

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 high-precision 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** (★★★★☆), an opening weekend treat by Belgian choreographer Ugo Dehaes. His shtick is that it has become too expensive to employ dancers in his company [Kwaad Bloed](#) 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 [Swan Lake](#) sequence, in which synchronised metal arms swing down over skittering insect dancers, they also have a mesmerising mechanical beauty.