

JAN LAUWERS (*long version*)

Jan Lauwers (Antwerp, 1957) is an artist who works in just about every medium. Over the last twenty years he has become best known for his pioneering work for the stage with Needcompany, which was founded in Brussels in 1986. Over the years he has also built up a substantial body of art work which was shown in an exhibition at BOZAR (Brussels) in 2007.

Jan Lauwers studied painting at the Academy of Art in Ghent. At the end of 1979 he gathered round him a number of people to form the *Epigonenensemble*. In 1981 this group was transformed into the Epigonentheater zlv collective which took the theatre-world by surprise with its six stage productions. In this way Jan Lauwers took his place in the movement for radical change in Flanders in the early '80, and also made his international breakthrough. Epigonentheater zlv presented direct, concrete, highly visual theatre that used music and language as structuring elements. Their productions were *Already Hurt and not yet War* (1981), *dE demonstratie* (1983), *Bulletbird* (1983), *Background of a Story* (1984) and *Incident* (1985). Jan Lauwers disbanded this collective in 1985 and founded *Needcompany*.

NEEDCOMPANY

Jan Lauwers *needs company*. He founded Needcompany together with Grace Ellen Barkey. They together are responsible for Needcompany larger-scale productions. The group of performers Jan Lauwers and Grace Ellen Barkey have put together over the years is quite unique in its versatility. Their *associated performing artists* are MaisonDahlBonnema (Hans Petter Dahl & Anna Sophia Bonnema), Lemm&Barkey (Lot Lemm & Grace Ellen Barkey), OHNO COOPERATION (Maarten Seghers & Jan Lauwers) and the NC ensemble, which includes the inimitable Viviane De Muynck. They create work of their own under Needcompany's wing.

Since Needcompany was founded in 1986, both its work and its performers have been markedly international. Its first productions, *Need to Know* (1987) and *ça va* (1989) – which received the Mobiel Pegasus Preis – were still highly visual, but in subsequent productions the storyline and the main theme gained in importance, although the fragmentary composition remained.

Lauwers' training as an artist is decisive in his handling of the theatre medium and leads to a highly individual and in many ways pioneering theatrical idiom that examines the theatre and its meaning. One of its most important characteristics is a transparent, 'thinking' acting and the paradox between 'acting' and 'performing'.

This specific approach is also to be found in his adaptations of Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar* (1990), *Antonius und Kleopatra* (1992), *Needcompany's Macbeth* (1996), *Needcompany's King Lear* (2000) and, at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, *Ein Sturm* (2001). After directing *Invictos* (1996), the monologue *SCHADE/Schade* (1992) and the opera *Orfeo* (1993), in 1994 he started work on a major project called *The Snakesong Trilogy*, which

signalled his first full emergence as an author: *Snakesong/Le Voyeur* (1994), *Snakesong/Le Pouvoir* (1995) and *Snakesong/Le Désir* (1996). In 1998 he staged the reworked version of the whole *Snakesong Trilogy*.

In September 1997 he was invited to take part in the theatre section of Documenta X (Kassel), for which he created *Caligula*, after Camus, the first part of a diptych called *No beauty for me there, where human life is rare*. With *Morning Song* (1999), the second part of the diptych *No beauty...*, Lauwers and Needcompany won an Obie Award in New York. In May 2000, at the request of William Forsythe, Lauwers created, in co-production with Ballett Frankfurt, the piece entitled *DeaDDogsDon'tDance/DjamesDjoyceDeaD* (2000).

Images of Affection (2002) was created on the occasion of Needcompany's 15th anniversary. Jan Lauwers presented three monologues and a dance solo under the title *No Comment* (2003). Charles L. Mee, Josse De Pauw and Jan Lauwers wrote pieces for Carlotta Sagna ('Salome'), Grace Ellen Barkey ('The tea drinker') and Viviane De Muynck ('Ulrike') respectively. Six composers – Rombout Willems, Doachim Mann, Walter Hus, Senjan Jansen, Hans Petter Dahl and Felix Seger – wrote a musical composition for the dance solo by Tijen Lawton. Broadly speaking the themes of this performance are those Lauwers has reformulated and redefined ever since the start of his work with Needcompany: violence, love, eroticism and death.

A collection of several thousand ethnological and archaeological objects left by Jan Lauwers' father urged him to tell the story of Isabella Morandi in *Isabella's room* (2004) (Avignon theatre festival). Nine performers together reveal the secret of Isabella's room with as central figure the monumental actress Viviane De Muynck. This play was awarded several prizes, including the 2006 Flemish Community Culture Prize in the playwriting category.

In 2006 he created two pieces for the Avignon Festival, one of which is *The Lobster Shop*, whose script he wrote himself, and *All is Vanity*, a monologue by Viviane De Muynck, which the actress herself adapted from Claire Goll's book of the same name.

The Salzburger Festspiele has invited Jan Lauwers to make a new production, *The Deer House*, for summer 2008. Together with *Isabella's Room* (2004) and *The Lobster Shop* (2006) this new production makes up a trilogy on human nature: *Sad Face | Happy Face*. The trilogy as a whole was performed for the first time at the Salzburger Festspiele 2008.

Needcompany has been artist-in-residence at the Burgtheater in Vienna since 2009. Jan Lauwers is writing a new play called *The Art of Entertainment* (2011) and will combine his Needcompany ensemble and some Burgtheater actors to stage it.

PROJECTS

In 1999 Jan Lauwers launched *Needlapb*, a one-off occasion for ideas, notes, sketches and random thoughts. *Needlapb* enables one to see the initial stages of various projects in which experimentation gropes its way towards the stage.

Just for Toulouse (Théâtre Garonne, 2006) was the first of a series of evenings when Needcompany's associated performing artists presented installations and performances. In 2007 *Just for Brussels* was presented at BOZAR.

He founded OHNO COOPERATION together with Maarten Seghers to give concrete shape to their mutual artistic commitment. Up to now this has taken the form of listening to, looking at, thinking about and making music, visual art and performances: *The Grenoble Tapes* (2006), *O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O.* (2006), *The OHNO Cooperation Conversation On The O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. Ontology* (2007). They are combined in *an OHNO cooperation evening* (2008). In 2009 the artist-curator duo OHNO COOPERATION invited several artists to participate in *The Tragedy of the Applause – Roubaix*.

Deconstructions were made by Jan Lauwers using disused museum material.. These museum installations have already been shown at BOZAR (Brussels) and the haus der kunst (Munich) in 2007. They formed the setting for a six-hour marathon performance by the NC ensemble on which the whole of Jan Lauwers' mental world converged.

FILMPROJECTS

Jan Lauwers also has a number of film and video projects to his name, including *From Alexandria* (1988), *Mangia* (1995), *Sampled Images* (2000), *C-Song* (2003), *C-Song Variations* (2007) and *The OHNO Cooperation Conversations on the O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. Ontology* (2007). During summer 2001 Lauwers shot his first full-length film with the working title *Goldfish Game* (2002). The script was written together with Dick Crane. *Goldfish Game* is the story of a small community of people who are violently torn apart. The premiere took place at the Venice Film Festival (in the New Territories (*Nuovi Territori*)) category. The *Kinematrix* internet magazine (Italy) proclaimed *Goldfish Game* the best film in the *Formati Anomali* (Unusual Forms) category. The jury report said: 'An innovative style of directing that surpasses the limits of the digital medium'. *Goldfish Game* was selected for the Buenos Aires International Human Rights Film and Video Festival in 2002, the Ghent Film Festival in 2002 and the Solothurn Film Festival in Switzerland in 2003. At the Slamdance Film Festival (January 2004), *Goldfish Game* was awarded the Grand Jury Honour for the Best Ensemble Cast.

In February 2003 Jan Lauwers made a silent short film on violence, called *C-Song*. This film has been shown to a limited audience several times, during the *Needlapbs* at STUK in Leuven and the Kaaithheater Studios in Brussels, and also in 'War is Not Art' at the Vooruit in Ghent. In April 2004 *C-Song* had its official premiere at the Courtisane short-film festival in Ghent. It was subsequently selected for the International Short-Film Festival in

Hamburg in 2004 and in July 2004 was screened in the old water-tower at Bredene on the Belgian coast as part of Grasduinen 2004, SMAK-aan-Zee.

C-Song Variations (2007), a short film made in connection with *The Lobster Shop*, had a preview at BOZAR (Brussels) in April and its premiere at the Temps d'Images festival in La Ferme du Buisson (Paris) in October 2007. It was then shown at the haus der kunst (2007) in Munich.

For the SPIELART Festival in Munich (2007) he did a video project together with Maarten Seghers: *The OHNO Cooperation Conversations on the O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. Ontology*.

VISUAL ART

At the request of the curator Luk Lambrecht, Jan Lauwers took part in the *Grimbergen 2002* exhibition together with 8 other artists (including Thomas Schütte, Lili Dujourie, Job Koelewijn, Atelier Van Lieshout, Jan De Cock and Ann Veronica Janssens).

In spring 2006 his work was included in the DARK exhibition at the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam.

In 2007 Jan Lauwers had his first solo exhibition at BOZAR (Brussels), curated by Jérôme Sans (former director of Palais de Tokyo, now at the UCCA). To accompany this exhibition he also compiled the first book to focus on his art work from 1996 to 2006. At the Artbrussels art fair (2007), Lauwers was invited to make a site-specific work for BOZAR.

Luk Lambrecht has invited Jan Lauwers to take part in *Down to Earth*, a group exhibition of ceramics at Strombeek cultural centre, which includes work by Ann Veronica Janssens, Heimo Zobernig, Atelier Van Lieshout, Lawrence Weiner, Kurt Ryslavý and Manfred Pernice.

In May 2009 Jérôme Sans invited Jan Lauwers to exhibit at Galerie Bleich-Rossi at *Curated by_vienna 09*. *Curated by* brought 18 Viennese contemporary art galleries together with international curators.

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The House of Our Fathers – a house measuring 20 x 5 x 5m – is the basis for a major new project by Jan Lauwers. A 'house' work of art that examines time, place and perception (the essential difference between theatre and art). It will be expanded over the years to form an entirely independent work of art to which Jan Lauwers invites other artists.

WORK FOR THEATRE – JAN LAUWERS & NEEDCOMPANY

- 1987 Need to Know**
Opening: 24 March, Mickery, Amsterdam
- 1989 ça va**
Opening: 18 March, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1990 Julius Caesar**
Opening: 31 May, Rotterdamse Schouwburg
- 1991 Invictos**
Opening: 18 May, Centro Andaluz de Teatro, Seville
- 1992 Antonius und Kleopatra**
Opening: 14 February, Teater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1992 SCHADE/schade**
Opening: 21 October, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1993 Orfeo, opera by Walter Hus**
Opening: 23 May, Bourschouwburg, Antwerp
- 1994 The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Voyeur**
Opening: 24 March, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1995 The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Pouvoir (Leda)**
Opening: 11 May, Dance 95, Munich
- 1996 Needcompany's Macbeth**
Opening: 26 March, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 1996 The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Désir**
Opening: 6 November, Kanonhallen, Copenhagen
- 1997 Caligula, No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part one**
Opening: 5 September, Documenta X, Kassel
- 1998 The Snakesong Trilogy, reworked version with live music**
Opening: 16 April, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 1999 Morning Song, No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part two**
Opening: 13 January, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 2000 Needcompany's King Lear**
Opening: 11 January, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 2000 DeaDDogsDon'tDance/DjamesDjoyceDeaD**
Opening: 12 May, Das TAT, Frankfurt
- 2001 Ein Sturm**
Opening: 22 March, Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg

- 2001 **Kind**
Opening: 21 June, Het Net, Bruges
- 2002 **Images of Affection**
Opening: 28 February, Stadsschouwburg, Bruges
- 2003 **No Comment**
Opening: 24 April, Kaaitheater, Brussels
- 2004 **Isabella's room**
Opening: 9 July, Cloître des Carmes, Festival d'Avignon
- 2006 **All is Vanity**
Opening: 8 July, Théâtre Municipal, Festival d'Avignon
- 2006 **The Lobster Shop**
Opening : 10 July, Cloître des Célestins, Festival d'Avignon
- 2008 **The Deer House**
Opening: 28 July, Perner-Insel, Hallein, Salzburger Festspiele
- 2008 **Sad Face | Happy Face, A Trilogy, Three Stories on Human Nature**
Opening: 1 August, Perner-Insel, Hallein, Salzburger Festspiele
- 2011 **The art of entertainment, Needcompany plays the dead of Martin Wuttke**
Opening: 5 March, Akademietheater (Burgtheater), Vienna

PUBLICATIONS IN BOOK FORM BY OR ABOUT **JAN LAUWERS**

- LAUWERS, Jan, *Leda*, Bebuquin (Antwerp), a coproduction with IT&FB publishing company, Amsterdam, 1995.
- VANDEN ABEELE, Maarten, *The Lucidity of the Obscene*, Needcompany in cooperation with IT&FB publishing company, Brussels/Amsterdam, 1998.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *La Chambre d'Isabella* followed by *Le Bazar du Homard*, Actes Sud-papiers, Paris, 2006.
- STALPAERT, Christel, BOUSSET, Sigrid, LE ROY, Frederik, (eds.), *No Beauty for Me There where Human Life is Rare. On Jan Lauwers' theatre work with Needcompany*, Academia Press, IT&FB publishing company, Ghent/ Amsterdam, 2007.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Restlessness*, Mercatorfonds, BOZAR Books, Needcompany, Brussels, 2007.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Sad Face | Happy Face, Drei Geschichten über das Wesen des Menschen*, Fischer Taschenbuche Verlag (Frankfurt), 2008.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *La maison des cerfs*, Actes Sud-papiers, Paris, 2009.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *KEBANG !*, Uitgeverij Van Halewyck, 2009.

PRIZES

- Mobil Pegasus Preis, Internationales Sommertheater Festival Hamburg, for the best international production, *ça va*, 1989.
- Thersitesprijs, Flemish theatre critic prize, 1998.
- Obie Award in New York for the play *Morning Song*, 1999.
- *Kinematrix Prize* for Digital Format, International Film Festival Venice 2002, *Goldfish Game*, 2002.
- Grand Jury Honor for Best Ensemble Cast, Slamdance Film Festival, *Goldfish Game*, 2004.
- Le Masque, prize awarded by the Académie Québécoise du Théâtre in Montréal, Canada, for the best foreign production, *La Chambre d'Isabella*, 2005.
- Prize awarded by the Syndicat Professionnel de la Critique de Théâtre, de Musique et de Danse in France, for the best foreign production, *La Chambre d'Isabella*, 2005.
- Culture prize awarded by the Flemish Community 2006, theatre literature category, for the *De kamer van Isabella* and *Ulrike* scripts.
- Grand Prix – Golden Laurel Wreath Award for Best Performance / MESS Festival Sarajevo, for *Isabella's room* (2009).