

Review in 8Weekly by Erica Smeets An impressive “Me”

WE Janskerkhof Utrecht, May 23, 2008

Here we are again. Just like last year, a strange object has been resurrected at Janskerkhof in Utrecht. Again we see cyclists, while speeding along, who look back in astonishment, and tourists who ask in a both timid and curious way what is happening here. A year ago this very spot was occupied by a soundproof box of *Gerucht (Rumours)*, from where Lotte van den Berg made her audience observe the strolling and shopping public as well as actors who were mixing with the unsuspecting walking crowd. *Gerucht* was looking outside towards the city. *WIJ (WE)* by Roos van Geffen offers a completely different, inward-looking and individual experience.

The circular construction made of wood consists of a number of boxes. Each box has its own door and flight of stairs. In front of the doors one finds a folding chair, where the visitor can wait for his turn to enter the door. Once inside the light is turned off and the spectator is immersed in total darkness. A small light appears behind a window and then disappears again. In that dark world faces pass by. Initially far away and hardly visible. Later on the faces come closer and closer with their eyes closed.

Although it is a very thrilling experience for the spectator to be confined alone in a dark cage, without knowing what is going to happen, you are still relatively safe in this first part of *WIJ*. You are seated in the dark. You are the one who is watching. The other has the eyes closed and has absolutely no way to know who you are. This anonymity brings a certain level of comfort but creates at the same time a sense of distance between the observing and the observed person. But when somewhat later during the performance, the actor opens her eyes and looks straight in your face, when the light in your box is switched on and you as observer are now being observed, there is no sense of distance anymore. You are being looked at. You are being recognized as a unique individual with a unique face. In these moments *WIJ* by Roos van Geffen comes awfully close. The anonymous “they” of unfamiliar faces that pass by becomes an impressive “me”. (Erica Smits)