

The Manx cat project

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Belgium | 5 theatrical forms (5 episodes)

“Restoring the place of women in history means giving the women and girls of today the assertiveness to play their full part in the world of today and tomorrow.” Reine Pratt, February 13, 2020

Eight women—five young stage directors and three writers—were commissioned with a simple yet complex dramaturgical intention: use national archives to bring to light women or works that were erased from history or at least marginalised through the creation of an original work for the stage, structured into 5 different theatrical forms.

A century of Belgian feminism. The five propositions weave together this untold and buried history: no didacticism but a story of complex and captivating lives wrapped in a common scenography to bring together inquisitive perspectives and multiple approaches on a past that speaks to us of our present.

► FEBRUARY 5 | SALLE B9/ST LUC

4:00-6:25 PM: EPISODES 1-2-3 –PAUSE– 7:00-8:35 PM: EPISODES 4-5 (In French)

Episode 1

Et ta sœur ?

Based on the work of Marie Denis : *DIS MARIE, c'était comment rue du Méridien 79 ?*

In 1972, at the height of the second wave of feminism, women joined forces to create a venue, a tangible utopia, open to “sisters” in the struggle against sexism and in favour of birth-control and abortion rights. They had to overcome many obstacles: balancing, for some, their commitment with motherhood and family life, agreeing on keeping a single-sex venue and mitigating the impact of social inequalities.

Episode 2

Détonnantes

Around the archives of the Machine Women of the FN Herstal and Eliane Vogel Polsky

In 1966, a strike broke out among the women workers of the National Weapons Factory in Herstal, the “Machine Women” who worked in appalling conditions for lower wages than men. Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome (1957) “Equal pay of equal work” was claimed loud and clear. The lawyer Éliane Vogel-Polsky was present during this strike and came away convinced that the law could be used in the fight for equal pay.

Episode 3

Une femme remarquable

Based on the archives relating to Adèle Hauwel

Adèle Hauwel (1920-2004) bequeathed to the archives of the History of Women a life of feminism ranging from institutional struggles against wage inequality in the 1930s to revolutionary sabotage actions in the 1970s. How is the collective desire to fight and keep the trace of past struggles fuelled when collective awareness is not an ally? How does the search for purity, radicality, irreproachability become federative or detrimental depending on time and context?

Episode 4

Le cas Nele Marian

Based on archives relating to the work of Nele Marian and the Pan-African congresses

Two boxes, those are the only containers dedicated to a racialised woman at the Women's History Archive. They hold what remains of Mathilde Idalie Huysman's personal effects, a Belgian-Congolese author who published under the name Nele Marian. Two boxes to reconstitute the career of a woman born in 1906 of the relationship between a Belgian soldier and a young girl from the Lisala region. Two boxes. It's not much to recount a life, not much to understand the ambiguous career of a woman who spoke out during the colonial era, during the Nazi era and then completely stopped expressing herself.

Episode 5

Suzan·ne

Based on the archives relating to Suzan Daniel

The Belgian penal code first mentioned homosexuality in 1965, for discriminatory purposes. Before then, homosexuality did not exist and lesbians even less.

Born in 1918, Suzan Daniel sets a precedent: at the age of 14, she is the first Belgian woman to publish a movie review. In the magazine *Film*, she shows unending praise for the lesbian film “Mädchen in Uniform” (Girls in uniform). On February 14, 1933, she wrote, “I am in love. Alas, it is with a woman.”

In the 1950s she taught herself psychoanalysis and spoke at several international congresses on gender equality. In 1953, she founded the “Centre Culturel de Belgique”, the first Belgian LGBT organisation. Created in 1996, the first LGBT archives in Belgium are named after her.