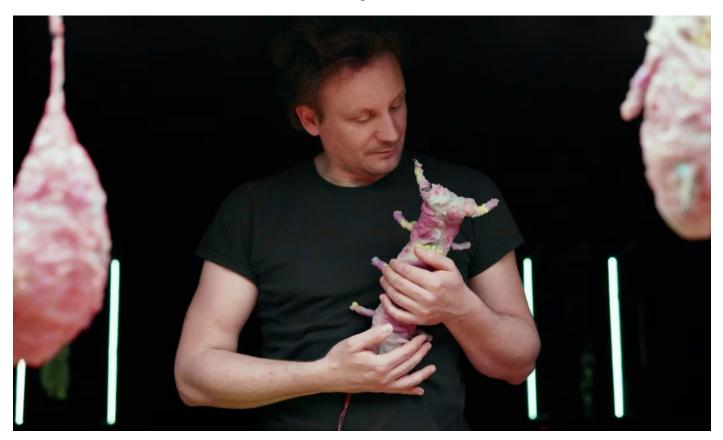
Edinburgh's Manipulate festival: rubbery robot Swan Lake leads celebration of the unexpected



The annual festival of visual theatre delivers an inventive mix of wry commentary, daft puppetry and highprecision performance

You can rely on Edinburgh's Manipulate festival to give you something you have never seen before. This year, it comes in the form of **Simple Machines** ($\star \star \star \star \star$), an opening weekend treat by Belgian choreographer Ugo Dehaes. His shtick is that it has become too expensive to employ dancers in his company <u>Kwaad Bloed</u> so he has followed the lead of big business and done away with them.

Just as Amazon embraces automation and supermarkets use self-service tills to make us do their work, so Dehaes has created a robot corps de ballet and got his audiences to develop their moves. We sit around a table to watch these dancing robots, some like snakes, others crabs, with rubbery flesh or mounds of black hair.

In a wry commentary on our brave new world, they are clunky and malfunctioning. And yet, in a culminating <u>Swan Lake</u> sequence, in which synchronised metal arms swing down over skittering insect dancers, they also have a mesmerising mechanical beauty.