

# spa for spirits

spaforspirits.com



Spa for Spirits is a traveling meeting place that questions conventional notions of human well-being. Since 2021, performers Leonie Buysse and Lili Vanderstraeten have led Spa for Spirits—a wellness center inhabited by otherworldly creatures. Together with artists and experts from various artistic and life domains, they create interactive and participatory installations and performances, where individual art practices interweave through collective play, exploration, and wonder.



Documentation Sensorial Islands — Spa for Spirits, Museum van Schone Kunsten (Gent), during Pride and Paintings (2024).

Participants are invited to step beyond the ordinary and embrace new ways of seeing, thinking, and being by rediscovering everyday activities, loosening them from their monotonous rusty patterns and reconnecting them with diverse crafts and techniques. The peculiar rituals that emerge from this process aim to ground participants in their bodies, reawaken the senses, and grow a more conscious engagement with their surroundings. By occupying diverse public and semi-public spaces, we disrupt and queer them from their usual identity and function. We reimagine them through artistic and sensory exploration, this transformative process invites an unexpected mix of participants—local residents, passersby, and communities—to engage in new and surprising ways. Through these explorations the otherworldly hosts of **Spa for Spirits** strive to reconnect humanity with its fundamental needs.

In recent years, **SfS** has focused on creating ‘safe sensory islands’—small installations that transform everyday activities into enigmatic rituals and interactive performances. Each island revolves around a theme and activity from daily life. For example, an island exploring loss may use sewn-together sleeves and trousers to create an architectural space where participants move through, sew, and connect with others, transforming the clothing of those no longer present into something dynamic and alive. The creation process of making islands may arise from a single artist’s vision, a collaboration among artists, or a participatory process involving the local community.

In collaboration with: **Henny Baeken** (body-oriented therapy advisor), **Renske Maria Van Dam and Francesco Apostoli** (architects), **Nora Vanderstraeten** (graphic design and documentation), **Alice Dooreman** (documentation), drag queen collective **House of Lux - Theo Bonne, and Daan Dekeyser** (performers, makeup and look development), **Luna De Mey** (performer & chef), **Oscar Pichard** (sound artwork), **Sybre Janssens** (scenography), **Wim Pelgrims** (sound artwork), **Anton Cla** (video work), **Aidan Abnet** (costumes), **Noam Youngrak Son** (graphic designer), **Mats Van Droogenbroeck** (dramaturg), **Antonio Triolo / Nino Kooks** (chef), **Heike Langsdorf** (mentorship). With support from: **404** (in collaboration with **Nachtzweemmen**), **GC Nekkersdal** (in the GAG cabin), **Buda** (residency), **De School Van Gaasbeek** (residency), **Nightshift / Gouvernement** (for the GIF festival), **Kyoto University of the Arts** (AGxKansai conference), **De Grote Post** (residency), **Broei** (residency and open studios), **Brussels Gallery Weekend** (Generation Brussels), **Theater De Nieuwe Vorst** (Murf/Murw festival), **Pleasure Island** (residency), **Campo Nieuwpoort** (A Shot at Love), **De Koer** (residency and open studios), **Fomu** (with **Melanie Bonajo**), **Radical House** (residency), **MSK Ghent** (Pride and Paintings), **Dr. Guislain Museum** (with **Lucinda Ra** for **Psycho Jazz**). With financial support from: **the Flemish Community Commission, Alleskan, the City of Ghent, and Kunstendecreet** (Flanders State of the Arts).

**“We reject the representational space and the work as passive contemplation.”**

Lygia Clark – *in Wij weigeren...*  
a manifesto from 1966.

SfS envisions these islands as dynamic spaces where co-creation and presentation seamlessly intertwine—like a Möbius strip—during multi-week on-site residencies. Each culminates in a mini-festival, sharing discoveries with a wider audience. Art-making merges with everyday life, shaped by local rhythms and social dynamics, transforming into a relational, evolving experience. Inspired by Lygia Clark, we challenge a neoliberal world where the body fades, hyper-individualism and consumerism dominate, and shared rituals disappear by an increasingly digitized world. Through handwork and bodywork, we shift art from mere presentation to mutual learning, collectively exploring its outcome with the community we gradually build. Together we explore how our ‘wellness center’ can stimulate well-being and help us reshape how we want to live. What moves us? What helps? What opens us to the world—and what makes us retreat? Through this exploration, we invite visitors to reconnect with their senses and simply be present—in their bodies, in the here and now.

Over three years, SfS will grow into a traveling care space, partnering with diverse communities to redefine well-being. At its core is The Landscape of Safe Sensory Islands, a process-based, relational art project that organically learns from the experiences of its participants.

The Landscape of Safe Sensory Islands consists of three core elements:

- 1 Reception Desk – a symbolic gateway welcoming participants.
- 2 The Landscape – a sensory-rich wandering path for creative interaction.
- 3 Cafeteria – a communal space for reflection and decompression with food and drinks.

Structured in phases, The Landscape connects ideas and dreams, participatory methods, and various artists while queering institutional roles—where the nurse becomes the artist, the patient the doctor, the artist the cook. In this way we want to distribute responsibilities and reimagine normative roles, enriching the experience we aim to offer at the wellness center. Community involvement grows through dialogue with select partners, ensuring an accessible, barrier-free space. Above all, we prioritize openness—a sanctuary where people can step in and return freely.

## **Phase 1 (2025)**

### **Constructing the Foundation**

The project will commence in the summer of 2025 with the construction of a foundational structure comprising a mobile reception desk and cafeteria. This phase will be executed in close collaboration with architect Renske Maria Van Dam and Francesco Apostoli, with the build taking place at De Koer (Ghent) or Jester (Genk), pending final scheduling details.

## **Phase 2 (2025 - 2026)**

### **Initial Engagement in Brussels**

Following the construction, the performative aspects of the reception desk and cafeteria will be further developed. SfS travels to Brussels with the newly built reception desk and cafeteria, collaborating with care-focused partners Kaos Vzw, Globe Aroma, and Topaz to integrate community-driven rituals of care. The reception desk will be created in partnership with Globe Aroma, a cultural and artistic hub for newcomers in Belgium, symbolizing a welcoming entry point. For the cafeteria, we aim to collaborate with TOPAZ, a day center focused on palliative care, and Kaos vzw, an initiative integrating art and mental health care. Both organizations emphasize communal activities such as cooking, morning soup, and afternoon coffee gatherings—rituals that align deeply with our vision of building community and marking the culmination of The Landscape through the shared space of the cafeteria.

## **Phase 3 (2026-2027)**

### **Long-Term Residencies**

SfS expands to Ghent (De Koer & Dr. Guislain Museum), Ostend (De Grote Post), and Antwerp (Het Bos). Each landing will culminate in a two-day mini-festival, fostering collective experiences and public engagement. The mini-festivals are integrated into the programming of the partners and their festivals.

Each residency follows a structured process:

**Week 1: Immersing in the space and connecting with its people.**

**Week 2: Gathering materials from the surroundings. (+ first public event)**

**Week 3 & 4: Collective making—dyeing, cooking, sewing, cutting, destroying, and repairing. (+ second public event)**

**Week 5: Preparing and curating a two-day mini-festival in an off-program of a bigger festival (Gentle parasitizing)**

**Week 6: Presentation of two-day mini-festival**

Throughout the landing zones for one-on-one performances, co-creation and collective action emerge, using diverse materials and crafts. As each landing concludes, the focus shifts to preparing the mini-festival, where interconnected islands are brought together, activated by otherworldly creatures—performers who have mastered the operation of the wellness center. Every two weeks, SfS will host a participatory event centered around a specific action, ideally by a fire with freshly baked bread, ensuring ongoing engagement and community connection.



UrbanCampsite Amsterdam

Spa for Spirits – The Lanscape of Safe Sensory Islands, under the artistic direction of **Leonie Buysse** and **Lili Vanderstraeten** / Supported by: **Wouter Bouchez** and **Julie Rodeyns** (Through Art We Care) / In collaboration with: **Henny Baeken** (body-oriented therapist), **Renske Maria Van Dam** (architect), **Francesco Apostoli** (architect), **Nora Vanderstraeten** (photographic documentation), **Alice Dooreman** (performer), drag queen collective **House of Lux** - **Theo Bonne** and **Daan Dekeyser** (performers, makeup and look development), **Luna De Mey** (performer & chef) and **Jonas Baeke** (dramaturg)