

Grace Ellen Barkey & Needcompany

# Fun for Brussels



a Needcompany production

## BACKGROUND

In March 2020, COVID-19 enveloped the whole world in silence and restricted everyone to the confines of their own homes. It soon became clear that the experience of art would also suffer greatly as a result. This experience preferably happens collectively, in a group and as an encounter between artist and audience. That's precisely where a virus finds its breeding ground.

For artists and performers all over the world, a moment of reflection began. How do we bring our art to people? How do we reach our audience if they can no longer come to us? Livestreams, personal events and online disclosure of archives were used as alternatives but served as a small bandaid on a big wound.

When COVID-19 regained ground in the autumn of 2020 and the second wave brought with it a second lockdown, Needcompany's artist Grace Ellen Barkey approached the situation with a reversed philosophy. We should not try to get into people's living rooms, we should reach people where they are still allowed to go: the public space. This philosophy was embodied in *Fun for Brussels*, a local art project with which Needcompany wants to bring some light into the public space in these dark times.

With the projection of a selection of uplifting, humorous videos from the project *18 Videos* (2012) by Lemm&Barkey on a wall of the Gosset building - Needcompany's home base - visible to passers-by and local residents, Barkey reaches out to Molenbeek. The woman walking the dog, the man returning from kindergarten with his children or someone taking a quick breath of fresh air... They can all be amazed by the projection of absurd creatures from an insane world full of porcelain, paper and fabric attributes.

In addition to the projections on the Gosset building, Barkey also seeks connection with local residents in biomarket Be.Here in the Byrrh building behind Thurn & Taxis. The market is a meeting place where all layers of the local community cross each other and is therefore ideal for a moment of wonder and enlightenment with the selection from *18 Videos*.

With this project, Needcompany wants to give the neighbourhood an artistic boost and at the same time show the world that, behind the walls of the massive Gosset building, work is continuing on art in order to bring people back together and revive the power of the collective experience of art.





## 18 VIDEOS (2012)

Life-size figures loom out of nowhere. They appear absurd and sensual, with a deliberate clarity, standing upright against the infinite blackness, and then they disappear again. They emerge from an insane world of majestic rulers in regal underwear and paper headdresses, voluptuous princesses with porcelain busts and radiant crinolines, and colourful, handmade animals that guilelessly carry out human actions. These figures form images and are intended to be not indecisive, but radical in their appearance and disappearance. The figures are human, but are dehumanised because they are concerned with everything but the actual moment. They attempt to become an image, together with the object, and the material, and they make a triumph of their failure.

The images are permeated with questions of material. They are signed by Lemm&Barkey, the name of the joint venture by the artists Lot Lemm and Grace Ellen Barkey. They are together engaged in seeking out radical images.

Grace Ellen Barkey's stage productions are sequences of images that attempt to be autonomous. The videos are an in-between stage in the archiving of these autonomous images. An in-between stage because Barkey never wants to achieve her aim. She is not interested in solutions, but in the problem itself. When we look carefully at the images in the installation exhibited, we see that there is no logical order. The images are intentionally juxtaposed and their interaction leads to yet more sensations.

The use of a craft, both porcelain and knitting and crochet, is an important element. The materials that pass through the hands of Barkey's 'partner in crime', Lot Lemm, are treated in an almost relentlessly hysterical manner and made into something monumental. What starts with material bursts its seams to form a bigger story. Porcelain objects that become body parts and even link bodies together. But also: what could be more pointless than a teacup – meticulously hand-turned – from which no tea can be drunk? A bra in porcelain is unbearable. And is the painstakingly crocheted bear a children's story or a transgressive dream? To take an example, Lemm&Barkey will intentionally give you no answer to this last question. If they had known the answer they would not have created the object.

But then Barkey sets the bodies of her performers counter to these ideas. These bodies may be almost perfect, trained works of perfection, utterly fragile and obstinate, or a primal force. Just as, in Barkey's productions, it is never all about the choreography as such, but about its disappearance, in the videos it is never a matter of the representation, but of the presentation itself.

This installation is the result of a non-preconceived aim. An anti-conceptual delusion.

## GRACE ELLEN BARKEY

The artist, choreographer and performer Grace Ellen Barkey was born in Surabaya (Indonesia). She lives and works in Brussels and is a co-founder of Needcompany (1986), a house of artists. Since 1992 she has been steadily and successfully building an international career with her own stage creations, whose nature lies where theatre, dance, live art and visual art meet. The musical dramaturgy is central to her work, and includes works by Gustav Mahler as well as Sonic Youth. In 2013 the iconic avant-garde American performance art collective The Residents wrote music for her creation *MUSH-ROOM*. In *FOREVER* (2016), Grace Ellen Barkey raises the same questions as Mahler: "No one can sustain constant praise of life. Death or, rather, the finiteness of human life deserves a song or a dance too."

*PIE - Probabilities of Independent Events* (2019), her latest production, is build on pop and folk songs by Zappa, Queen and other pop icons. It questions the (im)probability of things. Everything is possible. It cannot fail.

Grace Ellen Barkey is steadily building up a visual oeuvre of her own. Her most recent installations form a study of the transposition from a space to a narrowness in which the viewer is invited to become part of a sensory work. She has been collecting, photographing and filming flowers, leaves and other flora for many years in her own town garden in Brussels and her immediate surroundings. "A claustrophobic look at the notion that people are mortal while nature is eternal. Beauty is only appealing when it is transient. Only then does it acquire a history."

Her visual work has recently been exhibited at Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (Rotterdam), Poortersloge (Bruges), CC Strombeek, UZ Jette and Coup de Ville (Sint-Niklaas). Grace Ellen Barkey was one half of the artistic duo Lemm&Barkey, together with Lot Lemm. Their work has been exhibited at several museums including BOZAR (Brussels), Benaki Museum (Athens), Musée des Arts décoratifs (Paris), CC Strombeek, Dr. Guislain museum (Gent), Triënnale Hasselt / Superbodies i.a

# NEEDCOMPANY

Gabrielle Petitstraat 4/4, 1080 Sint-Jans-Molenbeek

[www.needcompany.org](http://www.needcompany.org)

Artistic Director | Jan Lauwers

General Manager | Johan Penson: [johan@needcompany.org](mailto:johan@needcompany.org)

Business coordination | Toon Geysen: [toon@needcompany.org](mailto:toon@needcompany.org)

Artistic Coordination | Elke Janssens: [elke@needcompany.org](mailto:elke@needcompany.org)

Artistic & programme development | Kasia Tórz: [kasia@needcompany.org](mailto:kasia@needcompany.org)

Production | Marjolein Demey: [marjolein@needcompany.org](mailto:marjolein@needcompany.org)

Finance & Production | Melissa Thomas: [melissa@needcompany.org](mailto:melissa@needcompany.org)

Communication | Pieter D'Hooghe: [pieter@needcompany.org](mailto:pieter@needcompany.org)

Technical Director | Ken Hioco: [ken@needcompany.org](mailto:ken@needcompany.org)

Assistant Technical director | Tijs Michiels: [tijs@needcompany.org](mailto:tijs@needcompany.org)

International bookings

Key Performance / Koen Vanhove

[koen@keyperformance.se](mailto:koen@keyperformance.se)