



Washy washy washy
Round and round
And makes nice sound
Never be dirty
Always be clean
That's why we have a washing machine

This a fact: there are more stars in the universe than grains of sand in the Sahara desert. Imagine that everything could speak. What a noise! Cosmic soundscape! Unbind your mind! International absurdities, universal illusions, cosmic disorientation. That's what we need to keep mother earth spinning!

Grace Ellen Barkey

The productions of Grace Ellen Barkey are surreal and permeated by absurd humour: grand failure, the tragedy of a clown, the clumsy barbary of sexuality. Her increasingly intensive cooperation with the artist Lot Lemm resulted in the *Lemm&Barkey* label. Together, they seek out radically poetic images in a grotesque world, driven onward by Rombout Willems' compelling guitar music.

The theatre magazine *Etcetera* described watching Barkey's production *Chunking* (2005) as 'looking at an untranslated, uninterpreted fantasy'. In *This door is too small (for a bear)*, Grace Ellen Barkey has created a visual idiom that adds to her quest for 'how to free your mind', looking for that part of the mind that has not yet been fathomed. Frank Zappa's motto, 'To me, absurdity is the only reality', is the thread that runs through her this production, in which she balances between surrealism and the psychedelic.



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CREDITS

Concept Lemm&Barkey

Choreography, direction Grace Ellen Barkey

Created with & performed by Misha Downey, Julien Faure, Yumiko Funaya, Benoît Gob, Sung-Im Her, Maarten Seghers

Set, costumes Lot Lemm

Music Rombout Willems*

Text Grace Ellen Barkey

Light design Ken Hioco

Sound Bart Aga / Pierrick Drochmans

Production manager Chris Vanneste

Technical manager, light Marjolein Demey

Assistant to the director and dramaturge Elke Janssens

Production Technician (creation) Luc Galle, Frank Van Elsen

Stage assistant to the director Tom Engels

Stage set Brend Canoot

English language coach Helen McNamara

French language coach Anny Czupper

* Music by Rombout Willems, except "Tell me you love me" by Maarten Seghers

Guitars Rombout Willems, "Slow June" featuring Maarten Seghers, Drums "Washy Washy" by Nicolas Field, Final mix by Bart Aga

A Needcompany production.

Coproduction: ImPulsTanz (Vienna), PACT Zollverein (Essen), künstlerhaus mousonturm (Frankfurt).

With the collaboration of Kaaithéâtre (Brussels).

With the support of the Flemish authorities.



REFLECTIONS ON *THIS DOOR IS TOO SMALL (FOR A BEAR)*

By Luk Lambrecht

Theatre is a patiently framed view of a complex world that is increasingly topsy-turvy. Like a picture, a stage performance restricts itself to the boundaries of the stage, which is the focal point of the transferral of thoughts to a ‘created’, mentally free, ‘other’, coloured world.

A world represented in the theatre is not our world at all, but one which, from the reservoirs of the artist’s odd imagination, sets ‘in motion’ performers who can make ‘an’ imaginary world of difference.

The art of Grace Ellen Barkey and her dancers is based on the realisation that utopia and dream are intangible and summon up hardly any image: at the most they are unfamiliar ‘vocabulaires’ that evocatively give the imagination ‘a’ language.

Grace Ellen Barkey pilots her art in the context of an absurdity where she lets meanings run free as if in a hellish ride on a roller-coaster which, *a priori*, yields indeterminable and consciousness-evading ‘helter-skelter’ experiences. Her performances follow a loose thread along which intense experiences produce indefinable and personal, secret interpretations that make the absurdity crackle with what everyday reality silently and insidiously dictates to ‘us’.

Grace Ellen Barkey’s art is for ‘us’ – it grabs the imagination by the hair and throat and drags ‘us’ collectively along in a breathtaking and alienating maelstrom of absurd and grotesque sketches, scenes and circumstances. Her world generates theatrical situations like a twinkling light that spreads over the audience sitting cosily in the dark.

After *Chunking* (2005) and *The Porcelain Project* (2007), *This door is too small (for a bear)* is latest of her fairytales that cling to the outer edge of the imagination.

Grace Ellen Barkey unfolds a visual stage language that is clear, sparkling, expressive, effervescent, filmic, humorous, ironic and above all disarmingly appealing.

The hilarious scene with washing machines, ironing board and a stack of plastic washing-baskets that refer loosely to Pop Art is overwhelmingly evocative. The stage is like a magnified puppet theatre where no-

nonsense movements enable one to see *and* feel the helpless dependence of the essentially solitary individual.

The ‘image’ of the rubber washing machines is a scene where, by way of an ‘elastic’ metaphor, Grace Ellen Barkey alludes to transformation, change and renewal.



© Maarten Vanden Abeele

The washing machines are insubstantial props that become signs/symbols in the surreal setting of a launderette, where a colourful creature looks a right monkey in an unequal struggle with things that are no longer kept under control. This scene generates images that stick in the mind, comparable to the powerful videos by Bruce Nauman where clowns mirror the naked, tragic-comic fate of man for the audience.

The dazzling setting is the result of the combined machinations of Grace Ellen Barkey and Lot Lemm, who has for years been actively contributing to Needcompany’s visual stage design.

The implicit, virtual images in the mind of the choreographer are brought together, knitted and sewn; in short they are made ‘visual’ by the way Lot Lemm provides an ‘image’ for ‘what’ the choreographer attempts to ‘depict’ on stage as a ‘new’ world.



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In a ‘set’ full of fantasy, the dancers are taken in tow to roam around in a wondrous, carefree world where they can uninhibitedly stumble, dance, and move freely without restraint (sexual or otherwise).

The performance evokes nothing but beauty – a filmic *tableau vivant* – where the colourful creatures who had already appeared in *Chunking* entertain themselves wonderfully well and are overcome by amazement in a strange world that hangs from strings (literally) – or rather a silken thread.

Here, beauty is at the service of the enigmatic imagination and dark after-images, in which the creatures, as the alter egos of man, lose themselves in a ‘material’ absurd reality that has run amuck. One big dream deliberately rolls in front of the wide-open eyes, in which beauty collides with the clownesque ‘failure’ where pain, sorrow and joy ensconce themselves behind masks and facades... An artificial paradise becomes visible to some heavy ‘Jimi Hendrix’; as if in a full-blown high-energy revue, innocent ‘boys & girls’ stray deep into the imagination – singing and dancing in imitation of sweet fantasies, with pitch black hats/masks pulled down over their heads.

Reality and memory beckon to the tune of Swan Lake, where elementary and basic dance steps in synchronised formations return dance to its emotionally charged history – balancing perfectly between ballet and dance.

'I am alive' is literally proclaimed the sprightly motto of this performance – prancing and stamping, life is feted in the dance!

It is as if Grace Ellen Barkey's images had been plucked from a fairytale that was thought lost; a dream of a world where content is found amidst the interactions of characters who do not really know how to move, but clumsily continue the march through an 'abstract' life.

The world that creaks open on stage is reminiscent not only of the Pop Art of the sixties and the abject art of Mike Kelly and Paul McCarthy, but also of the mysterious world of miniatures and peep shows by artists like Joseph Cornell and of surrealism where images undermined the routine conventional language.

Displacement, linguistic and mental uprooting, confusion and disorientation are both the heirlooms and the debris of surrealism, which, by means of colourful and distorted images of delusion, formulated a creative answer to the dark side of the moon, and of the way the world underestimated violence, destruction and power.

The clumsy powerlessness presented in this piece can be understood as an ode to the unrestrained freedom of man, so passionately battled for and won in the late sixties, and even to the naïve goodness of man, who unsuspectingly made himself prey to 'other', adventurous possibilities only to ultimately once again lapse into the void of the 'ego'.

The theatre is a black hole/an illusion in which Grace Ellen Barkey wanders around with her rucksack overloaded with possible images, picked up from 'worldly and inner' experiences, from which she 'scatters' contemporary opera-images all over the stage.

The performance tips from subdued calm into insanity, with frenzied dancing and sugar-sweet 'la la la' ensemble singing over an undertone of latent erotic imagination. An imagination that explodes like a volcano in a crazy mixture balancing between pleasure and pain, where the language remains absurd, with no finality or pretensions about truth.

From sensual dance emerge aesthetic images/lively-ephemeral and boundlessly energetic sculptures.



© Phile Deprez

Dance as a collection of ‘previously unseen’ comical images brought to a stuttering point where the droll becomes both ‘cramped’ and ‘crap’.

Asian girls dancing in seductive synchrony; a man with a loaf on his head or one who, in the incongruous theatre space, parades naked in a black hat as if René Magritte were happily prompting from the wings.

It all takes place against the background of the monumental graphic set sawn out of thin wooden panels fixed loosely together, in which motifs stumble over one another, with creatures and monsters that sometimes threaten to devour each other like the lion and the hind. This set evokes a dizzying world; lace-work overwhelmed by the highly individual mythology of Lemm&Barkey.

Like a grand tapestry with (even in its form) distant echoes of the Cobra-arabesque work of Pierre Alechinsky, this set dominates the close of the performance, in which Grace Ellen Barkey lets calm descend on a grotesque world that comes to a tranquil standstill to the cadence of Rombout Willems’ sensuous music.

The components of the monumental but insubstantial set shift slowly back and forth like the courtly movements of a ballerina. The dance takes place in gracious harmony, in sharp contrast to the previous chaotic and agitated desperation and babbling dialogues.

The story of the bear and the mouse falters in a world of trash – ‘rejected’ words evade the neat conventions of notification and meaning. Art survives and the door remains too small for the bear... and for ‘us’, the audience.



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PERFORMANCE CALENDAR 2009-2010

Kaaithéâtre, Brussels	25, 26, 27 February 2010
Le Merlan, scène nationale à Marseille	28, 29 April 2010
künstlerhaus mousonturm, Frankfurt	20, 21, 22 May 2010
Teatro de la Laboral, Gijon	11, 12 June 2010

PERFORMANCE CALENDAR 2010-2011

Festival au Carré, Mons	4 July 2010
CC Strombeek	15 October 2010
MaZ, Bruges	20 October 2010
Stadsschouwburg, Leuven	27 October 2010
De Velinx, Tongeren	29 October 2010
PACT Zollverein, Essen	17, 18 December 2010
Festival Teatro a Mil, Santiago de Chile	11, 12, 13 January 2011
Teatro Central, Sevilla	18, 19 March 2011
Teatro Alhambra, Granada	23 March 2011
Vooruit, Ghent	6, 7 April 2011
de Warande, Turnhout	27 April 2011
Dni Sztuki Współczesnej /	
Days of Modern Art Festival, Bialystok	28 May 2011
Kasino (Burgtheater/ImPulsTanz), Vienna	14, 15, 17, 18, 19 June 2011

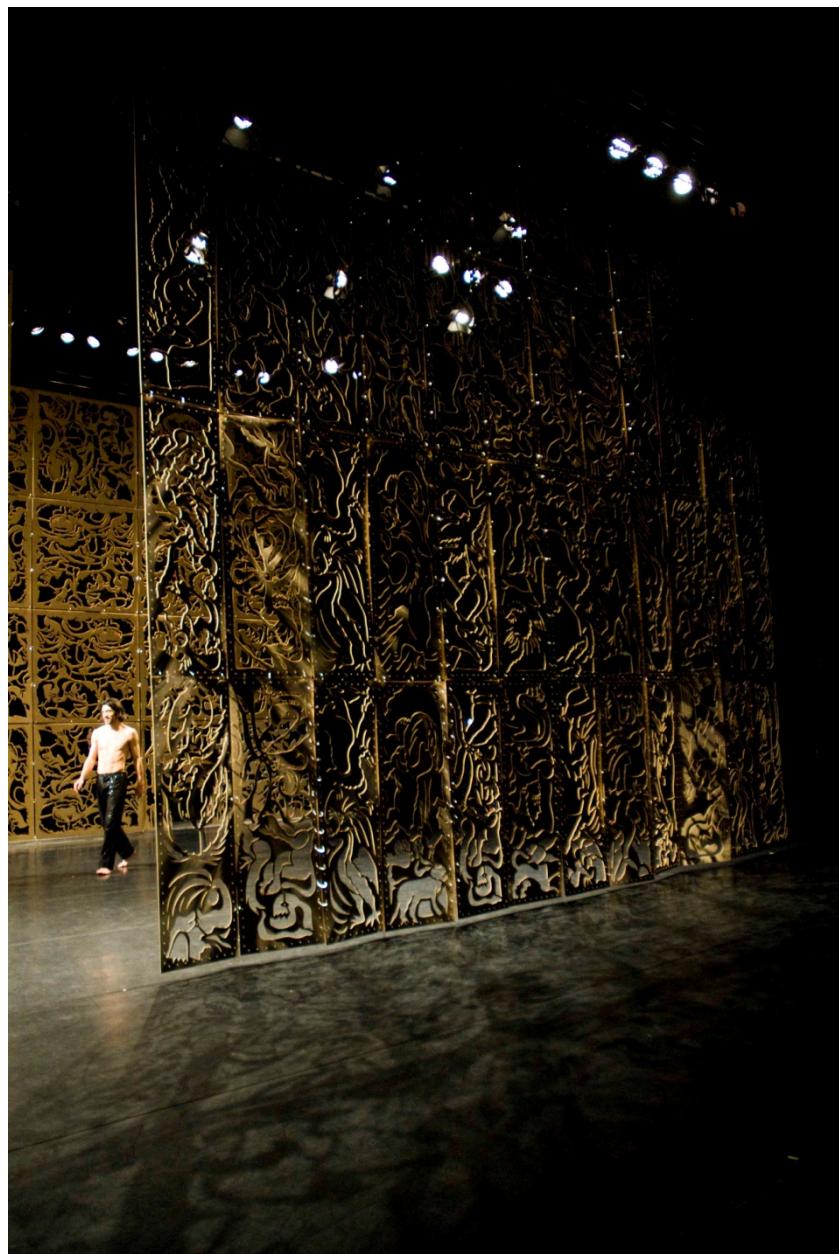
PERFORMANCE CALENDAR 2011-2012

Theater aan het Spui, Den Haag	27 September 2011
EPIC du domaine d'O, Montpellier	14, 15, 16 October 2011
Théâtre Garonne, Toulouse	10, 11, 12 November 2011
Bora, Bora – Dance and visual theater, Aarhus	17, 18 February 2012

PERFORMANCE CALENDAR 2013-2014

Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro, Bogotá	16, 17, 18, 19 April 2014
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OVERVIEW OF PERFORMANCES BY GRACE ELLEN BARKEY

1992 One

first night: 26 November 1992, Theater am Turm Probebühne, Frankfurt

1993 Don Quijote

first night: 28 October 1993, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt

1995 Tres

first night: 18 October 1995, De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam

1997 Stories (histoires/verhalen)

first night: 19 February 1997, Brigittenkapel, Brussels

1998 Rood Red Rouge

first night: 5 October 1998, STUK, Leuven

1999 The Miraculous Mandarin

first night: October 1999, PS 122, New York

2000 Few Things

first night: 7 October 2000, BIT teatergarasjen, Bergen (Norway)

2002 (AND)

first night: 23 October 2002, De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam

2005 Chunking

first night: 12 May 2005, PACT Zollverein, Essen (Germany)

2007 The Porcelain Project

first night: 10 October 2007, Kaaitheater, Brussels

2010 This door is too small (for a bear)

first night: 25 February 2010, Kaaitheater, Brussels

2013 MUSH-ROOM

first night: 22 March 2013, PACT Zollverein, Essen (Germany)

2013 Odd? But True!

first night: 9 November 2013, EXPORT/IMPORT Festival, BRONKS, Brussels

[Click here for an updated list](#)

NEEDCOMPANY

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

LEMM&BARKEY

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

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

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



Lemm&Barkey © Phile Deprez

GRACE ELLEN BARKEY

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

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

LOT LEMM

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

Click below for the performers' biographies:

[Misha Downey](#)

[Julien Faure](#)

[Yumiko Funaya](#)

[Benoît Gob](#)

[Sung-Im Her](#)

[Maarten Seghers](#)



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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 coordinator | Elke Janssens: elke@needcompany.org
General manager | Eva Blaute: eva@needcompany.org
Production manager | Chris Vanneste: chris@needcompany.org
Technical manager | Marjolein Demey: marjolein@needcompany.org