



LEMM & BARKEY
& NEEDCOMPANY

ODD? BUT TRUE!

A Needcompany production.
In collaboration with BRONKS (Brussels).
With the support of the Flemish authorities.
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In the wondrous world of Needcompany anything is possible.

Anything? Yes, anything!

Don't you believe it then?

Your eyes see what they see, don't they?

The bear who runs a launderette,

the fish wearing a bra,

an ironing-board in a bad mood,

that's not so odd, is it?

And they all dance with each other

in every possible colour: it's true!

I think you ought to come and watch

then you'll see it happen!

Lemm&Barkey are making a wordless dance performance for all ages.



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Odd? But True!

Choreography

Grace Ellen Barkey

Visual Concept

Lemm&Barkey

Created and performed by

Benoît Gob, Sung-Im Her, Maarten Seghers, Mohamed Toukabri, Catherine Travelletti

Music

Rombout Willems en Maarten Seghers

Installation, costume design

Lot Lemm

Objects

Lemm&Barkey

Technical manager

Marjolein Demey

Production of the creation

Chris Vanneste

Photos

Fred Debrock

Opening night

9 November, IMPORT/EXPORT festival, BRONKS, Brussels

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www.needcompany.org

SEASON 2013-2014

Opening night

Bronks, Brussels	9 November 2013
CCHA, Hasselt	4 March 2014
STORMOPKOMST, De Warande, Turnhout	23 March 2014
CONACULTA, Europa Joven, Teatro Julio Castillo, Mexico	31 May, 1 June 2014

SEASON 2014-2015

De Rode Hond, 30CC, Minnepoort, Leuven	26 October 2014
AggloScènes, Palais des Congrès, St-Raphaël	29 October 2014
CAMPO, Ghent	16 November 2014
Le carré, Ste-Maxime	18 November 2014
December Dance, CC Bruges	14 December 2014
Schouwburg Kortrijk	10 January 2015
CC De Werf, Aalst	18 January 2015
Scène Nationale de Sète et du Bassin de Thau, Sète	26, 27, 28, 29, 30 January 2015
PôleJeunePublic –TPM, Revest-les-Eaux	29, 20 May 2015
Théâtre de Grasse	1, 2, 4, 5 June 2015
La Croisée des Arts, Saint Maximin La Sainte Baume	9 June 2015



REVIEW

Etcetera 135, jg. 31 - December 2013, Pieter T'Jonck

Odd? But True!, a performance for children by Grace Ellen Barkey and Lot Lemm, had not been on long before a small boy in front of me commented with some disappointment that 'there is no story'. His parents replied placatingly that this was because it was 'dance'. This appeared to be a sufficient remedy, because for the rest of the performance the child watched what was going on with great interest. This may tell us something about what we understand by the term 'dance': stage practices where there is no story involved. But although a few scenes are unmistakably pure dance, the parents' explanation does not really work. They chose the wrong word. This is theatre. Pretending. But in a fairly shameless way. Until it becomes just like the real thing.

While almost the whole of Needcompany ensemble was on tour in China, the ones who stayed at home – Grace Ellen Barkey and Lot Lemm – thought up this piece for children. But what exactly is so childlike about it, or why do Lemm&Barkey think this material is suitable for children? After all, if you have kept track of their development, in the first place you see something else: a quick montage of images from previous productions which the actors cheerfully set to work with.

The stage set, for example. The stage is full of suspended plastic panels covered in busy, colourful decorative motifs like those on mattresses or the curtains in an old-fashioned interior. It was precisely the same image that dominated *Chunking*, a piece from 2005. (You see more elements from *Chunking* later, when mythological creatures sawn out of plywood float above the stage.) In this new production these panels again become living set elements. From the very beginning they lead a life of their own, or so it seems: they slide across the podium under their own steam. But it doesn't take long before an actor sticks his head out from behind one or other panel – an acted showpiece – to give the explanation of this mystery of animated matter. These panels are not the only thing that comes to life. The play begins with the sound of howling wind, or at least a successful imitation of it. The first character is a small boat in cardboard. It slides past in a string. No trouble is taken to hide the string. On the contrary, a lot of effort is put into showing it. Then you hear the mumbling of a man, Benoît Gob, who soon makes his appearance, wearing a captain's uniform and babbling in an odd mixture of French and Dutch. In his wake follows Sung-Im Her as the duty cabin boy. You know this because of her sailor's cap and jumper, though she is also wearing a peculiar pair of knickerbockers, like oversized underwear.

These two have to brave not only the elements, but also dangerous animals such as a fish and huge shark, both in cardboard. Sung-Im Her is scared to death when she sees the shark and always runs off screaming. Though I have rarely seen a woman so much enjoy being frightened. Which is no surprise: every so often Maarten Seghers, bewigged and grinning, pops up from behind a panel to show the audience with a great big wink that it is he who is operating the fish and that the danger is thus only imaginary.

If there is one mechanism which in my memory I associate with children's theatre, it is this: someone who assures you that it's not all as bad as it looks. That it's 'only' theatre. This is what we do with children, after all. If something strange turns up, we ward off the danger by 'explaining it'. This is usually a matter of giving it a name. 'Don't worry, it's only a dog.' This doesn't make the animal any different or less dangerous. But we seem to have it under control precisely because there is a word for it. Exactly as the parents at the beginning said when their son raised a problem: 'It's dance'. And this is probably necessary for a children's performance. Unlike adults, children naturally accept an image as true. What is happening is real. It is too much to credit that adults invent places where things can be done that they do not themselves believe in. Rightly so, for that matter, from their point of view: they see that these same adults are moved by or get excited about things which they themselves say are 'not real'.



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But Barkey goes to extremes in her demonstration that what we see is only acting, an artifice. In a superb scene taken from *The Porcelain Project*, Mohamed Toukabri and Sung-Im Her come on in a gigantic crinoline dress, a sort of oversized lampshade. They suddenly rise up in the air like unnaturally big giants, without your being able to see how. Until Toukabri wants to come down again. The man who is carrying him – it's that nuisance Seghers again, of course – doesn't obey. Not even when Toukabri uncovers his head and gives it a serious blow.

In this way the hidden (though not very hidden) deceiver becomes one of the main characters of the play, in a metaphorical sense too. He reassures the viewer, but this reassurance is not very reliable, because when it comes down to it he turns out to do his own thing, and his thing is rather unpredictable. Take the scene lifted from *This door is too small (for a bear)* that is repeated here. Gob comes on as a teddy bear who wants to do the washing. But Seghers has hidden in the washing machine (made of slabs of PU foam) and keeps on throwing the clothes back out again. Sung-Im Her and Catherine Travelletti bait the bear by pulling its ironing board away on a string. In this case the deception is not used to create an illusion. Children too see this as something different from a shark that is really 'only' made of cardboard. The washing machine and ironing board are clearly not 'alive'. It is the actors who control them, with the clear aim of pestering the bear.

This brings us to the end of the play. Just as in *Chunking* and *This door ...*, all the players now appear in brightly coloured, crocheted costumes, very clearly inspired by cuddly toys. The sort of object that domesticates a dangerous outside world into a cosy interior that is identified as appealing. You would probably never dream of cuddling a real bear, only a toy bear. Barkey undoubtedly drew her inspiration for these costumes from Mike Kelley's cuddly toys. They tell the story of a false childlike innocence, a world where the signs we hang on things turn out never to perfectly describe the thing itself. Take Travelletti's costume, for instance: it may portray a gentle creature, but her bare legs emphasise the broad piece of cloth like a nappy that covers her pubic region, so emphatically that it's almost obscene. Though the occasionally explicit sexual references that otherwise crop up in Barkey's work do not appear in this play for children (but then again...), the odd innocence of the crocheted animals nevertheless suggests a sort of amorphous sexuality.

Which is why this is theatre. It is constantly saying 'this is not real'. Or, rather, 'this is too real', because we know exactly how it's all put together. Everything has a name and a place. But unlike serious theatre, it all goes haywire. Sometimes it gets serious, sometimes mean, and sometimes just stops short of being explicit. This is of course why the parents enjoy the play too. They see confirmation of what they already thought: we show each other all sorts of signs; we serve up stories to each other. Sweet cakes with a bitter aftertaste. But I also think that children pick up something too. They learn something from it.

But parents, like their children, also learn something else. In Lemm&Barkey's theatre anything is possible. It may be uncomfortable, but it is also a refuge. Cheating, giving the wrong names to the wrong things, all this also liberates you from 'received ideas'. In fact this is not so different from what the duo otherwise does elsewhere. And that too is theatre. Or was it dance? Oh, let's just forget the names.



OVERVIEW OF PERFORMANCES BY GRACE ELLEN BARKEY

- 1992 One**
first night: 26 November 1992, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1993 Don Quijote**
first night: 28 October 1993, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1995 Tres**
first night: 18 October 1995, De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam
- 1997 Stories (histoires/verhalen)**
first night: 19 February 1997, Brigittinenkapel, Brussels
- 1998 Rood Red Rouge**
first night: 5 October 1998, STUK, Leuven
- 1999 The Miraculous Mandarin**
first night: October 1999, PS 122, New York
- 2000 Few Things**
first night: 7 October 2000, BIT teatergarasjen, Bergen (Norway)
- 2002 (AND)**
first night: 23 October 2002, De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam
- 2005 Chunking**
first night: 12 May 2005, PACT Zollverein, Essen (Germany)
- 2007 The Porcelain Project**
first night: 10 October 2007, Kaaitheater, Brussels
- 2010 This door is too small (for a bear)**
first night: 25 February 2010, Kaaitheater, Brussels
- 2013 MUSH-ROOM**
first night: 22 March 2013, PACT Zollverein, Essen (Germany)
- 2013 Odd? But True!**
First night: 9 November 2013, BRONKS, Brussels

BIOGRAPHIES

NEEDCOMPANY

Needcompany is an artists' company set up by the theatre-maker and Jan Lauwers and the choreographer Grace Ellen Barkey in 1986. They form the core of the company, and it embraces all their artistic work: theatre, dance, performance, visual art, writing, etc. Their creations are shown at the most prominent venues and abroad.

LEMM&BARKEY

In 2004 Grace Ellen Barkey & Lot Lemm set up Lemm&Barkey to give shape to their close artistic cooperation: they designed the costumes for *Isabella's Room* (2004) and were responsible for the concept, set and costumes for *Chunking*, *The Porcelain Project*, *This door is too small (for a bear)*, *MUSH-ROOM* and *Odd? But True!* In 2007 they created a porcelain installation for the production *The Porcelain Project*. It has been shown at several museums including BOZAR (Brussels) and the Benaki Museum (Athens). The curator Luk Lambrecht then invited them to take part in the group exhibition *I am your private dancer* (2008) at Strombeek cultural centre, they created works for the group exhibition *Het spel van de waanzin, over gekte in film en theater* (2008) at the Dr Guislain Museum (Ghent) and were invited to take part in the 'contemporary ceramics' section of the *Down to Earth* (2009) exhibition by its curator Hugo Meert.

The curator Pieter T'Jonck has invited Lemm&Barkey to put together an exhibition on their last three productions: *Chunking* (2005), *The Porcelain Project* (2007) and *This door is too small (for a bear)* (2009) for the Modemuseum in Hasselt in 2012. It will be part of the third Hasselt Triennale / *Superbodies: an art project for contemporary art, fashion and design*. For this they made 18 video works entitled *18 Videos*, in which images are constructed and deconstructed almost in passing. Human figures become forms, matter becomes a part of the body, hesitation becomes eroticism.

In 2013 they made their first children's play together, called *Odd? But True!* A wordless dance performance for all age groups.



Lemm&Barkey © Phile Deprez

GRACE ELLEN BARKEY

Grace Ellen Barkey, born in Surabaya in Indonesia, studied dance expression and modern dance at the theatre school in Amsterdam and afterwards worked as an actress and dancer. Before co-founding Needcompany in 1986 and becoming its full-time choreographer, she had choreographed several other productions. She created the choreography for *Need to Know* (1987), *ça va* (1989), *Julius Caesar* (1990), *Invictos* (1991), *Antonius und Kleopatra* (1992) and *Orfeo* (1993). She also acted in several of these productions, as well as in *The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Voyeur* (1994), *Caligula* (1997), *Needcompany's King Lear* (2000), *Images of Affection* (2002), *No Comment* (2003), *The Lobster Shop* (2006), *The Deer House* (2008), *The art of entertainment* (2011), *Marketplace 76* (2012), *Needlapb* and *The House of Our Fathers*. She was one of the cast of *Goldfish Game* (2002), Jan Lauwers & Needcompany's first full-length film. For *Isabella's Room* (2004) she joined forces with Lot Lemm to create the costumes under the name Lemm&Barkey.

Since 1992 she has been steadily and successfully building an international career with her own stage creations. Her first pieces, *One* (1992), *Don Quijote* (1993) and *Tres* (1995) were coproduced by Theater Am Turm in Frankfurt. These were followed by the Needcompany productions *Stories (Histoires/Verhalen)* (1996), *Rood Red Rouge* (1998) and *Few Things* (2003). *Few Things* was received very enthusiastically both at home and abroad. With *(AND)* (2002) she transcends all the boundaries of theatre, dance and music with an irresistible flair. In 2005 Grace Ellen Barkey presented her new stage show, *Chunking* and was nominated for the Flemish Community Culture Prizes (2005). For *The Porcelain Project* (2007) she created a porcelain installation together with Lot Lemm. In 2010 she made the production *This door is too small (for a bear)*. 2013 saw the premieres of both *MUSH-ROOM* and *Odd? But True!*

LOT LEMM

Lot Lemm has worked at Needcompany since 1993. She initially started as costume designer on various productions including *Le Voyeur* (1994), *Le Pouvoir* (1995), *Needcompany's Macbeth* (1996), *Le Désir* (1996), *Caligula* (1997), *The Snakesong Trilogy* (1998), *Morning Song* (1999), *Needcompany's King Lear* (2000), *Images of Affection* (2002), *Goldfish Game* (feature film, 2002), *No Comment* (2003), *Isabella's Room* (2004), *The Lobster Shop* (2006), *The Deer House* (2008), *The art of entertainment* (2011), *Marketplace 76* (2012), all by Jan Lauwers, and *All is Vanity* (2006) with Viviane De Muynck. When it comes to Grace Ellen Barkey's productions, her involvement increases with each one. She started as a costume designer on *Tres* (1995), *Stories* (1997), *Rood Red Rouge* (1998) and *(AND)* (2002). On the productions *Few Things* (2002), *Chunking* (2005), *The Porcelain Project* (2007), *This door is too small (for a bear)* (2010), *MUSH-ROOM* (2013) and *Odd? But True!* (2013) she also defines the stage setting.

PERFORMERS

[Benoît Gob](#)

[Sung-Im Her](#)

[Maarten Seghers](#)

[Mohamed Toukabri](#)

[Catherine Travelletti](#)



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