

# **Sympathetic and super-grotesque**

Text: Elin Lindberg at Norsk Shakespare tidsskrift.  
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## **Susie Wang delivers again! MUMMY BROWN, the second in a horror trilogy about human nature is both dark and cheerful.**

Concept: Susie Wang

Text / director: Trine Falch

Sound / music: Martin Langlie

Lights / stage design: Bo K. Wallström and Philip Isaksen

SFX: Fannei Antonsdottir

Actors: Valborg Frøysnes, Kim Atle Hansen, Mona Solhaug and Mari Strand Ferstad

Rom for Dans, October 6th, 2018

It's a year since Susie Wang made their first production: THE HUM. It was a successful, weird and bizarre story. I therefore had great expectations for number two in this which will become a horror trilogy. And yes, my expectations were met. MUMMYBROWN is a whole new story, but it is just as weird and bizarre as the first one. And it's excellent theatre!

### **Mysteries**

It feels exclusive to watch Susie Wang in Rom for Dans. Exclusive in the sense that it isn't shown for a very large audience. There are few seats in Rom for Dans and the venue is a bit secluded – you have to ring a doorbell to be let in. This suits the production well. The situation may resemble a workshop, but the performance is no sketch or work in process, it is well made and precisely presented by a group of highly experienced and professional theater people.

The stage is a room in a museum. All surfaces are in 'marble'. Objects are displayed on marble blocks. They are artifacts that might be art or represent art, but in this case the objects represent something mysterious – whether they are from space or from a distant past. They are linked to the logic or dramaturgy of dreams. Things change meaning and significance. Susie Wang investigates theatricality through this dramaturgy of dreams, making the whole work wonderfully playful and unpredictable.

### **Dense calmness**

The museum guard (Mona Solhaug) is sitting on a chair. She chews on some crunchy food as she looks at the entrance of the room. Martin Langlie makes music and sound. Distant sounds that we associate with city life and museums – street noise, children whining, people talking, birds singing, engine sounds and piano – maybe from a piece played elsewhere in the museum? The sounds are muted, the room is quiet, but at the same time there is a well-balanced expectation that something is going to happen. The guard picks up her sewing gear, but is interrupted when a visitor (Mari Strand Ferstad) enters. She is dressed in a white tennis-like suit. She watches the objects calmly and meditatively and is told by the guard in Danish(!) that she must feel free to touch the objects. In THE HUM some of the characters spoke Swedish and German, even though the actors were Norwegian. Like the Danish spoken here, this generates a strangeness and

emphasizes Susie Wang's quirky ways of expression. The tennis woman sits down on a marble bench and looks at an artifact – a circle of wood – for a long time, as if she was meditating and reflecting on it. When she gets up, she has left a blood stain on the white bench. Menstrual blood has stained her white tennis skirt, but the stain on the bench makes a precisely drawn figure. The tennis girl leaves quietly without noticing. It doesn't seem to stress the museum guard, either. She tries to wash the stain away, but it is stuck. Instead, she covers it with a tissue paper.

### **What do you see?**

The stain on the bench, which is also the logo of the production, is the first in a series of ten classic and original images of the Rorschach-test. It is a psychological test in which a patient comments on random inkblots. What you see says more about yourself than about the inkblot – or here: the blood stain. Susie Wang invites its audience to join in as co-creators in the imaginary world they present – that's smart and sympathetic. It says in the program that they 'take the mystery seriously and team up with dreams, hallucinations and fantasies', they also team up with their audience.

One by one several visitors enter the museum – even the director Trine Falch shows up as a museum guest. We play at the game and go deeper and deeper into the state of the museum.

### **The body**

'I'm so tired of being a woman,' one of the characters says. Witty, but also with several serious layers in it. It applies to the roles of women as well as to the biological aspects of the female gender, both the actual and the expected ones.

A heavily pregnant woman (Valborg Frøysnes) enters and gets startled by the blood stain/Rorschach image on the bench. Now a birth scene from hell begins, a splatter/body horror sequence. The group has brought with them Fanny Antonsdottir, who creates special effects for stage and film – so-called SFX effects, that function as realistic prostheses. MUMMY BROWN holds an orgy of umbilical cord and placenta and ripped up breasts. It's as grotesque as it gets. And – oddly enough – with the rather distanced style of acting, we still get carried away. What happens in the depths below the marble floor? We find ourselves believing in monsters and aliens as if we were watching a realistically made horror movie. Once again, well done! When the monster/baby bites off his father's penis, it is put in a glass vase where it swims happily around before the museum guard sews it back in place, and we shudder in delight by the surprises and the theatricality of it all.

### **Imagination**

The references to other body horror works are many. Among others, the iconic and classic Alien films directed by Ridley Scott are part of this universe. The frightening and threatening comes from outside and at the same time, from within.

The way Susie Wang takes imagination seriously is touching and affecting. Imagination becomes a power of its own and it encourages and enhances our ability to see human life in perspective. The strange and grotesque stories encourage recognition by other means than the purely intellectual ones. Not only does Susie Wang take imagination seriously, but also art, theatre and what may be at the bottom of it all: playing.