

GOSIE VERVLOESSEM

The Horror Garden

PERFORMANCE

KAAISTUDIO'S' ∫ concert studio

EN ∫ 75' ∫ €5

28/06 ∫ 19:00 & 22:00

The Horror Garden is an investigative performance and/or installation that questions the relationship between humans and plants. Do people treat plants with enough respect? Do plants feel recognised and understood by people? Can the relationship between people and plants transcend the unlimited mutual exploitation? What can we learn about ourselves if we consider plants as the *significant order* and what kind of horror can this lead to? What happens when plants break out of the background of our living rooms?

When searching for an answer to these questions, Vervloessem calls on a number of horror movies in which plants frighten us. Sometimes they attack us head-on, but often the horror lies in ominously waving branches and rustling bushes. Colonisation runs like a red thread through the story: colonisation of territory by humans and plants, colonisation of organisms, bodies and spirits... According to Vervloessem there are three locations where the human-vegetal relation comes to a climax, where the relation between humans and plants takes a stark form: the nature reserve, the plantation and the botanical garden. Places with a direct link to a colonial past. Places in which the relationship between people and plants seems tightly aligned. At least it seems. But is that really the case?

BIO

Gosie Vervloessem (BE, 1973) lives and works in Brussels. She studied Pedagogical Sciences at the KULeuven, Audiovisual Arts at the LUCA School of Arts Brussels and Advanced Performance and Scenography Studies at a.pass. In 2010 Vervloessem began working under the name Domestic Science Club, putting together lectures, performances, workshops, recipes and installations. In 2014 the focus of Vervloessem's work shifted to eating, digestion and indigestion. Currently she focuses on we-they opposition in regard to nature and its surroundings. Vervloessem's work has been shown at Recyclart, Vooruit, Beursschouwburg, STUK, De Brakke Grond, Belluard Festival, PPPBern, Dock II and elsewhere.

Concept and performance **Gosie Vervloessem**

Dramaturgy **Einat Tuchman**

Audio-recording **David Elchardus**

Production **wpZimmer**

Supported by **cc Strombeek, de School van Gaasbeek**

working title festival

What is your particular interest in horror or the uncanny when it comes to nature?

Gosie: Many philosophers say the world becomes more and more unthinkable. We live in a world of disasters and pandemics, but we don't want to confront ourselves with the consequences all the time. This gets crucial when it comes to air pollution or climate change. People don't feel the urge to do anything about it, because they don't see the real horror. I am interested in horror movies like *The Happening* because they try to think the unthinkable in a different way. In this movie plants are releasing toxins in the air, which are deadly but not visible. There is no escape but also no explanation, and that's the real horror of it.

***The Horror Garden* is divided into 3 chapters: *The Botanical Garden, The Nature Reserve and The Plantation*. What is the relationship between humans and nature in these three concepts?**

Gosie: In all three concepts the relationship between the human and the plant comes to a horrifying climax, to a boiling point. In *The Botanical Garden* there is a strong connection between nature and science, in *The Plantation* there is the link to agriculture and exploitation. *The Nature Reserve* for me is a very strange concept, that is strongly linked to tourism and gives us a very idealistic view of nature. All three examine the question of what we consider as nature and how we relate to it.

You are also linking these concepts to the European – and especially the Belgian – colonial past. How do they relate to this part of our history?

Gosie: During my research I became aware of the importance of botanical gardens in colonial history. A lot of horrific things were justified for scientific reasons, but also plantation played a big role. The Congo had a lot of rubber trees and as the endeavours by King Leopold II started to fail, he needed new money. At the same time Charles Goodyear invented the process of vulcanisation, a revolution in the production of rubber. As these rubber trees could not be domesticated and forced into plantations, people needed to go into the woods to harvest the rubber from the plants. But in the wilderness these people could not be controlled by Leopold's troops, which is why a bigger and more restrictive control system was implemented. That was one of many reasons why the colonial system became so cruel.

In another project you focus on invasive species, plants that are expansively spreading their habitat. What is your special interest in this sort of plant?

Gosie: For about a year I travelled to different places and worked with people who eradicate Japanese knotweed, a very fast-growing bush that crowds out any other herbaceous species. Even though it is considered to be one of the worst invasive exotics, erasing this plant is a very politically loaded topic. The whole discourse about what is native and why we only want to have native species on our native soil is in fact a very problematic idea. Plants are very often used as symbols of cultural heritage and the distinction between native and non-native in social discourse comes from a botanical perspective. But if we talk about invasive plants, I always have the feeling that we homo sapiens are the most invasive species on planet earth, but we always remove ourselves from this question.

Interview with **Gosie Vervloessem** by **Andreas Fleck**