

# North West End

## Negative Space - Contact Theatre, Manchester

Negative Space is the latest creation of the UK / Belgian performing troupe known as Reckless Sleepers.

Formed in 1988 and taking its name from the painting of the same name by Belgium surrealist Rene Magritte, the company produce striking, visual, physical and rule breaking pieces of theatre. There is no one word to describe their performance style. They do not fit into any genre. And so to describe their style as surrealist is perhaps the most apt. They produce work which pushes boundaries and then breaks them completely; starting with an idea, their work is installed around that idea and given time to develop and mutate; and once there, they then make something which becomes challenging and uncomfortable - both for performer and audience alike.

To begin their work on Negative Space, the company built a room-sized wooden frame and covered it with plasterboard. For several weeks they started smashing it up and smashing it down, then pieced the fragments of their destruction back together again. This is the ultimate in deconstruction theatre - this is literal!

There is no dialogue and no music underlay. Just six performers and the space. Yet what they produce is lyrical, hilarious, agonising, dangerous and exciting. Mini-stories emerge, empathy is created, only to be destroyed by anger and a hammer with a life of its own!

This hour long performance starts with a new and unscathed plasterboard house construction, and ends with the whole thing in ruins. This must surely be a Stage Manager's and Risk Assessor's idea of hell!!! Six hammers and two saws are used during the performance - and if any of the cast miss their mark by anything less than a centimetre, there is going to be blood! Even those sitting on the front row got splattered a couple of times from the shards and sawdust of the plasterboard.



The performers though are absolutely at the top of their game in this. Their physicality is incredible as they slither snake-like down trap doors and scale the top of the structure to jump in from above; and their stamina unreal as they are pushed through the plasterboard and fall on the stage full of debris. No faking, this is for real!

It is compelling viewing too. Once you start you cannot take your eyes from the stage. Their timing is impeccable, and their body language superb.

To be honest I have no idea what I witnessed and what I should call it. Nor do I know if I have accurately described their intention and done the piece and the company justice in this writing. All I can say is that this is something that you need to find out and experience for yourselves. This is certainly not theatre in the accepted sense, but whatever it is, it is bloody brilliant!

Sadly there were no programmes or cast lists available, and so I have had to look at their website for these details. Therefore according to their webpage, the performers last night were... Alex Covell, Leentje Van De Cruys, Kevin Egan, Tim Ingram, Mole Wetherell and Rebecca Young, and was directed by Mole Wetherell.

**Reviewer: Mark Dee - Reviewed: 1st March 2016**