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Concept: Bart Baele, Yves Degryse, and Cathy Blisson

Reviewer: Ciara L Murphy

Nadia and Pétro Opanassovitch Lubenoc live in Zvizdal, deep within the Chernobyl exclusion zone. Refusing to leave when urged to do so by family, friends, and the government this couple have forged a life together in abject isolation. Company members of BERLIN Bart Baele and Yves Degryse, alongside independent journalist Cathy Blisson visited this area, and Nadia and Pétro, over the course of a five year period. The result is an illuminatingly beautiful and multi-faceted visual feast.

The audience in the Samuel Beckett theatre are seated transversely, but what lies between them is less of a stage and more of a visual art/cinema setting. The film is projected onto a large dual-sided screen and below are three exquisite models of the Lubenoc's farm and home. A camera is rigged to sit below the screen and intersects moments from the screened film with the models that sit underneath. The result is a unique sensory experience which is breathtaking in its subtlety and skill.

It is hard to justify this production as a piece of theatre, but this reviewer finds that this does not matter. It is a highly performative and stylised production, the presence of the three seasonal models build a very effective tension among the audience members who simply have no idea whether or not this story will have a 'happy ending'.

The camera work and editing, realised expertly by Bart Baele and Geert De Vleeschauwer, is like an extra character in our midst. There is nothing cliché about this approach and the audience gets an unimpeded, and authentic, view into pastoral life in Ukraine's exclusion zone. The story of Nadia and Pétro is heartwrenchingly beautiful, and the beauty lies in its truthfulness. It is not an easy story to tell, and there are moments of deep sadness. What is striking is the joy and love represented in this desolate space realised as a true work of experimental art.

Runs until 1 October as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival | Image: contributed