

JAN LAUWERS & NEEDCOMPANY

THE LOBSTER SHOP



Photo © Eveline Vanassche

A Needcompany production

Coproducers: Festival d'Avignon, Théâtre de la Ville (Paris), Théâtre Garonne (Toulouse), PACT Zollverein (Essen),
Cankarjev Dom (Ljubljana), La Rose des Vents (Scène Nationale de Villeneuve d'Ascq),

Automne en Normandie, La Filature (Scène Nationale de Mulhouse),

Kaaitheater (Brussels), deSingel (Antwerp).

With the support of the Flemish authorities.

With the support of the Culture 2000 Programme of the European Union.



Culture 2000

THE LOBSTER SHOP

The Lobster Shop tells the story of Axel and Theresa. They have a son called Jef who dies on the beach in a stupid accident. Axel and Theresa's sorrow is complete, and when it turns out that no therapy is able to help, Axel one day decides to walk into the sea. He puts on his best suit and goes to eat one last lobster at his favourite restaurant, 'The Lobster Shop'. But the waiter trips and the lobster and its armorican sauce end up on Axel's white suit. In the fraction of a second that Axel sees the sauce landing on his suit, his carefully prepared ritual is shattered and he sees his whole life blowing up in his face. In what follows we find ourselves in Axel's hallucinating brain, where one story succeeds another, on the boundary between delusion and reality, comedy and tragedy, grotesque and philosophical reflection.

This personal tragedy of a man with a terrible sadness is from the very beginning incisively pictured against the background of a world at boiling point. A world of boat refugees, criminals, illegal immigrants, the borders of civilisation and discussion of the new human. Several stories become apparent, in which characters struggle with, or actually play in amusement with the lightning developments all around them: gene technology, migration flows, the clash of religions, and violence. In a whirlwind of quick-fire dialogue and often absurd reflections, the 21st century is presented as an era in flames, crumbling and decomposing, a biotope for irrational fear and endless boredom, with rampant acts of desperation. But the weight of social issues, loss of identity, fear of death and personal sorrow is more than once counterbalanced by humour, dance and music.

Axel is a professor of genetics and caused a furore by his creation of two clones: a bear called Sir John Ernest Saint James, and Salman, the first human clone. Salman is his greatest scientific success, but in human terms his greatest failure. This is because he was trying to use Salman to fill the hopeless void that has dominated his life since the death of his son. When he realises that no clone could ever replace his son, in despair he tries to destroy Salman, his life's work.

The story of the disturbed Axel and his equally desperate but loving wife Theresa is told through the eyes of Catherine, Axel's psychiatrist. Despite her involvement she tries to create order in the murderous trip Axel finds himself in.

The Lobster Shop is set in the rue de Flandre. A few shops, the 'Lobster Shop' restaurant, several houses and a garden: Axel and Theresa's garden, where they try to pick up the thread of life again by holding a barbecue. But it seems ordinary life will never have a chance again. After the dramatic events of the past, the estrangement from reality is too great. The fire of the barbecue becomes an apocalyptic fire that spreads ever outward: 'Not only was Axel and Theresa's house alight, but whole suburbs went up in flames. ... What was new about this violence was that it was random and never focused. It lacked any sense of system.'

Encouraged by Nasty, a damaged schoolgirl with an ephemeral beauty, Salman the clone becomes the purveyor of this young violence. The empty perfection of the future cloned world infects them with a boundless sadness. Face to face with the lobsters in the 'Lobster Shop' aquaria, he identifies with the hopeless situation of these creatures with their claws tied shut as they wait for nothing. He calls himself a lobster man, and under the motto 'I am not' he urges people to set fire to cars and loot shops. In his cocoon of reluctant humanness Salman clumsily tries to find out who he is.

The Lobster Shop is a reflection on identity. It is a story of imperfection and of longing against one's better judgement. The characters that surround Axel and Theresa are also in a permanent state of restlessness, attempting to define their positions. All are in search of freedom, a viable position in the face of laws, religion, boundaries and personal sorrow. A series of unlikely chance circumstances brings them together in the rue de Flandre, immediately in front of 'The Lobster Shop', the scene of the action, of confusion and of grotesque coincidences. Jan Lauwers gives us a glimpse into these characters' shadowy sides, where pain and doubt lie hidden.

But the beach, and by extension the sea, are also places for unexpected encounters. They are a place of contemplation, a refuge, rather than a field of action. The sea is a rite of passage, a longing for death and at the same time the source of all life.

This is what Theresa says to Axel about his obsession with the new human: 'Boredom, that's the problem. You wanted perfection. But perfection is so predictable, perfection is boredom. No pain, but no joy either. This new human of yours will die of boredom.'

Through Axel's tragedy Jan Lauwers raises the question of humanity and dehumanisation. He counterbalances the unceasing urge to improve mankind by arguing for the beauty of the imperfect and the unpredictable, the beauty of the inner world where in spite of everything longing remains the most powerful motivation. The often dark theme is presented with raw energy and vigour. Joie de vivre. Lust for life. Vitality taken to extremes. Out of necessity. As a counterbalance. Vitality as a political act. The actors brought Lauwers' previous production, *Isabella's Room*, to a close singing 'We go on...'. Now they insist, with more conviction than ever: 'We have to go on...'

Jan Lauwers: 'This play was written in the solitude of hotel rooms, the television always on. Cynical realism and romantic sentimentality increasingly form the main accent in just about every conversation carried on today, and are therefore an inevitable component of this play. I have wallowed in them with pleasure and sincerely hope that the end of mankind is not just around the corner.'

The Lobster Shop is a nightmare you can lose yourself in. It is a metaphor for the desperation of deeply human and all-destroying sorrow, but at the same time also for human beauty. A hallucination that flees from reality in search of human security, to that which is longed for. It is a sad image which in all its beauty tries to survive.

Sigrid Bousset

Elke Janssens



Photo © Eveline Vanassche

CREDITS

Text, direction, set

Jan Lauwers

Music

Hans Petter Dahl, Maarten Seghers

With

Hans Petter Dahl

Axel, Professor of Genetics

Grace Ellen Barkey

Theresa, Axel's wife

Yumiko Funaya (replaces Tijen Lawton)

Jef, Axel and Theresa's son

Anneke Bonnema

Catherine, Psychiatrist

Benoît Gob

Vladimir, Truck driver

Sir John Ernest Saint James, first clone of a bear

Inge Van Bruystegem

Nasty, a young girl

Julien Faure

Mo, transformer

Maarten Seghers

Salman, first human clone

Costumes

Lot Lemm

Lighting

Lieven De Meyere, Ken Hioco

Sound design

Dré Schneider

Production manager

Luc Galle

Assistant director and surtitels

Elke Janssens

Video C-Song Variations

Photography: Maarten van der Put, Bart Baele

Montage: Nico Leunen

Sound: Senjan Jansen / Senstudio

Music: Rombout Willems

French translation

Monique Nagielkopf

English translation

Gregory Ball

Editing text and translation

Sigrid Bousset

French language coach

Anny Czupper

English language coach

Louise Chamberlain

Stage

Eva Blaute

Assistance Costume

Lieve Meeussen

Technician

Ken Hioco

Photography

Eveline Vanassche, Maarten Vanden Abeele

Production

Needcompany

Coproducers: Festival d'Avignon, Théâtre de la Ville (Paris), Théâtre Garonne (Toulouse), PACT Zollverein (Essen), Cankarjev Dom (Ljubljana) La Rose des Vents (Scène Nationale de Villeneuve d'Ascq), Automne en Normandie, La Filature (Scène Nationale de Mulhouse), Kaaithheater (Brussels), deSingel (Antwerp).

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PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2006-2007

Première

Festival d'Avignon	10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 July 2006
Automne en Normandie	18, 19 October 2006
PACT Zollverein, Essen	27, 28 October 2006
deSingel, Antwerp	11, 12, 13 January 2007
Kaaitheater, Brussels	18, 19, 20, 23, 24 January 2007
Théâtre de la Ville, Paris	31 January, 1, 2, 3, 4 February 2007
La Filature, Mulhouse	8, 9 February 2007
La Rose des Vents,	
Scène Nationale de Villeneuve d'Ascq	21, 22, 23 February 2007
Cankarjev Dom, Ljubljana	10, 11 March 2007
Deutsches Nationaltheater und Staatskapelle, Weimar	27 April 2007
Festival Internacional de Teatro y Artes de Calle, Valladolid	25, 26 May 2007
Teatro Gavarre, Pamplona	29 May 2007
Hollandfestival, Amsterdam	23 June 2007

PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2007-2008

Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt	28, 29 September 2007
Schauspielhaus Zürich	30 November, 1, 2 December 2007
Les Halles, Schaerbeek	12, 13, 14, 15 December 2007
Vooruit, Gent	20, 21, 22 December 2007
Espoo City Theatre, Espoon Kaupunki (Finland)	26, 27, 28, 29 February 2008
Teatre Lliure, Barcelona	6, 7 March 2008
CC Kortrijk	11 March 2008
Stadsschouwburg, Leuven	14 March 2008

PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2008-2009

Kampnagel, Hamburg	29, 30, 31 August 2008
La Bâtie, Festival de Genève	7, 8, 9 September 2008
Théâtre Garonne, Toulouse	21, 22 October 2008
Magdalenazaal, CC Bruges	17, 18 December 2008

PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2009-2010

TANZtheater INTERNATIONAL, Schauspielhaus, Hannover	11 September 2009
Burgtheater, Vienna	16, 17, 18 October 2009
MC2 Grenoble	17 March 2010

PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2010-2011

Akademietheater (Burgtheater), Vienna	4, 5, 6 October 2010
REPUBLIQUE, Copenhagen	31 March 2011
La Comédie de Clermont-Ferrand, scène nationale	12 May 2011

As part of the Sad Face | Happy Face Trilogy

Salzburger Festspiele 2008	1, 3, 5 August 2008
Schauspielhaus, Schiffbau, Zurich	5, 7 December 2008
Festival d'Avignon	12, 14, 18 July 2009
deSingel, Antwerp	20 December 2009
MC2 Grenoble	20 March 2010
MALTA Festival Poznan	27, 29 June 2010
REPUBLIQUE, Copenhagen	3 April 2011

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

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, 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**
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 7**
Opening: 7 September, Ruhtriennale (2012), 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 from 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.
- *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.
- '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 of 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 Ballet 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 for the workshop of Dramatic Arts. Curator Alex Rigola invited a group of prominent theatre makers, resulting in a performance called *The Seven Sins* (2011).

Jan Lauwers wrote a new play called *The art of entertainment* (2011) which premiered 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.

PROJECTS

In 1999 Jan Lauwers launched *Needlab*, a one-off occasion for ideas, notes, sketches and random thoughts. *Needlab* 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.

Jan Lauwers founded **OHNO COOPERATION** together with Maarten Seghers to give concrete shape to their mutual artistic commitment. In *O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O.* they went in search of the iconography of pop music. For this first version they worked with the video artist Nico Leunen (Cobblersson Incorporated). This was a highly sensory installation whose subtitle was 'the tragedy of applause'.

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 at the Museum M in Leuven, after the 16th Internationale Schillertage in Mannheim (2011).

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 *Needlaps* 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 Rylavý 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 exhibited 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](#)

[Anneke Bonnema](#)

[Hans Petter Dahl](#)

[Julien Faure](#)

[Yumiko Funaya](#)

[Benoît Gob](#)

[Maarten Seghers](#)

[Inge Van Bruystegem](#)

PRESS ABOUT THE LOBSTER SHOP

Living on anyway, in spite of everything

The Lobster Shop, darker than *Isabella's Room*, examines our instinct for life. Moving.

Jan Lauwers' new play *The Lobster Shop*, first shown at the Avignon Festival and written in the wake of the huge success of *Isabella's Room*, displays a great many similarities to that play. Its form, halfway between a story, a crazy musical (this time with a pronounced 'country' streak) and contemporary dance. The constant mingling of dream and reality. The strange costumes that are both exquisite and comical, and sometimes, as in the case of Axel's white suit with its unravelling sequins, as expressive as the people who wear them. And then there are the actors: Hans Petter Dahl, the dancer Tijen Lawton, Benoît Gob, who plays Vladimir and the first cloned bear, Julien Faure as the refugee-seaman-waiter, Maarten Seghers as Salman, the first cloned human, and Anneke Bonnema, the narrator with the irresistible voice in each of the sung passages. Nor of course should we forget Inge Van Bruystegem as Nasty, and the outstanding Grace Ellen Barkey as Theresa, Axel's wife.

All the characters are so much more than just a character; each symbolises in their own way all the contradictions of our society. Axel, a genetic engineer, juggles with our genes, but is not capable of saving his son when he is struck by a simple cardiac arrest. Mo the refugee has no identity: he is what his current occupation makes him. Even the cloned bear becomes a living cuddly teddy that presents TV games.

The TV is always on...

In *The Lobster Shop* Jan Lauwers deals with a thousand questions concerning the age we live in. Beneath a breezy exterior, captivating and with the pretence of nonchalance, he delivers an excellent play that deals with man's fears with a poignant elegance and sincerity. He trained as an artist and so knows better than anyone how to create a superb visual world. But he also – or above all – shows himself to be a gifted writer; meticulous, full of fantasy and at the same time delving deep into the complexity of human feelings.

He says he wrote the play 'in the solitude of hotel rooms with the television always on. Cynical realism and romantic sentimentality increasingly form the main accent in just about every conversation carried on today, and are therefore an inevitable component of this play.'

As if endlessly zapping, *The Lobster Shop* runs through all the fears of our era, and always returns to the one and only question: that of life and death. Axel, the genetic engineer, tries to create a new human who is perfect, without fear or blame. Near the end of the play Theresa calls out to him 'You wanted perfection. But perfection is so predictable. Perfection is monotonous. No suffering, but no more pleasure either. Monotony will be the ruin of your new man.'

Axel and Theresa have been a broken couple since the death of their child. The horrible pain, the accusations they

almost unthinkingly hurl at each other, the longing to die rather than continue suffering. Jan Lauwers tells us this is all part of human nature. But in the end this all encourages us to carry on living. Because, says Theresa with heartrending accuracy, 'We don't want to die. We find life the most agreeable thing there is, and that's it. And do you know what, Axel, I think we're right.'

Jean-Marie Wijnants, Le Soir, 13th July 2006

Staggering with style, a contemporary Passion

The Lobster Shop, the new play by Jan Lauwers and Needcompany, opened at the prestigious Avignon Theatre Festival. It is theatre that stays in your mind, fascinating you long after the curtain has fallen.

It is a play that digs deep, but with a lightness that makes the drama human. It is a play that offers consolation in its formal respect for beauty and sincerity. It is a play with great richness of content resulting from the casual use of topical images that combine effortlessly with the surreal illusions of tragic characters.

The Lobster Shop tells the story of Axel, a professor of genetics, and his wife Theresa, a mother creature. Their son Jeff died on the beach as a result of a silly accident. Axel and Theresa are each in their own way consumed by sorrow. Axel decides to drown himself in the sea. For his last supper he chooses to eat lobster. The waiter who serves the lobster in the restaurant, The Lobster Shop, clumsily spills the lobster dish on Axel's white suit. Axel sees the meticulously planned ending of his life turning into utter chaos. He starts hallucinating. He embarks on a descent into hell. It is a voyage through an unstable world which, at the start of the 21st century, is burning fiercely.

Salman, the first cloned human, is the climax of Axel's scientific work. A superb youth, perfection in human form, but soulless in his complete lack of identity. The creation of Salman is Axel's attempt to struggle against the imperfection of existence, an imperfection of which he himself is a victim. But in a world full of people who make frequent mistakes, it seems that it is precisely this desire for perfection that makes living together so inhuman.

A scene: Axel and Theresa have organised an evening with friends. The conviviality of a barbecue is mimicked by the light from imitation log fires.

'You're late, the guests will be arriving any minute.'

'I bought some firelighters, otherwise you'll never get the barbecue going.'

'I've invited a man who helped me load the sausages into my boot.'

'Is that a metaphor? Loading the sausages into your boot!'

Under the entire conversation runs the loneliness of a mother and father who have lost their son, plus their guilt and the desire for everything to be as it was before. But nothing in this play is as it was before. It is a world where everyone tries to cope with the chaos in their own way. And everyone tries in their own way to make their life story into a logical whole. But logic always fails. The only thing that helps is humour and occasionally singing a song.

At the end of the play Theresa says to Axel: 'Why should we want to improve the human race? ... you wanted perfection. But perfection is so predictable. Perfection is monotonous. No suffering, but no more pleasure either. Monotony will be the downfall of your new human.'

The Lobster Shop is a tribute to an unsteady human in his search for something to hold on to, a rhythm of his own. In the given situation no one is able to tell a coherent story, and it is the music that comes closest to it. The songs offer the actors an opportunity to celebrate the harmony of life in its many voices. The dance scenes are not only beautiful and consoling, but also display a vitality that is taken to the edge. It is this vitality that makes the play so powerful. It's like the old saying: 'if you're going on a difficult journey you'd better put on easy shoes'.

The Lobster Shop is a play that challenges you to look at theatre in more than one way. It is a contemporary Passion in the form of a musical. On stage, people make love, shout, cry, work each other up and calm each other down, and it is to the actors' credit that in this intense tragedy a chastening lightness continually resounds from the background. Staggering with style.

Anna Luyten, Knack, 20/7/2006

Lauwers attaches to this same lobster a whole caboodle – a 'jumble' – in his new play performed by Grace Ellen Barkey and the rest of his permanent company. We also encounter a newcomer, the extremely charming Inge Van Bruystegem, a 14-year-old Lolita, in a play that combines a family drama with unambiguous opinions about the riots in the suburbs, never losing sight of the humour we so much appreciate in his work. This gives the performance the breeziness of a contemporary musical. In mannered dialogues that appear to come straight out of a television novelette, Lauwers sets these minor dramas against the background of an exhibition on totemic art and taboos – a humourous reinterpretation of delving into the inner being. A labyrinth. There is dancing everywhere, both in the farthest corners of the set and on the forestage. Group movement in unison or minimalist solos of a rare intensity, such as Grace Ellen Barkey's dance with outstretched arms in which she mourns a husband and son. After *Isabella's Room*, this *Lobster Shop* seems like a second episode in Jan Lauwers' plan to write a chronicle of the search for happiness, which to many people may come as a shock.

Fabienne Arvers and P.S., Les Inrockuptibles, 25/7/2006

Jan Lauwers' crazy *Lobster Shop* leaves a half-spoken and half-sung refrain in your mind, the style in which this slightly psychedelic 'musical tragedy' is immersed.

Jean-Marc Adolphe, Charlie Hebdo, 26/7/2006, 'Avignon is 'underground''

Since then this Flemish theatre-maker has continued to sail the same theatrical course. He combines several disciplines, as was also the case in *The Lobster Shop*, shown in the Cloître des Célestins. ... In an era when cloning is a hot topic, Lauwers makes his 'Lauwers on the beach' into a motorway that leads to the imperfect sun, to the refusal to pursue the ideal at any price. Stunning and scintillating. Long may they live! Timeless, single-minded, lucid, dazzling, penetrating, determined: Jan Lauwers' actors/dancers/singers deserve our best wishes.

Fabien Bonnieux, Le Comtadin, 14/7/2006, 'Lauwers on the Beach'.

... the fantastic energy of the performers who seem to be capable of anything and who move over the stage with exceptional grace.

G.B.R., Nice-Matin, 12/7/2006, 'Two Lauwers in one go'

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