

## THEATRE

# Hitting the streets

Brussels' theatre troupe surprises unsuspecting passers-by

Monique Philips

You might recognise Irma Firma from such projects as "How to Survive in a City", in which artists joined forces with biologists to find edible titbits in an urban environment, or "The Walk", in which five farm animals were led on an old-fashioned pilgrimage of 85 kilometres to the sea at De Panne.

It took them three weeks and a lot of effort to get there. Quarrels arose amongst the city-raised artists: "You're feeding your animal crisps?" And the animals weren't exactly great travelling companions. "A sheep doesn't talk back, whereas you are projecting all your feelings onto it. In fact, the animals were just doing their thing, and us humans were making all the fuss."

Walking is essential in Ann Van de Vyvere's work. "By being on foot you discover so many new possibilities," says the founder of the performance art group Irma Firma. "I especially like investigating the

walking potential of the city." This is helpful to scout out sites, too, since the Brussels-based group regularly initiates surprise appearances in random public places. "By deliberately choosing a specific form and route, we rediscover Brussels. And if we're well prepared, perform consciously and are observed by an accidental audience, a walk becomes a parade, which can inspire our audience to look afresh at their own environment."

Irma Firma's latest piece is called "Salle des Pas Perdus", which was inspired by the movement – and restriction of movement – that "people without papers" experience every day. The first run in the midst of a Saturday shopping crowd in Brussels' Nieuwstraat was nothing short of hilarious. Except for a small crowd of onlookers, you wouldn't have realized anything out of the ordinary was happening.

Gradually the "illegal spotting" took shape as the same handful of walkers passed

by again and again. Are there patterns to be discovered as they drift by aimlessly or walk by briskly or fall on the ground, drawing chalk lines on the pavement, or stand in line for an invisible money dispenser? The performance aims to explore the obstacles and physical boundaries many immigrants face every day. Let's not forget how easily one outstays one's welcome – whether as a tourist, a guest worker, or even as an artist. After all, between shows a considerable portion of the international dance scene is living and working in Belgium illegally.

Your next chance to see Irma Firma at work is at 58T, a day of entertainment on the rooftop of Parking 58 in Brussels on Car Free Sunday. You can walk all the way to the top to enjoy the show and the

backdrop – the best panoramic view of the capital. Or you might want to applaud the colourful crowd that intends to walk, run or cycle a total of 58 laps around the expansive roof, equalling a very artistic marathon. As Irma Firma would say: Experience the city anew.

58T, 21 September from 14.00, Parking 58, Bisschopstraat 1, Brussels, [www.park58.be](http://www.park58.be)

online  
[www.irmafirma.be](http://www.irmafirma.be)



Guerrilla theatre: a common street becomes a playground for performance group Irma Firma