



REDCAT

MARIANO PENSOTTI

EL PASADO ES UN ANIMAL GROTESCO
(THE PAST IS A GROTESQUE ANIMAL)

FEBRUARY 23–25, 2012 8:30 PM

FEBRUARY 26, 2012 3:00 PM

presented by

REDCAT

Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater

California Institute of the Arts

CaLARTS

MARIANO PENSOTTI

EL PASADO ES UN ANIMAL GROTESCO (THE PAST IS A GROTESQUE ANIMAL)

Text & Direction: **Mariano Pensotti**

Performers: **Pilar Gamboa, Javier Lorenzo, Santiago Gobernori, & María Ines Sancerni**

Set & Costume Design: **Mariana Tirantte**

Light Design: **Matías Sendón (& Ricardo Sica)**

Music: **Diego Vainer**

Sound Engineer: **Demian Chorovicz**

Assistant Director: **Leandro Orellano**

Technical and Production Assistant: **Juan Pablo Gomez**

Produced by Grupo Marea.

Coproduced by Kunstenfestivaldesarts (Brussels), Complejo Teatral de Buenos Aires, Theaterformen (Hannover), Norwich & Norfolk Festival, and Festival de Otoño de Madrid.

The program runs 120 minutes without intermission. It is performed in Spanish with English surtitles.

REDCAT is a Partner of the National Performance Network (NPN).

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PROGRAM NOTES

Is it possible in these times to create great fictions that contain what we imagine, as well as real events from our lives and the lives of the people we know? How does the history of our cities influence our personal history? What happens when fiction is set within a concrete temporal framework? How can we recount ten years in the life of a person? How do we incorporate the most recent history—upon which we haven't reflected in excess—into our own, more excessive stories?

In *El pasado es un animal grotesco*, the stories of four people between the ages of 25 and 35, living in Buenos Aires during the years 1999 to 2009, are told in brief, interspersed fragments.

These stories reflect on the moment when one stops being who one thinks one is. The attempt is to narrate multiple stories in which ambitious and exorbitant fiction is contained within a precise historical and temporal framework.

The play is performed by four actors on a round, rotating stage divided into four sections. The actors embark on the heroic task of narrating and performing the stories, bringing to life dozens of characters and situations in a metafiction enacted with minimal stage resources.

Ten years ago I began to collect damaged photographs that a developing shop near my home threw away every month. I don't know why. A while ago the place closed, because hardly anyone now gets photos developed, and I went back to have a look at the boxes full of damaged images, blurred and discarded fragments of unknown lives. A lot of them seemed to be people of my generation, a flawed record of a decade. I remembered a phrase from Balzac that talked about his art as the attempt to "photograph the soul of people and their times." I decided to take some of the photos and try to revive the ambitious nature of those 19th-century tales, to tell the story of the lives of four people from my generation over a ten-year period, using the fragmented images as the original source material. The result was a highly narrative-driven, literary text, full of events and impossible-to-represent situations, which are displayed with much freedom.

I thought of the idea of identity as a narrative construct. We are what we narrate. I also considered the ways in which life becomes fiction. Aided by the epic effort of the four actors that tell and perform these stories, the past arises in this play as an animal glimpsed in a dream jungle, an animal that changes shape each time we remember it—a grotesque animal.

The four main stories begin in different ways. A man wants to be an independent filmmaker, but instead works as an actor in pathetic beer commercials. A woman steals her father's savings to go to Paris to live the bohemian life portrayed in French new Wave films, but ends up working in a theme park that revolves around the life of Christ. A girl becomes obsessed with her father's secret family in the countryside. A student and novice writer receives a box with a severed hand inside that changes his life.

From a narrative standpoint, the play develops a singular process. Situations are acted both in real time and cinematographically, each showing a brief moment in the life of a character. At the same time, an actor who functions as a voice-over tells the audience what's happening and gives insight into the characters' thoughts. This narration of the past can feel similar to the scattered fragments of a film that is lost forever. The past is like a strange animal that should be discovered and trapped by following blurred traces.

"The Past Is A Grotesque Animal" is the title of a song by the band Of Montreal. I listened to it a lot while I was writing the text. Its excessive duration and ambitious narrative made me feel it was close to what I was developing. I decided to use the name and include the lyrics in the play when the stories reach their end.

—Mariano Pensotti

ABOUT MARIANO PENSOTTI

Mariano Pensotti is an Argentine writer and theater director. He studied cinema, visual arts, and theater in Buenos Aires, Spain, and Italy. While touring extensively, he formed the ensemble Grupo Marea with set designer Mariana Tirantte, light designer Matías sendón, and musician Diego Vainer. He has developed two key directions in his work: performances for conventional stages in which he writes his own literary texts, with the play strongly based in the work with the actors, as well as several site-specific performances where the main intention is to create a contrast between fiction and reality in public places. Considered one of the most noted experimental directors working today, Pensotti has also been heralded as one of Latin America's brightest theater talents.

As a playwright and director, Pensotti has created over fifteen productions in the past ten years. *El Pasado es un animal grotesco (The Past is a grotesque animal)* (2010–2011) premiered at Complejo Teatral de Buenos Aires and was presented at Kunstenfestivaldesarts (Brussels), Festival de Otoño (Madrid), Theaterformen (Hannover), Hebbel am Ufer (Berlin), Auabirlewen (Bern), Norwich & Norfolk Festival (England), Kampnagel Festival (Hamburg), Zürcher Theater Spektakel (Zürich), Tempo Festival (Rio de Janeiro), Fiac (Bahia), Rotterdamse Schowburg (Rotterdam), and Frascati Theater (Amsterdam). *Sometimes I think I can see you* (2010–2011) premiered in Berlin at Hebbel am Ufer as part of the Ciudades Paralelas Festival and was presented in Buenos Aires, Cologne, Brussels, Zürich, Warsaw, Salamanca, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Girona, and Paris. *Encyclopedia of unlived lives* (2010) premiered at Schauspielhaus Graz (Austria) and was presented during Steirischer Herbst Festival. *La Marea* (2005– 2011) premiered at the V Buenos Aires International Festival and was subsequently presented at the Kunstenfestivaldesarts (Brussels), Hebbel am Ufer Theater (Berlin), Homo Novus Festival (Riga), Dublin Festival (Ireland), Festival Automne en Normandie (Rouen), Carrefour International de Théâtre (Québec), Festival Transamériques (Montréal), Yokohama (Japan), Festival Temporada Alta (Girona), Norfolk & Norwich Festival (England), Metropolis Copenhagen (Denmark), and Push Festival (Vancouver).

For more information, visit www.marianopensotti.com.

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