

Biography Barbara Raes

Since 2023, Barbara Raes has been artistic director of the Belgian city theatre NTGent, together with Yves Degryse and Melih Gençboyacı. Together they embody a shared and polyphonic form of leadership. At NTGent, Raes founded the Care Cure Comfort Lab, a hub for artists working (or aiming to work) on the creation of new rituals, or the rituality of their existing practice. Within the Lab, Raes simultaneously upscales her own practice with projects as *One Day I Will Make the Onion Cry* (2024) and *Fire, Walk with Me* (2025).

In 2014, Raes decided to reorient her professional career and practice in the arts. After almost fifteen years as a programmer and artistic director in leading arts centres in Belgium, she went to the UK to train as funeral celebrant with the organization *Green Fuse*. As part of her training, she observed and analyzed more than eighty funerals, using her experience in the performing arts to better understand the dramaturgy of these rituals of 'saying goodbye'. When she returned to Belgium, she obtained a research position at KASK arts college in Ghent and developed the project *Open End* (2015-2018), in which architecture and healthcare students worked together in an interdisciplinary context to design 'new mental and physical spaces for farewell rituals.'

To complement this more theoretical research, she founded the organization *Beyond the Spoken, a workspace for unacknowledged loss*. Unacknowledged losses are 'the little funerals we encounter in our lives', such as an operation, changing school or jobs, giving birth, getting an abortion, or divorcing, all of which are moments of transition, which we do not acknowledge enough, although we actually want and need them to be seen.

Capitalizing on her previous networks in the performing arts, Raes has curated a series of projects and festivals that explore how art and rituals can address the topic of grief and care. They include the 2019 *amen & beyond* program for the arts centre Vooruit (now VIERNULVIER) in Ghent, which she curated together with the musician Colin Van Eeckhout, the research block *unfolding fields of interaction with health, life, loss and death* for DASarts in Amsterdam (2016), and *U-Loss* for HAU, Berlin (2018 and 2020), for Kaaithheater, Brussels (2019), for Dublin Theater Festival (2021) and for DeSingel, Antwerp (2022).

Raes curated the festival Theater Aan Zee in 2018 for which she designed the performance ritual *Golden Child*.