

Flesh can't can't not't 'tis flesh h... – Mario Barrantes Espinoza

Fruit, queerness and *perreo*

As the public enters the hall, greeted by the pulsating beats of reggaetón, Mario Barrantes Espinoza's latest show kicks off with a burst of energy. *Flesh can't can't not't flesh h...* transcends mere revelry, delving into realms of seduction, exploration and the exports of exotic fruit. It's a multimedia spectacle where each element contributes harmoniously, a feat few performances achieve.

Reflecting on their previous work *El cantar del playo or... a song is a rose is a thorn* in an interview for [het Theaterfestival](#), Mario Barrantes Espinoza expressed a desire to further explore the intersection of queerness and Latin America, coupled with a fascination for culinary expression. This latest endeavour, accompanied by the optional supporting act *Culo Shaking Night*, fulfils that aspiration. At the premiere in De Kriekelaar, attendees were treated to a culinary extravaganza featuring *coxinhas*, fried octopus, and reimagined *chigrijo*. Latin American rhythms set the tone, punctuated by a captivating performance from ballroom dancer Mamore, setting the stage for what was to come, yet *Flesh can't can't not't flesh h...* transcends mere revelry; it is an immersive experience that extends beyond the confines of a traditional party.

The opening of *Flesh* evokes a Biblical tableau, with Espinoza suspended in the air from thin purple ribbons. Against a backdrop of a shiny, swirling sculpture, bathed in kaleidoscopic hues, Espinoza is clad in an urban, almost futuristic outfit, accentuated by a solitary fake boob sitting on their chest. You could be forgiven to think this was a doll, if it weren't for the chest moving up and down and therefore betraying breathing. The sculpture bears resemblance to a fallen angel, with the floating plastic shape behind them reminiscent of wings. As the pulsating reggaetón glitches and stutters, an aura of overstimulation permeates the space. Meanwhile, an unknown liquid drips onto Espinoza. The audience, tantalised by the infectious beats, teeters on the brink of abandon, held in thrall by the music's relentless cadence.

Abruptly, the sound yields to quasi esoteric mindfulness music, accompanied by a voice addressing Espinoza. Words are displayed in English and Spanish on a screen in the top right corner. The soothing tones are gradually suffused with erotic fervour. Bathed in azure light, the translucent sculpture lights up in fascinating ways, much like bioluminescent beaches or jellyfish. The trance culminates in a crescendo of sound. As the prologue concludes, a fictional radio dialogue unfolds on a smaller screen at the bottom left, where two presenters talk about a harvest season, lending an air of surrealism to the proceedings.

The subsequent chapters of the show, delineated into five distinct acts (1. Preparation 2. Voyage 3. The Deal 4. The Truck 5. Hallucination... Arrival), chart a dystopian odyssey. Espinoza and Luis Javier Murillo Zúñiga traverse a landscape marred by decay, chatting over and to each other. As they survey the decaying world around them, they explore each other's bodies in slow perreo-choreographies, crawl over the ground, sing love songs and act in a half-nonsense language as if they were playing in a telenovela. Each time, there is something both comical and intimate in those scenes. That intimacy becomes palpable when Espinoza and Zúñiga seem to be tentatively exploring each other. The comical dimension reaches a climax when a monstrous voice is personified by Zúñiga's shaking ass.

Building on Espinoza's thematic preoccupations, *Flesh* intertwines notions of queerness, Latin American culture and the inherent challenges of communication. In addition to these themes, which are slowly but surely representing Espinoza's oeuvre, *Flesh* works with the fruit theme. References to harvests, fruity bodies and transport punctuate the performance. The fact that 'fruity' means 'queer' in some English slang adds another layer of meaning. What it is mainly about, however, is the exports of exotic fruit and the long journeys involved. The difficulties during transport are poetically described as if they were people, who would also travel this road. This alternates with a video projection of old commercials for tins of pineapple and Chiquita bananas, subtly showing the commercial side of exporting.

Meanwhile, the performers continue their journey across the playing surface. It is in these multi-layered artistic connections that *Flesh* excels. Multiple autonomous art forms, from video projections, lighting, music and sound to movement, converge to evoke a visceral response. The absence of a linear narrative fosters a collective immersion, inviting viewers to surrender to the immersive spectacle.

Language assumes a unique role in this production. The overhead titles on the main screen undergo gradual distortion, with some words spelt phonetically, others adopting near-incomprehensible spelling variations. Letters duplicate, words fragment into disjointed clusters. As the voice grows more animated, the distortion intensifies. It transcends the realm of linguistic correctness, delving into the inherent inadequacy of language to express emotion. Language disintegrates, just as a body might disintegrate into pleasure.

The final image encapsulates this sentiment. With light pouring in from different angles, the figures move in a time-lapse, converging in awe-inspiring unity. As the lights dim, a solitary voice asks, 'Can you see how we come together?' A pregnant pause ensues, leaving the audience uncertain if it marks the show's conclusion, before the lights illuminate once more for the bow. Post-performance, there was the option to carry on the festivities with Culo Shaking

Night, with glasses of *agua de sapo* or *chiliguaro*, two Latin American drinks, for those keen to dance the night away to reggaetón beats.

Flesh can't can' t not't tis flesh h... doesn't overtly address queerness and cultural identity, but subtly navigates these themes. Through the motif of fruit, a futuristic, post-apocalyptic landscape ensues, with a blend of humour and visually abstract elements. Its multimedia form facilitates fluid connections, allowing the audience to extract meaning from diverse elements without delving into exhaustive analysis. It's a juicy performance, where immediacy takes precedence over exposition, offering an experience rich in nuance and sensation.

Check out the list of upcoming tour dates [here](#).