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Metal confetti rains on stage. (Photo: picture alliance / dpa / Ullrich Perrey)

**The Fascinating and the Perverse of Manmade Nature**

**For two years now, objects have been dancing alongside bodies in the works of Mette Ingvartsen. In her recent work, the Artificial Nature Project, she uses confetti to create and destroy landscape.**

In the beginning was not the word, not the definition, not the deed. In the beginning of *this* creation story – spun from the fantasies of female choreographers from Denmark – was, wholly in keeping with the Bible, the light. Scattered flashes, like stars in the night sky, twinkle in the pitch-black space at Pact Zollverein, where even the emergency lights have been snuffed. Eventually, the sparks multiply, congealing into a swarm of dancing fireflies. After the light has enveloped the entire length of the stage, metal confetti begins to fall in the nocturnal landscape like glimmering snow. All the while, the lighting shifts subtly, eliciting a changing array of associations from the confetti as it trickles down from the firmament.

All theater-makers like to play God, and Ingvartsen is no exception. For the last two years, Ingvartsen – who in addition to graduating from the famous Belgium dance school PARTS digested heaping portions of critical theory and postmodern philosophy – has been producing artificial versions of nature that comment on the desolation of today’s world. In this piece, kilos of party confetti symbolize the atoms of creation, and evoke astonishing landscapes, to boot.

Soon the opening idyll comes to an abrupt halt, naturalesque poetry giving way to postapocalyptic intimation. Seven performers, manipulators of material all, appear on stage, their faces concealed by dust masks and outsized glasses, their bodies draped in hoodies resembling hazmat suits. As they tumble around in the confetti, heaped like piles of ash, the stage is lit by the kind of poisonous green light one associates with radioactive contamination – the kind of environment created by Fukushima, we are meant to think.

Beauty and horror fuse repeatedly this evening. The performers throw the metal confetti into the air, producing geyser-like fountains. They let the confetti skid across the stage like pearls of quicksilver, and then distribute it in uneven moonscapes. At some point they abandon the contemplative exploration of the elements. They arm themselves with loud leaf blowers and precipitate a storm of confetti. In one corner the confetti sprays through the air like flames of fire; in the other it climbs up the wall like sea foam. The performers destroy the order they create, their bodies disappear in chaos, just as mankind, by seeking to subjugate the world, becomes both architect and victim of environmental catastrophe.

In every scene of this impressive theatrical installation, Ingvartsen plays with the fascinating and the perverse of manmade nature. In doing so, she alludes to the way in which real and artificial landscapes are becoming harder to tell apart, the way breeding, technology, and illusion have replaced nature, much to our peril.

As the end nears, the performers snatch Mylar blankets from the ground. Standing in a circle, they use leaf blowers to make the golden foil sheets dance in the air until the first-aid devices begin to sail along like flying carpets in a fairy tale. A grand, ironic image for the hybris of human beings, who work diligently on the apocalypse in the naïve belief that salvation will come – by magic, if need be.