



Photo: CUE Photographer Megs Kelly, National Arts Festival, 2017

The Alchemy of Words

Conceived by Naomi van Niekerk

With

Arnaud van Vliet

Yoann Pencolé

Naomi van Niekerk



ABOUT

Arthur Rimbaud, the ‘enfant terrible’ of French poetry published his first immortal poem at the age of 16 only to completely abandon writing poetry at the age of 21... During this short period he managed to create a body of work that has had a profound impact on the poetry of his own time and on that of the 20th Century. André Breton, Dylan Thomas, Jack Kerouac, Bob Dylan, Patti Smith and Jim Morrison are some of the artists and musicians that have been influenced by his writing. Who is this literary pioneer and creative genius who continues to receive letters from fans all over the world even 123 years after his death?

In *The Alchemy of Words*, three artists from different disciplines –puppetry, film and music search to capture the enigma of Arthur Rimbaud and what it means to be a pioneer. Expect an immersive experience that combines artistic projections, puppetry and live music inspired by the diverse imagery from Rimbaud’s poems – smoke filled battlefields, the lush countryside of the French Ardennes, colourful vowels, crimson seas ...

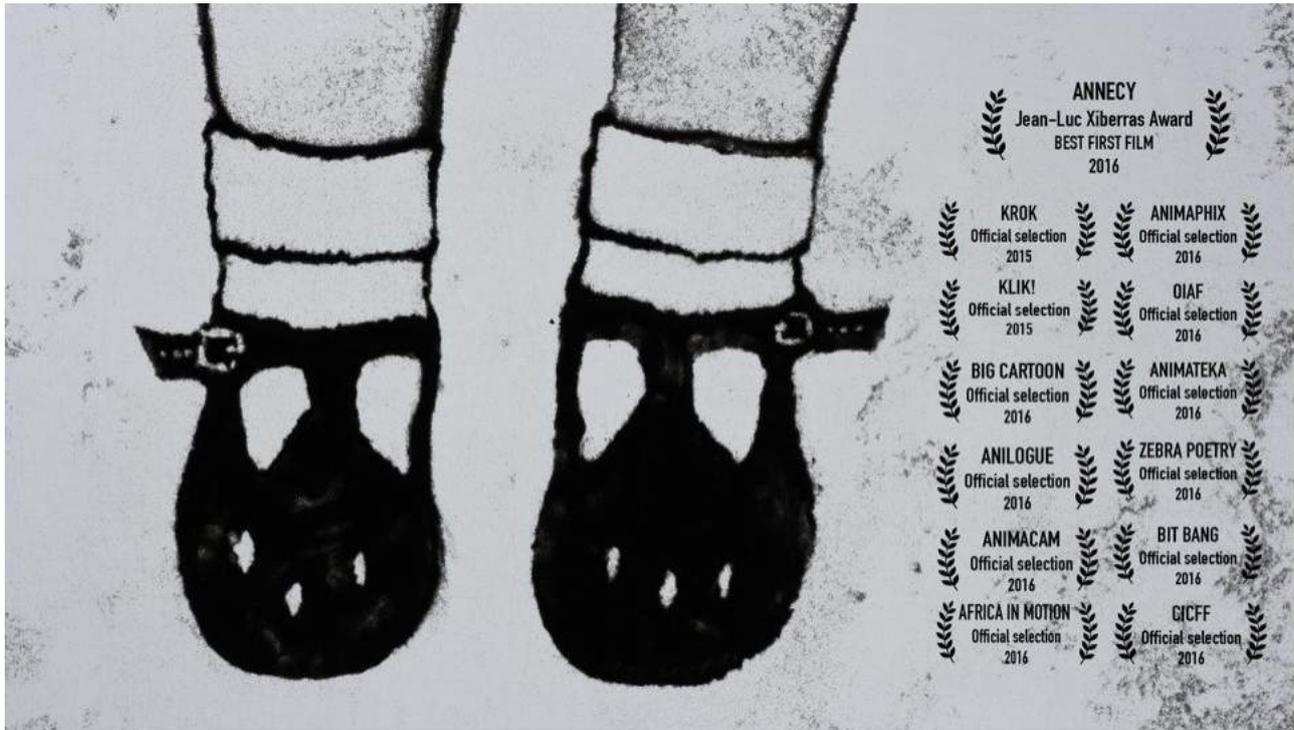
From 2008 to 2011, Naomi van Niekerk (Sand-animations / Puppeteer, RSA) and Yoann Pencilé (Puppeteer, FR) studied Puppetry together at the “École Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette” in Charleville - Mézières, the birth town of poet Arthur Rimbaud. In June 2017, five years since the completion of their Puppetry Diplomas, they came together to collaborate on the creation of a new performance piece. Combining their skills and shared experience in Charleville, they present a multi-disciplinary work for an all-ages audience.

Video link: <https://vimeo.com/214639798>



Credit: Zoom Photography / Photographer: Dee-Ann Kaaijk

Projections of Animated Short films



A still from 'An ordinary blue Monday', a sand animation short film directed by Naomi van Niekerk

A part of the proposition of 'The Alchemy of Words' is screening of a series of animated short films made by Naomi van Niekerk. This screening can take place before or after the performance. Naomi has been making stop-motion animation films (mostly sand animation) since 2014 and recently won the *Jean-Luc Xiberras* award at the *Annecy International Animation Film Festival 2016* for best first film. Here is a list of the films proposed:

1. The combination of things (01:57)

<https://vimeo.com/101281716>

2. *Wiegelied* / Lullaby (00:58)

<https://vimeo.com/97513716>

3. *'n Gewone blou Maandagoggend* / An ordinary blue Monday (03:20)

<https://vimeo.com/155360803> Password: Monday

4. The Impermanence Museum (14:00)

<https://vimeo.com/187701840> Password: Burns

5. *By alle skone dinge* / To all things beautiful (03:00)

<https://vimeo.com/139448351>

6. *My mamma is bossies / My mum's bonkers (03:04) / Les folies de ma mère*
<https://vimeo.com/204214987> Password: bonkers

Total duration of the screening is 27 minutes.

CAST



Credit: Zoom Photographv / Photographer: Dee-Ann Kaaiik

Naomi van Niekerk is an inter-disciplinary artist working in puppetry, animation, illustration and performance. She studied *Dramatic Arts* at the *University of Witwatersrand* in Johannesburg (2003-2006) where she obtained her BA Hons in (Dramatic Arts) Cum Laude and then won a scholarship to study puppeteering in France at the *École Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette (2008-2011)*. This post-graduate diploma comprised of intensive training in Puppeteer, writing for stage, acting and sculpture. During her studies her work was performed at several significant theater festivals across Europe, including the *Avignon festival* in 2008 and 2011 as well as the *Festivale Internationale de la Marionnette (2011)*. After her return to South Africa in 2012 she founded the *Dryfsand* collective and started to collaborate with musician Arnaud van Vliet. They have created five works up to date - *Epitaphe, Sfeer, Kontinuum, The Impermanence Museum* and most recently *The Alchemy of Words*. Naomi has gained international recognition for her animated short films - *An ordinary blue Monday* won the prize for Best Debut at the *Annecy International Animation Film Festival* in 2016 and her latest short film 'My mum's

bonkers' had its première at the Holland Animation Film Festival in March 2017. Currently the film is included in many Official Selections at film festivals worldwide.



Credit: Zoom Photography / Photographer: Dee-Ann Kaaijk

Arnaud van Vliet is a performing musician – guitarist and singer, composer and SAMA nominated music producer. He has performed extensively throughout South Africa at all major music festivals and venues. He has shared the stage with international acts such as the Prodigy, Faithless and Roxette. In parallel to his public career as a performing artist Arnaud has been composing music for film and theater combining an eclectic combination of genres and styles.



Photo: CUE Photographer Megs Kelly, National Arts Festival, 2017

Yoann Pencolé (France) is an actor, puppeteer and theater maker and enjoys working in different theater genres. In 2011 he met Yeung Fai, a master in Chinese Hand puppets and together they

created 'Hand Stories', a show about the legacy of the Chinese Hand Puppet tradition - they continue to tour the show extensively internationally. Most recently Yoann directed his own multi-media theater creation called 'Landru' that combines puppetry, projections and objects.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

We are 4 on tour, 3 cast members and one technical director.

We need one day of setup before opening night.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

SETUP: Minimum of 6 hours for setup and 2 hours between performances

STRIKE AND GETOUT: 2 hours right after the show

REQUIREMENTS: 2 Attachment points for cable to suspend large paper screen.

TEAM ON TOUR: 3 cast members, 1 technical director / production manager

STAGE DIMENSIONS: Performance space: 6m x 7m

Opening wall to wall : 8m

Depth : 7m

Minimum height : 4m

MAXIMUM PUBLIC: 180 people

SUITABLE FOR ALL AGES from 5 years and up

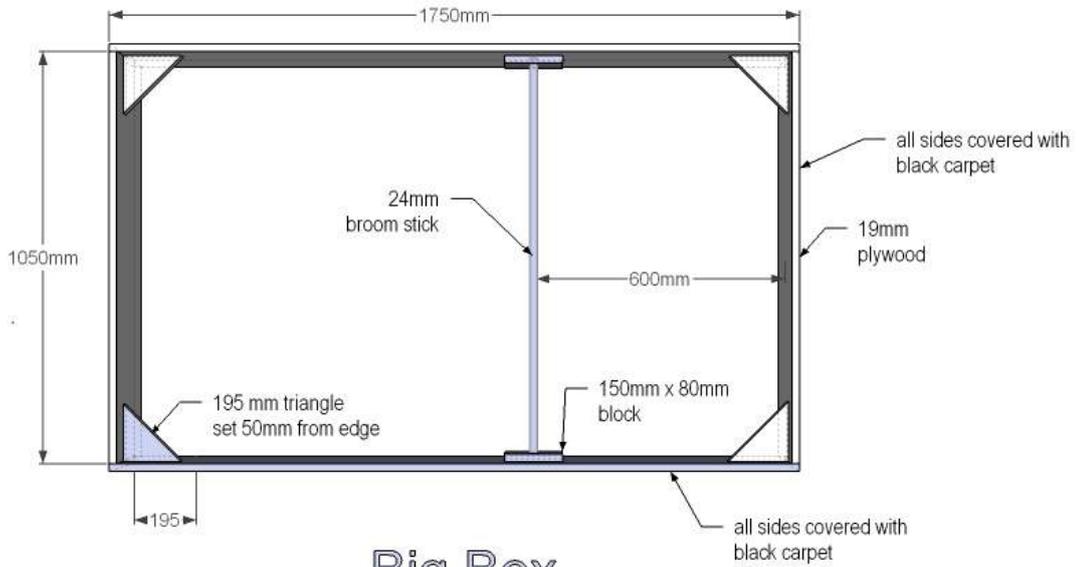
LANGUAGE: English / French

DURATION: 50 minutes

DRESSING ROOM: Water, fruit and tea / coffee.

SET PIECES are from wood and can be constructed at the theater:

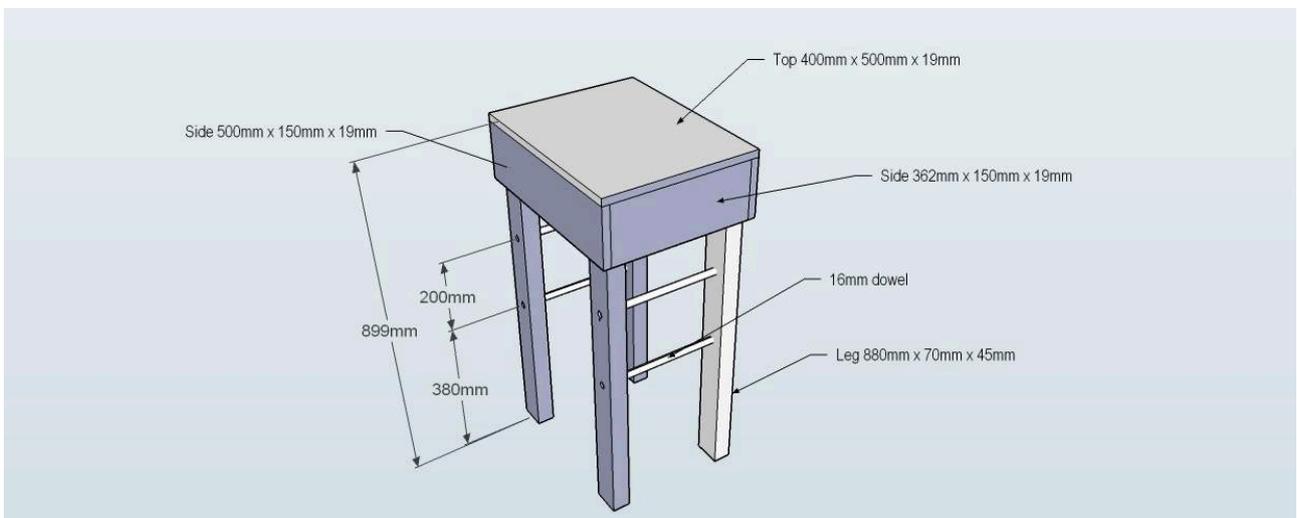
- 2 x Big 'boxes'
- 3 x Smaller boxes
- 1 x Table for retro-projector

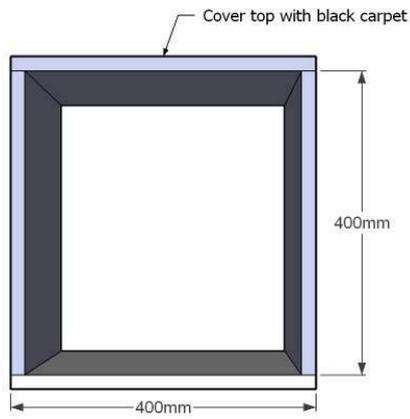


Big Box

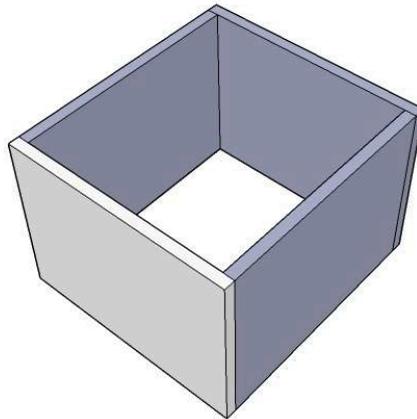
Constructed from 19mm plywood

Table for Retro-projector





Small box
400mm x 300mm x 19mm



PRESS

“Weaving wands of vocal wonderment in The Alchemy of Words”

JULY 2, 2017 - NATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL, South Africa 2017, CUE
YASTHIEL DEVRAJ

“Naomi van Niekerk’s ethereal production The Alchemy of Words can best be described as a symphony of pure creativity. The performance traverses a spontaneous, surreal landscape through a plethora of mediums, immersing the audience in a powerful tribute to seminal French poet Arthur Rimbaud.”

INTERVIEW WITH NAOMI VAN NIEKERK

“The Alchemy of Words” plays with different disciplines creatively

SEPTEMBER 26, 2017 ~ DEBEERNECESSITIES

DIANE DE BEER

Van Niekerk’s personal affinity to Rimbaud started when she studied for three years in a small town in northern France, Charleville-Mézières which also happens to be the birth town of Rimbaud. His face is everywhere and all the shops are named after him. “I discovered his poetry and started translating it from French with a dictionary (as part of learning the language) and was intrigued though I never really got into it, it was too complex!”

If you have seen any of Van Niekerk’s collaborations, you will know that she works in a unique way. “I don’t describe or see myself as a theatre-maker. I’m an artist and performance is one of the mediums I work with,” she explains. “I’ve always been working in many mediums such as scenography, puppetry, filmmaking and most recently printmaking. I was always drawn to shadow puppetry because it fits into a frame like a graphic novel and within that frame anything is possible. My light box gives me the same freedom – to create a world in a frame without needing too much. In my case some sand, cardboard and scissors... I also love to draw, its an obsession that started when I studied in France and could not speak French, it was a way of communicating ideas and absorbing new experiences.”

Experiencing her work on stage is like seeing many different artworks appear and disappear as you



Credit: Zoom Photography / Photographer: Dee-Ann Kaaijk

watch them being made.

With *The Alchemy of Words*, she collaborates with two artists, composer Arnaud van Vliet (a regular collaborator) and puppeteer Yoann Pencolé, someone she studied with in France. It wasn't an easy process because of living on different continents, but Van Vliet who is also the dramaturge of the piece, selected a series of Rimbaud poetry and set it to music. During a short time together in June (just before the National Arts Festival where the piece premiered) Pencolé and Van Niekerk would work out scenes which Van Vliet would see in the evenings and critique. "The music existed before we started and so did many of the projected imagery. Our challenge was to create a narrative thread," explains Van Niekerk.

While she is currently hooked on film, she enjoys working in different mediums and the one feeds off the other. "With theatre it feels like I'm taking my prints/drawings off the gallery walls and into the street, making it accessible to a broader public than the elite Fine Art community. Theatre is a shared experience that happens once, within a specific framework of time. The performance then continues to exist in the memory of the audience."

She believes that *The Alchemy of Words* has wide appeal. "Some people connect with the words of Rimbaud's poetry, others enjoy the visuals and the music and we've had some fantastic responses from children as well. Anyone who would like to engage with imagery and poetry on both emotional and intellectual level, should see it."

“This is one of my goals – giving the public a memory that they can linger on.”

Experience the magic of ‘The Alchemy of Words’

ARTS PORTAL / 25 SEPTEMBER 2017, 11:04PM / ORIELLE BERRY

“In the ethereal production you can watch Van Niekerk as she stands at a light desk and, with the simple but effective use of tools such as sand, a comb, drops of ink and transparencies, paints beautiful pictures that are screened overhead, as the alchemy of the words of Rimbaud’s poetry are expressively translated by Van Vliet to melodious and haunting songs, while Pencolé alternates between reading some of the poems in French and moving two puppets on top of two boxes.”

“Although many of Rimbaud’s poems and letters describe his anguish from an unsettled life, notably The Alchemy of the Word, from which this production takes its name, much of what he writes portrays a sense of hope and almost contentedness. In today’s troubled times it’s reassuring to find that young creative folk, such as this talented trio, portray optimism with a touch of melancholy in such a charming and clever way.”



Credit: Zoom Photography / Photographer: Dee-Ann Kaaijk

CONTACT

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Dryfsand is a performance collective that was founded in 2013 by Naomi van Niekerk and Arnaud van Vliet. Their contemplative cross-disciplinary work combines poetry, animation, puppetry and music. They are known for creating immersive visual stories for stage. To date they have created 'Sfeer' (2013), 'Kontinuum' (2014), 'The Impermanence Museum' (2015) and 'The Alchemy of Words' (2017).

www.dryfsand.com

www.vimeo.com/sfeer

<https://soundcloud.com/arnaud-van-vliet>

'The Alchemy of Words' was created with the support of 'The French Institute of South Africa (IFAS).



As the cultural agency of the French Embassy in South Africa, **IFAS-Culture** organizes artistic events throughout the country all year round. Events organized and supported by IFAS take place in venues and festivals throughout the country, allowing the Institute to establish relationships with various South African partners. As part of its mission, IFAS-Culture encourages cultural diversity and exchanges between South Africa, France and the rest of the African continent by supporting artistic events ranging from contemporary dance, theatre, puppetry and music, to contemporary art exhibitions and literature.



The Alliance Française, established in Paris in 1883 by eminent figures is now the largest cultural network in the world. Present in South Africa since 1936, the Alliance Française in a South African non-profit organization which aims at promoting cultural diversity through language classes and cultural events.