

Brussels May 2006

'I'm afraid I'm an agnostic when it comes to art. I don't believe in it with all the mystical trimmings. As a drug it's probably very useful for many people, very sedative, but as a religion it's not even as good as God.' (Marcel Duchamp). It may be that to make good art the only real attitude is not to believe in it. It is precisely this unbelieving attitude that enables the right questions to be asked, although even Duchamp was known to cheat once in a while.

'The twentieth century is cursed by an art that it is no longer possible to understand. Decadent artists are only concerned with themselves and their chosen few, who laugh at and are scornful of normal outsiders.' (Gilbert and George). I am one of these decadent artists, hopelessly trying to erase his background. In fact I want to be a pop star. I'm too old for the glamour and glitter, but there's something about stiletto heels...

The Flemish minister of popular art and entertainment has, all on his own, seen to it that the world's best system of subsidies for the performing arts has lost its essential freedom, by driving young artists into the arms of over-protective intendants. I understand that Gilbert, George and Marcel must, like snakes, bite the hand that feeds them, but when the 'mini-star' of singing Flanders starts biting his own hand... Brecht would have said: 'Minister, it's hard to be angry with you all the time...' And why is it hard? Because this minister is actually a fine fellow whose intentions towards the arts are good, but who always forgets to do his homework.

In Brussels the Royal Flemish Theatre (KVS) has reopened after many years. A fine example of positive cooperation between an old theatre hand, Franz Marijnen, and the architect Michel Verliefden. I wish Jan Goossens and friends plenty of biting-power to make something special of it. Let the B-architects, the mutilators of the Beursschouwburg, come and clean the stage at the KVS as a punishment.

A little more about the greatest:

- The greatest danger for the living arts is the moment when Anciaux's ideas intermingle with those of the so-called greatest intendant of the last century, Gerard Mortier.
- Do you know why Duchamp was one of the greatest artists of the last century? Because he was an agnostic.
- Do you know why Bert Anciaux can never be one of the greatest Ministers of Culture? Because he is an agnostic.

Regards,

JL

Busy times for Needcompany. One special highlight is the programming of **Grace Ellen Barkey's Chunking** at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris in May. With this piece, **Barkey**, who was nominated for the 2005 Flemish Culture Prizes, stepped onto the stages of major theatres: the play will be on in Villeneuve d'Ascq, Vienna and Paris in the next few months. We also welcome Inge Van Bruystegem, who will be replacing Louise Peterhoff.

May is Needcompany's month at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris. In addition to **Chunking** there is also a new series of performances of **Isabella's room** and to round it all off the company will be presenting **Needlapb 13**.

The programme for the Avignon Festival has been announced. So we can now officially confirm that Needcompany will be presenting two new creations at this 60th edition of the festival: **The Lobster Shop**, a play for eight performers by **Jan Lauwers**, and the monologue **All is Vanity**, an adaptation of Claire Goll's book of the same name, performed by **Viviane De Muynck**.

Isabella's room won the prize for the best foreign production from the Académie québécoise du Théâtre in Québec. This play has in the meantime also been on at the UWA Perth International Arts Festival in Australia, where it was once again exceptionally well received. It is still touring, with dates to come in Paris, Lisbon, Zurich, Vienna, Lyon, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and elsewhere.

A first: **Jan Lauwers** is making his debut as a published author. In May, Actes Sud publishers will be launching a book by Jan Lauwers containing two plays: **Isabella's room** and **The Lobster Shop**. He thereby becomes the first Flemish playwright to be included in this prestigious publisher's catalogue.

Jan Lauwers was recently a guest at the **DARK** exhibition at the **Boijmans van Beuningen** Museum in Rotterdam. Spring 2007 will see the first ever extensive exhibition of his art work, at BOZAR in Brussels. The curator of this solo exhibition is Jérôme Sans (Palais de Tokyo). Lauwers' work will be on show there for two months at the same time as several other Needcompany activities.