

Brussels, May 2005

Dear Friend,

Here are a few concepts I am trying to grasp as a result of the fuss made by the Vlaams Belang (one of the largest parties in Belgium and on the far right). The confusion of concepts comes naturally to the Vlaams Belang. The fact that people who have never shown the slightest interest in art suddenly have an opinion about it is quite grotesque. But the intellectual elite who react to it are thoroughly confused too.

- **Experiment:** an experiment is a means to an end. Artists are always experimenting. And experiment is an intermediate stage. If it leads to nothing, it is meaningless and doomed to failure. The important thing is that it be a beautiful failure.

- **Beauty and consolation:** art is always about beauty and consolation. What could give you more beauty and consolation than the devastating ideas of Marcel Duchamp? Or Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock: a black man, dressed as an Indian, playing a distorted version of the stars and stripes?

- **Elite:** I consider myself an elite man. I refuse to give in to the tastelessness of the masses. I shall always try to understand this tastelessness and if possible undermine it. As an artist, that is my task.
This is why I consider myself an elite man. In a democracy an elite is a necessity.

- **Subsidies:** in a democracy, subsidies are a means of protecting the minority from the dictatorship of the majority. To safeguard freedom of thought.

- **Social mix:** what is the social mix like in, let's say, the European Parliament? If politicians took the social mix seriously the underground railway in Brussels would be a safe place. But at present it is only the lowest classes who by necessity travel on it. No, in the arts one uses the notion of the social mix purely and simply as a stick with which to beat what one does not understand.

- **Freedom:** the higher up the social ladder one is placed, the greater one's freedom, and the greater one's responsibility. Freedom without these consequences amounts to laziness. And since art is right at the top of the social ladder, the responsibility borne by artists is huge.
(Pistoletto)

- **Separation of Art and State:** it has taken us several hundred years to persuade the Church not to interfere in the State. It has only been partially successful and the consequences are disastrous. Should we ask the same questions about Art and the State?

- **Art:** let's use more and more words like hysteria, mysticism and trance. Any art that burns flags is bad art. Any art that advances political propositions is entertainment. It is as a result of far right bullshit that we do this. Art is always mutilated by extreme political ideas.

I will kill anyone who says that art is superfluous.

Regards,
Jan Lauwers

Needcompany can look forward to an exciting period.

After several weeks of intensive rehearsals, Grace Ellen Barkey's new creation **Chunking** will open at PACT Zollverein in Essen on 12th May. It will then go on to De Brakke Grond in Amsterdam and the Marseille Festival. It is worth noting that Grace Ellen Barkey will be making her first appearance at the Kaaitheter in Brussels, the Theaterhaus Gessnerallee in Zurich (October 2005) and the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris (May 2006). In addition to this, next season she will open the Stad in Vrouwenhanden festival in Mechelen.

We have once again been invited to appear at the Avignon Festival.

This time we shall not be making a new production. The three evenings in the Cloître des Célestins will be filled by a new **Needlapb**: number 10. Yet another **Needlapb** will be presented at the Kaaithheater in Brussels in the autumn. The last **Needlapb** at the TorinoDanza festival (in February) was in any case a rousing success. New extracts from the work of Jan Lauwers, **Chunking** and the sequel to the short film **C-Song** were presented to the audience.

Isabella's room has been selected for the 2005 Theatre Festival.

This year, the Theatre Festival will take place in Brussels and Amsterdam. In the meantime this play is still busy touring. We are already looking forward to performing in Montréal and Quebec, and at the Marseille Festival and ImPulsTanz in Vienna. On the occasion of Tom Stromberg's departure as intendant from the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, Needcompany will be giving one extra performance to thank him for the confidence he has shown in our work together. This play clearly makes a deep impression on audiences. It is also extremely well received by the press. In the controversial magazine Les Inrockuptibles, for example, it was proclaimed best play of the year and Viviane De Muynck best contemporary actress.

*"A reminder to announce the tour of the best show of the last year. **Isabella's room**, directed by Jan Lauwers. Viviane De Muynck – the greatest living actress? – leads Lauwers' dancers and actors in a 'tragic musical comedy'. All the audience has to do, with its eyes shut, or rather wide open, is follow the Needcompany on this crazy journey halfway between a dream and childhood memories."*

(Fabienne Arvers, Philippe Noisette, Les Inrockuptibles, 12-18 January 2005)

No Comment

No Comment was performed for the last time (for the present) in Groningen, where, after a successful tour, it can look back on a remarkable performance in which Jan Lauwers, with four very special women, carried on his exploration into the question of theatre's very existence, on the basis of such themes as eroticism, love, violence and death.