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Folkert de Jong's 'scary and beautiful' costumes for 'CRY, TROJANS!'

Dutch artist Folkert de Jong, known for his grotesque, evocative narrative tableaux, tries his hand at costumes and set elements for the Wooster Group's spin on 'Troilus and Cressida' at REDCAT.



Andrew Schneider and Ari Fliakos in "CRY, TROJANS! (Troilus & Cressida)" from the Wooster Group. (James Allister Sprang, Redcat / October 29, 2013)

By Karen Wada

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Elizabeth LeCompte was walking past a New York gallery window when sculptures by Dutch artist Folkert de Jong caught her eye. "They were so ugly and scary and beautiful at the same time," recalls the director of the Wooster Group. "It was what I always want for my work to be."

LeCompte invited De Jong to create pieces for her experimental troupe. His costumes, set elements and props will be seen in "CRY, TROJANS! (Troilus & Cressida)," a retelling of Shakespeare's Trojan War saga, which begins its world-premiere run Feb. 27 at REDCAT.

De Jong, 42, has gained international attention for his narrative tableaux featuring grotesque, evocative figures fashioned from industrial Styrofoam and other materials. He says his entry into the stage world has been eased both by the freedom the Wooster Group has given him and by the group's

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collaborative, ever-evolving creative process. "I feel very close to their methods and the way they use theater as a medium to reflect upon social, cultural and political subjects."

The New York-based Woosterites, known for multilayered, multimedia deconstructions and mash-ups, initially enlisted De Jong for a Royal Shakespeare Company co-production of "Troilus and Cressida" in England in 2012. They played the Trojans and the RSC the Greeks, each side staging its part of the tale with, as they put it, "the seam intentionally left rough."

"CRY, TROJANS!" which grew out of the co-production, continues through March 9 at REDCAT, a Wooster Group partner. "It's the story of the Trojans ... remembering their enemy, the Greeks ... and re-creating a great battle," says LeCompte, the show's director. The people of Troy are "re-imagined as a fictional tribe of early Americans ... which allows us to play with a lot of clichés, myths and questions."

De Jong, whose installations have a theatrical feel, creates stage pieces and sculptures in a similar way: "mixing and sampling subjects, materials and techniques." To represent the Greeks, he used flexible polyurethane rubber, textiles, clothes and statue molds and casts made years earlier. "Greek" elements were attached to the Trojans' costumes, which he designed and built with his wife, painter Delphine Courtillot.

"The idea," De Jong says, "is that the first impression of the Native American-inspired theme would be recognizable, but the audience would discover more and more behind the visual layers. These works are as metaphorical as the whole play is."