

KAAI THEATER

MEG STUART/DAMAGED GOODS & EIRA BLESSED

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DANCE | 80 MIN.

EXTRA On the occasion of the 100th performance of *BLESSED*, four photos by Chris Van der Burght and Laura Van Severen have been printed as a limited poster series. Available for free in the foyer!



MEG STUART/DAMAGED GOODS & EIRA BLESSED

NL Een man beweegt voorzichtig tussen kartonnen decorstukken. Alles lijkt vredig in dit gestileerde paradijs, tot een plotse regenbui escaleert tot een vernietigende stortvloed. Een decennium na de première van *BLESSED* blijft Francisco Camacho zich vastklampen aan een wereld die al lang in puin ligt. Melancholie en de strijd om te overleven vormen de tegenpool van de troostende esthetiek die samengaat met destructie en verval. Onze wereld van artificiële hebbedingen, rolmodellen en schone schijn blijkt in een vingerknip omvergeworpen door onvoorspelbare, primitieve krachten. Op een soundscape van Hahn Rowe schetst *BLESSED* de geleidelijke teloorgang van een illusie, tot op het bot.

- Meg Stuart en de Portugese danser en choreograaf Francisco Camacho werkten voor het eerst samen voor *Disfigure Study*, Stuarts debuutvoorstelling. *BLESSED* werd hun tweede samenwerking en speelde in 2007 haar première in Gent. Nadat de voorstelling vorig jaar tien kaarsjes mocht uitblazen, viert de solo in het Kaaitheater nu ook haar 100ste voorstelling. *BLESSED* is daarmee de langst tourende productie van Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods. Geen stoffige herneming, des te meer een uitdieping door Camacho, waarvan de actualiteit doorheen de jaren steeds overeind wist te blijven.

FR Un homme se meut avec prudence entre des pièces de décor en carton. Tout semble paisible dans ce paradis stylisé jusqu'à la survenue d'une averse qui se transforme en déluge dévastateur. Une décennie après *BLESSED*, Francisco Camacho continue à s'accrocher à un monde depuis longtemps en ruine. La mélancolie et la lutte pour la survie constituent l'antithèse de l'esthétique réconfortante qui va de pair avec la destruction et le déclin. Notre monde de gadgets artificiels, de modèles et de belle apparence s'avère pouvoir être renversé d'un claquement de doigts par des forces primitives imprévisibles. Sur fond de paysage sonore de Hahn Rowe, *BLESSED* brosse la déchéance d'une illusion, jusqu'à la moelle.

- Meg Stuart et le danseur et chorégraphe portugais Francisco Camacho ont collaboré pour la première fois lors de la création de *Disfigure Study* (1991), le premier spectacle de Meg Stuart. *BLESSED* était leur deuxième collaboration et s'est déroulé à Gand en 2007. Aujourd'hui, dix ans plus tard et avec la 100^{ième} représentations, le spectacle est toujours au répertoire de Damaged Goods.

MEG STUART/DAMAGED GOODS & EIRA BLESSED

EN A man moves carefully between cardboard set pieces. Everything appears peaceful in this stylized paradise, until a sudden rain shower escalates into a destructive deluge. A decade after the première of *BLESSED*, Francisco Camacho continues to cling to a world that has long been left in ruins. Melancholy and the struggle to survive form the antipole of the consoling aesthetic that is aligned with destruction and decay. In the blink of an eye, our world of artificial gadgets, role models, and keeping up appearances is transformed by unpredictable, primitive forces. Set to a soundscape by Hahn Rowe, *BLESSED* sketches the gradual loss of an illusion, right down to the core.

- Meg Stuart and Francisco Camacho first worked together on Stuart's debut evening-length work *Disfigure Study*. *BLESSED* became their second collaboration, and premiered in Ghent in 2007. After blowing out ten birthday candles last year, the solo performance now also celebrates its 100th performance, here at Kaaitheater. This makes *BLESSED* the longest touring production by Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods: Not a dusty revival but Camacho's deeper exploration of a work that has lost none of its contemporary relevance over the years.

CREDITS

CHOREOGRAPHY Meg Stuart | CREATED WITH AND PERFORMED BY Francisco Camacho, Kotomi Nishiwaki & Abraham Hurtado | MUSIC Hahn Rowe | DRAMATURGY Bart Van den Eynde | INSTALLATION Doris Dziersk | COSTUMES Jean-Paul Lespagnard | LIGHT CONCEPT Jan Maertens | ASSISTANT CHOREOGRAPHY Abraham Hurtado | ASSISTANT SET DESIGN Ania Pas | PRODUCTION MANAGER Tanja Thomsen | TECHNICAL DIRECTION Oliver Houttekiet | STAGE TECHNICIAN Pierre Willems | RAIN & STAGE Kay Hupka | STAGE Emmanuel Desmyter | TOUR MANAGER Delphine Vincent | MANY THANKS TO Sonya Cipriano, Christine Clauser, Sarah Corijnen, Ierê Ferreira, Françoise Hottois, Anne Kleiner, André Lepecki, Britta Mayer, Ania Pas, Christine Peterges, Eddy Present | PRODUCTION Damaged Goods & EIRA | CO-PRODUCTION Vooruit (Ghent), Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz (Berlin), PACT Zollverein (Essen), Centro Cultural de Belém (Lisbon), Théâtre de la Bastille (Paris), Festival d'Automne (Paris) | Meg Stuart & Damaged Goods ARE SUPPORTED BY the Flemish authorities and the Flemish Community Commission | EIRA IS SUPPORTED BY the Directorate-General for the Arts – Portuguese State Department for Culture / Presidency of the Council of Ministers

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IT IS STILL RAINING ON FRANCISCO CAMACHO

DANCE CRITIC INÊS NADAIS SPOKE TO MEG STUART, BEFORE LATS YEAR'S REPRISAL OF *BLESSED* IN PORTUGAL. (PÚBLICO, 16/06/2017) TRANSLATED BY HELEN SIMPSON

Ten years after the premiere of *BLESSED* – a solo created especially for the Portuguese dancer Francisco Camacho – Meg Stuart is bringing the show back to Porto and Lisbon. The piece has aged well, she says; the world not so much. When Meg Stuart first saw the rain fall on the pocket-sized model that scenographer Doris Dzierzk showed her, which immediately became the most auspicious beginnings of a new piece, it did not carry the cataclysmic violence of the environmental apocalypse that it is now impossible to miss in *BLESSED*. But even that rain falling in droplets from a small sprinkler was enough to destroy an entire world in minutes, Doris assured her. Doris had the idea of working with cardboard and water after spending time in Latin America, with its eternally precarious, eternally temporary cities, which we all believe to be unreal until we actually go there.

Meg Stuart believed in her. At first, the apocalyptic devastation that Hurricane Katrina caused in New Orleans, where the American choreographer and dancer was born and raised, and which she thought should have been the most solid and indestructible city of call, had also seemed like a hallucination. It was 2006 (*BLESSED* had its debut in Ghent in March the following year) and it was impossible not to associate the proposed installation on the table in front of her with the shock of that disaster, seen in real life, during those unimaginable days in late August 2005.

‘At that time, I kept thinking about how absurd it was that all the assistance in the days after Katrina failed – the whole structure failed – and about the extreme experience of losing everything from one moment to the next. You have your wonderful world, or at least your world, and then suddenly that falls apart... How do you react? How do you live with that? How do you keep your faith? What do you believe in? I couldn’t get those questions out of my head,’ she tells Público from Berlin, days before bringing the solo performance back to Portugal.

But at the same time, she goes on, other things were coming into her head: ‘The favelas in Brazil; the homeless people on the streets in our cities; the disaster tourism that leads people to want to visit the most devastated places in Haiti; or... Most of all, I was intrigued by people’s resistance. I wanted to

understand how we keep going in spite of everything; what it is that keeps us going.’

During those days, there was something else she couldn't get out of her head: the body of Francisco Camacho – one of the most exceptional she had encountered in the late 80s, just before she became a choreographer. In fact, she has seen few like it to this day. She couldn't imagine the rain, which she wanted to cascade down on stage, falling on anyone in the world as well as it would fall on him; there was no one capable of inhabiting, with such mystery and authenticity – holding on as though there were no tomorrow – the little cardboard paradise (a hut, a swan and a palm tree) that we see collapsing before our eyes like something out of a disaster movie, over the course of 70 minutes.

‘That was a long time ago... But I still remember being in New York in those early years, to dance and teach, and someone – I don't know who – telling me that there was a very special, strong dancer that I had to meet. He did a few things with me in the studio and then, when I went to Leuven to do my first piece, *Disfigure Study* (1991), I wanted him to be one of the performers. The way he moved was exceptionally intelligent, very precise and very well crafted; he moved with incredible presence, and he still does,’ the choreographer tells Público. Since then, they have been in constant contact (Camacho was her assistant on *UNTIL OUR HEARTS STOP*, which premiered in 2015), but it wasn't until 2006 that Meg Stuart finally got her hands on the perfect setting for a solo by Francisco Camacho. *BLESSED* was the piece that she created especially for him and it is, perhaps, even more enjoyable seeing him perform it now than it was ten years ago.

ENDURING

To recap: a man, a hut, a swan, a palm tree and the unrelenting rain that still falls on them ten years on. A hurricane named Katrina and a president called Donald Trump (who would have this to say on Twitter about the Paris Agreement: ‘Covfefe’). ‘The world is worse than ever; we are not doing well at all. In 2007, the phenomenon of global warming was still just beginning. Suddenly, it seems that everything has got alarmingly more precarious,’ says Meg Stuart. But she didn't want to put the weight of that on *BLESSED*, which actually has a heartening and overtly religious title (if we see a god moving out there, it is not a hallucination). It seems to say: fear not, water is a saviour; it washes away the sins of the world.

Before salvation, however, an entire little universe will undergo harsh punishment: the hut, the swan, the palm tree and the only inhabitant of this lost paradise. ‘I wanted to see how Francisco would handle the heavy adversity of that

rain over time. The piece was being written as we were looking at how he danced before and after the water, and how much time it would all last – his resistance, and the resistance of the materials,’ Meg Stuart tells us. Francisco Camacho’s body endured – we all endure. ‘As a performer, Francisco doesn’t allow much of himself to be seen. On stage, he has a very strong presence, but one that does not seem to be associated with an ego. That is why it is easy for us to project ourselves onto him but difficult to grasp him completely. He doesn’t throw his distinctiveness out to the public. Quite the opposite: he lets the public step into that world; into that fantasy.’

He was the ideal soloist for a choreographer with a preference for ‘multifocal’ group pieces in which a lot happens to a lot of people at the same time, or, indeed, for her own solo performances. ‘With Francisco you can work with small, subtle, precise movements; he essentially lets the movement move through him.’ None of that has been lost ten years on. ‘It’s all still there and it’s still just as strong... I think seeing him do this piece now that he is ten years older makes it more real and emotive; more poignant. For me, it’s lovely to watch a mature performer in action and witness a life experience play out on stage. Politically, I think it is important for dance not to be a place just for twenty-somethings. It is important for me to be able to continue dancing too.’

At the age of 52, something keeps her going.

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LET'S TALK (ABOUT DANCE)

Zin om informeel na te praten over deze dansvoorstelling? Ben je nieuwsgierig naar de ervaringen van anderen, of wil je jouw observaties delen? Welkom bij LET'S TALK (ABOUT DANCE)! Een moderator reikt jou en een kleine groep toeschouwers kapstokken aan om je kijk op dans te delen. Wat heb je gezien en wat betekende dat voor jou?

Vrijdag 1/06, na de voorstelling, in het Kaicafé (in het Nederlands)



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