

JAN LAUWERS & NEEDCOMPANY

THE ART OF ENTERTAINMENT

NEEDCOMPANY PLAYS THE DEATH OF DIRK ROOFTHOFT



© Maarten Vanden Abeele

A Production by Needcompany and Burgtheater (Vienna).
With the support of the Flemish authorities.

DISTRIBUTION

Text, direction, set

Jan Lauwers

With

Dirk Roofthoof

Gena

Liliane Van Muynck / Mr. Young

James Brown / Mrs. Young

Mr. Duchamp

Yoko

Dr. Joy

Elisabeth

Grace Ellen Barkey

Viviane De Muynck

Misha Downey

Julien Faure

Yumiko Funaya

Benoît Gob

Eléonore Valère/Inge Van Bruystegem

Music

Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, Maarten Seghers,

Jan Lauwers, Nicolas Field

Costumes

Lot Lemm

Light

Marjolein Demey

Sound

Pierrick Drochmans

Production direction

Luc Galle

Production Assistant and Dramaturgy

Elke Janssens

Trainee Dramaturg

Jonas Rutgeerts

Technicians

Luc Galle, Ken Hioco, Frank Van Elsen

Moulding

Luc Cauwenberghs

Dramaturgical Introduction

Erwin Jans

English Translations

Gregory Ball

French Translations

Anne Vanderschueren

Photography

Maarten Vanden Abeele

Burgtheater:

Production Direction

Harald Brückner

Set and Costumes Assistant

Katharina Heisteringer

Production

Needcompany/Burgtheater (Vienna).

With the support of the Flemish authorities.

Duration

+/- 1h40



© Maarten Vanden Abeele

THE ART OF ENTERTAINMENT

NEEDCOMPANY PLAYS THE DEATH OF DIRK ROOFTHOFT

‘Here we are, six strangers on an island, and we have to survive. The big bad outside world is knocking at the door. We’ve got good music, delicious food, excellent drinks and genitalia. So what do you suggest, you beautiful new woman who has just slipped into my life?’

Dirk Roofthoof in ‘The art of entertainment’

The art of entertainment is Jan Lauwers’ new play, commissioned by the Burgtheater.

The art of entertainment is a black, comedy about a famous actor, who decides to end his life because he feels that his memory, the home of the soul, is slowly breaking down. He is invited to kill himself in a reality show with a worldwide audience: ‘The Art of Entertainment’, a cookery programme in which a celebrated French chef prepares the suicide’s last meal. Here the story unfolds of an exhausted actor who has been overtaken by time. The profession he has lovingly practised for so long has become inaccessible to him. After all, what remains for an actor who is no longer able to remember his lines, who, with his memory, has also lost his most important weapon in the struggle against reality. But he doesn’t give up that easily. For the last time he takes up the challenge of history. Until the bitter end he continues to play his role. By consciously choosing death where and when he wants it, he retains control until the end of his life. This is his final act.

The art of entertainment thus unfolds as an entertainer’s *apologia*, the death-song of an actor who can only exist in the play. In confrontation with his great love, Gena, the woman with whom he had made love more than a thousand times, Mr Joy, the embittered doctor-without-borders, and, of course, Liliane Van Muynck, the world-famous host of the programme, an older stand-up comedienne on the decline, a conversation arises about the decadence of the Occident and the actor launches into a tirade about the loss of his profession: acting.

SNOW WHITE ON THE URINAL

OR, THE PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS AN ENTERTAINER

By Erwin Jans

I see myself as a sort of radical entertainer. I ask a number of questions. People come and take a look, then go out again laughing, or crying. They have had a good time. I hope that I have brought them something. If the show brings something to the audience, is that entertainment or art?

Jan Lauwers

0.

A comedian emerges from behind the curtain with a grin from ear to ear. He is nervous. He is wearing a red fez. He cracks a poor joke. The audience laughs. He does a trick with a rope. The trick fails. The audience applauds. He signals with his hand and encourages the public to clap louder, while he looks nervously towards the wings as though the director of the theatre is monitoring his performance. The audience laughs even harder spurring him on. It enjoys the conspiracy of making fun of the man in the wings. That man represents the invisible order. Anyone looking for him in the wings will find no one, except perhaps ultimately themselves. The only people we are making fun of are ourselves. First there is the laughter and only then the joke. The status of the comedian owes more to the laughter and the applause than to the quality of his jokes. Laughter is a social duty and jokes act as the alibi.¹ On 15 April 1984 during a *live* television show the comedian slowly collapsed and fell backwards into the curtains. While the audience was almost suffocating with laughter, the comedian died of a heart attack before the eyes of tens of thousands of people. A sublime death? The irony of fate? Dying *live*: the last sacrifice. *The final countdown*. The ultimate entertainment. Since May 2009, it has been possible to view the 39-second Tommy Cooper Death Video on *YouTube*.

1. Last Guitar Monster: Here we are now, entertain us!

The Tragedy of the Applause: this is the name of the joint exhibition and concert organised at the end of 2010 by OHNO COOPERATION – a splinter group of Needcompany that is the result of a partnership between Jan Lauwers and Maarten Seghers - the curator and artist duo.² Both the exhibition and the concert gravitate around pop music and above all the guitar, a symbol par excellence of the contemporary entertainment industry. At the heart of this was a declaration by Louise Bourgeois about the corruptive power of success. Applause is the main reason why the entertainment industry has adopted and integrated pop music so speedily and efficiently: “It is only thanks to the applause that Mick Jagger, at 60, still can’t get no *satisfaction*. The tragedy of the applause. But there’s nothing wrong with that. We love tragedies. In this concert of concerts that lasts 72 minutes and 46 seconds, OHNO COOPERATION celebrates the 464th anniversary and the death of pop music,” states the announcement for the concert organised by Lauwers and Seghers together with a number of *partners in crime* such as Rombout Willems and Eric Sleichim. The 464th anniversary/day of the death of pop music refers to the publication of the *Tres libros de musica en cifras para vihuela* (1546) by the Spanish composer, Alonso Mudarra. This is the oldest compilation of pieces for the guitar. The history of pop music in fact started with the first piece of music for the guitar.

¹ Matthijs van Boxsel, *Deskundologie. Domheid als levenskunst*, Amsterdam, Querido, 2006

² *La Tragédie de l'Applaudissement* a été présenté à *La Condition Publique* (Roubaix) et CC Strombeek.

Lauwers took part of his inspiration for the exhibition from this popular instrument. He produced a large sculpture, *Last Guitar Monster* that he described as “a guitar with feedback that plays all by itself and refers to the masturbation guitar of Jimi Hendrix and *The Great Masturbator* by Salvador Dalí, the anagram of which, Avida Dollars, is also a dramatic nod to the tragedy of applause that was rapidly converted into hard cash in the vulgar capitalist system that we have opted for since the fall of the Berlin wall.” Pop music has become the victim of the tragedy of applause. In his sculpture, Lauwers looks for the common ground with the visual arts. The visual artist as a pop musician? Or the pop musician as a critical mirror for the visual artist? “It is widely known that a lot of pop musicians since Andy Warhol and The Velvet Underground have come from the field of the visual arts. Which is odd as what pop music doesn’t do is precisely what an artist should do, namely looking at material and redefining art itself. Pop music is first taken into the grip of the entertainment industry and is only seen as ‘real’ art sporadically. As **art** represents the unravelling of the relationship between the entertainment industry and the merciless art market, we end up realising that that which is reduced to a *format* is no longer an image,” according to Lauwers. Image versus *format*, ‘real’ art versus the entertainment industry, studying material versus applause. The theatre of Jan Lauwers develops in the open space created by these questions. It uses theatre to reveal the ambiguity of the medium. Theatre has missed the train of modern art in more ways than one, and in the words of Lauwers, is “a historical-museum fact”. Theatre has not confronted itself sufficiently. It needs to thoroughly review its role. I distinguish fundamentally here between directors and creators of theatre. Directors stage a repertoire and I think that is very important. But for me a performance is only interesting when it is about the subject of theatre itself. One example is the sculptures of Michelangelo. His works were commissioned by religious clients, but actually what was important was the material he worked with, the marble. That is what made him the great artist he is. The tragedy of applause has also played a dangerous role in theatre. Because the actors and the director want to hear the same applause every evening, they end up in a system of perfect reproduction. But theatre *can* escape the hold of the market, you can’t buy a performance like you can a work of art, you can’t speculate with it on the art market. That’s why theatre is a refuge for reflection. It is a slow medium and we need to take it a lot more seriously. I have become a great defender of theatre, which was not at all the case ten years ago. Perhaps we can rediscover the role of art through theatre?”

2. Voyeurs without illusions

But how far can you take the critical potential of theatre at a time when society has become a ‘show’ in its deepest innermost fibre. “For something to have meaning, there has to be a scene, and there can only be a scene if there is illusion, a minimum of illusion, an imaginary movement, a challenge to reality that transports you, that seduces you, that revolts you. Without this aesthetic, mythical, playful dimension par excellence, there is not even a political scene where something can take place. And this minimal illusion has disappeared for us. What we have is an over-representation by the media, but not really a performance. As far as we are concerned that’s simply obscene because it is made by the media so that it can be watched without being seen, to be hallucinatingly transparent, absorbed like sex absorbs the voyeur: from a distance. We are not spectators, nor actors, but voyeurs without illusions.” Instead of the scene, according to the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard, we have entered the era of ob-scenity. “Illusion is manifested through the scene; reality manifests itself through the ob-scene.” The difference between reality and fiction is on a dangerously slippery slope. Because of televised ‘formats’, reality and authenticity are being produced on an assembly line: *Big Brother*, *The Bachelor*, *Temptation Island*, *Fear Factor*,... are explicit productions about the strong emotions that we are no able to experience in our daily lives. In politics and in public spaces, the (auto)production and

representation have become vital machines of war and first line survival strategies. What Baudrillard calls 'performance' or 'the stage' Lauwers calls the 'image'. What Lauwers calls '*format*' is a term for 'obscene'.



© Anna Stöcher

3. The greatest work of art

At the press conference in Hamburg on 16 September 2001 for his opera cycle *Licht* the composer, Karlheinz Stockhausen described the attacks of 9/11 as 'the greatest work of art ever': "Well, what happened there is, of course—now all of you must adjust your brains—the biggest work of art there has ever been. The fact that spirits achieve with one act something which we in music could never dream of, that people practise ten years madly, fanatically for a concert. And then die. And that is the greatest work of art that exists for the whole Cosmos. Just imagine what happened there. There are people who are so concentrated on this single performance, and then five thousand people are driven to Resurrection. In one moment. I couldn't do that. Compared to that, we are nothing, as composers. (...) It is a crime, you know of course, because the people did not agree to it. They did not come to the "concert". That is obvious. And nobody had told them: "You could be killed in the process." Comparing a terrorist attack with a concert and a work of art: was this the ultimate aestheticisation of reality? Stockhausen's declaration was the proof for many that modern art was completely detached from any values and awareness of reality, and that the modern artist, completely isolated in his ivory tower, could permit himself to make the most abhorrent comments. But, in a certain way, Stockhausen was right. 9/11 was the perfect mediatisation of terror. No event has transformed so many viewers into voyeurs at any one given point in time. Terror and media exist in a symbiotic relationship: they are mutually interdependent. The media provide the cameras and the journalists and the terrorists provide the corpses and the blood. Together they provide the waves of fear

and excitement that stimulate the nerves of the dead tired TV audiences day in and day out. But what exactly did we see? Did we see an image? Or were we already deep in the matrix of the obscene?

4. Always look at the bright sides of death (2x)

The main character in *The art of entertainment*, the latest play by Jan Lauwers, is Dirk Roofthoof. Dirk Roofthoof plays an ageing celebrity who has decided to put an end to his life. He is slowly losing his memory and his faculties and does not want to go through this process of degeneration: "I am no longer myself and it will not be long before I am no longer aware that I am no longer myself". He is invited to kill himself in a *reality show* with a worldwide audience: *The art of entertainment*, the one and only real suicide show on the planet, with a global audience: "We have exceeded the 100 million viewer mark," explains the moderator "and we hope to reach 110 million viewers tonight. The programme is broadcast in 74 countries. *Live...* what a word for a programme in which someone is going to die." This *reality show* is also a cooking programme – perhaps the favourite TV format of the moment – in which a famous French chef prepares the last supper of the person about to commit suicide. While this last meal is being prepared, Dirk Roofthoof listens to his favourite music, the *Stabat Mater* of the prematurely deceased composer Pergolesi, and has conversations with several larger than life characters: Gena, his great, but unfaithful love; Doctor Joy, a doctor without borders, who will be present for the suicide; Liliane Van Muynck, the host of the show, a former stand-up comic making a come-back, etc. Their existential discussions that jump from one subject to another vacillate from acting, sex, art, politics, suicide; the favourite themes of a drifting intellectual class. There are also some grotesque characters who jump out from the margins of the story and interrupt it brutally with *slapstick* and inappropriate and obscene comments: Mr. Duchamp, a cook; James Brown, a washer up; Yoko, a piece of meat; a camera, etc. While Lauwers created a sort of 'community' in his previous plays, however broken and fragmented it was, around the subject of sorrow and death, this time that is not the case. The TV studio does not allow for this apparently. There is no singing together either – the emotional trademark of the *Sad Face / Happy Face* trilogy – in this play: just a lot of chattering to fill in the time "because entertainment will not entertain the idea of a moment of silence", the hostess of the programme tells us. No tragic generosity as we find in *Isabella's room*, no collective mourning that we find in *The Deer House*. This time, Lauwers goes for Monty Python style comedy: absurd, black, sharp, incisive, at times insolent and even in poor taste.

5. The Duchamp Fountain 1

When Gena is about to be caught by Dirk in flagrante delicto with Dr. Joy, she rushes to sit down at table with the complete works of Rimbaud and pretends to read. Dirk subtly points out that she is holding the book upside down. Gena: "Oh, I wanted to see if I could find another meaning to Rimbaud's *Une saison en Enfer* if you turned it on its head. Certain things are impressive when turned on their head." What Gena is doing, is what modern art does with Beauty: turning it on its head. In the opening poem of *Une saison en Enfer* (1873) Rimbaud writes the well-known lines: "One evening I sat Beauty on my knees. And I found her bitter. And I insulted her." In the last poem he writes an even more famous line: "One must be absolutely modern." The first rule of modernity is to insult and to scorn Beauty. Modern art turns the rules of harmony, recognition, representation, order, tradition, history, work taste, emotion on their head to see if we can find "another meaning." "Turning something on its head", is the radical gesture of modern art and this is particularly true of the avant-garde. If there is a work of art that has not just articulated this gesture in all its clarity, but that has taken on the full responsibility for it – and has made art irremediably 'absolutely modern', - it is *Fountain* (1917). It was under this English title, an exponent of traditional

Beauty, that Marcel Duchamp submitted a urinal for an exhibition in New York. The organisers thought that it was sent as an insult so the object was refused. But Duchamp's intention was a much greater and more fundamental insult, the aftershocks of which can still be felt today. In 2004 the work was selected by a panel of 500 art aficionados as the most influential work of art of the 20th century. Once the fountain had been turned on its head and become a urinal, there was no going back. From that moment on, art exists thanks to the autonomous gesture of artists who are able to declare that all objects are art by putting them in the right environment. Any reference to a history or tradition, to the craftsmanship and technical skills, to a recognisable and representable reality, loses its necessity for art. It is essential to be absolutely modern: being absolutely modern is about constant fracturing, a new beginning, the tabula rasa, destruction. Destroying and creating, insulting and affirming in one and the same gesture. "Delete the old days", wrote Kasimir Malevitsj in a short poem before he painted *White square on a white background* (1918): "Try to never repeat, in icons, or in paintings, or in words/ If the fact of doing something reminds you of something done in the past, the voice of the new birth tells me:/ delete, shut up, put the fire out if it is fire,/If you want the drift of your thoughts to be lighter and to not go rusty,/ in order to waft the breeze of a new day into the desert."

6. The matrix of amusement

In 1984 (1948) Georges Orwell wrote how modern society was falling prey to an excess of totalitarian control and authoritarian violence. In *A Brave New World* (1932) Aldous Huxley revealed a completely different vision of decline. In his world, there is no need for a Big Brother who deprives people of their autonomy, their insights and their history. According to Huxley the people started to love those who oppress them and admire the technologies that keep them under control. In his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) the American sociologist Neil Postman analyses the difference between two futuristic visions, he adopts that of Huxley in which people allow themselves to plunge into a sort of blessed state of drowsiness and voluntarily relinquish their rights. For Postman television was the medium par excellence to put people into this type of comatose state: the audiences give up their individual rights in exchange for entertainment. Media are no longer technological tools or instruments that are at our service. They have become the stage on which we can appear. We are seduced by them. We live 'in' the media. We are surrounded by them. We are submerged in them. Is there a real world behind the media world, in the same way that there is a real world behind the wings where illusions are lost? A world in which the way illusion is created is revealed? 'Welcome to the real world'. This famous line, comes from the film *The Matrix* and is uttered by Morpheus the head of the resistance when Neo, the hero of the film, gains an insight into the virtual construction of our reality, generated and controlled by a gigantic computer that everyone is hooked up to. Human beings are kept in an artificial dream-like state and only think that they exist. The 'real' reality that the hero gains access to is the desolate desert landscape of Chicago that lies in ruins following a global catastrophe. Which is the catastrophe that is concealed behind our media society? If the world is presented to us like a play in which we are allowed to play a role, what lies behind the curtains? What happens when the show is over? According to the philosopher Henk Oosterling we are characterised by what he calls 'radical mediocrity': we are radically immersed in the media. The media (from cars to mobile phones, from microwave ovens to CNN, from microchips to cyberspace, from biotechnology to intelligent weapons) have become the 'environment' in which we exist. "If media have become the environment, the question of whether a medium is good or bad can no longer be answered," added the philosopher. Any pure criticism of our media-driven condition is no longer feasible because in order to present their critique, they are forced to use the media that are being criticised. "Any medium starts as a liberation and ends up as a problem. A medium becomes mature as soon as it overtakes and turns its creator into a slave. In the

same way that rituals facilitated contact with the gods, media make our inner and outer world experimentable and communicable. They infiltrate into the pores of the bodies of individuals. The media control, direct our attention and channel collective behaviours,” added Henk Oosterling. The medium has become the means of subsistence. In other words: Does life exist outside the Matrix? Can we still think outside the ‘formats’? Has the world become irremediably ob-scene?

7. The Duchamp Fountain 2

Two decades after Duchamps’ Fountain, Walt Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), the first full-length animated film appeared. Lauwers considers Duchamp and Disney as two icons of the visual culture of the twentieth century. D&D represent two radically opposed gestures. The fundamental gesture of Duchamp is destruction, demolishing the existing order. The fundamental gesture of Disney is creating a new mythology and new iconography. It is true that Disney does not form part of the history of art in the strictest sense of the word, but his impact – and this applies to his impact on artists too – is greater than that of Duchamp. For Lauwers D&D represent a tension in modern art: the longing for iconoclasm and idiosyncrasy mixed with the desire for iconography and communication. He translated this tension into two dramatic trilogies: the *Snakesong Trilogy* and *Sad Face / Happy Face*. Is the transgression from *Snakesong Trilogy* to *Sad Face / Happy Face* a transgression from Duchamp to Disney, from modern iconoclasm to a post-modern mythology, even if it is fragmented and hybrid? For the American art historian, Wendy Steiner the 20th century is the century of ‘autonomous’ art that she calls ‘sublime’. The 21st century however, will in her opinion, be the century of heteronomous art that she associates with what is ‘beautiful’. She believes that sublime represents art that tears apart, that is disturbing and alienating, that does not seek recognition from a certain audience or a certain community, while beautiful represents communication, consolation, openness and dialogue with the public. Steiner’s vision is too simple, but it reveals a part of the crisis that is having an impact on the notion of autonomy. *Isabella’s room*, the first part of *Sad Face / Happy Face*, was born out of the desire to create a much more direct communication with the audience, while accepting that modern art since Duchamps’ Fountain, had lost a lot of its contact with the public: “Was the removal of emotion from works of art that we have seen since Fountain a good move? That is the fundamental question I ask myself. Duchamp changed the function of the object and demanded that the audience think about it. Anyone who is not familiar with the framework of reference in which Fountain is placed, does not understand the image. My opinion now is that a work of art should be able to hold its own even without a context. The work of art should have the same effect as the pyramids in Egypt: even the greatest nitwit realises immediately that something happened there. The reflection that Duchamp provoked, is important and necessary, but I think that the point of view of the person observing has been forgotten. By specialising you can lose your relationship with society. Duchamp forced the audience to specialise in art, if they wanted to be able to understand it. Gilbert and George have also recently admitted that the greatest error in modern art has been to have not given the observer a chance. This ivory tower mechanism has brought in its wake the elimination of the social aspect of the visual arts and its adoption by the commercial circuit. Because of the tragedy of applause, Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain has returned to its status as a urinal. Because images no longer exist without ‘reflection’, the entertainment industry has chosen to exclude the concept of reflection and has consecrated applause. That is tragic. Artists are also responsible for this. An enormous confusion has emerged around art, culture and leisure. Artists have forgotten their role. Artists such as Luciano Fabro and Michelangelo Pistoletto say that artists must search for wisdom, not truth, but wisdom. Art is about asking questions and not providing answers. But then you have to be asking the right questions. At the current time a lot is demanded of art and artists. In recent years long and intense discussions have been held about canon and repertoire, about making the public

aware and encouraging them to participate, about diversity and target groups, about accessibility and emancipation, commercial culture and new media, about urban and social responsibility, etc. But art has nothing intrinsically to do with politics. Art can of course form a relationship with politics, but you're not allowed to express that dogmatically. I also find that the innumerable political statements that form part of modern theatre today are crude simplifications."



© Anna Stöcher

8 . Human sacrifice

The cult of human sacrifice is not a thing of the past. Just the contrary, it has just relocated to TV. Aren't most news items constructed around death and victims? Wars, attacks, accidents, earthquakes, floods, epidemics, etc. as well as the scarred and marginalised bodies of the unemployed, the homeless, the junkies, asylum seekers, illegal immigrants, etc. an endless line of human sacrifice. In most of the detective series the body that is dead, killed, raped, mutilated, etc., plays a central role. Different series concentrate explicitly on corpses, the *crime scene* and the pathological-anatomical research. The bodies are cut open with the greatest possible realism, ribs are cut through with cutters, organs and stomach contents are analysed. We follow the route of a bullet and we see how it creates a path through the skin, destroying muscle and penetrating deep into an organ; a pornography of violence and blood. Television (and the Internet) devour bodies on a production line. A daily orgy of destruction. And doesn't the cookery programme fit in with this scenario. Lauwers goes right to the ultimate consequence: the last supper of Dirk is a cannibal ritual. Dirk's final meal is a Japanese dish: the girl Yoko, described in the cast as 'a piece of meat'. Yoko is played by Yumiko Funaya who played the role of the foreigner, the outsider in *The Deer House*, the person that no-one accepted or that they accepted with reluctance. Before she dies, she speaks

for the first time in the play. Her maiden speech and testament is a perfectly cynical description of our era: "Just a minute. I want to say something before you eat me. We live in a post-modern, post-dramatic, post-melancholic, post-romantic, post-national, post-global, post-social, post-popular, post-sexual, post-political, post-capitalistic, post-human post-world with grotesque clowns who stuff themselves with anonymous animals, anonymous vegetables, anonymous drugs, anonymous alcohol and who hang themselves with anonymous ropes, jump into anonymous rivers, jump under anonymous trains, throw themselves from anonymous window. Endless, endless. Thank you. You can eat me now." With *The art of entertainment*, Lauwers puts Snow White back on the urinal and allows snakes to enter the deer house!

9. The icing on the cake

After the last supper it's time for the lethal injection: Dirk commits suicide *live*. Doctor Joy witnesses the death. What follows is not a serene grieving of the defunct that we are familiar with from previous productions by Lauwers but a hilarious and grotesque spectacle. Gena, who wanted to die with Dirk at first, decides not to die. And then we have the 'deus ex machina'! To the great amazement of Doctor Joy and of all the others, Dirk gets up again a few minutes later: "Of course you don't understand anything. You are a doctor. And for doctors you can only die once. But I am an actor. An imposter. I can die a thousand times. Every evening I die and I don't die. That's my life. And you don't understand that." Everything gets completely out of hand on the stage: violence, rape, murder, etc. And all of that live:: "No camera, no entertainment", says the host of the programme. Doctor Joy and Dirk throw insults at each other. They start attacking each other. Doctor Joy strangles Dirk. Is this the end? Not yet. We have another *mise-en-scène*. This time it is for a good cause: Dirk's participation in the suicide programme was part of an advertising strategy for Doctors Without Borders! The theatre is a stage for social commitment after all. Or double or triple irony? Because who believes who now? Who's fooling who? "As long as lies and impostors entertain us all is well," says the hostess. Lauwers lets the theatre machine run at full revs. In overdrive. *Amusing ourselves to death*. Even love turns crazy!

DIRK

Gena, you owe people an explanation.

GENA

I have nothing to explain.

DIRK

You're right about that. But I am a bit disappointed..

GENA

Your disappointment is feigned.

DIRK

Absolutely.

Why are we so ready to deny ourselves what we love?

GENA

Blahblahblah.

Dirk, I love you.

DIRK
Fuck you.

GENA
O.K. Now?

(They laugh.)

10.
Dirk & Gena Fuck Video shortly on *YouTube*.



© Anna Stöcher

FRAGMENTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH JAN LAUWERS AND JÉRÔME SANS

You are a theatre-maker, film-maker, writer and visual artist. How do you describe yourself?

Not as a director, painter, writer or film-maker. I am just an artist who tries to use all those different media. Isn't that the only way to survive? Why should I restrict myself? Art should not specialise. Art begins when thinking is still in its infancy. Leave specialisation to the scientists and the philosophers! In art I prefer to use other words, like 'hysteria'. Philosophers have a lot to learn from non-specialised artists. Together we can achieve general wisdom. That is the eventual goal: achieving wisdom. We invariably fail to do that and we call that failure beauty.

I use as many different means of expression as I possibly can. At first I found that frustrating; now I see it as a blessing. I am no longer afraid of it. The restlessness it causes serves as a driving force. Every medium raises different questions. In visual art you have to destroy your virtuosity, while in the theatre world you have to foster it. It took me twenty years to understand the 'theatre' medium, which is a mix of contact with the public, the vulnerability of the actors, the virtuosity and the vanity of the medium... and the applause, the tragedy of theatre.

When I started out in theatre, I was not interested in classical theatre and I didn't know the repertoire. My introduction to the theatre was a performance by the German artist Joseph Beuys in which he wiped fat off a wall. I was interested in the dark depression of his performances and his drawings. That was in 1976, a crucial year in my life as a young artist. I saw the exhibition of Joseph Beuys's drawings at Jan Hoet's Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent; it was the year of Bob Wilson's and Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* and, of course, of the Sex Pistols' first record. I was in my first year at the art academy and I discovered Joseph Kosuth and the conceptual writings of Art&Language, and everyone was reading Wittgenstein. I was a very restless young man and I was determined to leave my mark.

When I see how the art of the last twenty years has evolved, or rather, has adapted to the aspirations of the public, to the desire for the spectacular, glamorous side of our culture and how it manifests itself as a fashion phenomenon, then I really despair. Art is too temporary, too susceptible to market mechanisms. Nobody escapes them any longer. We live in a cowardly and deceitful age. That's why people seek refuge in a superficial realism. *Big Brother* is described as avant-garde and war photography is elevated to the rank of art. People want recognisable forms. The fact that I only take Polaroid photos of objects I have made myself makes the Polaroids important. They go against that realism.

You are known for your actors' acting and in particular for the paradox between 'acting' and 'not acting'. How do you work with the different protagonists you bring together in your performances?

If you want to find the autonomy of a medium, you simply have to keep looking. As a director I don't look for form, but for a code. As soon as that code becomes clear, I want my actors to contest my authority. And if they haven't understood the code, we've failed. That is not to say that I dictate my actors' every gesture according to my script. That is sometimes a problem for those who are trained for reproduction. We have to destroy the idea of representation in the theatre and replace it with presentation. That is the only link with performance... It is the action that counts, not necessarily the result.

Your type of theatre seems to be more a work in progress than an objective per se.

That's the difference between presentation and representation. With a presentation the moment itself, the 'thinking moment', is the most important for the performers. That way the work is always moving forward

and is never the same. That's what makes the subscript important. In conventional theatre the emphasis is always on reproduction.

My work is strongly influenced by performances staged in the 1970s, but then without the sometimes pernicious narcissism whose substance was often too limited. In the 1970s, early 1980s, we tried to formulate an answer to ossified conventional theatre. We threw the linear story out and introduced visual, fragmentary theatre that attached importance to the physical presence of the actors, who we preferred to call performers. Yet it was always very different from 'performance' as such, not least because we worked with performers. In performance art the performer is the artist himself. In the theatre the difference between the creative artist and the performing artist is very important.

In the 1990s I started to explore the story, which resulted in *Isabella's Room*. The production became popular because a straightforward story had never been told in that so-called metatheatre. It was as if the spectators were relieved to see that all those experiments had led somewhere.

To prevent us slipping into a new form of repertoire I came up with the *Needlapbs*. These were one-off evenings when we tried to close the gap between artists and performers. My role was more that of a curator.

The 1970s were more important than the 1980s. Several Flemish artists, like Michel Laub, were responsible for taking theatre in a new direction. Laub made highly repetitive theatre even before Wilson and Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*, and it was more closely linked to the performance idea. His company was aptly named Remote Control: as the artist, Laub directed his performers from a distance. That signalled the end of the performance idea. In one of my first productions I had the performers run round the stage while a 60-kilo sack of sand rotated and knocked them over. But because I was the artist and so not taking part, I began to regard it as deontologically irresponsible. The show became an 'aestheticisation' of the performance concept of the early 1970s.

I believe that evolution was necessary. Just look at what happened to the Wiener Aktionisten. It was a dead-end. That return to the pursuit of beauty, or rather, a redefinition of beauty, was crucial. At the same time I read the writings of the artist Joseph Kosuth and other conceptualists. It seemed to me that that extreme intellectualism was not the only possible direction to go in.



© Anna Stöcher

PERFORMANCE DATES 2010 -2011

World première

Akademietheater (Burgtheater), Vienna	5, 6, 7, 9, 10 March 2011
	23, 24, 25 April 2011
Teatro Lliure, Barcelona (<i>Spanish Première</i>)	21, 22 April 2011
Akademietheater (Burgtheater), Vienna	11, 12 June 2011

PERFORMANCE DATES 2011 -2012

Kampnagel Internationales

Sommer Festival, Hamburg (<i>German Première</i>)	18, 19, 20 August 2011
Kaaitheater, Brussels (<i>Belgian Première</i>)	15, 16, 17, 18 September 2011
International Theatre Festival, Moscow	19, 20 October 2011
Rotterdamse Stadschouwburg (<i>Dutch Première</i>)	24 November 2011
VOORUIT, Ghent	15, 16, 20 December 2011
Espoon City Theatre, Espoon	11, 12, 13, 14 April 2012
deSingel, Antwerp	23, 24, 25 May 2012

PERFORMANCE DATES 2012 -2013

de Warande, Turnhout	22 September 2012
La Rose des Vents (<i>French première</i>)	
Scène nationale Lille Métropole, Villeneuve d'Ascq	16, 17, 18, 19 October 2012
De Werf, Aalst	9 November 2012
Cultuurcentrum Bruges, MaZ	8 January 2013
Dubbelspel, STUK, 30CC/Schouwburg, Leuven	9 January 2013

[Click here for the latest tour dates](#)

WORK FOR THEATRE – JAN LAUWERS & NEEDCOMPANY

1979 – 1986 Epigonentheater ZLV

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, Bourlaschouwburg, 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**
Opening: 5 March, Akademietheater (Burgtheater), Vienna
- 2012 Caligula**
Opening: 17 May, Kasino, (Burgtheater), Vienna
- 2012 Marketplace 76**
Opening: 7 September, Ruhrtriennale, Bochum

[Click here for an updated list](#)

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.
- FREEMAN, John, *The Greatest Shows on Earth. World Theater form Peter Brook to the Sydney Olympics*, Libri Publishing, Oxfordshire, 2011.

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.
- *Kinematix 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.
- 'Politika' prize for best director / BITEF Festival in Belgrade, for *Isabella's Room* and *The Deer House*, 2010.
- Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic Austria, 2012

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. Needcompany has been artist-in-residence at the Burgtheater in Vienna since 2009. 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 is awarded with the 'Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic Austria' (2012).

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.

Jan Lauwers was selected in the margin of the Biennale in Venice (2012) for the workshop of Dramatic Arts. Curator Alex Rigola invited a group of prominent theatre makers, resulting in a 20-min. performance called *The Seven Sins*.

Jan Lauwers wrote a new play called *The art of entertainment* (2011) which premiere in Vienna The show is currently running and the leading role is played by Dirk Roofthoof. *Caligula*, also a collaboration with the Burgtheater, will premiere in May 2012.

The new play which Jan Lauwers wrote for the Needcompany Ensemble is called *Marketplace 76*. It will premiere in 2012 during the Ruhrtriennale 2012.

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*. A variation of *The Tragedy of The Applause* was brought to CC Strombeek at the request of Luk Lambrecht, in confrontation with work by Jeff Wall.

AIR Antwerp invited OHNO cooperation to curate the fifth OPEN AIR in August 2011, in the frame of which they introduced the work of artists from all over the world.

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. The result was *The House of Our Fathers*, which was shown to the Museum M in Leuven, after the 16th Internationale Schillertage in Mannheim.

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 Kaaaitheater 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 *Curated by_vienna 09*. *Curated by* brought 18 Viennese contemporary art galleries together with international curators.

In September 2011 Champ d'Action and M HKA organised the 8th Time Canvas, during which Jan Lauwers' "Last Guitar Monster" was shown.

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.

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. A first version of this house was shown in 2011 in the Kunsthalle (Mannheim) during the Schillertage. A second version was shown in Museum M in November 2011 (Leuven). Work is currently ongoing on a large version for Hannover's Kunstfestspiele Herrenhausen in 2013.

Click below for the performers' biographies:

[Grace Ellen Barkey](#)

[Misha Downey](#)

[Julien Faure](#)

[Yumiko Funaya](#)

[Benoit Gob](#)

[Viviane De Muynck](#)

[Eléonore Valère](#)

[Inge Van Bruystegem](#)

DIRK ROOFTHOFT

Dirk Roofthoof was born in Antwerp in 1959. He studied theatre there and graduated in 1981.

From then on, he started working with famous theatre directors, choreographers and musicians, including Jan Fabre, Jan Lauwers & Needcompany, Luk Perceval, Ivo van Hove, Theu Boermans, Jan Ritsema, Josse De Pauw, Peter Vermeersch, Wim Vandekeybus, Ron Vawter (The Wooster Group), Rene Pollesch (Volksbühne, Berlin), Lotte van den Berg, Zita Swoon, the London Symphonietta, Schönberg Ensemble, Collegium Vocale, the jazz legend Henry Threadgill (opening Salzburg Festival '98) and the opera director Peter Sellars. He has performed on stages all over the world, not only in Dutch but also in French, Spanish, German and English. Throughout his career he has won several film and theatre awards, both in Belgium and abroad.

With Guy Cassiers he created *Kaspar* (Peter Handke) and *Tristan* (Klaus Mann) in the early 1980s and *Lying in decomposition* in 1993. In the latter, Guy Cassiers was responsible for the directing, and Dirk Roofthoof for the acting. In *Tristan*, the roles were reversed.

For the monologue *Sunken Red* (2004) Guy Cassiers collaborated again with his old friend Dirk Roofthoof. Roofthoof played the leading part in Guy Cassiers' *Mefisto for ever*, a big success at the 2007 Festival d'Avignon. In 2007 he received the Louis d'Or for his role in *Mefisto for ever*. The Louis d'Or is an annual award for the best male stage performance in The Netherlands.

Dirk Roofthoof played the role of the old Mister Eguchi in *House of the Sleeping Beauties* (2009), an opera based on the book by Yasunari Kawabata, conceived by Guy Cassiers and the composer Kris Defoort.

Dirk Roofthoof was invited to the Festival d'Avignon five times in seven years. Not only he performed in Avignon *Sunken Red* and *Mefisto for ever* directed by Guy Cassiers, he also played two of Jan Fabre's monologues: *The Emperor of Loss* and *The King of Plagiarism*. Still in Avignon, Roofthoof also performed *I am blood*, again by Jan Fabre. *The Emperor of Loss* and *The King of Plagiarism* are part of a trilogy, together with the final part *The Servant of Beauty* (opening March 2010).

Dirk Roofthoof performs also in *Ruhe* (Silence), directed by Josse De Pauw. *Ruhe* is a recital of beautiful Schubert songs brutally interrupted by people who wish to talk about their voluntary enlistment in the SS in 1940.

Dirk Roofthoof has also played numerous parts in film and television productions, like *Terug naar Oosterdonk* (Tales of a liar) or *Het verdriet van België* (The Sorrow of Belgium), directed by Claude Goretta and based on the novel by Hugo Claus. He has played in films directed by Dominique Deruddere (*Hombres Complicados* and *Hochzeitfeier*), Patrice Toye (*Rosie*) and Alain de Halleux (*Pleure pas, Germaine* (Don't Cry, Germaine)). Dirk Roofthoof won the Best Actor Award at the Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival (Miami) for his part in *Pleure pas, Germaine*.

He also played in *Olivetti 82*, a film by Rudi Van Den Bossche, in *Sombberman's Actie* (Remco Campert) by Casper Verbrugge, in *Anyway the wind blows* by Tom Barman (dEUS) and in *The Alzheimer Case* by Erik Van Looy. For his part in *Sombberman's Actie* he received the Best Actor of the Year Award in Pescara, Italy. Dirk Roofthoof played in *De Storm* by Ben Sombogaart, the director of *Twin Sisters* who received an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film.

Dirk Roofthoof often works with plastic artists, e.g. Thierry de Cordier, who he acted with at the inauguration of Jan Hoet's exhibition *Over The Edges* in Ghent (2000). Regularly he was responsible for the recorded declamation of poetry at the *Summer of Poetry* in Watou, an international exhibition including plastic arts, poetry and architecture at all kinds of different locations. For *Poetry in double time – a small rustling revolution* (in Bruges from Jan. 23 until May 23 2010), Dirk Roofthoof reveals himself as a visual artist. Through sensual, intimate and personal video images he adds a new layer to the poems.

Dirk Roofthoof has directed several theatre performances, including *Emiel*, Roofthoof's adaptation of Cocteau's *Le bel Indifférent*; *Enoch Arden*, a work for piano and voice, based on a compelling poem written by Alfred Tennyson in 1864, and accompanied by a fine piano score by Richard Strauss in 1897; Heiner Müller's *Kwartet*; and the above-mentioned *Tristan*, with Guy Cassiers as an actor.

He was the author of three plays. *Emiel*, *Beschrijving van een toestand* (Description of a condition) and *Alles Liebe*, directed by Luk Perceval.

Dirk Roofthoof has also directed and performed in music productions. The blues concert *Brick Blues* is about the melancholy for the things we have left, thinking that the grass is greener on the other side. *Walcott songs* is a production he created with the jazz legend Henry Threadgill based on Walcott-poems. It opened at the Salzburg Festival (1998) and was presented at the famous Blue Note Jazz Festival in Paris.

In autumn 2010 Dirk Roofthoof created together with Kris Defoort, composer and jazz-musician, *The Brodsky Concerts*, based upon Joseph Brodsky's texts.

Dirk Roofthoof worked with Jan Lauwers & Needcompany in *Julius Caesar* (1990), *Invictos* (1991), *Caligula* (1998) and *Needcompany's King Lear* (2000). In all performances of *The art of entertainment* outside the German language area, Michael König is replaced by Dirk Roofthoof.

NEEDCOMPANY

Hooikaai 35
B-1000 Brussels
tel +32 2 218 40 75
fax +32 2 218 23 17
www.needcompany.org
info@needcompany.org

Artistic director: Jan Lauwers

Executive director: Yannick Roman / yannick@needcompany.org
Artistic coordination: Elke Janssens / elke@needcompany.org
General director: Eva Blaute / eva@needcompany.org
Financial manager: Sarah Eyckerman / sarah@needcompany.org
Production manager: Luc Galle / luc@needcompany.org