



Sarah Brownlee previews
'The Paper Architect'
Production values

There's a quality to Davy and Kristin McGuire's work that keeps people guessing, and that's all part of its charm. Intricate paper models are combined with canny film techniques, animation and projection mapping that allows moving images to be superimposed onto the sets, which are delicately crafted out of paper and beautifully lit. The effect is enchanting and sometimes haunting. It's not unlike watching a traditional toy theatre performance, in terms of the intimacy and scale of the productions, except one that comes alive with its characters (appearing via video projection).

'When people ask how it's done, we often just say it's magic and they are usually happy with that,' says Kristin McGuire. The miniature scale of these 'theatrical productions' is undoubtedly part of the allure. Their breakthrough project, *The Icebook*, was essentially a pop-up book brought to life through video projection. Its tiny characters



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(Kristin and Davy themselves in acting mode) flit about the pages for a spellbinding 17 minutes. 'We make these little worlds and we end up inhabiting them,' laughs Davy. 'Sometimes we feel like we're not in the real world.'

Kristin trained as a rhythmic gymnast and dancer back in her home country, Germany. Her background in expressionist dance 'comes in handy', she says – rather too modestly, as there is little if any dialogue in many of their productions. This, along with the flickery quality of the projections, brings to mind the romance and drama of silent films.

Davy studied Devised Theatre at Dartington College of Art in Devon (now part of University College Falmouth); he loved it and was encouraged to 'make something from scratch with no script'. He does a lot of the filming and 'technical stuff' but they can both do a bit of everything – including the acting and the all-important paper-cutting, the latter

self-taught, astoundingly. 'It's something we both had to learn by trial and error,' says Kristin. 'It took a few years to get to the stage we're at now, but I think if you're passionate and interested in something you get there somehow.'

Their latest production, *The Paper Architect* – to be performed at Corner of Leytonstone Library in East London, as part of the *Beyond Barbican* season – will boast more paper models than *The Icebook*, but maintains the Lilliputian scale. And this time an actor (John Cording) will be interacting with models and projections with an element of shadowplay thrown in.

The McGuires received funding for *The Paper Architect* after winning this year's Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust Award. It is co-produced by Create London in association with the Tobacco Factory Theatre, Bristol, the city where they live and work. Writer Tom Wainwright was commissioned to work on the story with them – the melancholic tale

Opposite page, left: *The Paper Architect*, Davy and Kristin McGuire
Above: the making of *The Paper Architect*
Right, bottom to top: all images from *The Paper Architect*



of a lonely man who builds models in a secluded workshop. The models become 'vessels for his dreams and memories', relating to a past encounter with a woman.

Admirers of the McGuires' work, which also includes large-scale stage sets, installations and music videos, compare it with Lotte Reiniger (most famous for her *Fairy Tale* films, animated using paper silhouettes) as well as more contemporary exponents of the craft.

But they see themselves simply as 'storytellers', who just happen to combine paper-cutting with performance. 'For the last few projects we've used papercraft but another time we might use something else to tell our stories,' says Kristin. 'Whatever our vision is, we will figure out a way to realise it.'

Davy & Kristin McGuire's *The Paper Architect* is at *Beyond Barbican: Corner of Leytonstone Library*, 6 Church Lane, London E11 1HG, from 3-21 July (36 performances). www.barbican.org.uk/beyondbarbican