

# S p i n t i c A

## FRANK by Cherish Menzo at the Montpellier Danse Festival



*For the end of this year's Montpellier Danse Festival, Cherish Menzo presents FRANK, the third part of a trilogy exploring the decomposition of images and certainties. In a tri-frontal set-up, FRANK, which straddles the line between terror and fascination, questions the figure of the monster, not in its appearances or trappings, but in its cultural and anthropological function.*



Cherish Menzo, *FRANK* Bas de Brouwer

Like Frankenstein, *FRANK* is a monster made from the hybridity of composite, disparate, heterogeneous and heteroclit elements. In an atmosphere that alternately awakens our imaginary, the anguished worlds of qo's popular culture, the figure of the zombie, post-apo, Marilyn Manson-style shock rock, Winti rituals and their demonization by the Dutch colonial regime, the black body hollowed out of its soul by European settlers, the night patrol, the wild cage, the krump, the voice, the text, the PVC strip curtain of the butcher shop, the black body in the distorted mirror of the racist gaze, the cry, the tears, the earth, the decomposition. All this and more, sewn together in a Frankensteinian dramaturgy.

## "Vision is €ction

With *FRANK*, Cherish Menzo continues her research into radical otherness and irrational fear. *FRANK* is the final part of a trilogy that distorts the familiar to the point of revealing its disquieting strangeness, questioning our frightened gaze. The first part was inspired by the Vixen video phenomenon of the 90s, and featured the figure of *JEZEBEL*, whose story is recounted in the Old Testament. Wife of Ahab, King of Samaria, the Book of Kings presents her as a scheming foreigner who perverts the established order by inciting the king and the people to turn away from God. She was put to death by defenestration, and her body was later left to rot in the devouring dogs. The name Jezebel recurs in the stories of the Apocalypse, about a prophetess of doom who seduces believers away from their faith. After having, with *JEZEBEL*, tackled the hypersexualization of the black woman's body, the second part of the trilogy, *BAR-KMA "I" "FR*, invited us "to descend into the depths of darkness, where the

matter can overcome an entanglement of meanings". *FRANK* brings this research to a close, focusing on how the monster crystallizes our fears and externalizes them to the point of lying about their rationality and objectivity. "Vision is fiction", the performers tell us in a prosody distorted to the point of schizoid auditory hallucination. For to see is to project, blindly, what we think we know.



Cherish Menzo, *FRANK* Qc Bas de Brouwer

As we turn inside the cage made of PVC strips, a few openings, a few breaches, tell us that danger is potential and that it could well end up spilling out into the audience, onto us, that it could come "right into our arms", populating our nights with nightmares and fright. Cherish Menzo draws on the writings of Julia Kristeva, who defined horror as the loss of the boundary between self and other. Yet the threat is not where we think it is, for while fear may be on our side, the real peril lies on the other. Indeed, the set design is inspired by the Baka Gorong, the places at the back of the plantations in Suriname where enslaved people used to gather clandestinely to perform their Winti rituals and perhaps consider escape.

## "Is it scary?"

The monster is always structured in a mirror: that's its definition. Making monstrous spectacularization heard, the monster unmask the fantastical zones of our irrational fears. "Is it scary?" asks the narrator. A close-up covering the backstage wall, showing the face, the highest locus of individuation, the mouth, the tongue, the eye, is enough to make it clear.

monstrous. Regularly, the narrator's voice unplugs the "Collapse!" machine, extinguishing the bodies. A few sounds of dead flies can be heard, and you'd think the smell wasn't far away. Stepping over the railing, the performers invade the room and advance, as if inexorably, from row to row, transgressing the reassuring boundaries that separate fiction from reality. Nothing is contained; social, spiritual and cosmic disorder floods the theater.

The dead invade the living, the stage invades the auditorium, sound invades space. The collapse of the arena, a leak of water falling from the hangers, a messy structure suspended, stopped at the heart of the contradictory movements of falling and rising, a second before the collapse, the explosion, a frightening laugh, a sob. "Knock knock! Who's there? Collapse!"



Cherish Menzo, FRANK Qc Bas de Brouwer

With this piece, the festival ends in a kind of carnivalesque enjoyment of collapse. It's not the end of times, far from it, it's the precise moment when the old world, in its last jolts, unwillingly releases, like a fart, the moribund, nauseating odors of its old dominant culture, from which emerge the monsters it has created itself, like so many ideological mirrors of its fears, its political choices, and its cruelty. My seatmate on my left says, "It's wonderful to finish an edition like this! That's what I've always loved about the Montpellier Danse festival, is that it can indulge in anything."

Marie Reverdy

Concept and direction: Cherish Menzo / Creation and performance: Malick Cissé, Mulunesh, Omagbitse Omagbemi, Cherish Menzo / Sound creation: Maria Muehombo a.k.a M I M I / Video creation: Andrea Casetti / Sound and video **engineer**: Arthur De Vuyst / Set design :



Morgana Machado Marques / Lighting: Ryoya Fudetani / Dramaturgy: Johanne Affricot, Renée Copraij / Costumes: Cherish Menzo / Text: Khadija El Kharraz Alami, Cherish Menzo / Surtitles: Jennifer Piasecki / Artistic advice: Khadija El Kharraz Alami, Nicole Geertruida / **Stage management:** Pieter-Jan Buelens, Arthur De Vuyst, Ryoya Fudetani, Hadrien Jeangette / Graphics: Nick Mattan / Acknowledgments: Mildred Caprino, Anne Goedhart, Rodney Frederik & Winti Formation "Krin Ati," Daryll Geldrop, Ernie Wolf, Sandra Menzo, Shavelie Menzo, Madeleine Planeix-Crocker, Sarah Garnaud, Alice Bröker, Johanna CoolProduction: GRIP & Theater Utrecht (Dagmar Bokma, Anne Breure, Maartje de Groot, Teun de Loos, Philip den Uyl, Hanne Doms, Seline Gosling, Anneleen Hermans, Tom Hemmer, Leonie Jekel, Myrthe Ligtenberg, Thomas Lloyd, Rudi Meulemans, Lize Meynaerts, Klaartje Oerlemans, Jennifer Piasecki, Florian Smits, Sylvie Svanberg, Bregt van Deursen, Ad van Mierlo, Yoni Vermeire, Nele Verreyken, Vincent Wijlhuizen / In collaboration with : Dance On Ensemble / Bureau Ritter. DANCE ON is a project of Bureau Ritter gUG, financed by the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media / International distribution: A propic - Line Rousseau, Marion Gauvent / Coproduction: Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Carreau du Temple - Etablissement culturel et sportif de la Ville de Paris, Productiehuis Theater Rotterdam, Julidans Amsterdam, PACT Zollverein financed by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, Festival of Dance On Ensemble.

Montpellier Danse 2018-19, le Centre Chorégraphique National d'Orléans - Direction Maud Le Pladec, Tanzquartier Wien, DDD - Festival Dias da Dança, Festival d'Automne à Paris, One Dance Festival, Perpodium / With the support of : Center nationale de la danse à Pantin, BRONKS, KWP Kunstenwerkplaats, l'Atelier de Paris - Centre de développement chorégraphique national / With the financial support of : Le Gouvernement Flamand, Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral Belge via Cronos Invest, BNG Bank Theaterprijs, Charlotte Köhler Prijs van het Cultuurfonds, Culture Moves Europe, a project financed by the European Union and the Goethe-Institut. This work has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The opinions expressed in this work can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

Texts: *Disembodied Narrator* Cherish Menzo, inspired by and with excerpts from the introductory text of *The Host* in Wes Anderson's *Asteroid City*, 1984 by George Orwell. Excerpts, modifications and reinterpretations of chapter 4 of *The Modern Prometheus* - Mary Shelley. **THE WITNESS, THE MONSTROUS** - Cherish Menzo *Bam Barn* - Chaka Demus and Pliers, Sister Nancy, Toots & the Maytals *Fnya Siton* - A Surinamese "children's" ehansosn.

Inspiration, references, bibliography . *Baka Gorong* a place located at the back of the old plantations and in front of the wetlands where the enslaved people of Suriname secretly went to perform their rituals and contemplate escape. *tab Jab from Grenada* : Jab comes from the Creole word for 'Devil', a masquerader playing Jab Jab plays the devil. Jab is a satirical representation of the mal inflicted by white colonialists on the enslaved. *Black Skin, White Masks* - Frantz Fanon, *Pfountion Memories, Episodes Of Everyday Racism* - Grada Kilomba, **Powers of Horror**: In *Essay on Abjection* - Julia Kristeva, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* - Mary Shelly, *Monstrous Znnmncies* - Christina Sharpe, *Menus* in **Two Acts**

- Saidiya Hartman, *My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix*, *Performing Transgender Rage* - Susan Stryker, *For the Wild: Dr Báýò Akómoláfê* on Cominy *nfire to other senses* / 300 (podcast), **AS TEMPERATURES RISE, EP 9**. *Báýò Akómoláfê*.

**Monsters, Fugitiuity and Sitting in the Lostness of Things** (podeast), **The Horror Film** - Peter Hutchings, *Asteroid City* - Wes Anderson (the host and General Gibson), *'This Thin of Darkness'* *Social Discourse in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* - Allan Lloyd Smith, University of East Anglia



Cherish Menzo - FRANK  
Montpellier Danse

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