



THÉÂTRE DE LA PIRE ESPÈCE PRESENTS

# CITIES

PRESS KIT





# CITIES

## SYNOPSIS

Onstage: a lone actor, a table, a camera... and dozens of objects he will use to build, design and conjure up imaginary cities. Sometimes, he tells the agonizing tale of a city; every so often, he describes the residents of another city. In one case, he focuses on architecture and urban planning; in another, on the demographic boom. His camera, his very own crystal ball, draws the audience into the beating heart of a modern city and its obsessions. With each city, the narrator presents a different view of the world, musings on time, and questions human relations. Each city is in some way a metaphor, a symbol, an effigy.

## BUILDING AN UNUSUAL COLLECTION

With their signature low-tech approach, Olivier Ducas and scenographer Julie Vallée-Léger explore the symbolic and poetic value of objects as they create an unusual collection of imaginary cities.

The cities take on many forms. A bustling American metropolis with its many skyscrapers, for example, is transformed into a bar chart; or a city made of wood blocks and mirrors experiences seemingly endless and formidable exponential growth; while a disco ball serving as a tourist town hides its true colours from its extravagant guests.

There are no typical scenarios, conventional machinations or characters in the throes of psychological transformation here. **Cities** is a list, a collection. The work's meaning can be found in its twofold approach to storytelling: first, as a series of portraits of each city as told through the objects, the camera lens and the traveller's tales; and second, as a medley of interrelated portraits that are linked either based on their theme, their form (mirrors, sand, photographs, etc.) or their writing style (description, enumeration, personal testimony, etc.).

The live camera offers spectators the rare privilege of experiencing two simultaneous points of view on the same object or the same event: both the live action on stage and the projected images.

With this production, Olivier Ducas continues his reflection on the tension between reality and imagination, and on the overpowering influence of projected images, a reflection he began in 2008 with *Roland, la vérité du vainqueur*.



## ANOTHER REFLECTION ON OBJECT THEATRE

Olivier Ducas has been honing his craft with Théâtre de la Pire Espèce since 1999, where most of his creative work has revolved around object theatre. At first he explored the object as story character (*Ubu on the Table*, 1998) before experimenting with the object's role in the narrative structure and its capacity to open the doors of the unconscious (*Perseus*, 2005). The company's creative research then focused on the prosthesis/object and the facial mask as extensions of the actor that can be manipulated, thus erasing the boundary between puppet and manipulator (*Gestes impies et rites sacrés*, 2009). Over the past two years, Théâtre de la Pire Espèce has organized cabaret-style events around object theatre that have allowed the company to further test the limits of its creative investigations.

With *Cities*, Olivier Ducas wishes to explore a different approach, by considering the object as a symbol instead of a puppet or a character. This time he is working with the object for its semantic value and poetic potential, rather than for its form (colour, weight, distinctive features) – an approach commonly associated with manipulation-based performances. Searching for a poetic language akin to an “active installation” rather than a theatrical representation, *Cities* plays with notions of perception, as the live camera waltzes between the small and the big, the interior and the exterior. This visual/scenic language means that spectators have to deal with a number of elements simultaneously, therefore becoming actively involved in the performance through their personal “montage” of images.

Moreover, in keeping with Théâtre de la Pire Espèce's creative process that challenges matter and materials, every member of the creative and technical team who worked on the show's development helped create each city: sound and light were “objects”, for example, that could be assembled just like any matter or material.

The resulting collection of cities gives *Cities* a modular identity that makes it possible to perform the show in various formats (as a short piece, a street performance, a cabaret, etc.)!



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## CITIES INSTEAD OF CHARACTERS

Recently, and for the first time in history, the world's urban population surpassed the rural population. This shift has transformed our relationship to space and to others. Each city may have its own character, yet they are all surprisingly similar.

Ever since the early days of theatre, narratives have been built on the antagonism between individual and society. In Ancient Greek drama, a lone protagonist confronted the divine order as represented by the chorus. Later, the modern hero challenged old ideas. Today, in dramaturgies fuelled by psychology, long-standing social debates have been internalized in the duel between the id and the superego. Even though society is only implied, the conflict remains a social one. And this is what preserves its theatricality.

The societies in *Cities* are, on the contrary, explicit. Each has well-defined physical characteristics (city limits), a structure (architecture and urban planning) and a unique social fabric and history (memories). Their population has dreams, regrets and obsessions. Here, it's the individual as part of the whole that is implied. The show's dramatic structure actually seeks to thwart the conventional head-on collision between hero (with whom we identify) and community. The actor plays a part, more than an actual character. He's a narrator, a travel guide, a witness and a facilitator... not a hero. A kind of a portrait presenter (that sometimes also paints portraits).

Each city, described through simple means (a few words or a few objects), is therefore presented to the audience as a potential portrait of its own society. The cities provide a platform for our collective obsessions and help us identify and name our hopes for change. *Cities* is a partial but precise X-ray of our human social organizations that reveals the secret cancers that devour us or the true face of future generations.

As the presenter shares his lists and descriptions as well as the camera's viewpoint, without calling upon an actual "character", he reveals the latent, probable or future conflicts between individuals [sic] and societies. *Cities* is, literally, a theatre of potentiality.



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## PRESS REVIEWS

« Sublime and brilliant. »

– Jean Siag, *La Presse*

« Faced with buildings that appear before our eyes, walls that arise and objects that transform themselves, there's nothing more we can do but to marvel. »

– Christian Saint-Pierre, *Le Devoir*

« A first-class tour of imaginary cities where reverie, laughter, contemplation and exhilaration come together with Oliver Ducas' and Julie Vallée-Léger's creative folly. »

– Isabelle Brisebois, *Le Droit*

« A magnificent creation... and we are the « flâneur » of his little collection of cities, Baudrillard is in the wings, so is Baudelaire , watching, wondering, taking it easy, enjoying the surfaces, the graffiti, the sounds , the new urban space devoid of living creatures.. DON'T miss this. »

– Alvina Ruprecht, *Capital Critics'Circle*

## CREATIVE TEAM

Written, directed and performed by **Olivier Ducas**

Scenography and scenic/visual writing **Julie Vallée-Léger**

Artistic coordination **Manon Claveau**

Sound design **Nicolas Letarte**

Lighting design **Thomas Godefroid**

Technical direction **Camille Robillard**

Technical direction, production and stage management **Clémence Doray**

Artistic collaboration **Étienne Blanchette and Daniel Desparois**

Contribution to the scenography **Catherine Renaud D.**

A Théâtre de la Pire Espèce production

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## CREATIVE MINDS BEHIND CITIES

### OLIVIER DUCAS



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Olivier Ducas is a graduate of the acting program at the National Theatre School of Canada, class of 199X. His decisive encounter with Francis Monty led in 1999 to the founding of Théâtre de la Pire Espèce, where he serves as co-artistic director and works as a playwright, actor, director and manipulator. He is the co-creator of the company's productions (*Ubu on the Table*, *Perseus*, *Gestes impies et rites sacrés* as well as *Die Reise or the many faces of Félix Mirbt*) that have toured across Canada, Europe, Mexico and Brazil. In

2008, he single-handedly wrote and directed *Roland, la vérité du vainqueur*, based on *The Song of Roland*, a show for two actor-storytellers for teen audiences. In 2014, he repeated the experience with *Cities*, adding solo performer to his list of credits.

In addition to his creative work, Ducas also gives object theatre classes for professionals, theatre school professors and theatre students.

### JULIE VALLÉE-LÉGER

Julie Vallée-Léger is a graduate of the set and costume design program at the National Theatre School of Canada, class of 2002. After working as an assistant to Cirque du



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Soleil scenographer Jean Rabasse, a stage designer for a number of film and television projects (including at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation), an exhibition designer for gsmprjct° and Lupien + Matteau Architects, she now devotes her time to experimental theatre, and object and raw materials theatre.

She works as a scenographer for a number of theatre companies, including Théâtre de la Pire Espèce where she has collaborated extensively on object and shadow theatre productions, as well as raw material manipulation projects since 2007. She also works with the following companies and events: Théâtre du Party Chinois, Théâtre Ébouriffé, Le Carrousel, Projet Mû, Le Clou! and the Festival du Jamais lu. She also contributes to various galas and artistic events, particularly at the Théâtre Aux Écuries.

Julie Vallée-Léger also leads object and shadow theatre workshops for children and for UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal) students. In short, she divides her time between theatrical experimentation and venue or exhibition design, while remaining actively involved in the theatre community.