

ARTS TALK Colour Supplement

Number 30

April 2025

Three different dance shows this month. The NDT brought together all the parts of the Figures in Extinction trilogy and Alida Dor's (Sur)render has been on tour, as has been Conny Jannsen Danst's and the Ragazze Quartet's Normality No More. There is an excellent exhibition of photos by Scarlett Hooft Graafland at Museum Panorama Mesdag in The Hague and we are in Delft where we discovered the old gunpowder store. All this and more in the April edition of ArtsTalk Colour Supplement

Michael HASTED Publisher & Editor

Contributors

Atulya JAIN Astrid BURCHARDT



Amanda HARPUT Rahi REZVANI Sanne PEPER

Cover

NDT's Figures in Extinction
Photo by Rahi REZVANI





Mesmerizing at Panorama Mesdag in The Hague



Delft gunpowder magazine



Mama Dada at Theater Rotterdam



Contents

Nederlands Dans Theater's Figures in Extinction



Alida Dors' (Sur)render

Conny Jannsen Danst and the Ragazze

Quartet's Normality No More



MESMERIZING

Scarlett Hooft Graafland at Museum Panorama Mesdag in The Hague







Just as Hendrik Willem Mesdag did with his Panorama, Scarlett manages to create a new world of colourful, surprising landscapes and representations with each image, whether or not in collaboration with the local population. Nothing is what it seems, illusion and reality merge. Her photographs, which she sometimes enriches with embroidery, play with the viewer's perception. She



transcends reality with her photography. And that's clever, because she doesn't work digitally, all images are real, photographed with her analogue camera and not edited afterwards.

Her photographs of unspoilt landscapes contain unexpected stories, often with a socially critical undertone. But because she often uses humour in her



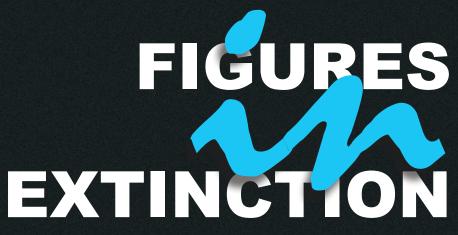


images, cynicism never dominates. Hooft Graafland wants to make things that matter, 'it is important that there is always hope', she says. Recurring themes in her work are about women's rights, inequality and nature conservation.

Scarlett Hooft Graafland studied in The Hague and New York. She was trained as a sculptor only taking up the camera in order to photograph her installations. She has had solo exhibitions at Fotografiska, the Stockholm Museum of Photography, at Huis Marseille Museum of Photography in Amsterdam, at Landskrona Museum in Sweden, the Museum of Photography in Seoul, South Korea, MOCA in Lima, Peru and the MOCA in Toronto, Canada

Scarlett Hooft Graafland - Mesmerizing can be seen at Museum Panorama Mesdag in The Hague until 31st August 2025











In May 2022, as part of the *Dreams 360* programme, *Figures in Extinction [1.0]* marked the first of a four year collaboration between English director Simon McBurney and his company Complicté, choreographer Crystal Pite and NDT. Later that year the piece won the coveted Zwaan (Swan) award for the most impressive dance production at the Nederlandse Dansdagen Gala in Maastricht. The McBurney/Pite/NDT partnership was one convened in heaven and promised the exciting prospect of things to come. *FiE[2]* carried the project a step further when it was premiered in February 2024 in the triple-bill *From Here Now Far*. The presentation of *Figures in Extinction [3.0]* marks the culmination of this extraordinary trilogy which is now being performed in its entirety.

Figures in Extinction is essentially about the trials and tribulations of life in the twenty-first century and the pressures and restrictions we all face, where separation from our true nature adds to our alienation and isolation. We are lead to believe that one way or another, the end of the worlds is nigh – but then history shows it always has been. But one thing is for sure, the end of the world for each of us individually is bound to come and the millions who are dispossessed, starving or innocent victims of violence will tell you it already has.

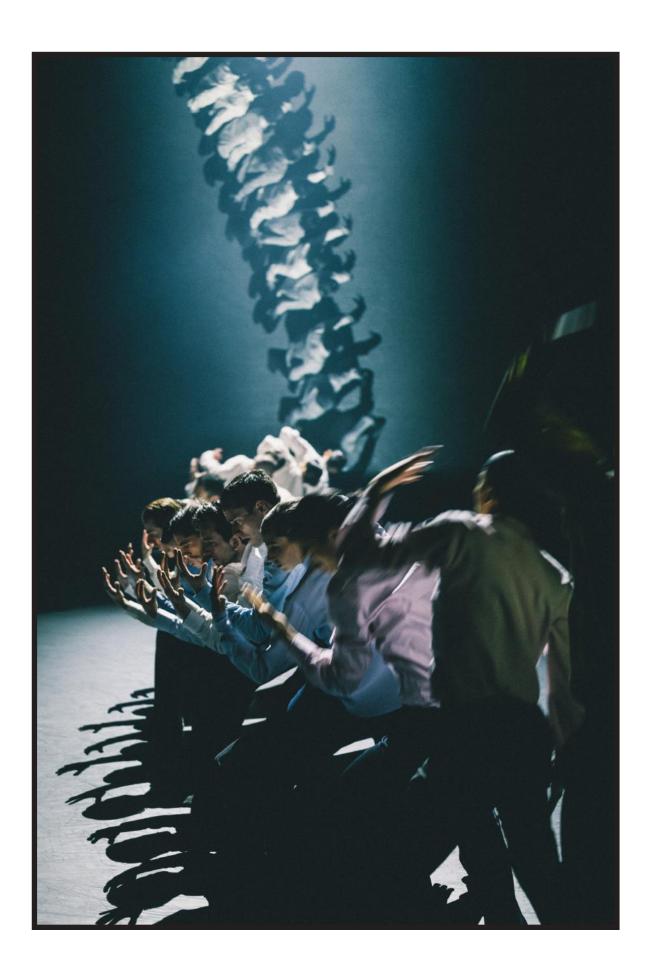
The evening starts, rather predictably, with the first tranche of the trilogy. We are taken through a sequence of tableaux highlighting the plight of endangered animals and birds, each one announced with a surtitle caption – *Figure I*, *Figure 4* etc., like a scientific lecture. The first cameo was almost the most dramatic, inspired by the Pyrenean ibex which became extinct in 2000. This amazing piece involved a single male dancer with two enormous ibex-type horns on his arms. The plight of several more species is highlighted but in the interest of balance and fair play we were also subjected to the occasional rant by a rather flashy climate change denier. Powerful and thought provoking stuff, beautifully presented with some amazing reflective light backdrops.

The action in *Figures in Extinction* [2] starts dramatically enough with the curtain rising onto a silent stage, the twenty dancers all wearing smart business suits and ties sitting in orderly rows of office chairs. Predictably, they start checking their phones – a not insignificant cause of human isolation – their faces illuminated by the glow. They listen to the radio.

Figures in Extinction [2] is essentially built around the spoken word to which the dancers react. This emphasis on text is perhaps not surprising from Mr McBurney whose main work is in drama. The piece is effectively an animated lecture extracted from *The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* by Jain McGilchrist. The premise is that our







society is suffering from the consequences of an over-dominant left hemisphere of the brain, losing touch with its natural regulative half on the right – not much we can do about that I would have thought. Now, this might sound fairly heavy going, even esoteric stuff, but Mr McBurney skilfully introduces a lot of humour to the proceedings and handles it with a light touch which draws the audience in and keeps it enthralled.

During the constant, seamless flow of movement the dancers each lip-syncs to the odd sentence or passage and at one point one of the dancers gets out his phone and films the action up close and personal, the pictures projected live onto the back wall. Towards the end a subtle revolution takes place, suits and ties are cast off, the slender stalks of freedom are grasped and signs of emotionally tenderness are witnessed.

For those who are regular visitors to NDT productions the first two parts of *Figures in Extinction* may bring on a *déjà vu* moment. With part three we were entering unexplored territory and needed to keep our wits about us.

In this world, as Benjamin Franklin stated, nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes. Maybe there is a show to be built around the latter but *Figures in Extinction* [3] deals with the former – and very thoroughly too.

The curtain rises to reveal the company of twenty-three dancers, dressed in their street clothes standing in a neat line across the stage. They take it in turn to step forward giving their name and family details before the piece starts in earnest. As in *FiE[1]* the *[3]* is performed to text by English renaissance man John Berger, spoken by a plethora of distinguished British actors. We were informed, in graphic detail of the stages of decay that a dead body goes through and lots more besides.

Although mostly performed in the ubiquitous black-box set, possibly the best sequence involved a small hospital room with a dying patient in bed surrounded by relatives and medical staff. There is a very funny moment when two male nurses have to change/remove the sheet from the bed with minimum discomfort to its occupant.

The *dénouement* was performed in front of giant cloud-like projections reminiscent of images from the Hubble space telescope. These swirling shapes could have been interpreted as the death of the universe or its birth. Powerful stuff. With *Figures in Extinction* McBurney and Pite have created a magnificent and important piece of theatre which no doubt will be performed near and far in years to come.











Jan Luyken's 1698 painting of *The 1654 Explosion of the Gunpowder Store in Delft*. Oil on Panel 37 x 62 cms. Courtesy of the Rijskmuseum in Amsterdam. The church on the extreme left is the Nieuwe Kerk, the one on the right is the Oude Kerk and between them stands the Town Hall, all of which escaped largely unscathed although some widows were broken by the blast.





unny language Dutch. It is part German, part English and part everything else. It has words you will recognise – if not the way they are pronounced - and words that seem eccentric, amusing even. One such is *ontploffing*.

That unlikely word means "explosion" and that's just what happened at Delft's gunpowder store on 12th October 1654. On what is now the Paardenmarkt, the former horse market, stood a convent, a Clarissen facility that once housed nuns of the Order of St. Clare, also known as The Poor Clares. In its cellar, which the city government used as a storehouse, were thirty tons of gunpowder.

This *ontploffing*, known as Der Delftse Donderslag, the Delft Thunderclap, was set-off by Cornelis Soetens, a inspector who was making his rounds of the gloomy subterranean stash with a naked-flamed lantern. The explosion injured a thousand people and left many dozens dead. It destroyed hundreds of wooden homes, mostly in the ensuing fire. The incident was dramatically represented (though not necessarily accurately as it was painted over forty years later) by Jan Luyken in his 1698 painting *The 1654 Explosion of the Gunpowder Store in Delft* which can be seen in Amsterdam's Rijskmuseum.

The explosion was caused by the equivalent of more than twenty tons of TNT and was heard 150 km away on the island of Texel in the North Sea. It is not known exactly how many people were killed but it could have been hundreds more as many of the inhabitants were at fairs either in Leiden or The Hague. One of the fatalities was the painter Carel Fabritius, a former pupil of Rembrandt. Not only was the artist killed, but most of his paintings were destroyed, only about twelve escaping the ensuing inferno. One painting that did survive was the famous *Goldfinch* which can be seen at the Mauritshuis in The Hague.

The explosion was the most significant event in the city's history since William of Orange was assassinated in 1584 in the Prinsenhof which was far enough away to survive the blast.

Within twenty years Delft had been largely re-built, of brick and stone this time. But they had learned their lesson. The barrels of gunpowder were now housed in a new, purpose-built facility about two kilometres south of the city on the banks of the Rhine-Schie Canal on its way to Rotterdam.

The new powder store complex was like a mini fort surrounded by a moat and high walls with an imposing gatehouse facing the canal, a weigh-house and a guard room. Commissioned by the State's General of the Republic of the Seven Provinces and designed by Pieter Post, the new structure opened in 1660 and now stands largely as it was following major renovation at the end of the last century.

For extra security the two buildings in which the gunpowder was actually stored were built in the middle of a lake surrounded by trees and reached by wooden piers while near the gatehouse are a couple of cottages and other brick buildings. The site is now the home of the water scouts and the Zwervers youth organisation but the gates are generally open and you can walk in and have a wander round free of charge



(SUR)RENDER

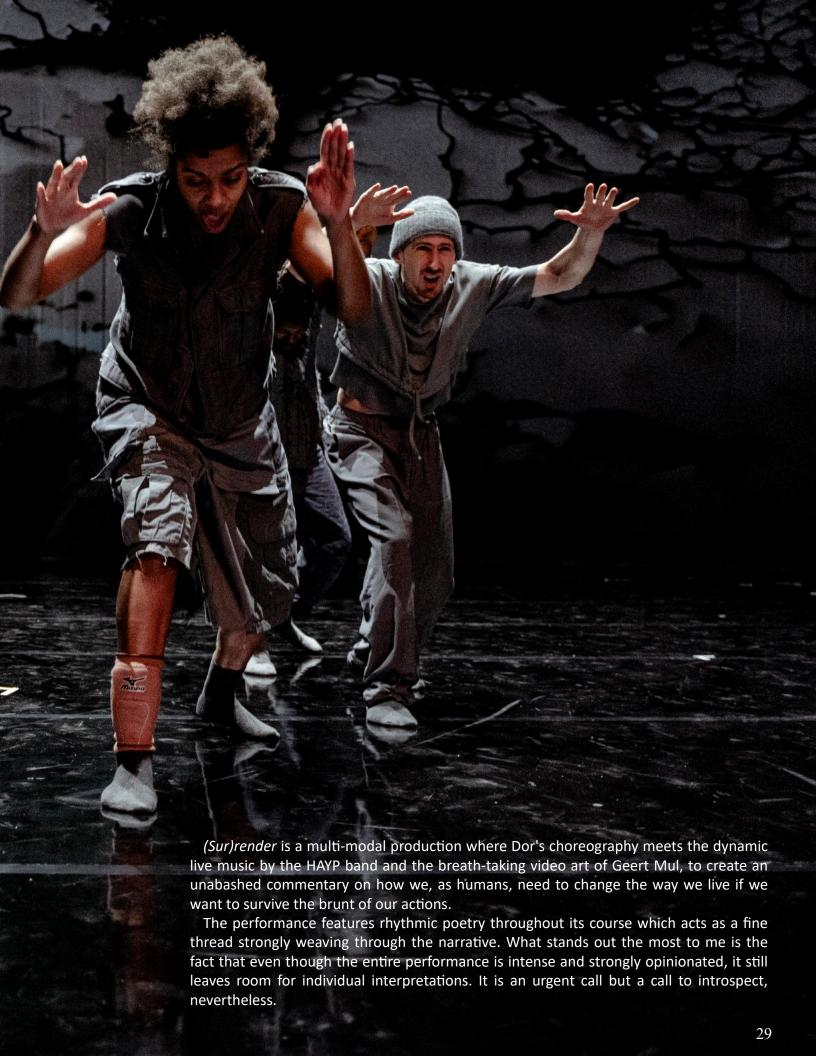
is the new, multi-faceted offering by Alida Dors. When Atulya JAIN went along to Theater Rotterdam to see it for ArtsTalk she came to face with a reflection on humanity that was undeniably honest, bold and utterly immersive

Photos by Amanda HARPUT











The choreography is crafted and executed exceptionally. For me, its heart resided in mastering the fluidity of movements. The show was based on how humans interact with each other in this age of rampant capitalism, to depict the utter frustration that plagues us, and what freedom from this vicious cycle looks like. This is commendably achieved by the dancers' seamless transitions and expressive physicality. Theatricality was at the core of the performance - every gesture, every shift in dynamics spoke volumes - as if the dancers were embodying unspoken dialogues. Their formations struck a delicate balance between precision and organic flow, reinforcing the choreography's overarching theme. The contrast between fragments of sharp isolation and fluid motions mirrored the contradiction of modern existence - constrained yet relentless.

The performance becomes even more provocative, in the best possible way, when it is paired with the live music by the band HAYP. It greeted me most unexpectedly, carrying the performance with its stealthy beats but also catching us off guard - almost challenging us to make sense of it. The music created a dynamic sonic landscape that heightened the intensity of the choreography. As crucial as the language of body movements and music was to the performance, the visual elements were the crowning jewel. The interplay of lights to create a range of environments, from urgency to ethereality, was fantastic. The video art particularly added to the discomfort the show wanted to create. I enjoyed how the props used within the show, be it the gigantic electrical fans, or a huge other-worldly being - that took all of us by surprise, were used as elements of personification.

Most of all, I loved how (Sur)render did not shy away from making its audience uncomfortable. Every artistic choice felt intentional - while the execution remained refined, the focus was never merely on aesthetics. Instead, the strength and relevance of the visual elements took centre stage, serving as a powerful medium to evoke emotion and provoke thought.

At one point, the dancers start laughing in an almost manic way, and that to me was the most haunting part of the performance, because of how relatable it felt. The shock of this realisation and relatability, of how we need to question the ways of our life, was I think the aim of the show and it has achieved it flawlessly. What I saw on stage felt like a representation of the chaotic perils of being a human, and translating something so abstract through dance is commendable

Alida Dors' (Sur)render continues on tour until 12th April



MANA DA DA

A one-woman performance in hommage to a largely forgotten German artist. Michael HASTED saw the show at Theater Rotterdam.

Photos by Sanne PEPER





It is a well-known maxim among actors that you should never appear with animals or children because they will always upstage you. Elvis de Launay defied that, and many other conventions, in the one-woman show, *Mama Dada*.

The performance is a sort of *hommage* to German proto-punk Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, sometimes known as 'the Dada Baroness'. Born in Germany in 1874, she was an avant-garde artist and poet who was active on the New York art scene from 1913 to 1923. Her medium was her body and her radical self-displays came to embody Dada. She was openly bisexual, championed the female orgasm and wore men's clothing in the street. She was considered one of the most controversial and radical women artists of the era, using her body to promote what we would now think of as feminist principles.

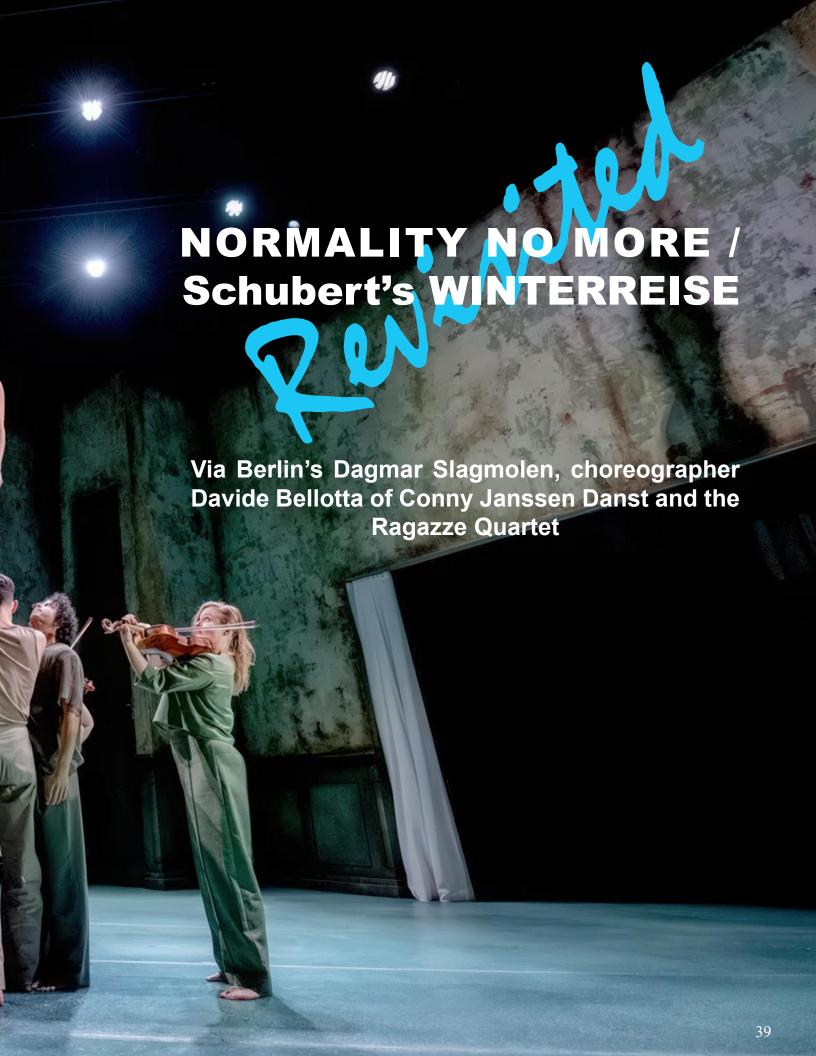
It is said she was responsible in some way for Marcel Duchamp's 1917 revolutionary ready-made *Fountain* (the urinal signed "Richard Mutt") although these claims are speculative and unsubstantiated. Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, unlike Marcel Duchamp, is now largely forgotten and few of her works have survived, but there are several photographs of her. Her provocative poetry was rediscovered and published in *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*. The *New York Times* praised it as one of the notable art books of 2011.





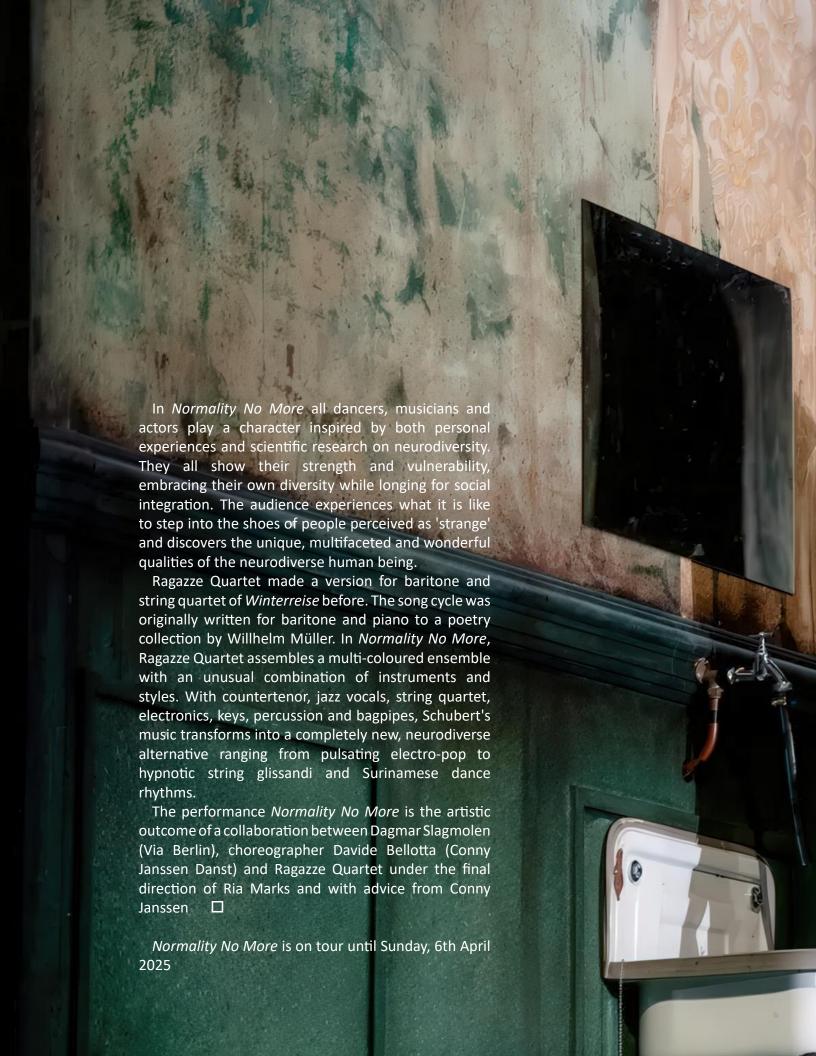














3–6 April The Hague (NL) rewre 2025 Kianí Del Valle Performance Group, Tayhana et Hamill Industries 'Cortex'