



**THE UPSIDE DOWN MAN
(THE SOUND OF THE ROAD)**
MOHAMED TOUKABRI

SAM. 15 JANV. 20 H
TARIF UNIQUE 6 €

DOSSIER ARTISTIQUE
RÉALISÉ PAR LA COMPAGNIE

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CREATION MOHAMED TOUKABRI

The Upside Down Man (The son of the road)



A production of Mohamed Toukabri. Coproduced by HELLERAU – European Center for the Arts Dresden and with the support from Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie. Residencies in Festival Artdanthé (Paris Vanves), Vooruit (Ghent), KAAP (Ostend / Bruges) and HELLERAU (Dresden). Rehearsal spaces in De Kriekelaar and MILL (Brussels).

In *The Upside Down Man (The son of the road)* Mohamed Toukabri moves back and forth between the past and the present, two countries, two cultures and two traditions. His personal story is used as a tool to discuss the sense of identity and the play of perception in our current society.

Toukabri explores the concept of “in between space” and confronts his audience with the splendor of this mysterious and philosophical zone.

In the performance Toukabri searches for poetic justice by touching the notions of identity, shock, transformation and the eternal power of discovery. In this work dance, video, text and sound are layered in a constant play.

The young Tunisian performer Mohamed Toukabri has been touring almost a decade with prestigious artists such as Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Grace Ellen Barkey and Jan Lauwers. This solo is his first creation.



Photo: Emilie Jacomet/HER

THE UPSIDE DOWN MAN (The son of the road)

- Introductory text by Lieve Dierckx

"For me the in-between space is a constructive space. It is a space in which you are not asked to make choices, only because you might seem lost without them. The in-between space is a space of life, of giving and taking, of constant flow. It is the space where my dance was constructed, between east and west." - Mohamed Toukabri

With his first solo performance, *The Upside Down Man*, the young Tunisian choreographer Mohamed Toukabri (°1990) adds a new voice to the discussions about migration policies and problems. Ten years after coming to study at P.A.R.T.S. in Brussels, his world is not located here or there, but in the enriched intermediate zone of here *and* there - between cultures, artistic disciplines and dance languages.

His in-between zone is poetic and spiritual, while pivoting around a down-to-earth and thus all the more universal humanity. In *The Upside Down Man* the stage is both a home and a laboratory where he tackles our western view of 'the' Muslim culture. He replaces it by a highly personal experience which is situated between his westernized Muslim background in Tunis and the world citizenship that European contemporary dance offers him.

"I decided on the autobiographical because I'm interested in what is unique and personal. In the fact that no one else can tell my story but me, because no one else can see the world through my eyes. And that, because of this unique quality, every person has his own place in the world. While we tend to generalize, to label, to make packages, it was my aim to say: I am not one story, I am many stories."

In *The Upside Down Man* Mohamed Toukabri counterpoints disarming, autobiographical text with sophisticated dance language that navigates between the choreographer's sources of breakdance from Tunis, the in-depth movement research attitude he developed at P.A.R.T.S. and the lyricism from his collaboration with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, all of which he infuses with crystal clear ballet lines.

But Mohamed Toukabri's focus in *The Upside Down Man* reaches beyond the zones between cultures and dance disciplines. In fact, he is concerned with the richness of each and every gap, the one between heart and rationality, between video and life performance, between text and movement, representation and being, between this moment and the next. It is the free ranging zone of the unnamed, 'the place of magic', as he likes to call it.



Photo: Emilie Jacomet/HER

1-

My first motivation to make this solo is simply to create. I want to give shape to a personal vision and my identity as a maker. As a dancer and performer I arrived to a point in my journey where I had the privilege to work in close collaboration with inspiring artists and people such as Jan Lauwers and Grace Ellen Barkey from Needcompany, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker... Now I feel the necessity and the need to challenge myself and take a further step in my artistic practice. This creation will synthesize the many influences that have touched me deeply and expose the fragmented nature of my cultural experience.



Photo: Emilie Jacomet/HER

2-

In *The Upside Down Man (The son of the road)* I move back and forth between the past and the present, two countries, two cultures and two traditions. Hence I explore the "in between space" and confront the audience with the splendour of this mysterious zone. In my work dance, image, text and sound are layered in a constant play of perception. Words get another meaning when linked to a certain image; sound influences an atmosphere which can change in a split second. The solo is a patchwork, integrating dance, music, text and video to create a personal series of dancing images and a story about the "in between space".

What does it mean to be "in between", to be living in between two cultures, two countries, two languages? I want to question this "in between space" and show the richness it contains. How is one's identity and view of the self challenged in this in between process? Could we consider ourselves as people carrying luggage from one place to the next, throughout time and space, adding suitcases, mixing stuff between different bags, losing items and adding new ones. Are we actually losing identity throughout this process? In the end I think something is won.



3-

Fifteen years ago I was a twelve year old boy taking the usual walk on Saturday afternoon after school. Walking in the city center of Tunis, I passed the main train station "la gare de Barcelone" and I suddenly heard groovy music and some encouraging screaming voices. I turned my head and saw a circle of young men bouncing on their spot, waving their hands. Inside that circle a guy was spinning on his head. It was the first time I saw such an image but it looked familiar to me to the point that I talked to myself, saying "I can do that, I know how to do that". It felt like I was already doing the same in a parallel world. From that moment on my life turned upside down and took another direction. I stopped dreaming the dreams of my parents and myself to become a surgeon, a teacher, a lawyer or an architect. Instead I became the person, the dancer who I am today. I became the upside down man.

This image and moment will be the central point of my story because it's what connects my past "who I was yesterday" with my present "who I am today". If I didn't pass by that place in that particular moment and if I hadn't seen the upside down man turning on his head I would not be here today. I would be somewhere else, doing something else.

Being born in a muslim society and having muslim parents did not stop me from making my life as dancer. My parents were the first to encourage and help me to make my dreams come true.

I have never ever thought of myself as an immigrant, wherever I traveled I felt like I was home. While trying to go back in my childhood memories through talking to my mother, we were counting and found out that from the moment I was born until the age of fifteen "before i moved to Europe" we had moved exactly 36 times. That might explain why it feels that natural and okay for me to be moving constantly. Whichever place I go, it feels like home.

This is what I want to show. In these times it's quite common to show "the immigrant" as part of a "sad story". I want to show the other side. The opulence of the "in between space", the magnificence of moving back and forth between two countries, histories, cultures.

Upside down is thinking, re-thinking, re-thinking again, is questioning, is re-questioning, is re-questioning again, is re-questioning everything you feel, everything you see, everything you think you know, is spectacular.

Upside down is you, is me, is they, at the end is we. Upside down is trying to let go, is accepting, is sexual, is straight, is homosexual, at the end is a personal choice, is anti-gravity, is cover, is uncover.

Upside down is a context, is out of context, is an idea, is non-sense, is trying to understand but it doesn't make sense, is beautiful, is an animal, is a war, is a war inside you, is a war between you and yourself, is war between you and the others, is a war between we and them, is World War I, is World War II, is World War III, is soon, is in, is side, is in-side, is out-side, is the in-side out-side, is the out-side inside.

Upside down is like lifting a heavy weight but you keep on smiling, it like knowing that it's not good but you still do it, it's a circle, a cycle, a repetition.

Upside down is patience, is taking distance, is up, is down, is left, is right, is the center, is an expression, is one way, is intense, is to allow things to naturally happen, is losing control, is being clear, is moving, is slowing down.

Upside down is the world, is the world we're living in, is human, is humanity.

TOUR

7 April 2018 : Festival Artdanthé (Paris Vanves) - presentation of work in progress

10 May 2018 : première HELLERAU (Dresden)

8 June 2018 : Festival Latitudes Contemporaines (Lille)

4 and 5 October 2018: Monty (Antwerp)

12 and 13 March 2019 : KLAP centre de dance (Marseille)

22 March 2019 : Bits of Dance Festival (Bruges)

27 and 28 March 2019: STUK (Leuven)

4 – 7 April 2019: Maqamat Dance Theatre (Beyrouth – date tbc)

26 and 27 April 2019: Beursschouwburg (Brussels)

21 June 2019: DanceEast (Ipswich – date tbc)

14 – 18 January 2020: Vooruit (Gent – date tbc)

C R E D I T S

Concept and Performance

Mohamed Toukabri

Text

Mohamed Toukabri

(With thanks to Ines Ghannoudi and two quotes from "Les identités meurtrières" by Amin Maalouf)

Dramaturgy

Diane Fourdrignier

Introductory Text to the Performance

Lieve Dierckx

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