

Dossier
Creation 2017
Première 18 May 2017 - Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussel (BE)

Le Moindre Geste

Selma & Sofiane Ouissi



© Koen Cassiman

In *le moindre geste*, dancers-choreographers-curators Selma and Sofiane Ouissi look for what connects people across language barriers and other differences. Each body is an archive of lived experiences and tells a story. This story becomes the score for a collective movement. Selma and Sofiane invite us to listen to ourselves and others in a different way, to the small gestures between the words.

Le moindre geste resonates with the proposition of the Canadian philosopher-artist Erin Manning who states that the greatest revolutions take place in small, daily, unnoticed gestures. Selma and Sofiane Ouissi's work is simultaneously poetic and political. They aim at a radical attention for the other.

Over the past five years, Selma and Sofiane Ouissi have gathered a series of life stories in Ghent, Brussels, Metz and Marseille. In each place, local participants engaged in intense group processes in which they explored each other's gestures. This process is shared with the audience in the performance. *Le moindre geste* invites us to partake in lives that often remain invisible.

The life stories are unfolded in their multilayeredness. *Le moindre geste* explores the tensions between the verbal and the non-verbal, the word and the body, the individual and the collective. The audio and video tracks of the interviews are disconnected. As an audience you are invited to listen to the audio document of a personal story, while watching a group of local participants, who are only shown the video track.



© Pierre Gondard / Festival de Marseille

The group of volunteers is in a different room, does not hear the words of the life story, but sees the video recording of the narrating body. For the participants, this narrating body is the video score for a collective choreography. Their embodiment is sent to the audience space via live video capture. With their own bodies, the participants 'listen' to the bodies of fellow citizens and thus carry their stories. Moving means being moved.

Each performance is different: each time you listen to two different life stories, embodied by a different participating audience. By bringing together two stories, Selma and Sofiane Ouissi take the next step in their process towards polyphony. They are building an echo chamber in which different gestures and lives resonate with each other.

After the performance the listening and the embodying audience meet each other to exchange their complimentary and radically different experiences. Le moindre geste is a multiplied encounter.

CREDITS

Concept and direction Selma & Sofiane Ouissi
In collaboration with Nicolas Sburlati (video)
Performance local participants
Supported by the City of Ghent, the Flemish Authorities

Created in the framework of the Creative Europe project 'Manufactories of caring-space time' curated by Catherine de Zegher, Laurence Rassel and Béatrice Josse at MSK Gent, 49 Nord 6 Est Frac Lorraine (Metz) and Fundacio Antoni Tapies (Barcelona)

PRATICAL

Duration: 150 minuten
Language: Performance in Dutch/French/Arabic (subtitled in English)

CALENDER

18-21/05/17 kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussel (BE)
juni 17 Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Gent (BE)
6-8/05/17 Festival Passages, Metz (FR)
27-30/06/19 Festival de Marseille, Marseille (FR)
11-15/08/21 Bijloke Wonderland Festival, Gent (BE)
18-19/05/22 Rencontres chorégraphiques de Seine-Saint-Denis, Saint-Denis (FR)
11-12/06/22 Holland Festival, Amsterdam (NL)
22-23/4/2023 T2G Théâtre de Gennevilliers - Centre dramatique national (FR)

Updated calender: <https://www.lageste.be/en/calendar>

INFO ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

Presentation text, credits, biographies, photos, trailer and press can be found here:

<https://www.lageste.be/en/creations/le-moindre-geste>

High-resolution photos, a video fragment and the trailer of the performance can be downloaded at this link: <https://www.lageste.be/en/touring/le-moindre-geste>

BIOGRAPHIE

Selma et Sofiane Ouissi

Choreographers, dancers and curators Selma and Sofiane Ouissi (b. 1975 and 1972, Tunis) are sister and brother. They have been creating and dancing together since the beginning of their careers. Graduates of the Conservatory of Music and Dance and of the National Centre of Dance in Tunis, and holders of the French State diploma of dance, they are considered major figures in contemporary dance in the Arab world.

The duo's personal creations include STOP ... BOOM (2004) and Waçl (2007), which have been presented regularly in the Arab world and in Europe. In collaboration with digital-arts creator Yacine Sebti, they have realised the choreographic pieces Here(s) & Les yeux d'Argos I & II. The three pieces were created remotely in real time using Skype, and have been touring since 2011.

In 2011, they moreover produced the choreographic film laaroussa inspired by the work of the female potters of Sejnane, which was shown at the Paris Triennale in the Palais de Tokyo, the David Roberts Art Foundation in London, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, the New Museum in New York, the Garage Triennial in Moscow, MSK in Ghent, etc. Continuing their research into the ancestral gestures of the Sejnane artisans, they responded to an invitation for a new creation on the occasion of the Marseille-Provence European Capital of Culture in 2013, with the choreographic/documentary piece laaroussa. This work, at once choreographic, anthropological and poetic, based on the gestures of the potters, has been shown at the Kunstenfestivaldesarts, La Bâtie - Festival de Genève, Zürcher Theater Spektakel, Bonlieu Scène nationale d'Annecy.

As part of their Performing Room project, Tate Modern in London invited the duo to create Les Yeux d'Argos (2014), a choreographic piece at a planetary scale for an audience of Internet users. Given the success of this collaboration, Tate Modern invited them to rethink the concept for the Do Disturb festival at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris in April 2015.



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In 2015 - 2017 they created the protocol and performance *Le moindre geste* in 49 Nord 6 Est Frac Lorraine in Metz. From 2017 to 2019 *Le moindre geste* was hosted at Kunstenfestivaldesarts (Brussels), the Museum of fine arts in Ghent and Festival de Marseille. *Le moindre geste* highlights the life stories of people living on the fringes of the dominant discourse. This installation-performance combines video, movement, and drawing and invites to meet these invisible citizens through gestures and empathy. The body is traversed as a memory site of experiences, as a living archive. The gestures of the other are transformed collectively.

From the story of Wajdan, a Syrian refugee met in Metz, a video was created with five female artists from Tunis, Beyrouth, Damas, Cairo, Brussels and Sao Paulo, presented in the Guggenheim Museum in Abu Dhabi (2020), in Festival de Marseille (2021) and in Dream City in Tunis (2022). Selma and Sofiane continue their work with the life stories, presenting a new version of *Le moindre geste* at Bijloke Wonderland festival (2021) in Ghent in collaboration with les ballets C de la B. Their next step is *L'opéra du geste*, creating an echochamber in which the different bodies, gestures and stories of the people they met resonate with each other and with the lives of others.

In 2007 Selma & Sofiane Ouissi chose to explore the boundaries of what art can do, and what can be constructed through arts and culture. With 'Dream City', they created an inclusive festival concept in Tunis, involving a wide range of artists, thinkers and activists, and exploring collaborations with very diverse participants, and on different locations (co-creations with local communities, long-term contextual work, investing unconventional spaces). The aim is to establish a space of free expression and creativity, but also to allow for exchange and even pleasure in the common struggle for a democratic Tunisia. In 'Dream City' every cultural gesture has a political dimension. 'Dream City' happens in Tunisia every two years since 2007. Moreover 'antenna' editions were set up in Marseille in 2013 (in the framework of the European Capital of Culture), and in London in partnership with the Shubbak Festival in 2017.

Selma and Sofiane went on to create the Tunisian structure 'L'Art Rue', dedicated to artistic gestures that aim for social and political transformation. In 'L'Art Rue' artistic disciplines meet and intersect with academic reflection. It is within this structure that 'Dream City' has continued to evolve, that the cultural magazine 'ZAT' (Temporary Artistic Zone) was developed, that a rich programme of support for artists from the Arab world and Africa was established, while at the same time putting in place an ambitious programme for cultural education in elementary schools all over Tunisia.

Nicolas Sburlati



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Nicolas Sburlati studied at the University of Turin and Paris 8 and started working for film as a light technician in 2008. Curious about understanding the entire process of creating a film, his focus turned to editing. He became editing assistant and started editing several fiction and documentary short films. He collaborates with various artists for the creation of video installations. Having experienced these different approaches allows him to be in a permanent questioning of the practice of editing

He met Selma and Sofiane Ouissi in 2011, for whom he edited *laaroussa*, a video inspired by the female potters of Sejnane. Since then, their collaboration continues and transforms to this day.

IN DE PERS

“Le Moindre Geste gaat op bijna wetenschappelijke wijze op zoek naar manieren om mensen, ongeacht sociaal-culturele verschillen, met elkaar te verbinden. De voorstelling nodigt uit om het lichaam als verteller te erkennen, curiositeit naar nieuwe werelden te voeden en collectieve verwerkingsprocessen te verwelkomen.”

Karima Aissaoui - De Theaterkrant 12.06.2022 <https://www.theaterkrant.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/recensie-Le-Moindre-Geste.pdf>

“Negen lokale vrijwilligers die met opperste aandacht iemands lichaamstaal geheel overnemen, een uur lang volledig toegewijd aan iemand die ze niet kennen, niet horen, niet kunnen verstaan.”

Iris Spanbroek - De Theaterkrant 12.06.2022 <https://www.theaterkrant.nl/recensie/le-moindre-geste/selma-ouissi-sofiane-ouissi/>



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“Schitterend inefficiënt. (...) Le Moindre Geste maakt van luisteren een daad. Een activiteit die inspanning kost, want je ziet de luisteraars hun best doen om de spreker zo goed mogelijk te weerspiegelen. Oordeelloos en egoloos, want zonder de ruis van hun persoonlijke reacties tonen ze hoe de verteller indruk op hen maakt. Collectief worden zij de mededragers van dat ene levensverhaal. Dat is ontroerend, ook omdat het hele gebeuren zo ongekunsteld is.”

Marijn van der Jagt in De Groene Amsterdammer, 18.05.2022 <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/schitterend-inefficient>

“Er zit iets activistisch in het werk van Selma en Sofiane en ook in de manier waarop ze het creëren. Ze zijn daar heel consequent in. Ze zetten zichzelf op de achtergrond en maken echt tijd voor het woord en het lichaam van de ander. Zo gaan ze in tegen het toesnijden op hoogtepunten van een verhaal. En tegen het productiviteitsritme en het werken met perfecte lichamen en bewegingen. Je ziet dat het koor van niet getrainde performers op een verschillende manier de gebaren ontvangen en beantwoorden. Ze zijn niet gedruild. Het is een koor maar tegelijkertijd zijn het allemaal individuen. Alle leden van dat koor geven een andere echo aan het verhaal.”

Roos van der Lint in gesprek met Judith Vranken en Marijn van der Jagt, 12.04.2022 <https://www.groene.nl/podcasts/de-groene-amsterdammer-holland-festival-podcast/afleveringen/le-moindre-geste>

“Nous voulons révéler l’écoute. Nous trouvons qu’elle perd de plus en plus de sa valeur face au discours et à la parole. Donner une place majeure à l’écoute, celle qui permet d’être affectée. Au-delà, la reconsidérer au théâtre. La rencontre et l’humain. Comment faire en sorte que le théâtre, le lieu, puisse reprendre sa fonction première.”

Wilson Le Personnic in gesprek met Selma en Sofiane Ouissi, Ma Culture (12.05.2022)

<https://www.maculture.fr/selma-sofiane-ouissi>

“Il faudra un pot puis un deuxième pour que l’histoire se rassemble. (...) L’idée est aussi belle que géniale. (...) Personne n’a accès à une information totale. (...) Le Moindre Geste est une déclaration d’amour à l’humain et rappelle que le langage est une danse, puisqu’il s’accompagne toujours de plein de petits (ou de grands !) gestes.”

Amelie Blaustein Niddam, Toute la culture (20.05.2022)

<https://toutelaculture.com/spectacles/danse/les-gestes-qui-parlent-de-selma-et-sofiane-ouissi-aux-rencontres-choregraphiques/>

“Doordat de woorden en de lichaamstaal in deze voorstelling uit elkaar worden gehaald, kunnen ze elkaar plots weer terugvinden. Het resultaat is ontregelend ontroerend, een kleine revolutie van de ontmoeting.”

Jeroen Donckers in Rekto: Verso, 27.08.2021 <https://www.rektoverso.be/artikel/eer-s-t-het-kleine-over-the-minor-gesture?ref=bNElGf4G8ydSWTxNG>

“With finesse and eloquence, Tunisian artists-choreographers Selma and Sofiane Ouissi invite an ethic of the body, where only the physical presence of the other calls for it to be observed, and where noticing its gestures and their nuances are as much invitations for it to come into being.”

Marianne De Douhet in IO Gazette, June 2019 <http://www.iogazette.fr/festivals/2019/ce-que-peut-le-corps/>

“Taking the time, making a place for the other, making direct contact, and focussing attention on the human body are, for them, not just idle words, but real gestures in a post-disciplinary practice that always and everywhere relies on local encounters.”

Tom Van Imschoot in conversation with Selma and Sofiane Ouissi, re/framing the international #1 30.11.2017 & Rekto: Verso 14.12.2017 <https://www.rektoverso.be/artikel/tijd-nemen-plaats-maken-selma-en-sofiane-ouissi-na-tien-jaar-dream-city>

In English : https://wp.assets.sh/uploads/sites/4718/2019/12/reframing1.pdf (p. 28-39)

“A kind of universal language emanates from this collective of individuals who together translate a story through gestures, and also an activism; a mass of people made up of a collection of individuals who speak up for the other. (...) By highlighting two different sides of the same personality in each story (word and body), the Ouissi's refuse to define identity as something fixed and immovable, on the contrary, they emphasise the complexity of an identity that is constantly being reshaped.”

Ophélie Naessens in Klaxon #7. <http://cifas.be/fr/download/klaxon2017>

“A wonderful lesson in zooming in and zooming out, hearing-watching and connecting.”

Stine Sampers in Subbacultcha, 22.06.2017 <https://subbacultcha.be/editorial/detail/manufactories-of-caring-space-time-het-kleine-gebaar>

"Facial expressions, tics, smiles, grimaces, everyone interprets what they see in the now. It is a choir that expresses a life story, embodies the absence of the one who speaks, carries the word of one and all with a community of bodies. The ten faces are a prism through which emotions multiply, a place where non-verbal language manifests itself, an empathic conduit for the life of the other transformed into a collective score."

Marie Pons in Inferno, 17.06.2017 <https://inferno-magazine.com/2017/06/17/retour-les-voies-du-kunstenfestivlidesarts/>



laGeste (les ballets C de la B + kabinet k)

laGeste came into being in 2022, from a fusion of les ballets C de la B and kabinet k. The two Ghent dance companies had a long history of collaboration and a great artistic affinity in the search for visceral storytelling. They decided to join forces and continue their work under the new name **laGeste**: a home both for the intergenerational practice that Joke Laureyns and Kwint Manshoven developed at kabinet k, and for the legacy of choreographer Alain Platel, who was the pivot of les ballets C de la B for more than thirty-five years.

laGeste, written by the body.

Each project is "un monde des possibles" populated with a diversity of bodies. Bodies carry a history. They can be weighed down by it, scarred by it, permeated by it to every pore. But a body is not a prison, a scar not a condemnation. The body also holds the promise of transformation. Bodily practices emerge from that deep connection between place and time, between individual and community. We prefer movement, produced by that connection, to words, but without excluding language.

The body is a battlefield on which the great social battles are fought. Cisgenders versus fluids, the enterprising versus the unproductive, the excellent versus the limited, the identitarians versus those who think they can become anything and anyone, the privileged versus the decolonised, the old scarred by historical traumas versus the young threatened by ecological disasters, the haves versus the have-nots.



This polarisation has increased enormously in the last five years, and intensified in times of pandemics and other crises. With our work, we hope to create temporary spaces where we can bridge the gap between people again.

We are building an inclusive narrative, not on the margins, but right at the heart of what we do. We aim for diversity and mixability at all levels. We would like to see more reality in the represented bodies and at the same time fight for the possibility of transformation, play and poetry, of singing our way out of the boxes we keep each other in.

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