

Since September last year, laGeste successfully organises inclusive workshops. These are short lesson series, each taught by different instructors and from different perspectives or themes. One of the teachers was dancer-actor Saïd Gharbi.

Interview with choreographer Saïd Gharbi by Wim Auwerx for laGeste, participant inclusive workshops.



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laGeste: How did you come to give this Mixability workshop at laGeste?

Saïd: Last year, Kwint Manshoven participated with 2 of his dancers in an inclusive workshop I gave at the Antwerp Conservatory. Afterwards, Hildegard De Vuyst called me to ask me to participate in a panel discussion in Ghent on inclusive dance. There, we asked ourselves how we could approach inclusive dance in a positive way and open it up to as many people as possible, knowing that everyone has different abilities.

After that panel discussion, Hildegard asked me to give a mixability workshop for laGeste.

laGeste: You do run mixability workshops quite often. Is there a difference with regular workshops?

Saïd: I think inclusive workshops are more challenging. It is very important that people with and without disability meet and feel comfortable with each other. We have to work from everyone's qualities. For example, certain disabilities bring a slowness, a tenderness, a subtlety that then transfers to the whole group. That is very intense and beautiful to experience.

laGeste: Beatrice Debrabant assisted you during this workshop. How did that turn out?

Saïd: I already knew Bea from a previous play where she did all kinds of practical things and cooked on stage. But now it was the first time she assisted me as a dancer. She did that super well. She gave me just enough information, she immediately found the right balance. That doesn't come naturally at all. I have worked with many assistants and often they give me too much or too little information. She was also very open and approachable to everyone. There was an instant click.

laGeste: What did you think of this mixability workshop? Did anything stick out to you?

Saïd: It was a remarkably attentive, patient and respectful group. Even though some people's disabilities make it not at all simple to hold their attention for a long time. I also know that for wheelchair users, for example, it is not always possible to do what I ask but that is not important to me. What matters to me is how someone handles it, how they interpret it and integrate it into their body. I'm not the most technical dancer myself but I let my energy and movements come from within, then you can create beautiful things. Furthermore, I think interaction is very important. I am not the teacher imposing something on a group. I like to get suggestions and have a conversation about how something might work better for someone else. For me, the mover/dancer also has a responsibility in the creation process.



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laGeste: Do you have any suggestions for the further development of these mixability workshops?

This kind of workshop is very important. If only on a human level, the fact that very different people meet.

Furthermore, I think we should show ourselves even more, that we should not limit ourselves to the small circle of dance studios or theatres. We have to go into society, into schools, for example. Communication, talking to people, and reassuring them is crucial here.

With my solo performance *Clair Obscur*, I went to schools. It was the first time I talked about myself and my blindness on stage. I then gave a short workshop in the morning and performed in the afternoon. At the end there was always a feedback moment. You immediately feel a difference because people already know you. They are more engaged and open.

A subject on 'Dealing with differences' should be introduced as early as primary school. From my own experience, I can testify that dealing with differences, working and travelling with different people, makes you a stronger and more empathetic person.