



# SUPERNAUT

## GALLERY

WRITTEN ON JUNE 5, 2017

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## GALA MOODY & MICHAEL CARTER, CIE. OFEN: THE VASE, AT BÖRSE WUPPERTAL

Six hours on the Autobahn and straight into the theatre to find Gala and Michael hard at it. I reckon they must be near the end, arriving so late as I did, but they keep going, like they were waiting as long as possible for me to get there before they started. In the end I missed maybe 20 minutes of their pre-general on Thursday evening and had the delight of their sweaty hot bodies jumping on me the instant they realised who the tardy arrival was.

Turns out missing the beginning is crucial to understanding what's going on. Without Gala's first monologue the piece only has the meaning I put on it; it's a strong argument for context and against interpretation. So I'll start with interpretation. A woman in a long, pale-lemon dress, cut just below the half-way line of her calves. Sleeveless, but over a dirty white short-sleeved shirt. A man in Oxford Blue corduroy trousers and a blue-grey unbuttoned shirt over a dirty white singlet. Both bare foot. A stage coated with ash, four wooden chairs, and downstage where the stage manager's box would be if it were on-stage instead of off, a table, chair, computer, sound and light desks, spaghetti-ing cables onto the floor into a red effects box, and a single microphone on a long cable.

It's one of the enduring clichés of dance theatre, ballet, contemporary dance and all, the single man and woman on stage, dressed so, performing the clichés of heteronormativity. It would be a comedy, except it's not. It's a cliché also of gay male choreographers making such work, almost a compulsion, like having to 'reinterpret' Giselle or Swan Lake. I'm watching these two dancers, tall, lithe, strong, who I've known for well over a decade in

various cities and countries, who have danced together for thirteen years now, who I adore — so let's not pretend I have any interest in lip service to 'objectivity' here — who I love watching dance, especially when it's their own dancing, especially together. I'm watching them, and without the benefit of that first monologue, wonder how awkward it's going to be if they fall over into that cliché. And giving them credit here, I know them for mercilessly mocking all the tropes and stereotypes of dance, both with their words and with their bodies. Yet sometimes the piece makes itself, and sometimes even the most caustic find themselves wanting to say something on those roles and identities and selfhoods which are real and lived, which we have to negotiate even if we ourselves are not fully part of, even while they are so often used to fill the void of ideas.

The next day I see the whole work. I pay attention. I listen to Gala say, "Have you said any words of love today? There are no words of love today." Say, whisper, bellow. Her voice is a typhoon blasting the stage, pushing the air before it. Rage, hate, anguish. This is the story of Medea, who kills her children after her husband's betrayal. This is the story of Gala. In *Genesis*, Michel Serres says,

*The more I think, the less I am me. If I think something, I am that something. If I simply think, I am no longer anyone. In any case, me thinking am nothing.*

*[...] Dance is to the body proper what exercise of thought is the subject known as I. The more I dance, the less I am me. If I dance something, I am that something, or I signify it. When I dance, I am only the blank body of the sign.*

When Gala and Michael reference the story of Medea and Jason, the Gods take an interest. Not to say it's an invocation, but rather to recite the lines from Euripides' *Medea*, and to find or thread together multiple variations, be it Euripides, Ariel Dorfman's *Purgatorio*, or their own private lives deferred through these variations is enough to reverse the relationship. It is Medea who dances her life through Gala as much as it is Gala who draws on Medea to tell her own. It is a repetition across time, through each work referencing a predecessor, tracing branchings and bifurcations back to Medea. It is a repetition also in their bodies, dancing themselves, dancing each other.



I want to diverge from philosophy here and write of the awe I feel seeing these two together. Because this is becoming something of a review and not just photography and a travel document, Gala and Michael first danced together in [Leigh Warren & Dancers](#), Michael

coming from Oz Ballet; Gala from WAAPA (by way of me and a couple of pieces back when I actually made dance). Michael went on to Compañía Nacional de Danza in Madrid, while Gala went to Charleroi Danses then Ultima Vez in Brussels. As for why I was seeing them in Wuppertal, Michael joined Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch a while ago. So we're talking about two highly capable dancer-performers, who have worked across dance, theatre, opera in Europe and Australia while making their own work together for much of that time, and 'officially' since 2012 under the name cie. OFEN. They move, alone and together, with brutal clarity. This isn't the kind of work you can make in six weeks by throwing together some steps and ideas; it's a knowing of self and each other down to their bones, worked into their bones. Even if they had gone fully into the cliché, I'd be destroyed by the beauty of them together.

The inevitability in their dancing. They compound that with dialogue, or with just the mundane acts of technical concerns, changing the lights, sound. There's a moment where Gala is on all fours, around the centre of the work, the light and the energy has gone into a dark place, like blood is going to be spilt — or already has and you don't even feel it yet — and Michael, barely above a whisper, spits, "Get. Up." Savage. A slap to the face. Hatred where there was supposed to be love; betrayal and resentment and spite. You want to see work like this. You want the shit mediocrity of the cliché exposed for what it is: violence and abuse. Those saccharine dramatic conceits of the love story rest on the unmentionable bodies of murdered women, and while Medea might have murdered her children, this is projection: it is not women who are the murderers, not terrorists who women must fear, but the men in our midst, the men closest.

It's a fucking hard, brave work.

It's a beautiful work. I've said that already. Here is the violence of abuse, and here also is something to aspire to, here is a way out. Michael and Gala, Gala and Michael. Maybe a decade and some years is what's needed for such a work. The care they take with each other, the familiarity, even or especially when they get rough, when it needs to be endured. The matter of fact getting on with it, like digging in the garden, there's a complete absence of pretence that also doesn't try and be some shite authenticity, like here's the genuine, essential, real Gala and Michael for your entertainment. I want to say more, but then it becomes personal, and the point of a performance is to defer biography. So I will end with the end. Michael is back at the table. He and Gala have danced together, separate but together, increasingly apart, the light has increased for this last somewhat third or act, he

sits and watches her as she comes from upstage in front of the chairs, dancing, dancing, and fades the lights, she's smiling. Alone, survived, no longer Medea, Gala dancing, smiling.

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 1

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 2

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 3

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 4

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 5

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 6

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 7

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 8

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 9

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 10

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 11

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 12

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 13

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 14

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 15

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 16

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 17

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 18

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 19

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 20

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 21

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 22

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 23

Gala Moody & Michael Carter, Cie.  
OFEN: The Vase — 24