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[Review: Cart Macabre](#)

Posted on 15 December 2010 Written by [Jake Orr](#)



I've never understood the term 'immersive theatre', I've always considered it to be some kind of promotional buzzword that companies use to lure their audience into a half-hearted site specific piece of theatre. This evening however, I actually experienced what can only be described as 'immersive theatre' in *Cart Macabre* by Living Structures in the Old Vic Tunnels (otherwise known as Tunnel 228).

My initial reaction to the show was to describe it as a 'roller-coaster ride of live art' and in many ways, this is how the logistics of the show makes you feel. Plunged into darkness, transported through tunnels, and placed inside a cart with three other audience members before being literally carted around the tunnels is somewhat of a thrilling roller-coaster ride. The 'action' or perhaps it's better to call it 'art' happens around you. Installations, animations, puppetry, singing, and 'living structures' are viewed through windows, peep holes, or at times everywhere at once, in all dimensions and forms.

Cart Macabre is a multi-sensual experience which is mesmerising, grotesque and thrilling. There are moments which make you want to reach out and absorb what's in front of your with your hands, whilst other times you're repulsed. There is of course much beauty in the work, especially in the choral singing that is layered during moments of the experience – it's haunting to hear such beauty when your sense of direction and awareness is stripped back in the darkness.

For me, it wasn't the live art that captivated me but rather the possibilities that a show built under these conditions of mobility offers. I've [bemoaned the use](#) of Tunnel 228 previously due to my inability to shake my initial experience (*Punchdrunk*), however *Cart Macabre* couldn't be any more fitting to such a location. It offers the intimate with the vast expanse that the tunnels can create. I found a certain calmness in the movement of the carts in the darkness, as if I was a convict being rattled off to jail, and the fragmented performance moments became glimpses into the sins I'd created. This is unique to my experience, but what pleasure to actually be moved in a performance without being shuffled along by ushers and character-actors between scenes on foot.

There are no real words that can capture the true essence of *Cart Macabre* just suggestive critiques of the show. What it is though is truly an immersive experience for the audience. There are some fragmented moments that don't completely win you over, but these are overshadowed by the real sense of adventure that the performance offers. It is undeniably clever in its execution and just when you feel yourself getting use to it, all conventions are

broken and the unexpected happens. My only wish is that it could have been longer, so that I could have really enjoyed the hypnotic state of being that slowly transcended upon me a little longer.

Cart Macabre is taking place in the Old Vic Tunnels until 22nd Dec. See the [Living Structures website](#) for more information and for future projects.

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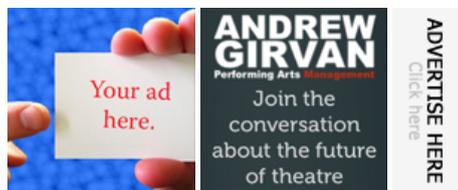
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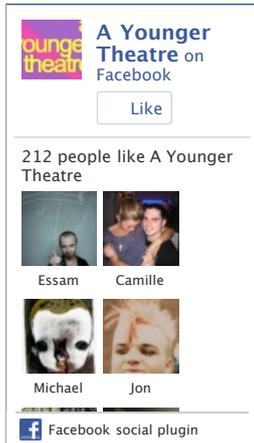
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