Art is tough. Hard to break. According to Gilbert & George, the big mistake made in the last century was that artists forgot their public. They said that in the twentieth century art was not only made by artists but also only for artists. The visual arts have also been taken over by a very wealthy elite that degrades works of art to the same status as conflict diamonds, so that for the more naive spectator all that remains is its significance as an event. As a result, Duchamp’s urinal has once again become no more than a urinal, not only because the snowbird society has forbidden independent thought, but also because too many people keep their head in the sand.

However, there is one art form that avoids much of this manipulation, and that is theatre. This medium, probably considered one of the most old-fashioned, generally withstands the attacks of the snowbird society. It is on too small a scale and at the same time involves too many people, which makes it too expensive, yet it is also too fleeting to have any investment value. The beauty of this medium is that it is a very hazy notion in the arts world. I would rather call it cooperation on a positive conflict.

So why is it that no writers are ever employed full-time by the official theatres, let alone employed to head the theatres? At least we have such a notion in the arts world. I would rather call it collaboration. Not that theatre is the peak of collectivity. Collectivity is a very hazy notion on which too much emphasis has been put at certain moments in history. It is said that we would have to suffer an attack from another galaxy before there could be any global solidarity or common language. That's as far as we have reached in interculturalism.

I see the theatre of the Low Countries as working very positively. Amidst the possibly unintended elitist attitude held by theatre-makers in the late seventies and early eighties, the most interesting of them, Jan Joris Lamers and Jan Decorte, opted for very small theatres and they were very happy with an audience of ten. I remember the lively conversations led by Hugo De Greet in the mid-eighties, when he asked for a significant number of theatre-makers to venture into the larger theatres. (Even an expensive company like The Wooster Group refused to perform for more than two hundred people). There was a passionate dislike of the large official theatres and the official repertory theatre. In Flanders, this sort of theatre was entirely eliminated and a new generation of theatre-makers arose who considered larger theatres definitely worth using. People such as Jan Fabre, Johan Simons, Ivo Van Hove and Guy Cassiers gave the large theatres back their added value. In this way they breathed new life into the moribund theatres, but without losing sight of the ‘garage circuit’ of their past, increasing their audiences tenfold and expanding the opportunities to give work to playwrights. It must be said that this was an evolution that was not repeated in any other country. We are still living in the aftermath of postmodernism and the anything-is-possible mentality that often led to nothing-is-possible-anymore. And that at a time when art liked being under a cloud. But art is tough and the greatest illusion art has ever come up with is that it is not essential. I know for sure that without art life in an affluent society would not be worth living. And a life has to be made, not just lived.

Playwrights are undervalued in the Low Countries. Thomas Bernhard was still a hero, albeit much maligned. Even Brecht, despite there are as many literary programmes on television as cookery programmes. Every self-respecting festival in France devotes a lot of attention to the authors themselves. In Mexico the best-known poets read their poems to thousands of people in the national parks. In Austria first readings of works are regularly given in packed theatres. Alright, it’s true we are not the same as them, but we do have a lot of pretension and international festivals are swamped by Flemish productions, and to a slightly lesser extent Dutch productions too, so there is huge appreciation for plays and productions that don’t look for their raison d’être only around the parish pump.

This is in fact precisely the strength of small countries. That by being small we think faster and sometimes more clearly. At the moment we are the world leaders in the performing arts because we have independent artists who know that one’s place of birth is incidental, not a place to die for, only to live for. If we can be proud of our Dutch language it’s because we don’t have any trouble learning three other languages. Because we know that what can be read between the lines is more important than the lines themselves. This is why they have no problem understanding us all in the world and have a lot of respect for us.

I would like to add one more thing, especially for the new Flemish Minister of Culture: Mrs Schauvliege, here in Flanders we have what is possibly the most efficient subsidy system for the performing arts in the world. In this too we lead the way. To look at another example, the Anglo-Saxon model has no international presence and has made England a more culturally impoverished country. You have gold at your disposal, Mrs Schauvliege, work hard for it, and don’t forget the writers: they are the conscience of our affluent society. You could make a start by reading them. Because, Mrs Schauvliege, prosperity means that a lot of people have a lot of leisure. It is said that at a time when art liked being under a cloud, art was tough and the greatest illusion art has ever come up with is that it is not essential. I know for sure that without the next few months at NEEDCOMPANY

**NEEDCOMPANY**

Needcompany is getting the year off to a vigorous start with two premieres in February.

In This door is too small (for a bear), Grace Ellen Barkey has created her own formal idiom, a part of her quest for ‘how to free the mind’, for that part of the mind that remains unfathomed. Frank Zappa’s motto ‘to me, absurdity is the only reality’ provides the thread that runs through her new production, which balances midway between the surreal and the psychedelic. Her increasingly intensive collaboration with the artist Lot Lemm resulted in the Lemm&Barkey label. For this new production they have sought out radical poetic images in a grotesque world.

The journalist Sarah Vankerschaver’s view of the performance in De Standaard (2 January 2010): ‘I’m beting on the powerful fragility of doubt, emotion that gets stuck in absurd sensuality and, let’s not forget, a world that’s so funny it hurts. Lemm&Barkey in any case promise ‘beautiful failure, the tragedy of a clown, the clumsy cruelty of sexuality’. An exciting prospect!’

This door is too small (for a bear) will open at the Kaaitheater in Brussels on 25 February and will then tour to Essen (D), Marseille, Frankfurt and Gijón.

In addition, Lemm&Barkey’s video of The Porcelain Project / Installation has been selected for the 7th International Film Festival on Earthenware and Glass (Festival International du Film sur ’Argile et le Verre) in Montpellier. The journalist Sarah Vankerschaver’s view of the performance in De Standaard (2 January 2010): ‘I’m beting on the powerful fragility of doubt, emotion that gets stuck in absurd sensuality and, let’s not forget, a world that’s so funny it hurts. Lemm&Barkey in any case promise ‘beautiful failure, the tragedy of a clown, the clumsy cruelty of sexuality’. An exciting prospect!’
This new work tells the story of the contemporary experiences of a couple for whom there is no happy end. And when the soap is soon transformed into a methadone, the psychedelic nirvana in which several realities intermingle. This sad opera is coloured by melancholy landscape songs.

The premiere of Ricky and Ronny and Hundred Stars will take place at the Euregional Opera and Musical Theatre Festival in Maastricht and then tours to Bergen (NO), Brussels and Rotterdam.

We welcome Louise Peterhoff back to Needcompany, where she will join Sophie Bonnema and Hans Petter Dahl in this new opera.

Apart from this, MaisonDahlBonnema have taken their first intercontinental step, receiving a warm welcome for The Ballad of Ricky and Ronny – a pop opera at the Spiral Hall in Tokyo. In June this show will be on at the Opera in Antwerp (BE).

Jan Lauwers’ Sad Face / Happy Face trilogy brought the year to a close at défilé in Antwerp. The audience braved snowstorms but was compensated with seven hours of theatre. This was preceded by the launch of KUULANG, the experimental plays of Jan Lauwers, which also attracted a sizeable audience. In March, MaisonDahlBonnema’s Room, The Lobster Shop and The Deer House were performed in Grenoble, first separately and then as a trilogy. The Sad Face / Happy Face trilogy can also be seen at the MALTA festival in Poznan in June.

In April, The Deer House will be going intercontinental, touching down first in Bogotá. It will then move on to Sevilla, Granada and Marseille in the same month. In May it will have 5 nights at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris and will end up at the Burgtheater in Vienna. Over the next few months MaisonDahlBonnema will take the collected plays of Ricky and Ronny on tour, as a trilogy. The Ballad of Ricky and Ronny will then be seen at the MALTA festival in Poznan in June.

The Lobster Shop and The Deer House, performed in Grenoble, have been separately and then as a trilogy. This Sad Face / Happy Face trilogy can also be seen at the MALTA festival in Poznan in June.

20 March 2010 Maison de la culture de Grenoble MC2, Grenoble Tickets: +33 4 76 00 79 00
27, 28 May 2010 L’Arsenal, Metz Tickets: +33 3 87 74 16 16

AN OHNO COOPERATION EVENING OHNO COOPERATION with special guests Nicolas Field and Jean-Marc Montera
A Needcompany/OHNO COOPERATION production, coproduced by Festival d’Avignon, Théâtre de la Ville (Paris), Théâtre Gartners (Budapest), PACT Zollverein (Essen), Centre Dramatique National de Villeurbanne (Villeurbanne), Autome in Normandie (La Havre), Le Halus (Scène Nationale de Mulhouse), Kaaitheater (Brussels) and défilé (Antwerp).

With the support of the European Union Culture 2000 programme.

17 March 2010 Maison de la culture de Grenoble MC2, Grenoble Tickets: +33 4 76 00 79 00
23, 24 June 2010 Euskal Teatro, Bilbao Tickets: +385 1 48 47 856
27 April 2010 GRM, Marseille Tickets: +33 4 90 46 59 69

THE BALLAD OF RICKY AND RonNY – A POP OPERA MaisonDahlBonnema
With: Hans Petter Dahl and Anna Sophia Bonnema

A Needcompany production, with the assistance of Kaaitheater (Brussels) and ImpulsTanz (Vienna International Dance Festival).

23, 24 June 2010 Euskal Teatro, Bilbao Tickets: +385 1 48 47 856
18, 19, 20 June 2010 Kaaitheater, Antwerp Tickets: +33 4 151 44 41 45
7, 8, 10, 11, 12 May 2010 Théâtre de la Ville, Paris Tickets: +33 4 12 47 74 27
27 April 2010 GRM, Marseille Tickets: +33 4 90 46 59 69

THE PORCELAIN PROJECT / INSTALLATION (VIDEO) Lebrum&Bærke
With: Grace Ellen Barkey, Lot Lemm

30 March, 1, 2, 3, 4 April 2010 XII Festival (Iberoamericano de Teatro de Bogotá) 10, 11 April 2010 Théâtre de la Ville, Paris 16 March 2010 Maison de la culture de Grenoble MC2, Grenoble
19, 20, 21 March 2010 Théâtre de la Ville, Paris
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Tickets: +33 4 12 47 74 27
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Tickets: +33 3 87 74 16 16

THE DEER HOUSE Jan Lauwers
Produced by Needcompany and Sado Country Opera
Coproduced: Schauspielhaus Zürich and PACT Zollverein (Essen).
With assistance from défilé (Antwerp) and Kaaitheater (Brussels).

18 March 2010 Maison de la culture de Grenoble MC2, Grenoble
Tickets: +33 4 76 00 79 00

ISABELLA’S ROOM Jan Lauwers
With: Viviane De Muynck, Hans Petter Dahl, Anneke Bonnema, Benoît Gob, Misha Downey, Julien Faure, Funaya, Sung-Im Her, Maarten Seghers / Ludie Hagberg, Jan Lauwers, Elke Janissen, Lebrum&Bærke

A Needcompany production, coproduced by Festival d’Avignon, Théâtre de la Ville (Paris), Théâtre Gartners (Budapest), PACT Zollverein (Essen), Centre Dramatique National de Villeurbanne (Villeurbanne), Autome in Normandie (La Havre), Le Halus (Scène Nationale de Mulhouse), Kaaitheater (Brussels) and défilé (Antwerp).

3 March 2010 Kaaitheater, Antwerp
Tickets: +33 4 151 44 41 45

THE LOST SHOP Jan Lauwers
A Needcompany production, coproduced by Festival d’Avignon, Théâtre de la Ville (Paris), Théâtre Gartners (Budapest), PACT Zollverein (Essen), Carätsjärvi Dom (Ljubljana), Le Rose des Vents (Scène Nationale de Villeuménil d’Asco), Autome in Normandie (La Havre), Le Halus (Scène Nationale de Mulhouse), Kaaitheater (Brussels) and défilé (Antwerp).

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A Needcompany/OHNO COOPERATION production, coproduced by GRIM (groupe de recherche et d’improvisation musicales) and Montevideo (Marselle).

27 April 2010 GRM, Marseille
Tickets: +33 4 90 46 59 69
27, 28 May 2010 L’Arsenal, Metz
Tickets: +33 3 87 74 16 16

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