

# THE TRAGEDY OF THE APPLAUSE

## Roubaix 2009

happening/collective exhibition curated by

**OHNO COOPERATION**

with installations, performances and music by

Rombout Willems, Nicolas Field, Fritz Welch,

Egill Sæbjörnsson & Marcia Moraes, Liquid Architecture & Thomas Lélou,

Jan Lauwers, Maarten Seghers

A Needcompany/OHNO COOPERATION/La Condition Publique (Roubaix) production

In collaboration with La Rose des Vents (Scène Nationale), Next Festival.

With the support of the Flemish authorities.

**OHNO COOPERATION** (Brussels) is a Needcompany splinter group. Maarten Seghers and Jan Lauwers take the role of the jester very seriously. The jester who was allowed to say whatever he liked to the king without fear of punishment. Their collaboration has taken the form of examining, thinking about and making music, visual work and performances.

*The Tragedy Of The Applause – Roubaix* is a happening/exhibition in which OHNO COOPERATION operates in the guise of a duo of curators and artists. Together with the artists invited, they asks why pop music has never questioned itself. 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> November will be three days of sensory performance, when artists will produce work based on the question of the creation and perception of pop music. What remains are traces – sounds and images – that signal an attempt to analyse the pop music process. They can be seen in the form of an exhibition at La Condition Publique in Roubaix until 23<sup>rd</sup> December.

In the exhibition we see a landscape composed of iPod headphones engaged in dialogue with each other (Nicolas Field – *Think Thrice*), Egill Sæbjörnsson & Marcia Moraes immersing themselves in their own videographic fiction of projected colours and cheese (*The Mind*), a song that turns into a straw (Maarten Seghers – *So, man, ...*), a Gibson seesawing up and down on a runaway donkey in search of its final song (Jan Lauwers – *Last Guitar Monster*), stages, drums and oatmeal huddling together into an organic growth (Fritz Welch – *Brundlefly Soundings Caravan*), spectators who, with a microphone in the hand, give their vanity free rein and run the risk of playing a leading part in ‘Broadcast Your Life’, the latest clip by Liquid Architecture and Thomas Lélou, an empty room filled with loudspeakers playing a feedback composition that never repeats itself, elicited by the warmth of a dancing composer or a passing spectator (Rombout Willems – *receive-send-receive*).

The artists and/or musicians involved are invited to perform new songs and compositions and to improvise for the audience at La Condition Publique in the course of three evenings (OHNO GIGtime), with all the performers as musicians. Stubborn creatures who briefly subject themselves to each other’s hopeful musical ideas.



*The OHNO Cooperation Conversation On The O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. Ontology*

CONVERSATION WITH MAARTEN SEGHERS AND JAN LAUWERS ON *THE TRAGEDY OF THE APPLAUSE*

**JL:** *The Tragedy Of The Applause* is based on something Louise Bourgeois once said: success corrupts. It is very questionable to assume that success is a criterion for quality. It is not because something is understood and well received at a particular time that it will also have any significance at other times.

**MS:** Whether there is applause or not. That's what it's about. Not whether something is, exists or happens no matter what. Things work or they don't. There has to be applause. So much *has to* be attained.

**JL:** The tragedy of the applause is that the applause itself creates a false image of reality. Perhaps that is why John Cage was only interested in the moment of performance itself, and not what followed.

**MS:** The tragedy of the applause is the tragedy of *having to*. Having to score. In art, 'having to' becomes a tragedy. Because nothing 'has to' in art. But if it does anyway, it's a tragedy. Jan, your work *Silence*, Rombout Willems' feedback and my own empty cardboard boxes are images founded on silence, the last parameter pop music would be allowed to avail itself of, because it risks putting a stop to something, leaving despair in its trail and asking for something new, to the point where it asks for nothing at all anymore.

**JL:** The artists we have invited all work on the fringe. None are at the centre. They are a group of 'unravellers'. There is no greater difference than between you and Rombout Willems. Rombout is a classical guitarist, composer and conductor, you are a 'rock' guitarist. Both of you are essentially doing the same thing: unravelling your own skills as instrumentalists, unravelling tone and sound as composers and summarising it in an image. Your images are actually packaged 'compositions' where the sound and its source are hidden by the false narrative idea of an after-party that has got out of hand. In Rombout's case this leads to an almost empty room in which a virtual image is created using a feedback system manipulated by the viewer.

**MS:** Pop music is symbolic of the betrayal of art and its freedom. It has accepted an existence whose sole condition is appreciation and has lost its right to individuality and mystery. I love pop music because when it is successful it touches upon beauty in a way that nothing else can. But I resent the fact that when it fails it does not allow itself to admit its failure, but carries on and just has to keep on scoring.

In this way pop music has betrayed the freedom of art. Not when it first came into being, but when its existence had to be prolonged. If music is once again to become art, it has to stop wanting to have a value pinned to it. Because art does not have to be valued. Art looks at, values that which had no value, reevaluates that which turns out not to have been correctly valued, and continues to look and reevaluate. Seeing the potential of things is something you too do with *Last Guitar Monster*, with meters of steel tubing and singing feedback: it is what it is, but it radiates power and tells stories, occupies space, tolerates things and blows things away, and gives things personality.

**JL:** Egill Sæbjörnsson's work unravels the notion of 'the image' in a video clip: this is the visual artist as a pop artist. It is widely known that since Andy Warhol and The Velvet Underground, many pop musicians have originated in the visual arts. This is odd, because pop music does not do precisely that which an artist aims to do, which is to research materials and redefine art itself. Pop music is of course in the first place embraced by the entertainment industry, and is only sporadically seen as 'real' art. The installations by Sæbjörnsson and Fritz Welch too in fact unravel the relationship between the entertainment industry and the hard art market. Iconographically speaking, they use the same materials: from a can of cola through a guitar and a drum kit made useless with silicones, to a porcelain 'villa' sculpture, to come to the conclusion that nothing is still an image if it is reduced to a 'format'.

**MS:** Art has to be looked at. By itself, if necessary. Apart from that it is not obliged to do anything. Art is the only thing in the human world that has acknowledged the possibility of failure as a part of itself, with the risk of achieving unprecedented beauty. This means the harm done by a failure in art is relative, and a triumph in art seems an absolute glory. This should not be held against it. It is only when failure is accepted that it is possible to look again. In this way, art, and music too, if you like, is the option of possibilities, the attempt to make attempts, the full by way of the empty; thus pop music tends towards the empty by way of the full. Courage as against victory. Not that art isn't courageous. It inspires a man and a society to look in wonder at what there is to be seen and to withdraw from its singularity. A struggle with the tragedy of obligation; the tragedy of the applause.

**JL:** Nicolas Field is showing *Think Thrice*, a table-full of headphones in dialogue with each other that produce new sounds out of the noise input from a battery of rock 'n roll lights. Feedback as the basis for a concept of freedom in music and the exclusion of composition. My own golden *Last Guitar Monster* is a feedback guitar that plays itself, making reference to Jimi Hendrix's masturbation guitar and *The Great Masturbator* by Salvador Dalí, the anagram of whose name – Avida Dollars – is also a dramatic nod in the direction of the tragedy of the applause which, in the vulgar capitalist system we have chosen since the

fall of the Berlin Wall, is converted absolutely into hard currency. This is what Liquid Architecture's work is also about: the glamour of the 'shades' for those who ask for applause too much, and the popularisation of the video clip, where the image is no longer an image and music is no more than an illustration of the infantilisation of life. Everyone is a pop singer, this is a comment on Joseph Beuys' idea that 'everybody is an artist'.

**MS:** If the high speed train on which the pop industry is travelling were a plane and you felt sick on it, you would either have to throw up or land. If landing implies an end, none of the artists participating has done so. Though each of them has crashed, feeling unwell, and the route was recalculated. Not as in a revolution – revolution is dead anyway, say Liquid Architecture – but as in evolution, by means of a constantly recurring conflict with the constantly recurring course of events. In spite of doubts about any significance pop music still retains, its history and its uncertain but obtrusive existence inspire such artists as Fritz Welch and myself to use such remnants as posters, party hooters, rock 'n roll junk and soup-spoons to make new images that may be able to reveal an idea of renewed beauty or logic. In *Think Thrice*, Nicolas Field examines the narrative power of individual elements that make up the self-evident nature of the everyday pop experience.

**JL:** The tragedy of the applause means Marcel Duchamp's urinal has returned to its status as a plain pisspot. Because an image does not exist without 'thinking', and the entertainment industry excludes thought and consecrates applause. That's a tragedy.

## The Tragedy Of The Applause - La Condition Publique, Roubaix

26 November – 23 December 2009

### Thursday 26 November 2009

6 pm opening

6 pm – 11 pm exhibition and performances

8 pm OHNO GIGtime 1

with Nicolas Field, Egill Sæbjörnsson, Fritz Welch, Rombout Willems,  
Jan Lauwers, Maarten Seghers, Liquid Architecture

### Friday 27 November 2009

6 pm – 11 pm exhibition and performances

8 pm OHNO GIGtime 2

with Nicolas Field, Egill Sæbjörnsson, Fritz Welch, Rombout Willems,  
Jan Lauwers, Maarten Seghers, Liquid Architecture

### Saturday 28 November 2009

11 am – 11 pm exhibition and performances

8 pm OHNO GIGtime 3 *featuring Jean-Marc Montera*

with Nicolas Field, Fritz Welch, Rombout Willems,  
Jan Lauwers, Maarten Seghers, Liquid Architecture

happening/collective exhibition curated by **OHNO COOPERATION**

with installations, performances and music by **Rombout Willems, Nicolas Field, Fritz Welch, Egill Sæbjörnsson & Marcia Moraes, Liquid Architecture & Thomas Lélou, Jan Lauwers, Maarten Seghers**

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As a duo of curators and artists, for this happening/exhibition OHNO COOPERATION adopts an Adornian view of art: 'art as an examination of matter'. More specifically the substance of pop music. The word 'tragedy' in the title leads to the following questions: 'Is applause a measure of worth? Is its artistic value in direct proportion to the amount of applause?' The applause in itself is a matter of demagogy, linked exclusively to the moment itself, without any criterion of interest. On the contrary, applause makes sure there is hardly any chance of evolution. Keith Richard and Mick Jagger composed (*I Can't Get No*) *Satisfaction* when they were eighteen, and it is the applause alone that decides that they continue to perform the same song virtually unchanged in their sixties. The tragedy of the applause is the power of the success that immediately corrupts the artist's mind.

Jan Lauwers (1957) and Maarten Seghers (1982) are two artists of a completely different generation who entered into dialogue as a result of the existence of pop music. The force of pop music and the utterly conservative iconic behaviour of pop musicians thus has a gripping power. On the subject of this 'pop' iconography, OHNO COOPERATION has since 2006 been developing the O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. installation, which is also a lasting inspiration for *The Tragedy Of The Applause – Roubaix*: an army tent (covered in chalk drawings by Jan Lauwers), as the house of the pop musician, is encircled by video projections (in association with Nico Leunen / Cobblersson Incorporated) of an audience that stares and repeatedly applauds at regular intervals. This image ritualises the relationship between spectator and entertainer and bypasses the live spectator and his appreciation of what is happening. For *The Tragedy Of The Applause – Roubaix*, O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. will be an open house for the artists and/or musicians involved. They subject their music, in the form of three OHNO GIGtimes, to the arbitrary dictatorship of the ever-intrusive artificial applause. The OHNO COOPERATION brings these 'guest' artists together in *The Tragedy Of The Applause – Roubaix* on the basis of a recognition of an inspiration and study area.

What these artists have in common is 'looking' at pop music. The questions they ask are the ones real pop musicians do not: 'What is the meaning of a microphone? What does feedback mean? Why do pop musicians all use the same lighting? What is the actual difference between Frank Sinatra's bow-tie and the peeled banana in GG Allen's backside? Why do we all know the first three words of pop songs but never any more?



**OHNO COOPERATION** (BE, 2006) is a Needcompany splinter-group that embodies the collaboration between Maarten Seghers and Jan Lauwers as a duo of curators and artists. They take the role of the fool very seriously. The fool was able to say anything to the king with impunity. Up to now this has been expressed in the study of, reflection on and making music, visual work and performances: *The Grenoble Tapes* (2006), *O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O.* (2006), *So man*, (2007), *The OHNO Cooperation Conversation On The O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. Ontology* (2007). Variations on the installations and performances have already been shown separately in Temps d'Images (La Ferme du Buisson, 2006), SPIELART (Munich, 2007) and BOZAR (Brussels, 2007). These installations/performances were first shown together in the form of an *OHNO cooperation evening* in künstlerhaus mousonturm (Frankfurt) and CAMPO (Ghent). For *The Tragedy Of The Applause - Roubaix* they have invited several artists/musicians and will be pondering on why pop music has never questioned itself. This is an exhibition/happening put together under their curatorship. In this exhibition they will present *O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O* and *The OHNO Cooperation Conversation On The O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. Ontology*. On this occasion, the *O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O* tent will provide the venue where all the artists taking part will be making music together (*OHNO GIGtime*).

**Nicolas Field** (UK/CH, 1975) is a sound artist and drummer. He has worked in a variety of projects encompassing contemporary music and jazz, improvisation and electronics for dance and theatre performances. He also builds sound installations. Ongoing projects are: *Buttercup Metal Polish* with Alexandre Babel, *Phô* with Morten J. Olsen & Bjornar Habbestad, *Le doigt de Galilee* with Jaime Fennelly and *The Same Girl* with Gilles Aubry. Nicolas was a co-founder of the *N-Collective*. He has worked/played with PSI, Damo Suzuki, Otomo Yoshihide Jazz ensemble, Keiji Haino, Antoine Chessex, Æthenor, Jacques Demierre, Michel Doneda, Seijiro Murayama, Rova 4tet, Tom Tlalim, Robert van Heumen and Anthony Pateras among others and has given concerts in Europe, Japan, Korea, Australia and the USA.

*Think Thrice* is a semi-interactive installation that acts as a filter, revealing visually and sonically conceived processes which one does not necessarily control, or which are controlled by others.

**Fritz Welch** (USA, 1967) lives and works in Glasgow (Scotland). He is an artist who explores both the visual and the musical world. His installations are often put together on site and involve mural drawings, sounds and images. In this setting he gives live performances using sound and music on the basis of improvisation. He has exhibited his work at Kunsthalle Exnergasse (Vienna), The Drawing Center (New York), Alma Enterprises (London), Transmission (Glasgow) and elsewhere. As a musician he is a member of the bands Peeesseye, Brittle Hammer Trio and Lambs Gamble.

*Brundlefly Soundings Caravan* (2009) is 'A self generating residue cluster with automatic drawings of plunder-phonetic musings, sculptures of supernatural entities and the sound of cathartic unravellings.'

**Rombout Willems** (NL, 1953) is a musician and composer. He lives and works in Haarlem. He recently exhibited work in the group exhibition *Censored Pornography* at De Service Garage (Amsterdam). He has composed music for several Needcompany productions by Grace Ellen Barkey & Jan Lauwers. He also teaches at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy and in the Modern Dance Department at the Amsterdam College of Arts.

In his *receive-send-receive* sound installation (2009) he creates an auditory image using feedback generated by the spectator's presence.

**Liquid Architecture** (FR) is a dance rock group headed by Jérôme Sans and Audrey Mascina. Their music has since the beginning engaged in ongoing dialogue with art, theatre, film and fashion. Every appearance, in the form of a photo, film, video or concert, is made in cooperation with a particular artist. They have for example previously worked with Virginie Barré, Fabien Verschaere, Bruno Peinado, Jonas Mekas, Araki, Sam Samore, Matthieu Laurette, Richard Kern and Kader Attia. For their new album, *I Love to Love*, they collaborated with Thomas Lélou on the development of a visual idiom that corresponds to their music, aesthetics and character. **Thomas Lélou** is an artist and writer. He has taken part in several group exhibitions at the CAPC, Fondation Cartier, the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris and elsewhere. His latest novel, *Le Parisien*, was published by Editions Flammarion in September 2009.

In *Broadcast Your Life* (2009), the audience is invited to make their own clip.

**Egill Sæbjörnsson** (Iceland, 1973) is an artist and musician. He lives and works in Iceland and Berlin. His work consists of sculptures and performances that incorporate music, sound and video. He has previously exhibited in Iceland, Berlin, Vienna, Skopje, Ljubljana and London. In July he brought out the second CD of his own music. **Marcia Moraes** (Brazil, 1969) is a director and actress. She works with the Jocy de Oliveira Opera Ensemble (Rio de Janeiro) and is an assistant in the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University.

In their work *The Mind* (2009), a play/performance/concert, Egill and Marcia explore the boundaries of the mind.

**Maarten Seghers** (BE, 1982) is an artist, musician and performer. It was on Needcompany's *Images of Affection* (2002) that he first worked with Jan Lauwers. After that he composed music for all the theatre and dance productions by Lauwers and by Grace Ellen Barkey.

*So, man,...* is an installation comprising objects that express the ambiguity of Seghers' ambition of scoring points in the pop media, and results in a total clearout. Audio installations such as a microphone above an empty box function on the basis of a discretionary call for the revaluation of the world, which consists of residues, noise and a void that remains after interest and virtuosity, have been lost.

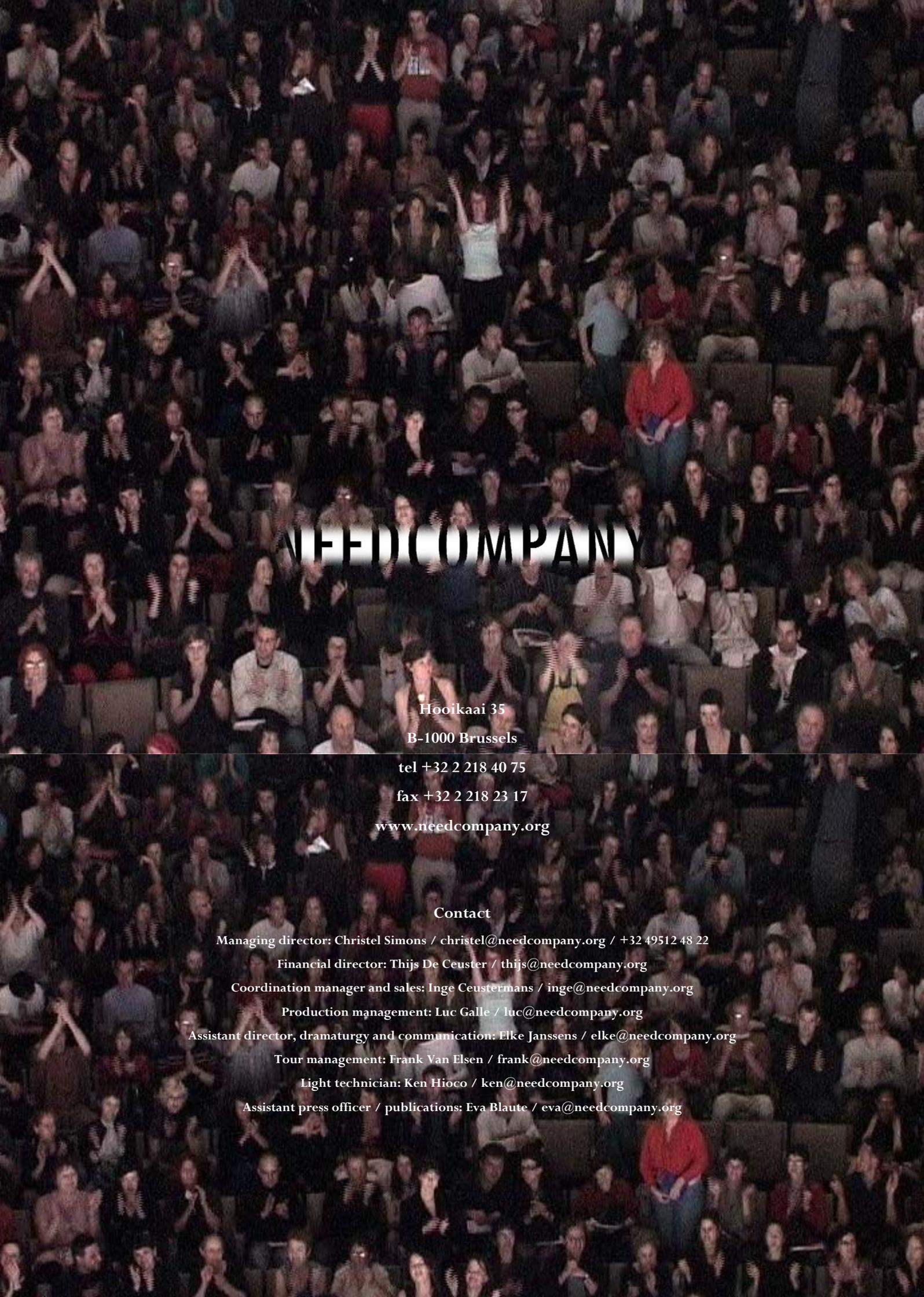
**Jan Lauwers** (BE, 1957) is an artist who uses just about every available medium in his work. Over the last twenty years he has gained an international reputation for his pioneering work for the stage and his legendary theatre company, Needcompany, which was founded in Brussels in 1986. Since then he has built up a substantial oeuvre of visual work that has been shown in a retrospective at BOZAR in Brussels (2007) and elsewhere. For *The Tragedy Of The Applause* he has created *Last Guitar Monster*.

**Jean-Marc Montera** (FR) is a guitarist who specialises in free improvisation and sound experiments. He plays solo and also in several groups (AMP, The Room, Meditrio) and has collaborated with Fred Frith, André Jaume, Barre Phillips, Loren Mazzacane Connors, Thurston Moore, Lee Ranaldo and others. In 1978 he founded GRIM (Group of Musical Research and Improvisation).

He will be a special guest at *OHNO GIGtime* during the opening weekend for *The Tragedy Of The Applause*.



O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. © Jean-Julien Kraemer



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