter and a saxophonist, respectively. They both played the melodic part of the First Gymnopédie by Satie. I accompanied them on piano.

C: There was also an actor who played the "fan"...

S: Yes, I had this idea, of an upside-down guitar on a stand whose strings would be vibrated by a pocket fan... It's rather cubisto-dada as an idea, don't you think?

C: Stéphane also created a soundtrack which was never descriptive. It played with. It was an additional element of performance for the actors.

S: Like all the videos in the performance and the portraits of the Critiques described by Satie.

C: Yes indeed. We also worked with three art history professors at NYU Paris who are also artists: Nicolas Baudouin, Marie Le Petit and Isabelle de Maison Rouge as well as with a young director, Alexandre Donot. Alexandre directed an animated film based on Blaise Cendrars' surrealist menus.

I: And next you are going to perform the theater piece in New York on October 9th at the Kimmel Center for one night only, correct?

C: Yes, for several years now, Caroline Montel, director of

New York University in France and Raïssa Lahcine, director of cultural affairs, have organized performances in New York of the theater pieces that we created in Paris. We have performed at the Maison Française, the Wasserman Center and presently at the magnificent Kimmel Center with a view over Manhattan. We love the idea that we get to share texts like Cendrars' marvelous poem Tours based on Delaunay's paintings of the Eiffel Tower in the middle of Manhattan... Could there be a more beautiful set than Manhattan to evoke the Cubist revolution?

New York University Paris
presents

L'œil qui voit

on October 9th at 7 pm.

Kimmel Center, New York University
Rosenthal Pavilion, 10th Floor
60 Washington Square South
New York, NY 10012

Free Entry

