

Manipulate review: LoopsEnd/Macbeth:Without Words at Traverse, Edinburgh



Macbeth Without Words - Ludens Ensemble - Photo by Gav Young (54716148)



Mary Brennan, Dance critic / 1 hour ago / [Stage](#)

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Manipulate

LoopsEnd/ Macbeth:Without Words

Traverse, Edinburgh

Mary Brennan

FOUR STARS

Two very different productions, these – but with a shared aim of delivering narrative without resorting to spoken text – a very Manipulate credo.

Paper Doll Militia bring another slice of their (literally) high-flying approach with two further instalments of LoopsEnd that push, ambitiously, at how far aerial skills – which they have to a seemingly effortless, accomplished degree – can convey emotional states and story-lines. Ashes echoes its name in the clouds of white dust that puff over everything, including the three performers who take to the ropes. Heavy ropes that keep twisting together, as if challenging the raggedy-clad figures to escape from the decay and pollution below. The imagery has a starkness, but – not least when compared to Unhinged XY – a limited scope. This latter episode has been simmering in the background for a while. Now the interlocking mix of movement, animation, design and aerial choreography has acquired an intriguingly spooky feel – are these tragic memories, or deranged imaginings that haunt a lonely girl in her attic? The outcome is? You want to know more!

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The Edinburgh-based Ludens Ensemble don't quote Macbeth aloud, but they do use fragments of projected text to outline the action. It's almost a distraction. The two men and one woman who turn the drama into a grotesque clown play are well able to give us a sense of blood, murder and mayhem as they grab minimal props, switch characters and adopt appropriate physical tics and body language. There is sound – amplified vocalisings and noises off – and fury, in the energetic details that signify Macbeth's downfall. A very enterprising stab at a complex scenario – by the pricking of my thumbs, Ludens are ones to watch out for.