

“Echte vondst nep-Picasso is theater in ‘True Copy,’” Joyce Roodnat, *NRC*, 28.11.2018. Translated by Patrick Lennon. <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/11/28/echte-vondst-nep-picasso-wordt-theater-in-true-copy-a2773676>

Real find of fake Picasso is theatre in ‘True Copy’ (●●●●●)

The ‘find’ of a Picasso stolen from the Kunsthal made the world press – but was staged for theatre group Berlin’s ‘True Copy’. What is fake and what is authentic blend completely into one another.

Flemish theatre group Berlin balances on the edge between theatre and reality. Real and not real, fake and authentic. It’s possible and it’s not possible – with Berlin, the craziest things are true and the most normal things are not. For ‘True Copy’, their latest performance, Berlin uses the reality of Dutch art forger Geert Jan Jansen to great effect. A cult hero. A crook. ‘Whether real or not real, it doesn’t matter, as long as the quality is good’, he says. His very first forgery, a ‘Karel Appel’, was recognized as genuine by Appel himself. Jansen is a master forger. ‘Master, I like that’, he says. ‘But not forger.’ Because what he makes is not fake. His paintings, he says, become ‘spontaneously real’.

In ‘True Copy’, he talks about his methods in a decor made up of tilting artworks. The audience is introduced to the con man’s psychological warfare. Charming and cuddly. Except that, if you look closer, you can see through that deception. But the point is precisely that you don’t want to – and that’s what this performance is about. The painter disappears into the decor. Behind it is a studio, where we follow him via camera footage. We see him produce a Matisse in the blink of an eye. Or not? Berlin challenges the audience to choose. Do I believe this? Is it real? And if not, is that a bad thing?

Auction

The house lights come on. A large drawing, Jansen’s portrait of Dora Maar by Picasso, is up for auction. It goes under the hammer for €3,000. The man next to me, who underbid by just a little, gets a small Jansen ‘Picasso’ as a consolation prize. He says he ‘really isn’t in on it’. I choose to believe him.

Part of ‘True Copy’ was an attempt to reunite Picasso’s drawing *Tête d’arlequin* with the Rotterdam Kunsthal from where it was stolen in 2012. Jansen made a forgery and the group hid it in a Romanian forest. Everything was filmed by a hidden camera concealed in a tree. We see the footage up to the real cries of triumph uttered by the finders: Dutchmen Frank Westerman and Mira Feticiu are now part of ‘True Copy’.

They shared their 'find' with the enraptured world press. It got out of hand, says Berlin member Yves Degryse afterwards. Or not. This is what the art market evokes: a fatally overstrained reaction. And this is what a forger like Jansen bases his tactics on.