

Creation laGeste 2023

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someone will always be missing

Joke Laureyns & Kwint Manshoven
laGeste (kabinet k + les ballets C de la B)

'In our reality as Palestinians, we have to think about every move we make. This brings tension and fear. But here, in this workshop, I could let go. It was the longest time ever that I kept my eyes closed.'

(Nadine Ali uit Nah Al Bared Camp, Tripoli)

THE PLAN

12 dancers come together as if for a reunion of distant relatives. There are children among them, youngsters, and adults of all ages. Due to circumstances - a lingering political conflict - not everyone can attend. *someone will always be missing*. How to create proximity in a world that drives people apart?

HISTORY

Choreographers Joke Laureyns and Kwint Manshoven are the driving forces behind a unique body of work in which children and adults share the stage. Their work is simultaneously playful and dark, exuberant and subdued, resilient and fragile. They call their performances small utopias: collectively designed dreams in which melancholy is never far away. It is work that inspires hope and, with its universal language, appeals to audiences across Europe. It expresses an insatiable longing for freedom, for boundlessness, for togetherness and closeness.

In 2015, they were guests in Jerusalem and Ramallah with the performance *Rauw*. Two years later, they visited refugee camps in Lebanon (2017). In 2019, they returned to Ramallah with a workshop as part of *les Ateliers Déplacés*, an initiative of *les ballets C de la B*. This introduction to Palestinian audiences and the first collaboration with Palestinian dancers created the breeding ground for connecting their work and Palestinian reality.

The imposed diaspora, the impossibility of crossing borders, the ban on visiting native land or homeland, the daily restriction of living and movement space, life in camps, overcrowded classrooms, occupations, blockades, queues, intimidation, detentions, checkpoints, the wall - Palestinian reality can be read as a crisis of movement. Movement-related concepts such as mobility, development, growth... but also the everydayness of a walk or a sports activity, are conflict-laden within Palestinian reality. For choreographers like Joke and Kwint who make their work with bodily freedom as the highest good, there seemed to be a universal story in the conflict-laden bodies of the Palestinians they met. From this intuition came the plan to create a performance.



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CONCEPT *someone will always be missing*

In the turbulent, complex and violent reality of millions of oppressed Palestinians, choreographers Joke Laureyns and Kwint Manshoven propose one of the most elementary artistic gestures imaginable: they bring a child and an adult together in a dance studio.

It is perhaps the most archetypal image expressing closeness, ranging from security, care, support, protection, to challenge and play. With a basic premise: trust. The resulting duet shows a vulnerable but vital image. Two generations carrying each other, two people encountering each other in movement, building a new unity. In the fragmented Palestinian reality, it is the expression of faith that the most basic connection can make a difference.

This image is repeated six times: six duets are developed with people coming from six different contexts.* In this way, we want to get to a collective dream: to bring all the duets together on one scene, like a festive gathering of distant relatives. This in full awareness that this dream is threatened at all times by the impact of geopolitical violence and will materialise in a different form and cast at each performance due to imposed travel restrictions or other obstacles. The absent will always be represented in one way or another.

The absence of those who did not make it to the performance will become a central feature of the project. *someone will always be missing* is a performance about absence and how to deal with it, about loss and resisting it. *someone will always be missing* transforms Palestinian reality into a universal story that touches on the life of anyone living separated from a loved one. Is the dancing body able to redirect and transcend the feeling of lack?

* *someone will always be missing* is created in different places. Any attempt to give an overview of this is confronting the geographical complexity of the fragmented Palestinian reality, and is therefore always a flawed simplification that needs to be explained. The six contexts referred to are Jerusalem, Israel, Jenin, Gaza City, Lebanon and Ghent. In the Palestinian part of Jerusalem, work is being done in the Beit Hanina neighbourhood, which is outside the old city; there is a desire to also develop a trajectory within the old city, where living conditions are very different. No workshop is carried out in Israel itself - cooperation with Israeli organisations inevitably leads to clouding of the project's content - but Palestinians living in Israel join the group of participants in Jenin on the West Bank. There, they work in the refugee camp; dancers living elsewhere in the West Bank also go to Jenin. Access to the Gaza Strip is made so difficult by the Israeli authorities that work can still only be done via streaming. In Lebanon we work with Hamana, a village one hour away from Beirut, as a base. From there, we travel to the Palestinian refugee camps in or near Tripoli, Beirut, Saida and Tyre. The working sessions in Ghent gather Palestinians from the European diaspora. These come from a variety of contexts: West Bank, Gaza, Israel, Lebanon... For the sake of understanding the project: travelling between these different contexts is not obvious for Western Europeans, but possible in most cases; for the majority of Palestinians, it is virtually impossible to travel from one context to another.

PROJECTS AND PREVIEWS

The creation of *someone will always be missing* is preceded by an intense workshop process with hundreds of participants, for which Joke and Kwint travel to different Palestinian regions. Depending on the region and the local partner organisation they work with, this process proceeds differently. One child and one adult are eventually selected from each trajectory, with whom one of the six duets from *someone will always be missing* is created. But the intent of these preliminary trajectories is much bigger than that. They are essentially part of what Joke and Kwint aim to do with their work: to bring people together within a utopian dynamic.

The general course of these trajectories is as follows:

The first phase involves building links with performing partners on site. Structural partners are Douban Center for Arts (Jerusalem), Freedom Theatre (Jenin), Hammana Arts House (near Beirut) and Hai Team (Gaza City). These are artistic organisations with a strong local network, their own operation with children and adults, and their own audience reach. They may or may not work closely with local socio-cultural associations, sports clubs, schools, etc.

In consultation with these partners, a group of participants is put together, who are invited on site for an introductory workshop with Joke and Kwint. These include workshops in Douban Centre for Arts (Jerusalem), Freedom Theatre (Jenin) and several refugee camps in Lebanon: Shatila and Burj Barajneh (Beirut), Ein El Hilweh and Mieh (Saida), Nahr el-Bared and Beddawi (Tripoli), Rashidieh (tyre). ** Out of necessity, the workshop in Gaza City was organised via streaming from laGeste's dance studio in Ghent, which also hosts workshops with Palestinians from the European diaspora.

These workshops establish a solid basis of trust between all parties involved and all participants. For Joke and Kwint, it is a way to get more in touch with the local context and to assess who has affinity with their artistic idiom, their view of people and working methods.

On this basis, a small group of participants is invited for a follow-up workshop lasting several days. Duets are composed of a child and adult, each duet developing its own language of movement. With this material, a second phase then works towards a small presentation: a preview or short dance performance presented to the local community of artists and interested audiences. The aim: to leave a trace in the different contexts from which *someone will always be missing* is generated, and to share with the widest possible audience the vital and universal eloquence of the artistic encounter between child and adult.

** For the naming of the camps, we use the spelling used by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East: www.unrwa.org).



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PRODUCTION

The final rehearsals and premiere of *someone will always be missing* will take place in Ghent, laGeste's home base. The ambition is for the performance to tour Europe and, where possible, the

Middle East. Depending on the performance venue and related entry restrictions, the cast will look different for each performance.

Apart from developing the individual duets, the artistic team is exploring ways in which absence can be turned into presence, without using video/streaming. The final shape of the performance will be determined by questions such as: How does absence influence the dance idiom of the performers who are present? Text may play a crucial role in this: can the blanks be filled by describing memories of the movements of the absent dancers? Or do the absentees themselves record an audio file, describing their duet? Do the attendees dance to those words as instructions? Or does listening to those distant voices generate new material that is improvised on the spot? Or: are the absent voices' words silently brought into the performance through projection and danced in silence? What is the role of music in all this?

Musician Thomas Devos, who has previously worked in Palestine with rapper Boykot (of Ramallah Underground) and the collective Radio No Frequency, makes the soundtrack together with Palestinian musicians.

CREDITS

direction Joke Laureyns, Kwint Manshoven

dance duets between professional dancers and children of Palestinian origin

production laGeste (Gent)

coproduction Freedom Theatre (Jenin), Dansens Hus (Oslo), VIERNULVIER (Gent), TANDEM Scène nationale (Arras/Douai), hetpaleis

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TAX
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PRAKTICAL

Premiere: 02 11 2023 - De Vooruit Gent (BE)

BIOGRAPHY

Joke Laureyns (°1972) is a choreographer with a background in philosophy. Together with Kwint Manshoven, she is the founder and inspirer of the company kabinet k.

Since 2002, they have created a series of performances together under the wings of some larger theatre houses that have not gone unnoticed: *Dreams have laces* (Fabuleus), *Shelter* (Kopergietery), *Martha, Marthe* (Kopergietery) and *Questo Ricordo* (CC Hasselt).

Since 2008, they have been building up an oeuvre of performances for a wide audience with *Einzelgänger* (-), *unfold, i see you, zwaluwzang, rauw* and *ba(b)bel*. *Unfold* and *raw* are selected for the Theaterfestival and mark an international breakthrough.

In 2016, kabinet k starts a structural collaboration with hetpaleis (Antwerp). This will lead to the production of *horses* (2016), *invisible* (2018), *as long as we are playing* (2019, co-production with LOD muziektheater) and *promise me* (2021). *promise me* is the culmination of 20 years of work and life under the name kabinet k.

The oeuvre speaks in its own way about physicality, about dance, about human relationships. The performances occupy a unique place in the landscape of the performing arts because of the persistent search for an alternative, a utopia, by confronting silence with a world full of propositions. Their dance idiom is contemplative, minimalist and expressive on the one hand, and on the other hand, it tilts towards raw, brutal and exuberant energy. Their work can best be described in dual terms: there are children and there are adult dancers, it is intensely physical and still, it places horror opposite beauty, it seeks simplicity and is complex, it is playful and dark at the same time, and it has a light weight.

In 2022, kabinet k merged with les ballets C de la B to form laGeste. Joke Laureyns nurtures her view as a maker in her new position as artistic director of laGeste, a position she shares with Hildegard

De Vuyst. In addition, she is working with Kwint Manshoven on a new creation: *someone will always be missing*, a collection of duets between Palestinian dancers and children. This creation immediately dictates the framework in which the duo wants to work in laGeste: with attention for the strength and vulnerability within interpersonal relationships, in the middle of the world.

Kwint Manshoven (1971) is a choreographer and dancer, with a background in design. Together with Joke Laureyns, he is the founder and inspirer of the company kabinet k.

Since 2002, they have created a series of performances together under the wings of some larger theatre houses that have not gone unnoticed: *Dreams have laces* (Fabuleus), *Shelter* (Kopergietery), *Martha, Marthe* (Kopergietery) and *Questo Ricordo* (CC Hasselt).

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In 2022, kabinet will merge with les ballets C de la B to form laGeste. From his experience as a dancer and choreographer with a great sensitivity for the synergy between various forms of physicality, Kwint Manshoven takes on the role of coordinator of the inclusive work within laGeste. In addition, he is working with Joke Laureyns on a new creation: *someone will always be missing*, a collection of duets between Palestinian dancers and children. This creation immediately dictates the framework in which the duo at laGeste want to work: with attention to the strength and vulnerability within interpersonal relationships, in the middle of the world.

The logo for laGeste, featuring the word 'laGeste' in a stylized, handwritten blue font.

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

laGeste came into being in 2022, from a fusion of kabinet k and les ballets C de la B. 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.

www.lageste.be

Het Freedom theatre, Jenin, Palestina

The Freedom Theatre, founded in 2006, wants to develop a vivid, creative artistic community where young adults can freely express themselves on an equal footing through art.

The organisation's home is in the heart of the Jenin refugee camp on the West Bank. More than a dozen students have so far graduated from the theatre school. A hundred women have been taught photography and film, and the theatre works with more than 50 communities in Occupied Palestinian Territory. The company has taken performances and workshops to over fifteen countries. Thanks to The Freedom Theatre art has been made available and accessible to every child in the refugee camp. Innovative and reflective theatre/media productions have drawn national and international attention to the camp. The company bundles a unique programme of stage/multimedia activities, including theatre and drama, film, as well as photography. Within its main 'Care & Learning' project it organises workshops where local participants can raise their awareness of both themselves and the community, as well as boost their sense of identity. As a result - mainly young - women have been able to unlock their potential and self-confidence as well as perfect their leadership/communication skills.

Ahmed Tobasi has been the company's artistic leader since March 2020. As an actor, director, and lecturer, Tobasi has worked with both Palestinian and international theatres. He was born at Jenin Refugee Camp, under Israeli occupation. In 2002, aged sixteen, he joined the armed resistance. He was arrested and spent four years in an Israeli prison. Upon his release, he decided to continue resisting through culture and use the stage to champion change.

Ahmed Tobasi first came to Brussels in 2008 as part of PASS (Performing Arts Summer School), a project by *KVS* (Royal Flemish Theatre Company), the A. M. Qattan Foundation and *les ballets C de la B*. From Brussels he travelled on to Norway, where he received refugee status.

He later joined the One Space Project by *KVS*, Alcantara, and Exodos, which in turn helped him realize his duet with Adonis Nebié (a dancer with Serge-Aimé Coulibaly), itself completed at *co-laBo* in Gent.

After spending two years with The Freedom Theatre, Tobasi took an advanced training course at the Nordic Black Theatre, whose professional company he joined and with which he performed in *Guantanamo What Now? Destination Africa*, *Journey to Identity*, amongst others. He also directed his own work.

In 2013 he returned to Jenin Refugee Camp and The Freedom Theatre to take part in a local artistic movement that focuses on culture as a form of resistance. He has recently performed in *The Siege*, which toured Palestine and theatres across Great Britain. He has also started developing his own creations.

The following struck the artistic director of the Freedom Theatre in his chats with *kabinet k* about future collaboration: *'The creative process itself obviously raises issues of freedom (of movement), space and borders. Yet freedom is first and foremost a matter of personal disposition, a mental space. Freedom is a 'state of mind'.*

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