**The ballerina with the hammer** ⋆⋆⋆⋆

**November 2022, De Standaard**

Vulnerability and strength, Alexander Vantournhout never combined them so beautifully as in his new solo.

Alexander Vantournhout could be called a contemporary Thor. Thanks to years of training in circus and martial arts, his rock-solid body has become the personification of male primal strength and discipline. A sculpture in its own right. The choreographer in Vantournhout dismantles exactly that image. It makes his new solo a clever (self-)critique that breaks stereotypes regarding toxic masculinity from within.

On a wooden, circular platform, Vantournhout appears in bare torso and an androgynous trouser skirt. With his left hand, he grips his right elbow at the level of his neck, pushing himself around his axis. As the choreographer keeps spinning, he lets his arms fan out gracefully above his head before wringing them into another ingenious construction.

These are perhaps the five finest minutes of dance we have seen so far this season. Viewed from the back, you get the illusion that two bodies are dancing. Simultaneously, it is astonishing that Vantournhout is both active and passive at once. He moves and is moved in an ambiguous flow. What a lovely diptych this would make with Lisbeth Gruwez's Penelope (2017), in which she spins around like a dervish for 20 minutes.

Vantournhout's movements are strikingly elegant and tender, at times he almost seems to embrace himself. Never before have we seen such a soft and vulnerable side of him, though violence is never far away. After a few horizontal flips, he rolls with his bare knees across the hard floor only to launch himself coarsely yet again, like a bullet.

**Three years of research**

This interplay between hard and soft, surrender and brute force, continues in Vantournhout's duel with the slack hammer, again a reference to the mighty Norse god Thor. This enormous tool of 2 metres and 5 kilos will frighten everybody in the front row, but Vantournhout swings it like it is nothing and balances the stick on one hand. It took him three years of research.

As in the duet with the bowling ball from Screws (2019), you watch with bated breath at this showdown between man and thing, in which the position of power constantly shifts. Thanks to the bendable handle, the phallic hammer takes on something fragile and cartoonish, nicely mirrored by Vantournhout himself, who shows the human behind the superman much more than in other performances. In the final part, he transforms a white flag from a nationalist emblem into a gesture of reconciliation. Lovingly, he flaps it over the heads of the audience. The end result is clear. Thor vs Vantournhout: 0-1.