

Cute quadrupeds with awkward stories:  
Petra Zanki and Britta Wirthmüller in action at Wiener Tanzquartier

TANZQUARTIER WIEN

### **NASAL HAIR AS ANTIBODY**

HELMUT PLOEBST, 06 November 2011

**Dance against the raging norms in our society, statements against the hype of conformity:  
Petra Zanki and Britta Wirthmüller are convincing, and not only as human quadrupeds**

Vienna – Who determines what is to be considered “normal”? What is imaginable and what looks sexy? These are the questions raised by the two choreographers, Britta Wirthmüller from Germany and Petra Zanki from Croatia. Their thoughts on these issues have now been presented at Tanzquartier Wien.

Wirthmüller – who can be seen at Tanzquartier again next month, performing with Anarchiv #3: Songs of Love and War by Deufert+Plischke – enacts something more than a simple, everyday kissing scene in her solo called “Kissing Elisabeth”, as she, a young woman, lets her tongue slide into the mouth of an elderly, toothless woman. Wirthmüller is glowing on stage in her red shirt and brown breeches. At first she is silent while a mature female voice is heard offstage, squeamishly describing a street scene and a young female figure forming a part of the stage set. This loving description is followed by the narration of the kiss.

Step by step. From the grey hairs on Elisabeth’s upper lip, which “tickles my nose”, to the gums that “caress my tongue so full of desire, as if it were the first and the last time in her life.”

At that moment, Wirthmüller begins to dance by using only the slightest movements of her shoulders, arms, lips, hands, hips, and legs; it is precisely what the famous American postmodernist Steve has called “small dance”. In this way, in silence, she retains until the very end the tension that was built up while listening to the two texts.

*Antibodies* is the name of a trilogy by Petra Zanki and Britta Wirthmüller, on which they have been working for two years. On the same evening, we could see its second part, called “Quadrupeds”. The two dancers draw hoods over their heads and stand on their hands and knees. They pose as human quadrupeds. Some of their positions are strenuous or painful. As soon as they have pulled off their hoods, they are transformed into cats, which weasel across the stage and turn their heads at the smallest sound. Their eyes glitter in the light.

In this way, the duo tackles the surfaces that seem to guide everything in our society, stimulated as it is by images. They take off their sweatshirts, followed by their T-shirts, and then by two more layers, until eventually their bare backs glitter under the spotlights. The skin reveals itself as the ultimate surface. Mostly Zanki and Wirthmüller move in a synchronous manner – which represents the purity of form – except when they play the alert cats.

With these formally reduced and ironical performances, perfectly clear in terms of content, the two artists adopt a critical and daring stance against the exalted norm craze in our society and the hype of stylish conformity in contemporary dance.

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