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Festival Review: True Copy

Posted On 28 May 2019 at 11:55 pm By : Mikko Clarke Comment: 0

Geert van Jansen is master art forger who fooled every strata of the art world for over twenty years between the 1970s and 1990s. Starting out with the mundane aim of paying the rent on his fancy Amsterdam flat by passing off a piece of his work as a Karel Appel, he was encouraged to continue the enterprise when his second attempt at an Appel was, unplanned by Geert, certified by Appel as one of his own.

At the height of his powers, Geert was painting in the style of eighteen different artists, including the greats like Picasso and Matisse. The key to this ability was his immersion in the worlds of each artist: by now Geert was operating from a chateau in France where he installed studios dedicated to each artist, furnished appropriately and decked with their original art and meticulous documentation. He even commissioned musicians to play music conducive to each artist's style.

Geert made an appearance at the 2014 Brighton Festival as one of thirty storytellers in Dutch company BERLIN's *Perhaps All The Dragons*. Here Gert returned here to the Attenborough Centre, centre stage for their latest production, *True Copy*, retelling his life story in Dutch to a interviewer. The translation appeared in surtitles above an array of his forgeries that were revealed as forgeries themselves: they were in fact screens that showed stills and video to illuminate the interview and Geert's subsequent "live forgeries".

Those forgeries were created in a triptych of studios on stage that mimicked those from his chateau, including the classical musicians, behind the tessellated picture frame-screens. As he breezily penned faux masterpieces, he shared some of his elaborate techniques: collecting dust from old French churches to rub into the canvas to age it; leaving the finished canvases under his doormat for several weeks for the footfall to distress them. The final forgery of the night was too good to spoil in a review and is a masterpiece of staging by BERLIN.

The production is a compelling insight into story of this master forger and explores the nature of authenticity in art and duplicity in the art world. The same could be asked of the production as it asks of Geert Wilder: is it art? It doesn't matter, it's excellent quality.

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