

## Land's End (The Old Municipal Market, Brighton)

Date Reviewed: 13 May 2012

WOS Rating: ★★★★★

The story behind the latest production by the celebrated Belgian collective, Berlin, is not only true but also absolutely fascinating. The piece is based on a murder investigation where the victim, the owner of a pancake factory, was found dead in the boot of a car, having been bludgeoned to death in a horrific attack.

Despite the best efforts of the investigators they came to an impasse. They had reason to believe that the victim's Belgian wife Katelijne Verbeke had hired a French hitman Jean-Benoit Ugeux to do the deed, but both gave conflicting evidence about what actually happened on that day. The only answer was to get the two together for a confrontation where the truth, it was hoped, would come out.

However, there was a massive obstacle in the way because the crime happened in Belgium, but the French authorities will not send their citizens across international borders for interrogation. Nowadays they could just use a video link, but that didn't exist then and the Belgian prosecutors were at a loss for a way around this, until they found the most bizarre solution – the Groot Moerhof farmstead.

The farm sits across the French / Belgian border, so much so that it actually has separate French and Belgian addresses, and by placing a long table in the living room it was possible for the Belgian widow and the French hitman to be in the same room, but still be in two separate countries.

The production starts by showing us the widow and hitman meeting before the crime and, after we hear the various arguments from the two teams of trial lawyers, we watch, with brilliant use of video technology, the interrogation. I mention the video because five characters in the piece, the four interrogators and the woman's Belgian lawyer, are "virtual". They appear on life size video screens with speakers above and, in a stroke of theatrical genius and precision timing, they interact with the "live" characters.

Each of the accused gives their own version of events and, as well as answering the prosecutor's questions, they also talk to each other in an attempt to unravel what exactly happened that fateful day. The production is performed in French and Flemish, with English surtitles, but that is no barrier to getting the drama and tension, and even the humour, across.

The piece is totally engaging and brilliantly staged with the minimum of fuss and the emphasis purely on the characters. At the conclusion of the piece the five "virtual" characters walk out of their video screens only to walk back into view a few seconds later to acknowledge the rapturous applause from the audience with a "virtual" curtain call.

- by Paul Lucas-Scott



One of the amazing gadgets on display at Land's End

