

#MeToo comes for French theatre

For four years, the alleged rape had been wiped from Alice's mind - "post-traumatic amnesia," she says. When the memory started to emerge, it took another four years for her to find the courage to file a complaint against renowned actor and theatre director Michel Didym. "Filing a complaint, having to recount everything, it increases the trauma," Alice (not her real name) told AFP at a protest in Paris yesterday organized by a new group, #MeTooTheatre. Alice accuses Didym, more than 30 years her senior, of raping her when she was a 20-year-old acting student at the National Drama Centre in Nancy.

"As an actress, I depend on people who have far too much power," she said, her hands trembling as she spoke, and her face entirely masked to maintain anonymity. "The directors know perfectly well what's going on—that there are many predators." She is not alone in accusing Didym, who has had an illustrious career in the theatre dating back to the early 1980s. Several women accused the 63-year-old of sexual assault or harassment in newspaper Liberation earlier this month. He denies the charges but has cancelled his upcoming shows and is under investigation by the police.

Convicted murderer

It has taken a while for the MeToo movement to reach the world of French theatre. Protests, however, have been building against two controversial figures featuring in the current season of the Colline Theatre, one of France's six national theatres. Activists are angry over the hiring of director Jean-Pierre Baro, who was accused of rape in a complaint that was later dismissed for lack of evidence, and rock star Bertrand Cantat, who beat his girlfriend to death in 2003. Cantat, former singer with Noir Desir ("Black Desire"), repeatedly punched the actress Marie Trintignant (daughter of famed actor Jean-Louis Trintignant), in the head in a Vilnius hotel room.

She died from her injuries a few days later. The singer was sentenced to eight years in prison but was released on parole after four. The head of the Colline, Wajdi Mouawad, chose Cantat to compose the music for "Mere" which opens next month. In a statement, Mouawad said he supported "unreservedly" the fight against violence and sexual harassment, but that he would not act as "a substitute for the judicial system".

Although Mouawad was appointed directly by the government, Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot told France Inter radio on Monday that it was not her job to intervene in the theatre's day-to-day affairs, though she "regretted" the decision to hire Cantat. Mouawad has worked with Cantat before, casting him in "Des Femmes" (Some Women), in 2011, the same year the singer's parole ended. An outcry at the time meant Cantat never appeared on stage, though Mouawad still used a recording of his voice.

'Enough'

Such decisions are now attracting greater resistance. The #MeTooTheatre group was formed after a blogger, Marie Coquille-Chambel, published her account of being raped by a 45-year-old actor when she was 16. It triggered an avalanche of similar stories. "I was 23 and had a professional meeting with a 60-year-old director. He was naked in his bath when I arrived and asked me to join him," wrote actress Celine Langlois on Twitter. She was among the 300 or so that gathered for the protest yesterday. "We were scared to talk for a long time. But now we've had enough," she told AFP.

"Had enough of the myth of actresses being loose women, of the demand that they stay young and beautiful until death, of their under-representation in management posts." It is the precarious nature of the job - "the fear of missing out on roles" - that has allowed the problems to go unaddressed, said Laetitia Cesar-Franquet, a researcher with the Emile Durkheim Centre. There is also an attitude in the theatre "that the body is something that can be treated any way they want", she added. "If we witness violence and the majority don't intervene, people will go with the crowd," she said. — AFP



View of the remains of a member of the Maya community of Pomuch during a private ritual where relatives clean their loved ones' remains preceding celebrations of the Day of the Dead in Campeche State, Mexico. — AFP photos



Residents of the Maya community of Pomuch clean the skull of a relative during a private ritual preceding celebrations of the Day of the Dead.

Cleaning bones: Maya community honors the dead

Antonio Canche lovingly brushed a relative's skull in a cemetery in the Mexican jungle - part of the Maya community's ancestral bone cleaning tradition to honor the dead. This year, the ritual, usually held in late October before Mexico's Day of the Dead festival, is taking place for the first time since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Indigenous Maya residents of Pomuch in Mexico's southeastern state of Campeche carefully open graves and take out the bones of their relatives.

After they are cleaned, the burial shroud is changed for a new one and the remains are returned to their resting place, said Canche. Canche, 74, spent

the whole day cleaning the remains of his in-laws, his parents and an uncle. "For me it means joy and enthusiasm to do it," he said. Between songs and anecdotes, the families watched over the remains for a few hours to give them some sun and fresh air. "Come out, come out souls of grief," women sang in front of open boxes containing human remains and white clothes embroidered with the names of the deceased.

"It's a very beautiful tradition to remember our ancestors," said resident Jacinta Chi. "We change their shrouds because the celebration is coming and we remember them with a lot of love and affection," he added. It is customary for bones to be

cleaned for the first time three years after death, and every year thereafter. "Last year due to the pandemic, the ritual was not carried out. Many people were very afraid," said Sebastian Yam, Pomuch's cultural representative.

"The pandemic was worldwide, and definitely here in Pomuch as in all places there were many people who died because of COVID," he said. This year one woman performed the ritual for the first time with the remains of her father. She had to open the coffin, remove the skeleton, divide it into pieces and place them in a wooden box. Nobody knows exactly when the bone cleaning practice began, but Yam believes it to be centuries

old, based on the accounts of the village elders.

After cleaning the remains of their relatives, the residents of Pomuch, like others Mexicans, will set up an altar in their homes with their favorite dishes and drinks for the Day of the Dead. It is believed that their spirits will return from death to eat and drink on what is one of Mexico's most important festivals, celebrated at the start of November. Orange marigold flowers are laid out to guide the spirits to the altar as part of this tradition recognized by UNESCO on the List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008. — AFP



View of the remains of a member of the Maya community of Pomuch.



Residents of the Maya community of Pomuch clean the skull.

World's largest museum for artist? Munch gets new digs

To Edvard Munch, they were his children. And like any doting father, he hated the idea of them straying too far from home. Now, more than 26,000 artworks from the master expressionist's "family"-including his best known piece, "The Scream"-have moved under one roof in the enormous and custom-built MUNCH museum on the shore of Oslo Fjord.

Gone is the old, rundown and poorly secured Munch Museum in the Norwegian capital's outskirts-from where a version of "The Scream" and another masterpiece, "Madonna", were stolen by armed robbers in 2004. On Friday, the new museum opens to the public smack dab in the heart of Oslo, in a luxuriously spacious modernist building that has sparked much controversy.

"This might be the biggest museum for a single artist," museum director Stein Olav Henriksen says as he gives a tour of the building. With 13 floors covering more than 26,000 square meters, the new building offers five times more exhibition space than the gloomy museum that until now housed Norway's national treasure. A bachelor who had no children, Munch (1863-1944) bequeathed his work to the city of Oslo. He had originally intended to leave it to the Norwegian state, but changed his will at the last-minute to avoid the art falling into unwanted hands.



An image shows an external view of the new Munch museum building in Oslo, Norway.



Norway's King Harald and Queen Sonja open the new museum of Norwegian painter Edvard Munch in Oslo. —AFP photos

'Degenerate art'

At the time, Norway was occupied by the Nazis, who considered the pioneer of expressionism to be a maker of "degenerate art". Rising from the shore of the fjord and next to the city's iconic opera house, the new museum aims to make up for a historical injustice by finally giving the world-renowned artist the building his admirers feel his oeuvre deserves.

Half a million visitors are expected each year-with the museum hoping for more than a million-to view the 200 works on permanent display across 4,500 square metres. Amid some of the recurring darker themes like angst, despair and death are less depressing ones exploring love, self-portraiture and landscapes.

Pallid and sickly naked bodies mix with fiery red strokes depicting mops of hair or sunsets. And of course, there is "The Scream". The museum owns several versions of the iconic artwork: one painting, one drawing, six lithographs and several sketches. It also features other masterpieces such as "Madonna"-both it and the stolen "Scream" were recovered by police two years later-"Vampire" and "The Sick Child", as well as some lesser known Munch pieces.

Among the latter are sculptures, photographs, a film, and two massive paintings-"The Sun" and "The Researchers"-which had to be lifted into the museum

during construction through a hole in the facade. "Munch wanted to have a museum. He talked about his children (referring to) all his works and he wanted them to be together as a collection," says curator Trine Otte Bak Nielsen. "I think he would be very happy to see what we have made now."

'Brutal building'

The building itself, dubbed "Lambda" because its slanted top resembles the letter of the Greek alphabet with the same name, has been the subject of controversy. That shape has riled some, while the luminous glass windows promised in the designs are largely hidden beneath what some say resemble monstrous metal shutters.

Back in 2019, art historian Tommy Sorbo slammed the project as a "pollution" of Oslo, a "coming catastrophe". He maintains that opinion today, "at least for the exterior and the entrance". "The lobby looks like an airport, a warehouse, a hotel or a commercial building," he told AFP. "There is absolutely nothing in the choice of colors and materials to indicate that the place houses one of the greatest artists in the world." Management has shrugged off the criticism, saying the museum should provoke people in the same way Munch's art did at the time it was made. —AFP

Ancient Peruvian burial tombs shed new light on Wari culture

A team of archeologists in northern Peru discovered the remains of 29 people, including three children, that could help experts rewrite the history of the pre-Incan Wari civilization, the lead researcher said on Friday. The skeletons were buried more than 1,000 years ago in Huaca Santa Rosa de Pucala, an ancient ceremonial center in the coastal region of Lambayeque, 750 kilometers to the north of Lima.

The burials of the three children and a teenager at the front of the temple indicated they were human sacrifices from the Wari culture, Edgar Bracamonte, the lead researcher, told AFP. It is the first time a discovery linked to the Wari civilization has been made this far from their area of influence, said Bracamonte. "These discoveries allow us to rethink the history of the Lambayeque region, especially the links to Wari and Mochica occupations in the area," said Bracamonte. The Wari culture flourished in the central Peruvian Andes from the seventh to 13th centuries.

The Huaca Santa Rosa de Pucala enclosure, in the form of the letter 'D', was built between 800 and 900 AD. "We found a ceremonial temple with 29 human remains, 25 belonging to the Mochica era and four to the Wari culture," said Bracamonte. The Mochica, or Moche, culture developed from 100 to 700 AD on the northern Peruvian coast. The 25 Mochica remains were found in clay tombs and burial chambers in a temple. Researchers also found pieces of pottery and the remains of camelids — such as llamas and alpacas — and guinea pigs.

One of the most significant discoveries related to the Mochica culture was in 2006 with the unearthing of the fifth century Lady of Cao mummy, that showed the civilization included female leaders. The 1987 discovery of another mummy, the third century Lord of Sipan, is considered by experts one of the most significant archeological discoveries in the last few decades, as the main tomb was found intact and untouched by thieves. — AFP