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## PIETER DE BUYSSER & MAIKE LOND IMMERWAHR

On March 10 Immerwahr will begin. Inevitable. Immerwahr is a play. It's about Midas, Ellen and their young boy Levi. This family will encounter some adventures. Immerwahr. I know the title promises a lot, not to mention it's just pretentious: Immerwahr, eternal truth and if you pronounce it badly you hear Immer war, always war, unfortunately mankind has a tendency towards bad pronunciation.

But in the hope to appease all this a tiny bit, I must just say that Immerwahr is simply the name of the woman the play is inspired by: Clara Immerwahr. The wife of Fritz Haber. Father of chemical warfare, inventor of the fertilizer that turned Bayer into the Moloch that feeds one fifth of the world's population and his military invention in WW1 that was further developed in WW2 in the form of Zyklon B. Clara Immerwahr, a brilliant chemist herself, tried to resist her husband's cocktails of war and science.

The eternal truth goes into theatre. We will meet in the spacious lounge of the Brussels loft of Ellen and Midas. Their destiny is fatally entwined with the one of Immerwahr, but they don't know that yet. Be welcome.

### **The unaccountable**

On 2 May 1915 Fritz Haber returned home from Ypres. He had seen one of his inventions being successfully put to use: chlorine gas as a weapon of mass destruction. A party was given in his honour. His wife Clara Immerwahr, a brilliant physicist herself, found her husband's invention a perversion of science. After the party she shot and killed herself with her husband's service revolver. She died in the arms of her thirteen-year-old son.

Haber's invention was put to use after WWI too, in fertilizer (which enabled Bayer to grow into an industrial giant), as Zyklon B in WWII, etc. This also marked the start of a culture that eliminated the unique human bodily presence through mass production and also through endless repetition in image and sound recordings.

Theatre-maker and writer Pieter De Buysser, together with Maike Lond, created a performance inspired by the life of Clara Immerwahr. About gas and the disappearance of hand-to-hand combat, about the physical and the unaccountable, about mass production and mass destruction.

## ESTHER SEVERI ON IMMERWAHR

Pieter De Buysser is the author of *Immerwahr*: a story whose title refers to the historical figure Clara Immerwahr, wife of the German chemist Fritz Haber. But the story is about Ellen, Midas and their son Levi, a modern family with a loft in Brussels and a beach house in northern France. It starts with Ellen, who comes home after an evening of theatre: she has seen 'Immerwahr', and finds it appalling. She finds the title alone pretentious: as if you're going to tell the eternal truth in the span of one and a half hours. The actress who played Clara and the dramatic, classical performance – as if the avant-garde never existed – puts her in a defiant mood. Midas hears her story and in the meantime is reading e-mails: into his mailbox flow congratulations on an imminent and highly successful business deal.

The tragic fate of Clara Immerwahr hangs like a spectre in the mind of Ellen, 'like she left black ink inside me, and I can't remove it anymore ... or is it milk?' Immerwahr, herself a scientist, committed suicide in 1915, on the night her husband was being celebrated by the German glitterati for the use of his invention – chlorine gas – in the trenches of WWI. For Ellen, with a master's in social sciences, the confrontation with Immerwahr is a breaking point: a moment of insight that makes 'today' the endpoint of history. Change thus has unavoidably been put in motion.

The life of the family will change drastically. Conversations are had; choices are made. The outside world increasingly penetrates the closed, mental space of the couple on stage, like an ever-increasing echo in which resounds the consequences of their revolution. Their story is that of today: that of the major crises and challenges our world is facing, and how you, as individual, must cope with them, in relationship with those around you. And also: how you must physically place yourself in a world of new ideas in the here and now. Because, ideology and intention notwithstanding, human nature does not change and will always and inevitably remain 'ambiguous'.

Pieter De Buysser explains like no other how history is a part of the now, as a collective memory that make us think and drives us. He uses historical references as motifs that give the story a distinctive mood. In the daily life of Ellen and Midas, Immerwahr looms ever present as an eternal truth. It makes Ellen and Midas actors on the stage: the story of Clara, Fritz, and their son Hermann becomes a dark game that they repeatedly replay, in which they fully embody the painful fate that has determined these lives. The tragic story of Clara Immerwahr – who could not live with the moral awareness of the atrocities of her husband, and who eventually died in the arms of her son Hermann – appears to announce a potential tragedy in the story of Ellen and Midas.

On stage are Brussels writer/actor Pieter De Buysser and Maike Lond, performance artist from Estonia, two makers with very different backgrounds and practices. The combination creates an interesting tension. The piece is a balancing act between the acted reality and real 'artificiality' of their presence on stage. What unites them is a shared commitment: the belief that we live in times that are handed down to us, more than that we invent them ourselves. That the history handed down may not become an automatism and must be questioned, and that every human being has the right to create their own life, their own conditions. In this piece, both are saying that today is the last day of history. Therein lies a utopian power, against which the notion persists that history inevitably repeats itself. Also repeated in this repetition of history, as an eternal truth, however, is the real possibility to start over.

## CREDITS

**Concept & Performers:** Pieter De Buysser & Maike Lond

**Text:** Pieter De Buysser

**Sounddesign:** Lauri-Dag Tüür

**Dramaturgy:** Esther Severi

**Scenography & technician:** Herman Sorgeloos

**English Language Coaching:** Miles O'Shea

**Production:** Hiros

**Co-production:** Kaaitheater, Kanuti Gildi SAAL (Tallinn)

**With the support of:** The Government of Flanders, The Estonian ministry of culture & Flemish Literature Fund.

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## TOUR

10 + 11.03.2015. Kaaistudio's, Brussels (BE) - PREMIERE -

22 + 23.03.2015 Archa Theatre, Prague (CZ)

25.04.2015 Kunstencentrum De Werf, Bruges (BE)



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## BIOGRAPHY

### PIETER DE BUYSSER

°1972, lives and works in Brussels.

At the age of 20, Pieter De Buysser took a train to Paris to visit a school for clowns. He decided to study philosophy. Since, he writes fiction and non-fiction, theater and non-theater and he performs his own texts on stage - as a non-clown, a speculative realist, a transformatador in one. His fables are political, radical, epic and concrete. He has been described as “a contemporary Hiëronymus Bosch of literature” and “a 22nd century storyteller”.

His plays have been invited or commissioned by houses and festivals such as Kunstenfestivaldesarts Brussels, Berliner Festspiele, Taipei Festival, Biennale Wiesbaden new plays from Europe, Dublin Festival, Melbourne Festival, Baltoscandal Estonia, Théâtre de la Bastille Paris, Fondation Cartier Paris, HAU Berlin,... His writings have been translated and staged into Polish, French, German, Italian and English. His first novel “De Keisnijders” was published in 2012 at De Geus. Currently he travels extensively over Europe with his last monologues “Book Burning” & “Landscape with skiproads”.

[www.pieterdebuysser.com](http://www.pieterdebuysser.com)

# BIOGRAPHY

## MAIKE LOND

°1981, Estonia, lives and works in Tallin.

Maike is an artist making theater performances, exhibitions, sound design and video/ light solutions and she has been teaching or mentoring the students of Estonian Art Academy and Tartu Art College. Maike is also one of the initiating leaders of an artistic company MIMproject, a research based artistic structure dealing with the theater space, its conventions and politics as such.

MIMproject started in 2005 and by now has grown into a network of professionals, both from within and outside of the art field.

Maike's works as a solo artist or in MIMproject have been shown in venues and festivals across Europe. Besides touring with her latest solo "10 journeys to a place where nothing happens", she has been working on a retrospective of MIMproject in Tallinn Art Hall; she exhibited an installation in Draakon Gallery (Tallinn); an interactive sound/light installation for Lumina Festival in Portugal and a concert with MIMproject on Art's Birthday in Estonian Public Broadcast where the music travelled from the radio studio to the Moon and back and was then broadcasted to the public radio stations around Europe.

## CONTACT

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## HIROS

Hiros is the joint venture of the management offices Margarita Production and Mokum. Together we continue to build a solid framework for individual artists and artistic projects.

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