

KAAI
THEATER



**MEG STUART &
JOMPET KUSWIDANANTO /
DAMAGED GOODS**
Celestial Sorrow

**18 > 24/01/2018 • 20:30 • Kaaistudio's
première • dance/performance • 1h50**

EXTRA Join us for a post-performance talk on 19/01 with Meg Stuart and Jompet Kuswidananto, moderated by Jeroen Verstele.

nl/ Op uitnodiging van het EUROPALIA INDONESIA festival, wagen Meg Stuart en beeldend kunstenaar Jompet Kuswidananto zich samen met drie performers en twee muzikanten aan een artistieke ontdekkingstocht doorheen collectieve herinneringen en fictieve trauma's. Imaginaire en onzichtbare ruimtes, en de stemmen die ze tot leven wekken, vormen slechts enkele van de vertrekpunten voor een avontuurlijke ontmoeting op onbekend terrein.

fr/ À l'invitation du festival EUROPALIA INDONESIA, Meg Stuart et l'artiste indonésien Jompet Kuswidananto s'essaient, accompagné par trois performers et deux musiciens, à une exploration artistique à travers des mémoires collectives et des traumatismes fictifs. Des espaces imaginaires et invisibles – et les voix qui les font résonner – ne constituent que quelques-uns des points de départ de cette analyse aventureuse en terrain inconnu.

en/ Upon the invitation of the EUROPALIA INDONESIA festival, Meg Stuart and visual artist Jompet Kuswidananto, together with three performers and two musicians, embark on an exploratory journey into possession and implanted fictional traumas. Imaginary and invisible spaces, and the voices that make them resonate, are just some of the starting points for an adventurous leap into unknown territories.

credits

choreography Meg Stuart | **installation** Jompet Kuswidananto | **created with and performed by** Jule Flierl, Gaëtan Rusquet, Claire Vivianne Sobottke | **live music** Mieko Suzuki, Ikkal Simamora Lubys | **light design** Jan Maertens | **costume design** Jean-Paul Lespagnard | **dramaturgy** Jeroen Versteete | **technical direction** Jitske Vandenbussche | **production management** Nara Virgens, Delphine Vincent | **assistant costume design** Coline Firket, Isabelle Lhoas | **sound** Jérémy Michel | **realization installation** Jitske Vandenbussche, Guy Peeters (Kaaithheater), Peter Fol (Kaaithheater), Frank Vandezande (Kaaithheater) | **technical realization** Pierre Willems, Wannes De Reydt, Johannes Ringoot, Bekim Vanbosche, technical crew Kaaithheater | **thanks to** Franziska Dieterich, Ingrid Müller-Farny, Muhammad Nur Qomaruddin, Isabelle Pauwelyn, Arco Renz, Margaux Schwarz, Ictus (Brussels) | **production** Damaged Goods (Brussels) | **coproduction** EUROPALIA INDONESIA, Goethe-Institut Indonesien, HAU Hebbel am Ufer (Berlin), Kaaithheater (Brussels), Künstlerhaus Mousonturm (Frankfurt am Main), PACT Zollverein (Essen), Tanzquartier Wien (Vienna), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis)

www.damagedgoods.be



TO BE AS VISIBLE AS POSSIBLE

dramaturge Jeroen Versteede in conversation with Meg Stuart and Jompet Kuswidananto, December '17 (Berlin) & January '18 (Brussels)

Jeroen Versteede: What brought you together for this production?

Meg Stuart: I was invited to make a project for Europalia Indonesia and considered revisiting the themes of memories and ghosts. Arco Renz, the curator of Europalia, subsequently introduced me to Jompet. We spent a long day together in Berlin, saw two performances, ate dinner, we walked around. That was our beginning.

Jompet Kuswidananto: Later, we met again in my hometown of Yogyakarta which is also known as Jogja, on the island of Java. The musicians Mieko Suzuki and Ikbal Simamora Lubys also came, as did the lighting designer Jan Maertens. We visited historical places together and shared stories about personal and political traumas.

MS: Jompet took us on walking tours of the city and we visited the campus of his old college. Here, he re-enacted the demonstrations that took place during the student revolution of '98, when the dictator Suharto was overthrown, and described his memories of the events. Everything in Indonesia – the atmosphere, the mood, the way people live and how they work and create art – is still influenced by the rapidly shifting politics, as well as the various religions and traditions. We also saw exhibitions, concerts and an incredible street performance...

JK: *Jatilan*, a traditional magical dance from Java in which the performers enter a trance.

MS: The *jatilan* blew me away. In one sense, it felt like a sacred ritual, but on the other hand, it also seemed very chaotic. Some of the opening movements were quite minimal but then, and totally unexpectedly, the dancers entered into a trance. Sometimes they imploded in a formal manner, at other times in a very expressive, dramatic way. They were visited by animals and deities and their ritual costumes were altered by their everyday clothes. It was impossible to tell what was real and what was fake. I couldn't identify who was a shaman and who was helping, who was being healed, who was sick and who was cured, or if they even wanted to get to their feet again... Nothing was explained. I don't think the performers themselves knew exactly what was going to happen. It seemed endless. And then, after two hours or so, they would loop back to the beginning and start all over again, guided by the music, which went on and on and on. The many layers of the performance, its radical physicality, and the disorientation I felt while watching it, were all extremely compelling.

JK: We also went to a public square where traders rent out hundreds of bicycles and pedal cars decorated with blinking lights. It's a huge attraction. The square becomes a sort of dreamland, a wonderland.

MS: It was a place for escape and fantasy. One of the cars had bright flashing neon lights that read: 'I LOVE JOGJA' 'I LOVE JOGJA'. Which made you think: is this a statement of fact, or is it their way of cheering up the nocturnal visitors? People seemed really happy there, surrounded by bright, flashing, colourful lights. It was impressive.

JK: There used to be 'sound competitions' in the east of Java: trucks laden with sound blasters would cruise the streets, music blaring. It was banned because of safety issues, so people started to make miniature versions of the trucks, on which they would install loudspeakers. Their main intention, with regard to playing the music, is to showcase the range of their sound system, from the deepest basses to the highest frequencies.

How can you explain this fascination for the chaotic use of noise and bright lights?

JK: During the dictatorship, not everybody was allowed to speak. People were forced to express themselves through alternative channels, just to be noticed. The tendency you describe is therefore part of a tradition. When Suharto's regime was toppled in 1998, the people were euphoric: they could finally use their voices to express themselves. Nowadays, people are still taking to the streets

and speaking out in public. Every day, they bring crates to stand on, or drive trucks full of speakers in front of the president's palace. They want to perform. It's what I would call a performative democracy. This has long been an important topic in my work. How do people use their voices? How do Indonesians make themselves heard? How is it possible to be louder than everyone else? How can I be as visible as possible? Metaphorically speaking, the abundance of light reflects the hope of enlightenment, the desire to emerge from the shadows. At the same time, people are obsessed with darkness. They are afraid of disappearing, of being invisible. I'm very interested in this kind of tension.

MS: I think that this process of articulation, of speaking up, of excavating what's been hidden and bringing it into the light, is a movement of transformation. You burn it up. For many years, I've been thinking about ghosts as unfinished business, and the way in which unresolved conflicts affect both our presence and our movements. Our bodies are constantly shuttling between objects, sounds, lights, voices and unprocessed events from the past. This might awaken a dormant presence, whether we like it or not. I've always wanted to make a choreography about light and sound moving through the space, triggered by voices, as though part of a secret network. The voice is not something that you can hold, it's a part of you and yet it's not. During rehearsals, we experimented with fragments of songs, with the emotional depth of sound, with breathing, with proto-linguistic utterances, with whispering and distortion, with rhythm. Not only to create a sound concert, but to research what it might release in the body. How does it affect your emotions, and what memories does it evoke?

Do any lingering traces of the dictatorship still move you as an artist, Jompet?

JK: My memories of the dictatorship are very strong. As children, for example, we'd all be taken to see an anti-communist film. Every year, the teachers would take us to the cinema to see it, like shepherds herding their flock. The film shows how the communists of the 30 September Movement kidnapped and murdered six Indonesian generals during a coup in 1965. It was an early 1980s propaganda film that was trying to legitimize the events of 1965-66, when the dictator's troops executed millions of acclaimed communist sympathizers. The images of the ruthless, merciless communists that we saw in the film are etched into our memories. Even today, the majority of Indonesians believe that the mass killings of the so-called communists and leftists was a good and just thing. The propaganda still represents the truth for many contemporary Indonesians.

You once wrote that you hear the movie's soundtrack in your head when you wake up too early.

JK: Yes! Because the kidnappings and killings happened at dawn, I hear the eerie soundtrack of that scene whenever I lie awake in bed at five or six o'clock in the morning. Many of my friends, people of the same generation, have similar experiences. The national trauma is implanted in our brains.

Suharto's regime is not only associated with trauma but also with a ban, at one point, on sad songs. This inspired our research into melancholic music and sorrow in general.

JK: During the economically prosperous years of the dictatorship, around 1986-87, the regime wanted to promote development. As a result, they banned sad songs. It was only permissible to play happy music. Broadcasting a sad song was an act of subversion. I was very young at the time and didn't want to hear sad songs either. It was only after the dictatorship that I understood the absurdity of the diktat.

Why did they consider sad songs to be a threat to prosperity?

MS: It's funny, but sad songs seem so innocent and comforting, how could they possibly be dangerous? But in reality, they are the warning sign of dissatisfaction. Sad songs fuel longing, they suggest nostalgia, or a desire for an unknown future. You can't build a city on sadness.

Perhaps sadness can be a motivating factor? It might inspire you to change something. Can't it be also constructive?

MS: If you're sad because of a situation that you know you cannot change, or if you long for something you can't have, at the precise moment when you dive into that feeling, sadness isn't constructive. There's no construction in disappointment. It doesn't make things better. Of course, for the human soul, sadness creates a connection, it's a step towards compassion and understanding and sympathy. Sadness is unproductive but essential. And it's always around the corner.

Do you have any rituals?

MS: I can embrace rituals, but I don't keep them for very long. I sometimes write three pages in the morning, just after waking. Or I meditate. When I go into a new theatre, or if I feel as though I want to reinvigorate my home, I smudge the space with ashes of sage. Saging is when you burn a sort of incense to clear and cleanse the space. It gets rid of old energies. And then you need to open the windows. *(laughs)*

JK: I do something similar. Like most Javanese people, when I enter a new space, I mentally greet the spirits who live there. I can't translate the exact greeting that crosses my mind then, it's something like "excuse me, pardon".

Did your parents teach you that habit?

JK: No, it's something that was passed on by my childhood friends. If we were playing outside and needed to pee against a tree, we'd always excuse ourselves beforehand. We thought there might be a spirit hiding in the branches. Somehow, it has become an unconscious tradition that whenever I deal with a new space, I feel as though I'm interfering with new and invisible entities. So you have to politely knock on their door. This tradition is rooted in animism, like all religious beliefs in Indonesia. If you were to remove all the religions, the animist traditions would still remain.

MS: When we were in Indonesia, we performed a beautiful ritual together. According to the Javanese calendar, we were there on New Year's Eve. But it's not a moment for parties or celebrations. Instead, people go for a walk outside and reflect, silently. We met at around midnight and, without speaking, walked through the city together, through the streets that were, as usual, full of traffic. We encountered other people doing the same thing.

JK: Literally translated, the name of this ritual is 'muted walk'.

To return to the *jatilan* performance you witnessed in Yogyakarta: we deal with trance and possession during rehearsals. Possession, both voluntary and involuntary, is a universal phenomenon. You find it, in different forms, in every part of the world and in all religions. What does possession mean for you?

JK: I've never been possessed myself, and I'm not totally convinced that it actually happens. But I can connect to the idea of it. Becoming somebody or something else can be a very good exercise in terms of empathy.

MS: I see possession as a fiction, as well. It's a state that we, as dancers, strive towards when we improvise. Even if we don't know exactly what that means, it's something we can imagine. And for me, what we can imagine, we can dance. Possession compels you to let go of everything that holds you in its grip: your history, your expectations, your sadness. Perhaps possession can only take place if you're ready to share your mental space, your unconscious mind, with unknown forces.

An interview with live musicians Mieko Suzuki and Iqbal Simamora Lubys can be found online on www.damagedgoods.be

BIOGRAPHIES

Meg Stuart (US) – choreography

Meg Stuart is an American choreographer and dancer, born in New Orleans, living and working in Berlin and Brussels. Stuart decided to move to New York in 1983 and studied dance at New York University. She continued her training at Movement Research where she explored numerous release techniques and was actively involved in the downtown New York dance scene.

Invited to perform at Klapstuk festival in Leuven in 1991, she created her first evening-length piece, *Disfigure Study*, which launched her artistic career in Europe. In this choreography, Stuart approaches the body as a vulnerable physical entity that can be deconstructed, distorted or displaced but still resonates and has meaning. Interested in devising her own structure through which to develop artistic projects, Stuart founded Damaged Goods in Brussels in 1994. Together they have worked on over thirty productions, ranging from solos such as *XXX for Arlene and Colleagues* (1995), *Soft Wear* (2000) and the evening-length solo *Hunter* (2014) to large-scale choreographies such as *Visitors Only* (2003), *Built to Last* (2012) and *UNTIL OUR HEARTS STOP* (2015). Other projects include video works, installations and site-specific creations such as *Projecting [Space]* at Ruhrtriennale 2017.

Improvisation is an important part of Meg Stuart's practice. She has initiated several improvisation projects such as *Crash Landing* and *Auf den Tisch!*. In 2016 Stuart hosted *City Lights – a continuous gathering* in the Berlin HAU Hebbel am Ufer, in collaboration with an all female group of local artists.

Stuart strives to develop a new language for every piece in collaboration with artists from different creative disciplines and navigates the tension between dance and theatre. Previous collaborations include works developed with visual artists Gary Hill and Ann Hamilton, amongst others, and composers such as Hahn Rowe and Brendan Dougherty. The use of theatrical devices, in addition to the dialogue between movement and narrative, are recurrent themes in her choreographies. Stuart's choreographic work revolves around the idea of an uncertain body, one that is vulnerable and self-reflexive. Through improvisation, she explores physical and emotional states or the memories of them. Her artistic work is analogous to a constantly shifting identity and perpetually redefines itself while searching for new presentation contexts and territories for dance.

Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods has an ongoing collaboration with Kaaiteater (Brussels) and HAU Hebbel am Ufer (Berlin).

Jompet Kuswidananto (ID) – installation

Jompet Kuswidananto is a versatile Indonesian artist whose work ranges from installations and sound pieces to performances and theatre productions. He studied Communications at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. Originally trained as a musician, Kuswidananto turned to the visual arts and went on to work within the local Yogyakarta art community. Since 1998, he has been actively collaborating with Teater Garasi, a multidisciplinary collective of artists making works that reflect Indonesian life after the fall of the Suharto regime.

Kuswidananto's practice focuses on the issues of politics, colonialism, power and mass mobilization in post-reformation Indonesia, while also exploring the country's history and the complexities of contemporary life in a globalized world. In 2014, his installation work won the Prudential Eye Award, a major prize for emerging Asian artists.

Kuswidananto has participated in significant national and international exhibitions, including the Yokohama Triennale (2008), the 10th Lyon Biennale (2009) and *Phantoms of Asia* at the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (2012). Solo shows include *Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria* at the Osage Gallery, Singapore and Hong Kong (2009 and 2010), *Grand Parade* at the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam (2014) and *On Paradise* at MAC's Grand-Hornu, Belgium (2017).

Jule Flierl (DE) – creation & performance

Jule Flierl is a Berlin-based dancer, choreographer and vocal-acrobat. She studied contemporary dance at the Salzburg Experimental Academy of Dance (SEAD) and, as part of the EXERCE programme, obtained a master's degree in choreography from the National Choreographic Centre in Montpellier. Her work aims to make space tangible through breath, voice and dance. Flierl has collaborated with, amongst others, Anna Nowicka, Christine Borch, Sergiu Matis, Gintersdorfer/Klassen, Martin Nachbar and Tino Sehgal. In her most recent project, the lecture/performance entitled *I INTEND TO SING*, she shares her insights into the use of voice in dance – as a form of political empowerment, a tool for transhistorical interaction, and as a way of expanding dance into the realms of the invisible.

Gaëtan Rusquet (BE) - creation & performance

Gaëtan Rusquet is a Brussels-based artist and performer working in the field of performance, dance, theatre and the visual arts. After studying applied arts at the Higher National School of Applied Arts and Crafts (ENSAAMA) in Paris, Rusquet obtained a master's degree in stage design and performance from La Cambre, Brussels. His artistic proposals typically explore the relationship between the body and the space, and often focus on a specific medium and the necessity of a related movement. Through his creations, Rusquet aims to share a visual and performative experience with his audience. His work has been presented at various venues and festivals across Europe.

Claire Vivianne Sobottke (DE/FR) - creation & performance

Claire Vivianne Sobottke is a Berlin-based dancer, performer and choreographer. She defines her work as a site of resistance, and as a place for changing and challenging the norms of thinking and seeing. She has created several solo performances in which voice, sound and language drive the choreography and content. Collaborations include the works developed with Tino Sehgal, Tian Rotteveel, Christoph Winkler, Sheena McGrandles and Theo Solink. In 2017, she initiated *Amazonas*, an interdisciplinary platform that aims to support and connect young female artists in Berlin. Sobottke has previously collaborated with Meg Stuart on *UNTIL OUR HEARTS STOP* (2015) and the improvisation project *City Lights – a continuous gathering* (2016).

Mieko Suzuki (DE/JP) – live music

Mieko Suzuki is a DJ, sound artist and music curator based in Berlin. In her experimental DJ sets she creates unique sonic textures that mix drones and compressed beats with field recordings and spoken word. Suzuki has also been involved in many cross-disciplinary collaborations and has worked, amongst others, with Meg Stuart (*City Lights – a continuous gathering*, 2016), fashion designer Tatsuro Horikawa (JULIUS) and artist Barbara Raes. Since 2009, Suzuki has been running her own bi-monthly, multidisciplinary event KOOKOO, together with Arno Raffener (Spex), at the OHM gallery in Berlin.

Ikbal Simamora Lubys (ID) – live music

Ikbal Simamora Lubys is a musician, experimental guitarist, improviser and sound artist who is based in the Special Region of Yogyakarta in Indonesia. In addition to his academic study of classical music and classical guitar, he is also active in a number of avant-garde art and music communities. His work frequently explores how the guitar can be played and developed, both visually and in terms of sound. Acclaimed for his live performances, Lubys collaborates with a wide range of artists in both Asia and Europe. He is also known for his music for dance and film.

Jan Maertens (BE) – light design

Jan Maertens works predominantly as a lighting designer in the international world of contemporary dance and performance. He has lit productions for, amongst others, Meg Stuart (*VIOLET, Do Animals Cry, BLESSED, Maybe Forever, Hunter*), Philipp Gehmacher, Padmini Chettur, Arco Renz, Claire Croizé and Trajal Harrell. In addition to working on formally staged performances, Maertens often participates in site-specific projects. Notable examples of the latter include An Kaler's series *On Orientations*, various installations by Lawrence Malstaf, and a number of works by Meg Stuart, including *All Together Now, Auf den Tisch!* and *the fault lines*, a project by Meg Stuart, Philipp Gehmacher and Vladimir Miller.

Jean-Paul Lespagnard (BE) – costume design

Jean-Paul Lespagnard is a Belgian fashion designer and visual artist. He combines his unique eye for fashion with a fascination for high and low art, and for popular culture in all its shapes and forms. While developing art installations and happenings, he also works as a stylist on fashion and advertising shoots. He creates his own collections and has also designed costumes for, amongst others, Liesbeth Gruwez/Voetvolk, Troubleyn/Jan Fabre, Damien Jalet and Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods (*Atelier I, Atelier II, Auf den Tisch!, All Together Now, BLESSED*). Lespagnard's solo exhibition *REFLECTION* can currently be seen at the Museum of Fashion and Lace in Brussels (until 15 April 2018).

Jeroen Versteede (BE) - dramaturgy

Jeroen Versteede is a dramaturge who currently lives and works in Berlin. After studying Germanic languages and transmedia in Brussels, Versteede worked as a dramaturge for the NTGent from 2005 until 2010 under the directorship of Johan Simons. In 2010, he followed Simons to the Munich Kammerspiele, where he also worked with directors and choreographers such as Susanne Kennedy, Meg Stuart, Luk Perceval, Tian Gebing and Martin Kušej. A dramaturge for the Ruhrtriennale from 2015 until 2017, he joined the Berliner Festspiele in 2017. Previous collaborations with Meg Stuart include *Built to Last* (2012) and *UNTIL OUR HEARTS STOP* (2015).