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THOMAS ISRAEL, THE ACTOR TURNED PLASTICIAN

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Mixing immersive and interactive performances and video installations in connection with psychoanalytic work, reflection on the unconscious, dreams and death, Thomas Israel ranks among the "digital artists". With art as a tool to challenge the viewer.

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Thomas Israel

It is since the Opera of Bordeaux where he prepares a video scenography for a *Pelléas and Mélisande* , a first (!), That Thomas Israel tells us his course. An unusual path for this artist already renowned in its genre.

Thomas Israel was born in Brussels, with three siblings. His father, a pediatrician, Jew

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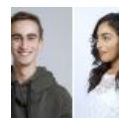
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from the Congo, from the Rhodian bourgeoisie, who will change his mentality in contact with his mother, Ashkenazi Jew, more politicized, with an " *almost communist* " consciousness from a political grandmother. A secular Jewish milieu, " *Jewish culture* ", who enjoys Chanukah and Christmas to get together as a family. A mixture that will undoubtedly forge in Thomas opening to the other, as will, he says, his elementary school, small communal school, before his high school in Decroly. The young boy who dreams of becoming an actor embarks on socio-anthropology studies at the ULB, while studying acting at INSAS. He will also participate as part of a youth project with Quinoa to the creation of a school in Burkina Faso, and will be involved with the same motivation in the NGO Aviation without Borders, accompanying migrants who fly to the school. first time fleeing Africa to the United States ... Already.

Thomas Israel becomes an actor and will remain ten years, " *a frustrated actor* ", he confides, " *realizing that I was a creator more than an interpreter, I wanted to embody my dreams rather than those of another* ". His first staging on dreams and death, helping him to mourn his lost mother at the age of 19, ended in failure, but made him discover the video as a new medium. " *When I try to be a director, I became a visual artist,*" smiles the one who, thanks to the second draft of his TröM project, will shine very quickly in museums and digital art festivals. " *My work was too abstract for the theater world, but he immediately spoke to the world of plastic art, which constantly renews the codes and even challenges it,* " he says.

In 2006, when he was a visual artist for only a year, and has already been noticed by his "Lit TröM" inviting the viewer to lie on a bed to watch and be integrated into a dream projected above from him, Thomas Israel wins a digital artwork contest on YouTube that gives him the opportunity to exhibit at MoMA (New York) and is a real boost for his career.

For his third solo exhibition at Galerie Charlot (2016), which represents him in Paris, entitled "Exilt" (fusion of "Exile" and "Exit"), he immerses himself in a work linked to the migration crisis, presented at the Jewish Museum of Belgium, as part of the exhibition "Brussels: Land of welcome? Until March 18th.

In order to challenge the viewer and the touch in the most intimate way, Thomas Israel releases statistics by dwelling on the humanity of refugees, on their faces, their eyes. He creates a set of calligraphies inspired by portraits of men, women and migrant children, taken by three renowned photojournalists (Reza, Johanna de Tessières and Olivier Papegnies), and superimposes them thanks to the video, showing the drawing progress as the face disappears: here, a boat that uses the eyes as a support, there a theater of war, the narrative to the most abstract, with all the emotions that are felt ... " *I liked it so much this work that I made a mural that includes hundreds of calligraphic elements as many human beings on the road to Europe, with the explosion of Syria, the border crossing, refugee camps, the Mediterranean, the closed centers ... I try to give them a little humanity* ". We can not remain indifferent to this barrel filled with oil (oil?), Which gives a three-dimensional aspect to the calligraphy that is projected, a tragic illustration of migrants sinking into the Mediterranean ... " *The reality of this exodus inevitably returns to that of our parents, grandparents who were lucky to be welcomed at the time when they left the Congo, Italy or Belgium at the arrival of the Germans ...* ", underlines Thomas Israel. " *We owe it to ourselves to welcome this suffering humanity because we too have suffered. And if we are not capable of it, it bodes a dark future* .

At the Bordeaux Opera, the 2:30 video editing of *Pelléas et Mélisande* will include the singers and the orchestra for two days. A real challenge that will take Thomas Israel to Japan in July, where he already received an award for his first show of "interactive bodymapping" a few years ago. Using his body as a screen, with a projection in real time, it is also one of the talents of the one who has not finished surprising us. " *Digital is now part of our daily lives,* " insists Thomas Israel " *Soon all the arts will be digital.*

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JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER DAVID SUSSKIND ASBL

Rue de l'Hotel des Monnaies 52, 1060 Brussels - Tel: +32 2 543 02 70 - info@cclj.be

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