



My Ström

LES PASSAGÉES / MET
O.M. ALEXANDRA
SWENDEN, WILLEM
HIELE, HUGO
ROELLINGER, GILLES
POLET, CHARLOTTE
CHARBONEL

Aquatic existential food



Oonagh Duckworth

Gezien op 15 december 2025

Creative House 'Les Passagées', Sint-Gillis, Brussel

Oystershells, whispering sponges, stalagmites, a wood-burning stove and two muscular, ancient Athenian-like wrestlers are just some of the elements that plunge us, body and soul, into the tasteful—literally—multisensory experience around liquids and the natural phenomenon of the whirlpool offered by Les Passagées, a singular arts space in Brussels.

15 DECEMBER 2025

We congregate outside Place Antoine Delporte No. 2, in Saint-Gilles where Les Passagées is located — a 'creative house' that claims to 'explores the infinite links between art, the body, and what nourishes us, literally and figuratively'. Once everyone is gathered, we are urged to choose from an assortment of glasses laid out on two tables flanking the front door. Next, we're served a dram of Madeira and instructed to decant it into the glass of our nearest neighbour before our first consumable liquid: 'Life-Giving Water— a broth of celeriac, assorted vegetables, herbs, kombu, katsuobushi, garum, and various aromatics' is poured into our Madeira-lined glass.

Contemporary gastronomy is without a doubt one of the most dynamically creative fields today, and the name of the young, French, three-starred Michelin chef Hugo Roellinger —working alongside Belgium's Willem Hiele for 'My Ström'—must have certainly piqued punters' interest. I am, however, not alone in sheepishly setting my glass of broth down still half full, before crossing the threshold into the 'creative house'.

Liquidity, Sea Water, and Primordial Milk are some of the other evocative names given to the drinkable solutions we are promised during 'My Ström'. The performance is inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's novella 'A Descent into the Maelström', a highly metaphorical and pertinently topical tale of a Norwegian fisherman narrowly escaping death by applying analytical reasoning while his boat is terrifyingly sucked down into a whirlpool during a storm. The story is also said to capture the awe-inspiring power of nature and our enduring fascination

with it.

Alexandra Swenden is the driving force behind Les Passagées, herself something of a hybrid figure having once been a film producer before being drawn to curating and the visual and culinary arts scenes. One of her aims in opening up her home is to bring artists from different disciplines together to shape audiences' multisensory experiences around a unifying theme.

Entering the main space of the house — originally built in 1904 by architect Jacques Van Mansfeld as the home and studio of the painter Eugène Broerman — we are given our second liquid to sip while savouring the warmth of the wood-burning stove. Taking in the muted grey, white, and beige tones of the surroundings and the soothing vibrations of Antwerp-based Japanese taiko drummer Tsubasa Hori's live percussion, I know I'm there for an immersive artistic experience, but after the chill of the outside wait, part of me relaxes as though I have entered an exclusive, quietly luxurious spa.

It is both nerve-racking and tantalising to watch the physical risk-taking combined with their erotically charged proximity.

There are, nonetheless, more unsettling images disturbing that sense of ease. A figure, face to a brick wall, is reaching out his arms as though seeking escape; another, at the other end of the space, slithers along the floor in a full-bodied suit of shiny black latex. Suddenly, the centrepiece — a huge hollowed-out boulder, or is it an oversized baptismal font? — begins to bubble and gush liquid which then hypnotically spirals downward, sucked back into the heart of the stone.

Visual artist Charlotte Charbonnel's plaster stalagmite and sponge sculptures, along with her glass, globular objects—like jellyfish washed up by the tide—are situated on the perimeters of the space, while her textured tableaux—prickly spikes or molten metal—adorn the walls. But it is the physical presence of the two dancer-choreographers who tip the experience from soothingly aesthetic to profoundly human, rendering the notion of human strife evoked in Poe's novella tangible.

First, Gilles Polet arrives swathed in white cloth, circling the space and sweeping us, the audience, to its edges. Slowly he begins to unwind the fabric from around his hips and then releases it, twirling faster and faster into a dervish-like dance, creating a spinning maelstrom with his torso at the centre. His rhythmic breath is clearly audible and somehow impels us to hold our own. He is joined by Arno Ferrera. Both men are harnessed in leather, like horses. Gripping the straps, they use each other's bodies as counterweights, hoisting one another into different positions — upside down or outstretched at right angles in improbable balances. It is both nerve-racking and tantalising to watch the physical risk-taking combined with their erotically charged proximity. All this unfolds to Tsubasa Hori's ever more powerful percussion and composer Barbara Drozkov's live prepared-piano.

Other delicacies and details that resonate with the notions of nature and the sea, the lapping of waves, the reflection of water, can be glimpsed, finely woven into the performance under the weather eye of dramaturge Isabelle Dumont. And not least, the final liquid we are served: a Solar Broth, subtitled 'Rebirth', in which floats the yolk of an egg. It is delicious and feels richly nourishing.

The refined liquids, we have been warned however, do not constitute dinner. And as the whole experience will set you back 45 euros, all that remains is to go for frietjes afterwards (thankfully still pre-VAT hike). No regrets, nevertheless; despite the price, the *My Ström* experience is rare and will certainly linger with me for a long time. And as public funding grows ever more precarious, privately supported initiatives such as Les Passagées may well offer a taste of what lies ahead.