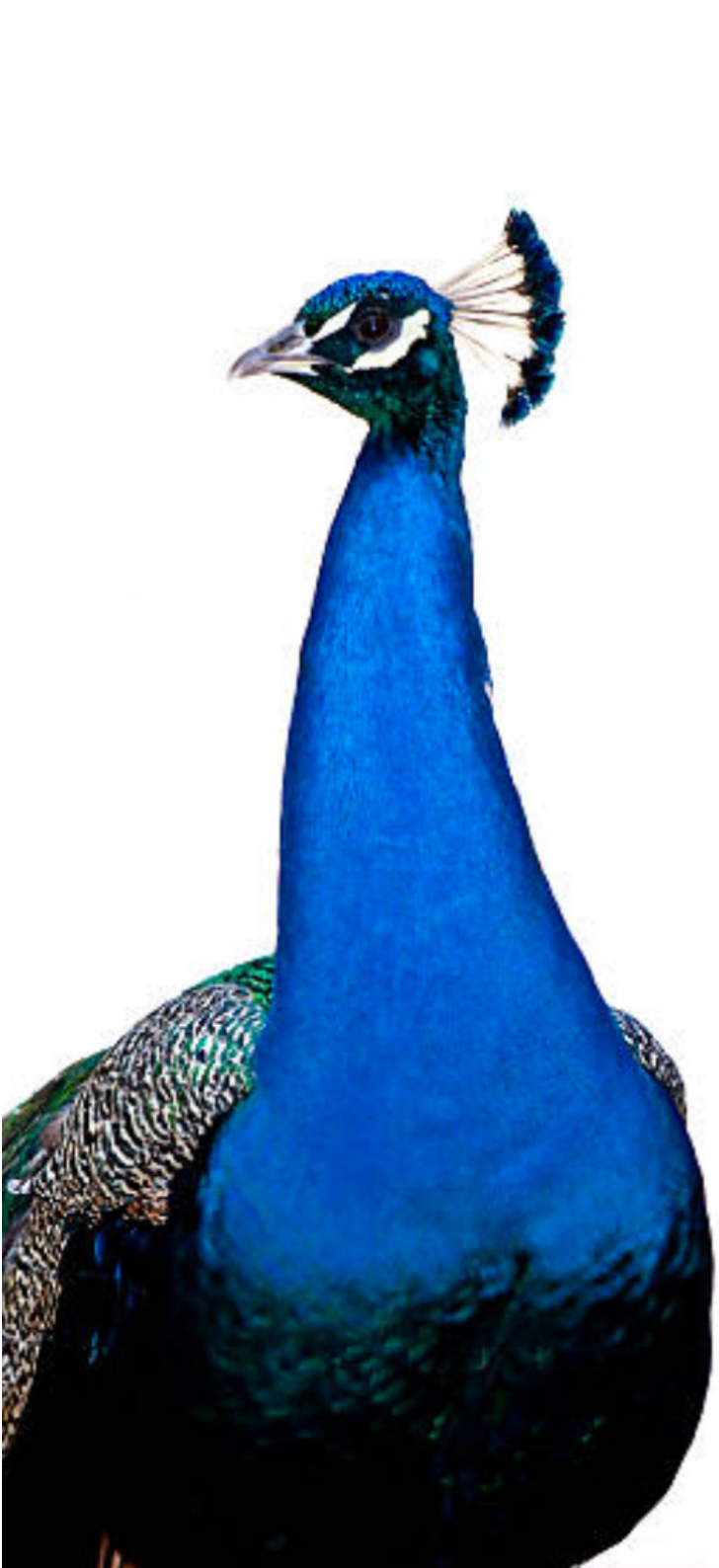


FIRST, TO DISAPPEAR

MÉLISSA VON VÉPY ▪ CIE HAPPÉS

AERIAL DANCE THEATER // NEW WORK 2028

[Project presentation document as of November 18, 2026]

FIRST, TO DISAPPEAR

AERIAL ▪ DANCE ▪ THEATER

New Work 2028

Or the creation of a floating ballet composed of a multitude of suspended coats.

Aerial performers, dancers, and actors will slip into these "ghostly envelopes" to humorously explore the concepts of character, embodiment, and ego.



Concept and Direction: **Mélissa Von Vépy**
Created with and performed by: **Olivier Bovet, Sarah Devaux, Chiharu Mamiya, Mélissa Von Vépy**
Dramaturgy and Writing: **Sarah Devaux**
Choreography and Acting: **Chiharu Mamiya, Olivier Bovet**
Artistic Advisors: **Julia Christ, Sumako Koseki**
Set Design: **Neil Price, Mélissa Von Vépy**
Costumes: **Emmanuelle Grobet**
Lighting: **Sabine Charreire**
Sound: **Jean-Damien Ratel**

Production and Booking: **Hélène Chenelot**
Administration and Production: **Hélène Garcia**

Cie Happés // Mélissa Von Vépy is Franco-Swiss. Based in Aigues-Vives (Gard) and Geneva, the company is supported by the Ministry of Culture—DRAC Occitanie.

← First research workshop—Aigues-Vives, March 2026.

PROVISIONAL SCHEDULE

On tour: 6 people
4 performers, 2 technicians, occasionally: 1 assistant director or 1 booker

Provisional production schedule:

- First workshop from March 18 to 21, 2026, in Aigues-Vives (Cie Happés venue)
- 2026–2027 Season: 4 works periods in Aigues-Vives + one month of research and development for set design and costumes.
- 2027–2028 Season: **We are seeking four host venues for work periods lasting 10 days each** (including the first day of setup)

- November 22–27, 2026 – Aigues-Vives (6 days)
- March 8–13, 2027 – Aigues-Vives (6 days)
- May 12–20, 2027 – Aigues-Vives (8 days
- August 14–19, 2027 – Aigues-Vives (6 days)
- between November 1 and 18, 2027 – (10 days)
- January 4–13, 2028 – (10 days)
- February 21–March 1, 2028 – (10 days
- between April 24 and May 13, 2028 - (9 days followed by the **PREMIERES**)



Roadside stall on the way to Viana (2007) © Jo Ratcliffe

"PRESENCES WITHOUT BODIES (...).
THEY HANG THERE AS IF THEY WERE WAITING.
LATER, WHEN THE GHOSTS COME, THEY WILL NEED TO BE CLOTHED."

Emmanuel Iduma

STATEMENT OF INTENT

From Butō, Kleist's string puppets, to Deleuze's "becomings"

First, to disappear, to make way for the "becomings."
For Gilles Deleuze, "becoming" is a process of continuous transformation that eludes fixed identities and established norms.
"Becoming" is not a transition between two fixed states, but a perpetual movement endowed with its own consistency.
It involves an encounter with the outside world or with the other (becoming-animal, becoming-woman) to break down rigid categories.

This creative project emerged from my practice of Butō— working with Carlotta Ikeda, but primarily through the insight and teaching of Sumako Koseki—which, for the past twenty years, has increasingly infused my work.

I have therefore chosen to surround myself with artists for whom the exercises is essential: openness, and a presence intensified by the setting aside of the intellect, with the body re-established as both the driving force and the vessel of emotions.
Our shared practice of butō is an invaluable foundation for developing this project.

The focus of this research also aligns precisely with Kleist's essay on grace: *On Puppet Theater* (the starting point for *VieLLeicht*, which I created in 2013).
In addition to the many advantages of the fascinating figure of the puppet—acting, or "becoming a thing" in butō—Kleist's work highlights the anti-gravitational dimension of these string puppets; an advantage that is truly enviable for aerial performers and dancers like us.

I am thus addressing an essential aspect of what drives my creative process: for a fleeting moment, the joy of being able to be someone else, somewhere else, in a more concentrated form

- But isn't that a lifetime's work?!
- Yes, here we are with our backs against the wall.
- "You have to dissolve yourself to pass beneath," says Novarina.
- Oh okay.

With a touch of « self-derision »—but absolute sincerity—a small troupe of dancers, aerial performers, and actors will challenge the dogmas of the great masters of the stage, who advocate erasing our personalities to summon a deeper, more universal dimension of being.

Aware that this is a utopian ideal, we're going to give it a try!
It is precisely this attempt that we will bring to the stage, united in a collective effort, to touch this ultimate quest with our fingertips.

I ask the dancer to shed his ego, his individual body, in favor of a deeper body.
Maurice Béjart

To be an actor is not to love appearing; it is to love disappearing immensely. To be an actor is to be gifted at shedding one's human garments, to have a strong inclination toward being nothing…
Valère Novarina

String puppets have this advantage over living dancers: they would never put on airs. For affectation arises the moment the soul finds itself at a point entirely different from the center of gravity of the movement… Their limbs submit solely to the law of gravity—a marvelous quality that one would seek in vain in most of our dancers.
Heinrich von Kleist

The dancer is there. He tells no story. But his body has a past that gives it weight, depth. Anonymous, he carries human substance, a distillation of lived experience. ...We embrace the souls of those who have gone before us, and they bestow their strength upon us. That is where the boundless power of Butō comes from.
Tatsumi Hijikata

The Space, the Stage Design

A multitude of coats hanging on hangers make up our stage space.

These rows of floating “ghosts”—slumped on the floor or fluttering in the flies—form our performance area.
All around: the ropes hanging from the pulleys, in the dim light but always visible, as puppeteers go about their work, lifting, hoisting, and guiding what unfolds in the center.

Being Acted Upon

While in theater, costumes usually serve to complement the work of the actor or dancer, we will do the opposite;

Suspended in these coats like string puppets, we will strive to be acted upon, to become “things,” “flesh,” stripped of our personalities and our willful egos.

Moved by these costumes—with their varied shapes, colors, and materials—but also moved by the music, and by the puppeteers at the edges who will hoist us to different heights, to reveal strange beings emerging from the depths, crawling, floating, and fluttering as they encounter one another.

Human Puppets

Without diminishing the serious, almost ceremonial nature of our endeavor, we are also aware of the absurdity of such an approach.
In this scenario of human puppets, we will play on these numerous paradoxes; between lack of will and inertia, the line is a fine one.

Held aloft by a single string, we will be somewhat vulnerable. At times, as the sole guardians of our verticality, we will have to hoist ourselves up to attempt an uncertain takeoff.
According to Kleist, these strings, which connect the puppeteer to the puppet, “are the path that leads to the dancer’s soul.”: These ropes, crisscrossing the entire stage, will be of the utmost importance to us!

These coats—shell-like shelters, sometimes abandoned—will allow us to evoke the gap between appearances and what lies within; an irreconcilable gap, or perfect coherence?
Dressing up is, first and foremost, a childlike, lighthearted joy. But one can also “feel dressed up,” or associate it with notions of deception or pretense.

Cross-dressing means playing with appearances, codes, norms, and social hierarchies. Being able to escape them: is it vital, or is it a game?
We'll borrow from carnival* its function as a festive and transgressive outlet.

* *From the Latin *carnelevare*, which literally means "to remove the meat."*

Putting on these clothes is like "slipping into another skin," playing a role so seriously that we end up "embodying" it.
This raises the delicate question of the ego—at the heart of our discussion—and one that is so pertinent today, when the constant self-representation is ever-present and highly valued.
"To be an actor is to love disappearing more than anything," says Novarina.
...Not so simple! Especially if—in a small meta-level twist—we include in our discussion our status as performing artists, that is, in a position where we must please!

At Stake

Through this project, we wish to celebrate this space of escape and infinite freedom that the stage affords.
The time of the performance, like that of carnival, is OTHER: Suspended, this time is a present so densified that it is paradoxically stripped of analysis and consequences.
Collectively playing the roles of puppeteers and puppets—acting or being acted upon—we will stage this ambitious desire to disappear in order to allow OTHERS to emerge.
We thus hope to invite the audience to join us, through the imagination, in our suspended ballet—united to celebrate a humanity of the depths, ageless and genderless—as well as this universal, powerful, and unalterable ability to PLAY.

TEAM



MÉLISSA VON VÉPY // CIE HAPPÉS • Concept and direction - Performer

Born in Geneva in 1979, she began her circus training at the age of 5 and later enrolled at the CNAC, from which she graduated in 1999 as a trapeze artist.
Through her company, Happés, she creates performances that blend her work in aerial arts, dance, and theater.
The set designs she creates are an integral part of the dramaturgy of her pieces, which are always grounded in aerial expression: the physical and inner dimensions of Gravity.
Together with her long-time artistic collaborators—Sabine Charreire, Julie Christ, Emmanuelle Grobet, Sumako Koseki, Stéphan Oliva, Neil Price, Jean-Damien Ratel, and others—Mélissa Von Vépy has been exploring, for some twenty years, the infinite metaphors of our vertical movements.

PREVIOUS SHOWS:

2025: ***Aspirator*** (duo) Premiere in October 2025
2023: ***Piano Rubato*** (duo)
2021: ***Les Flyings*** (quintet)
2018: ***Noir M1*** (solo)
2017: ***L'Aérien***, a talk-and-flight performance (solo)
2015: ***J'ai horreur du printemps*** (concert-performance with a jazz quartet)
2013: ***VieLLeicht*** (solo)
2009: ***Miroir, Miroir*** (duo for mirror and piano)
2009: ***Dans la gueule du ciel*** (duo)
2007: ***Croc*** (solo, co-directed by C. Ikeda)

Co-directed with Chloé Moglia:
2007: ***En suspens*** (quintet, co-directed by C. Moglia)
2005: ***I look up, I look down...*** (duo) / SACD Circus Art Award – 2007
2003: ***Temps Troubles*** (trio)
2001: ***Un certain endroit du ventre*** (duo)

AS A PERFORMER

«Talk Show» (2017) by Gaël Santisteva, «Ce qui n'a pas de nom» (2015) by Pascale Henry, «Hans was Heiri» (2012) by Zimmermann & de Perrot, «UCHUU-cabaret» (2008) by Carlotta Ikeda, «Les Sublimes» (2003) by Guy Alloucherie.

EDUCATION AND ARTISTIC ADVISOR

Mélissa Von Vépy regularly leads workshops and master classes on aerial arts and is invited to serve as a collaborator and artistic advisor by several companies.
She co-directed «**Plonger**» (premiered in December 2023) by Sarah Devaux / Cie Menteuses, as part of her mentorship program with Cie Happés.



SARAH DEVAUX • Dramaturgy and writing collaborator - Performer

Sarah is a graduate of ÉSAC (the Higher School of Circus Arts in Brussels), where she trained from 2011 to 2014.
She co-founded La compagnie Menteuses with Célia Casagrande-Pouchet to create their first show, «À Nos Fantômes».
She is currently developing her artistic research and practice around various physicopoetic mediums. Her preferred forms of expression and areas of expertise begin with the body in suspension, but her love for words and their power has opened up the fields of theater and fiction to her, as well as an increasingly keen interest in philosophy.
Recently, she met Nadia Vadauri-Gauthier and trained in the dance and performance method known as "corps sismographe®". The freedom and immensity of the body as it dances and moves—a vehicle for emotions, sensations, and the imagination—becomes the raw material that connects these different mediums. Her work has become increasingly hybrid, expressed through a metaphorical language and a unique, physically theatrical universe, driven by a recurring desire to give voice to the invisible, to bring to light the forces that underpin the human condition, and to confront people with their fragility and their untapped potential.
In addition to her own creations, Sarah collaborates with various directors across a broad and hybrid spectrum that encompasses circus, theater, and dance (Mélissa von Vépy // Cie Happés, Yvain Juilliard, Damien Droin–Cie Hors Surface, Camille Châtelain–Cie L'indécente…).



OLIVIER BOVET • Choreography Collaboration – Performer

Self-taught, he has trained through numerous workshops covering a wide and varied range of disciplines. (Clown with Michel Dallaire, Christophe Tellier, Emmanuel Sembely, Cahin-caha; butoh with Sumako Koseki…)
From 1994 to 2008, he worked with Cie Les sardines grillées (circus and street art). As a performer, he has worked notably with Cie Théâtre embarque, Aventures Anonymes (as an actor), and with the Impact company (as a dancer).
In 2008, Olivier Bovet founded Compagnie à tiroirs, where he developed his relationship with objects; he created and performed three solo shows: «Béron à tous les étages» (a solo piece about clumsiness), «C'est pas commode» (a poetic duet for a clown and his dresser), and «Portes!» (a giant animated origami installation).
In 2020, he joined the Easy to Digest Company for «Le magasin des suicides», a puppet circus.
At the same time, he continued his work in dance and poetic performances, notably with the Mot pour Mot Company and the Théâtre des Chemins Company, and joined Mélissa Von Vépy for the production «Aspirator» in 2025.



CHIHARU MAMIYA • Choreography collaborator - Performer

Trained in classical ballet in Japan from childhood, Chiharu Mamiya arrived in France in 1996 and studied at the École Rosella Hightower in Cannes, where she discovered contemporary dance and acting. In 1999, she joined the Kubilaï Khan Investigations company, with which she collaborated until 2008 on numerous transdisciplinary projects.
Since 2006, she has worked as a performer and/or choreographer with international artists and companies such as Gilles Jobin, François Verret, Caterina Sagna, Anne Lopez, Fabrice Ramalingom, Kaori Ito, Cie Anomalie, Jörg Müller, and Tabaimo, in the fields of dance, theater, circus, visual arts, music, and audiovisual media.
At the same time, she has been developing her own works, including «YAMIMA» (2011), «Danse le Tambo!» (2013), «Yamima Furoshiki» (2015), and «HOME MADE» (2019). Since 2020, she has been collaborating with Cie 1Watt («Nous Impliquer Dans Ce Qui Vient», «After Collapse») and is notably involved in «Paradoxe des jumeaux» (2025) by Cie Maison Courbe. She is a member of LIM – Landscape in Motion and collaborates with Pedro Prazeres.



JULIA CHRIST • Artistic Consultant

Julia Christ is a circus artist. A 2001 graduate of the École Supérieure des Arts du Cirque in Brussels, she has spent more than twenty years developing a unique physical language at the intersection of contemporary dance, acrobatics, and hand balancing.
After making her debut with the Compagnie Feria Musica («Calcinculo»), she collaborated closely with choreographer Gilles Baron («Droit comme la pluie», «Oozing Tears», «Animal Attraction»), and later with Jean-Baptiste André, notably in «Qu'après en être revenu and Pleurage» et «Scintillement», for which she co-choreographed. In 2009, she created the solo piece «Bambula», followed in 2016 by «Soulcorner», a winner of the CircusNext program, staged in collaboration with Michel Cerda. This artistic dialogue centered on stage composition has had a lasting influence on her dramaturgical approach and her perspective on creation.
For several years, she has been working as a director and external consultant for numerous contemporary circus companies, including Circo Aereo, Kirn Compagnie, Compagnie Happés // Mélissa Von Vépy, Association W, and La Dérive. Her work focuses on the body, dramaturgical structure, and precision of movement, within a careful dialogue with the artistic teams.
From 2019 to 2023, she was an associate artist at the Pôle National Cirque Le Sirque in Nexon (Nouvelle-Aquitaine), and since 2022 she has served on the jury for CircusNext and the European Circus Label.



EMMANUELLE GROBET • Costume Design

After more than thirty years and approximately 180 productions in live performance, this is how I would describe my career path.
I became interested in materials, volumes, and movement very early on, even before I encountered the performing arts.
I first worked with metal, then moved on to fabrics and many other materials, teaching myself and always approaching them with great curiosity.
It is discovery and creative adventure that fascinate me. Costumes, masks, puppets, props, and set design are an extension of my work as a visual artist. I discover a new world (and new materials) with every creation. I have the privilege of creating with my own hands in this artistic world that inspires me and is constantly evolving.
Since 1992, I have specialized in technical circus costumes while also creating props and set designs.
I have worked with numerous companies, including Cie Vent d'Autant, Cie Contre-Pour (Michel DALER), Cie ANOMALIE, Cie Les Apostrophés, Cirque Désaccordé, Cie les ARROSES, Cie XY, Cie Un loup pour l'homme, Cie Irina BROUK, Cie la VALISE, Cie DORE, Cirque AOC, Circo AEREO, Cie MANIE, Cie L'MRGée, Cie Out of the Blue, Cirque AITAL, Cie Bistaki, Cie happés // Mélissa Von Vépy…
I would like to make special mention of my collaboration with Jérôme Savary on the design and creation of puppets and masks for two operas («Les contes d'Hoffman» (2001) and «Carmen» (2005)) and a production titled «Une vie d'artiste» (2006), as well as with the Jérôme Thomas Company, for which I have designed the costumes and set designs for its 28 productions since 1992.



SABINE CHARREIRE • Lighting design

After training in technical stage management at the CFPTS in Bagnolet (2002–2003), Sabine Charreire honed her skills at the MC93 in Bobigny, the Centre National de la Danse, and the Théâtre National de Chaillot, Théâtre de la Colline, Théâtre du Châtelet, and Théâtre de la Ville, which gave her the opportunity to work in various fields of the performing arts and to meet lighting designers, Christian Dubet, Joel Hourbeigt, Valérie Sigward, and Françoise Michelle, who would inspire her reflections on lighting design. To broaden her skill set, she has worked regularly on television sets, notably with director of photography Olivier Diolez.
Out of personal interest, her career has focused more specifically on contemporary circus and dance. She adapts and supports the tours of several choreographers, including Alban Richard and Fouad Boussouf, and stages her own productions by Nina Vallon and Mélissa Von Vépy, with whom she has worked closely since 2009.
In addition to her work as a stage manager and lighting designer, she teaches optics, photometry, and ETC lighting consoles at the CFPTS in Bagnolet and at the Arkalya training center.



JEAN-DAMIEN RATEL • Sound Design

Jean-Damien Ratel has created the sound designs for approximately one hundred productions. He explores various forms of live performance that blend multiple disciplines: theater, dance, circus, poetry, music, opera, and film. His sound compositions are rooted in the concrete reality of the stage space. He strives to establish a subtle connection between the presence on stage, the space, and the dramaturgy. The sound score he crafts takes shape and becomes part of the musicality of the text and the movement of the actors, dancers, or acrobats. He thus creates a dynamic soundscape that serves not only as accompaniment but also as a source of mutual influence.
He met Mélissa Von Vépy in 2005 to create the soundscape for «I look up, I look down» and has been collaborating on her productions ever since. He was most recently seen on stage in «Melancholia Europea» and «66 Gallery» by Bérangère Jannelle, set to music using experimental instruments of his own design. He performs in a duo with actress Marie Payen («Perdre le Nord»).
He also continues his work in film with director Stanley Woodward: «Voir le jour» and «Les Vagues»; Bérangère Jannelle: «Petit Âne» and «Les Lucioles»; Isabelle Ronayette: «La Clarté»; and S. Louis: «Nourrir l'anima», «Ensuite ils ont vieilli», and «La chambrée».

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Minimum Space Requirements
Wall-to-wall width: 10 m / Depth: 8 m / Height: 6 m below the grid

Stage
Our stage structure consists of a series of triangular truss assembled to form a rectangle 5.5 m wide by 4 m deep.

This structure will be suspended from the grid at its center and at the four corners, at an ideal height of 7m; load capacity of suspension points: 250 Kg CMU per point.
It will be guyed at the four corners. Load capacity of the four guy points: 250 Kg CMU per point.
Our system of hoists and pulleys will be fully integrated into our truss structure.

Black backdrop and black dance mat on the floor covering the entire stage.
As of now, the type of hanging decorations/borders has not been determined.

Sound
In progress

Lighting
Initially, a full-stage floodlight covering the entire stage.

CONTACTS

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