

Fake Romanian Picasso is real

- by Joyce Roodnat, NRC 21 November 2018 -



foto: Koen Broos

Off they go. The writers Frank Westerman and Mira Feticu hop on a plane to Romania, because there - an anonymous letter claims - underneath a stone in a forest, the **Tête d'Arlequin** lies buried, a pastel drawing by Picasso that was stolen from the Rotterdam

Kunsthall in 2002. Feticu and Westerman follow the instructions in the letter, and lo and behold, they do find Picasso's **Tête d'Arlequin**. Feticu cannot control her tears. Westerman knows: this is going to be a book.

Dream on. The Picasso is false and not just a little. Antwerp based theatre-company BERLIN hid it under that stone as a 'publicity stunt', is what I read, hear

and see - every possible media outlet is covering it.

I jump up. Publicity stunt? No way. I know Berlin. This is part of a theatre production, I'm sure of it. This group travels the world and comes back with film images and stories of people with whom they've spent time and got to know through and through. The result is a reverse type of location theatre: we are not there - there is here, on stage. Their **Bonanza** performance took me to a ghost village in Colorado, where the last seven inhabitants make each other's lives miserable. **Zvizardal** sat me down with an ancient farmer's couple in a radioactive paradise near Chernobyl.

False-for-real in museums

True Copy is the title of their new production, which revolves around the art market and art forgery. It deals with what is real and what is not. With the unreal becoming real. Real life forger Geert Jan Jansen - who claims some of his counterfeits can still be found in museums - is on stage. I'm going to a performance next week, so I don't know - yet - what exactly to expect. In my book, however, the Berlin-orchestrated performance with the 'almost' Picasso has already earned five stars: two renowned writers were easily deceived and the entire world news jumped on their 'find'.

Art is magical, it evokes greed, sensationalism and chimeras. Take, for instance, the panel of the Ghent altarpiece, **The Mystic Lamb**, which has been missing since 1934 from St. Bavo's Cathedral, and is still *almost* found on a regular basis - but never really. Take the certainty with which specialists assumed Han Van Meegeren's **Supper at Emmaus** (1936) was a real Vermeer, pleased with themselves because they saw their own theories on Vermeer confirmed.

Westerman and Feticu have been enlisted by Berlin. The process is not entirely madcap; French artist Sophie Calle does it all the time. She followed and documented an unknown man for weeks for her installation **Suite Venétienne**. And the email in which her lover broke up with her inspired her to make a masterpiece, the installation **Prenez soin de vous**. 'Should I be laughing or

crying?' Mira Feticu wondered, when she realized she had been tricked into the Berlin performance. Neither. She should be proud.

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