



**fragment of wallpainting depicting duck on water  
(song of indifference)**

A performance by Maarten Seghers

a Needcompany production  
in collaboration with Ictus

« An Oriental wise man always used to ask the divinity in his prayers to be so kind as to spare him from living in an interesting era. As we are not wise, the divinity has not spared us and we are living in an interesting era. In any case, our era forces us to take an interest in it. The writers of today know this. If they speak up, they are criticized and attacked. If they become modest and keep silent, they are vociferously blamed for their silence. »

- Albert Camus (*Create Dangerously*, 1957)

For Maarten Seghers, creating work and meaning from ‘unintelligibility’ is a deliberate act in which the hopeful slumbers. A new notion can emerge. Thus disconnection is a potential re-connection.

**fragment of wallpainting depicting duck on water** is the next step in Seghers’ research into the potentially tragic relationship between entertainer and spectator. This resides in the irresistible urge to share and connect and the essential impossibility of doing so.

The title refers to an old, carefully preserved piece of wallpainting depicting a duck on a pond. For Maarten Seghers, the strange attraction to this unloaded archaeological artefact revealed an urge for the un-dramatic.

The subtitle (**song of indifference**) refers to the paradox between the completely uninvolved point of view of the depicted landscape with a duck on the water on the one hand, and the expectation of a dramatically engaged point of view of the man observing the scenery on the other; man recognising the worldly tragedies that form the background of the landscape.

*“Today, beyond all the discoveries, reclamations and exploits, we come to a landscape. It is a landscape that we no longer know. The same landscape that thus becomes the new discovery. The idea of the end is dropped, the need for an alternative world at astronomical distance is dropped. A new potential arises in the same place.”*

*“There is an eruption of all colours and meanings because everything could be and nothing is. An exuberant utterance that sprouts from an excited imagination about unattainable places and incomprehensible times. A generator that breeds the absurd idea called ‘together’.”*

Maarten Seghers

**fragment of wallpainting depicting duck on water** unfolds in the unconventional set-up of a surrounding, free audience. Every glance becomes part of the archaeological artefact ‘the spectacle’.

**fragment of wallpainting depicting duck on water** is structured as a musical and physical dyptych as a sequence of two polyphonic songs; ‘song of disconnection’ and ‘song of indifference’. One consists entirely of musical performance, the other of movement.

The concert floor is problematised as a scenographic object by making silence impossible through an unstable surface of corrugated sheets. As a result, the whole scenic situation is a radical sound installation that makes the physical control of the performers, but also the feasibility of their concert duties, fundamentally difficult. Presence becomes sound, sound becomes matter, matter becomes intensity, intensity becomes content.

## **Song of Disconnection**

I do not know what you mean with  
what you say when you speak  
that's not easy for me  
oh can't you see what I mean with  
what I say when I speak  
oh that's not nice for you  
what can I do; what I mean with  
what I say when I speak is  
that it's not nice for us  
oh can't we just  
know what we mean with  
what we say when we speak

*"The piece of wall painting confronts me with the historical notion of 'art as representation', which does not respond to the contemporary call for 'engagement'.*

*Making this image central to a new work provokes an inevitable reflection on 'involvement'. Social, political, societal... It is exciting and inspiring how the spirit and the subject of this historical art object contrast with our times; this time in which global emancipatory forces are at work; this time in which works of art must relate to the unmistakable need for engagement and activism.*

---

*I imagine a song that wanders in confusion between the traditions of operetta and performance. A song in which the people at the water's edge sing of their tragicomic fate; a libretto with an abstract language as a proposal for what the duck, as an unintended listener, hears and possibly experiences as meaningful; a libretto that oscillates between engagement and indifference and explores what intensity can provoke this clash.*

*With **fragment of wallpainting depicting duck on water**, I write my idea of 'the first conversation', an attempt at (re)connection, at interpersonal communication. This abstract-sounding libretto seems - despite intentions and intensity - tragic in its unintelligibility. It is a central notion in my work: communication only becomes clear when it fails."*

*Maarten Seghers*

## **Song of Connection**

**everything surrounds the middle  
and the middle is halfway to the other side  
the other side is always in front  
and the front is the backside of the back  
and together they hold it together**

**anything can be the middle  
and the middle is surrounded by everything else  
everything else is also the middle  
the middle can be anything  
and together they hold it together**

Since *WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHAT DO YOU MEAN AND OTHER PLEASANTRIES* (2014), Seghers has consistently had ‘the orchestra’ appear as the protagonist in his performances. First as frontman and imaginary backing band. Later, in *O or The Challenge Of This Particular Show Was To Have Words Ending In O* (2016), both as a contemporary bass drum ensemble, as bellowing herd of cows as well as muzzled Gregorian choir. Then as a toppled rock band in *Concert by a Band Facing the Wrong Way* (2018) and now as a wandering chamber orchestra in ***fragment of wallpainting depicting duck on water***. In all these forms, the orchestra turns up as an almost archaeologically excavated artefact; the ‘entertainer’ as a metaphor for humankind’s driving force to communicate and connect.

With percussionist/vocalist Aya Suzuki, cellist/vocalist Simon Lenski, violinist/harpsichordist George van Dam and flute player Michael Schmid, the orchestra consists more than ever of individual artists who excel in understanding and performing musical writing. They are virtuosos who, in their own work and each in their own way, fundamentally question music in order to arrive at sound and music as physical matter. In ***fragment of wallpainting depicting duck on water***, not only their profession but also themselves and their bodies are reduced to matter through the most embarrassing medium of all arts - the theatre.

***fragment of wallpainting depicting duck on water*** is created in collaboration with Ictus ensemble and shows where a contemporary ensemble such as Ictus and a performance collective such as Needcompany differ and intersect. The first goes through the logic of the performative to arrive at music, the other follows the logic of the musical in order to arrive at performance.

“In his poem ***An die Nachgeborenen***, written in the 1930s, Bertolt Brecht emphatically asks: “Was sind das für Zeiten, wo/ Ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist/ Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten einschließt!” Modern art has now made these ‘Untaten’ its main topic of conversation. The title of one of the new projects by Maarten Seghers - ***fragment of wallpainting depicting duck on water*** - sounds therefore somewhat provocative in the present context (...).”

Erwin Jans

# **fragment of wallpainting depicting duck on water (song of indifference)**



**Composition, libretto, direction** Maarten Seghers  
**By and with** Simon Lenski, Aya Suzuki, George van Dam en Michael Schmid

**Lighting design** Ken Hioco  
**Production management** Marjolein Demey

**Production** Needcompany  
**In collaboration with** Ictus ensemble  
**Realised with the support of** the Flemish Government

# NEEDCOMPANY

Gabrielle Petitstraat 4/4, 1080 Sint-Jans-Molenbeek

[www.needcompany.org](http://www.needcompany.org)

Artistic Director | Jan Lauwers

General Manager | Johan Penson: [johan@needcompany.org](mailto:johan@needcompany.org)

Business coordination | Toon Geysen: [toon@needcompany.org](mailto:toon@needcompany.org)

Dramaturgy | Elke Janssens: [elke@needcompany.org](mailto:elke@needcompany.org)

Artistic coordination & communication | Pieter D'Hooghe: [pieter@needcompany.org](mailto:pieter@needcompany.org)

Production | Marjolein Demey: [marjolein@needcompany.org](mailto:marjolein@needcompany.org)

Finance & Production | Melissa Thomas: [melissa@needcompany.org](mailto:melissa@needcompany.org)

Technical Director | Ken Hioco: [ken@needcompany.org](mailto:ken@needcompany.org)

International bookings

Key Performance / Koen Vanhove

[koen@keyperformance.se](mailto:koen@keyperformance.se)