

# COMMON STORIES

DECENTERING  
THE STAGE

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# ABOUT COMMON STORIES, BIRDS AND TREMBLINGS

BY VIRGINIE DUPRAY

Épars à l'écho multiplié,  
Cérémonieux dédoré,  
Verbe du temps et du désir,  
C'est ici, infléchi, négligé.  
Aux vertiges lacés, délacés  
Le luxe ponctuel des prophètes  
Sans liens sans pôles sans sommeil.

Magloire-Saint-Aude, *Tabou*, V

Birds or rather flocks of birds that suddenly, and in perfect unison, cut across the sky, tracing ephemeral figures with striking precision.

According to scientists, it is the birds on the periphery that give the signal and cause the group to swerve; it is specifically those birds on the margins, those exposed to the vagaries of the world, that trigger the shift. Those at the heart of the flight, at the heart of the system, totally blind to the world, are powerless...

In 2007 Édouard Glissant said in an interview with Laure Adler<sup>1</sup>: 'We must think with trembling thoughts, we mustn't think with thoughts of certainty, with fixed thoughts... Trembling thinking is not a thinking of fear, nor of apprehension, nor of hesitation, it is thinking that rejects rigid systems and believes that the world trembles, the world trembles physiologically, the world trembles in its becoming, the world trembles in its sufferings, in its oppositions, in its massacres, in its genocides, in its joys... and our thinking must be in tune with these tremblings.'

Twenty years later, the world has never trembled so much in full view and with the full knowledge of all, on our screens, before our eyes, which sometimes close out of indifference, fear, indigestion or just to find the strength to keep watching.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tropismes*, France O, 2007.

Twenty years later, the tremblings have never been so unpredictable, peoples are being erased by their neighbour(s), entire communities denied by their own, in Palestine, Sudan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Congo, Myanmar, Afghanistan. It is important to name them, knowing that the list is much longer. A president-dictator-with-300-billion-barrels has just been exfiltrated. International law is faltering (has it already fallen?), truths contained in a few words are being asserted unilaterally, while our individual lives have never been so strictly controlled for reasons of... security.

Trembling thinking should not be a thinking of fear, Glissant tells us. Constructed in the wake of World War II, in societies deeply traumatised by the extraordinary violence committed and suffered, Europe, now almost 80 years old, is nevertheless trembling with fear. As in many other parts of the world, it faces an unprecedented rise in extremism and identity politics, fuelled by fantasised identities.

On the margins of a world it sought to rule for centuries and which is now irretrievably slipping from its grip, Europe is afraid... of others. The others on the other side of its borders. The others within its borders, called on in the 1950s and 1960s to rebuild a devastated continent and who have since shaped and embodied the European project, economically, culturally and symbolically. Skilfully distilled, fear becomes a powerful lever to control thoughts and financial flows, a decoy by which to direct the birds...

So what does *Common Stories* have to do with these birds, these tremblings of the world and the fear within our societies? What is the place of these factories producing imaginaries and narratives that are the European cultural and artistic stages, and more particularly, the performing arts? Marginal, trivial and yet...

Faced with an often orchestrated distortion of representations, don't the imaginary, the collective memories and the narratives help to give meaning to our lives and societies, to stimulate critical perspectives, to open up spaces for projection and invention for future generations? Aren't artists like those birds on the periphery that guide our movements in an unpredictable environment?

But what imaginaries should we deploy to reach the entire flock and show the world in all its extreme complexity? What are these 'common stories', not similar or even familiar, but stories that we could embrace, not because we understand them, but because we recognise in them their

humanity? To return to Glissant: 'How can we be ourselves without closing ourselves off to others, and how can we consent to others, to all others, without renouncing ourselves.'<sup>2</sup>

Between February 2023 and December 2025, *Common Stories* set out to meet 25 young artists, choreographers, directors, authors, scenographers and performers living in Europe and invited them to take part in a travelling laboratory, the *CommonLAB*. Their experiences bear witness to these frictions, tensions and at times impossibilities in *making* a place for themselves on European stages and, more broadly, in society. On its own scale, *Common Stories* made it possible to connect worlds, experiences, practices, knowledge, resources and means that would probably not have met otherwise. And this is perhaps its greatest achievement: to have facilitated unique unions and unexpected partnerships that have generated powerful stories rooted in the world, as well as future collaborations and solidarities...

The path was not an easy one; engaging in a relationship means changing while exchanging. And change is never easy, especially for institutions and teams facing increasingly precarious contexts in increasingly tense political climates. But perhaps it is precisely in such contexts that institutions have something to learn from these birds on the edge of the flock, these experts in turbulence, in adaptation to everyday realities and in managing the unexpected.

And indeed, over three years, as part of a learning process that had its share of mishaps, the partners of *Common Stories* were able to collectively move forward, turn back, correct and adapt in order to best meet the expectations of the artists. Their generous presence in our houses united the energies of our teams, provided experience and knowledge, and sometimes miraculously broadened the field of possibilities.

Within the *Good Practices Factory*, regular exchanges between teams made it possible to share knowledge and experience, as well as difficulties and doubts, in order to combat discrimination internally, make our organisations more accessible and open, and turn our theatres and festivals into negotiation spaces around representation, trembling spaces...

*Common Stories* is also, lastly, a multiplicity of narratives, some already on stage, others in preparation or in progress. These are stories of mending, stories that repair families and worlds, that cut up, recompose and suture geographies and histories to generate liminal spaces, new frontiers. These are intimate and family stories that rewrite History, lineages that

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2 Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers*, Gallimard, 1996.



are invented, houses destroyed and rebuilt, paper aeroplanes that  
overturn certainties, street lamps that cross roads, werewolves that remain  
untraceable, and intergalactic flights in the face of impossible creations...  
‘Scattered’ stories ‘with multiplied echoes’, in the words of  
Magloire-Saint-Aude, to listen to the world.

**Virginie Dupray, December 2025**

# WHEN THE SPOTLIGHTS GO OUT

BY JOËLLE SAMBI, ASSOCIATE AUTHOR AT THÉÂTRE NATIONAL WALLONIE-BRUXELLES

Spotlights are hot.

Spotlights are hot — burning hot even when left on for a long time.

They look nice, too.

So nice that you can sometimes believe that these spotlights – these blue, red, yellow, pink and green spotlights — permanently shower our lives with light.

To the extent that we can see our names turns into tags, our lives into novels, our ideas into Konbini videos.

To the extent that we come to imagine that these lights, and these lights alone, are the ones that warm our hearts; the ones that give our bodies greater or lesser amounts of melanin, the energy to move forward; the ones that raise the temperature when we come together.

## **Hashtag Illusion Hashtag Raw.**

When all the lights are outside and the sky is no longer the limit; when all the lights are on and the adrenaline is pumping, things get mixed up. Everything gets mixed up: sleepless nights, DMs, posts, texts, calls, mistakes, realities, tweets, tears, dramas, repeat-dramas, sub-dramas, meta-dramas, tunics, fluorescent lights, mics, sound systems, radios, withdrawals, slogans, drops, falsehoods, meetings, texts, subtexts, headlines, photos, newspapers, sets, studios, networks, fear, courage and rage.

## **Rage.**

The kind that gnaws, gashes and cuts away at illusory certainties.

The same rage that holds all our voices together in chorus to cry out.

The rage that holds all our fists in the air to turn fear into revolt.

The sky's no longer the limit, it's been said, just a stage to pass through.

So when the spotlights go out, when the violence perpetrated by the police, by husbands, by Karens, by friends, by CEOs, by pedants, by scholars; when the ugliness of the system, of nepotism, of the bourgeois, of exclusion, of racism, of militant purity, of whitewashed intersectionality has barely receded; when the spotlights go out and the lights disappear, we look at the vast plain, the rebellious wasteland, and tell ourselves it's beautiful, isn't it?

## **It's beautiful, what's left.**

It's beautiful, this collective that moves in the trenches of domination.

It's beautiful, people sticking together, energies and souls boosting each other.

It's beautiful, this crowd of idealistic feminist optimists.

We tell ourselves that nothing, absolutely nothing would have been possible without the courage of each and every one of us. Each person in the crowd chanting, each person at home supporting. Each person driven by their refusal, their anger, their pain, their sadness, their criticism, their desire, their passion, their mistakes; all of them driven by this crazy, heroic storm, pushing for something better, something more, something different. **From now on.**

When the spotlights go out, when no warmth at all caresses our skin, when no light bulb replaces the sun, we do what we've always had to do to hang in there. We do what we've always done to keep going – after all, that's where we're at, right?

Feeding the energy to move forward, keeping our strength for other times, dyeing our wounds, eternal epigenetic ones, loving our dirty, dirty laundry so that it's not thrown into any pink, green or whitewashed basket, putting on bandages, smiling tactically for the comfort of a few, cherishing fraternal bonds, preserving our sisterly struggles while dancing. When the spotlights go out, we are what we are in rage, anger, disorder, noise, smells, class and gentleness: Arabs and Blacks, people of colour, girls, kids, trans people, poor people, disabled people, sick people, workers with or without jobs, union members, worn-out people, angry people, lefties, dykes, poofs, proles, artists, solos...

When the spotlights go out, with those who were there before, those who've joined the ranks, those who are preparing to join our resistance. With those who give up and who may return when hearts and arms will be needed to move other mountains, together: we stoke the fire of benevolence in our own way, not that of personal development... of others, no!

When the spotlights go out, we take care of ourselves. We pound the pavement with determination, we eat chips, goat or plantains. We take naps, make love, wage war, make banners and knit our balaclavas, with written on them the words **'Tokokende te tokolala awa!'**

**As long as there's no justice, we won't go back.**

**Neither into our countries, nor into the kitchen, nor into silence.**

When the spotlights go out, we move forward in tight ranks, in woven fields. We aim for the moon while grazing the stars, because for us, the sky isn't the limit, but only a stage. **To pass through.**

**WE MUST QUESTION  
OURSELVES,  
SHAKE OURSELVES UP,  
GET EMOTIONAL,  
GET MOVING  
— IN SHORT,  
GET TO WORK.**

HORTENSE ARCHAMBAULT

# THREE YEARS OF THOUGHTS, EXPERIENCES, PRACTICES AND DOUBTS IN A EUROPE UNDERGOING PROFOUND CHANGE

A CONVERSATION WITH HORTENSE ARCHAMBAULT AND VIRGINIE DUPRAY

Hortense Archambault, Director of MC93 and initiator of *Common Stories*, and Virginie Dupray, who conceived and is now coordinating the programme, look back on three years of *Common Stories* in today's Europe...

## EUROPE TODAY...

**Hortense Archambault (HA):** What is Europe? Who are Europeans?

These were the underlying questions behind the *Common Stories* project, with the challenge, for me, of changing the perception of the norm of the 'typical European'. Performing arts institutions are, potentially, places where this norm can be transformed, even if they are less powerful than the mass media. This is therefore where we must act, both in terms of the artistic aspect (Which bodies to show? Which stories to tell?) and the composition of the institutions themselves.

Europe has no other reality than that of a utopian project, still under construction. In this sense, it is made up equally of those who were born European, those who have just arrived, and those who dream of Europe and desire it, from near and far.

If we look at Europe through a different lens, this dream of creating a common space after such a bloody history, with such diverse languages and beyond nationalism, is not at all obvious. How can it hold together? Can it continue to hold together, in a global perspective of *mondialité* (globality), to borrow a concept from Édouard Glissant? And this in a context that may



seem increasingly divided. On the one hand, the climate crisis is forcing us to think transnationally, and awareness of the global nature of humanity's destiny has never been stronger; on the other hand, fascists are trying to sort and select people. Furthermore, the ghosts of the colonial past and the issue of migration continue to haunt the European project.

**Virginie Dupray (VD):** Nationalist rhetoric is nothing new. But it seems to me that what was previously just rhetoric is now becoming a political tool, a way of governing. Identity fantasies are growing within societies that are, paradoxically, becoming increasingly mixed. As irrational as it may seem, this fantasy of what a society should be for each and every European country has never been so pervasive. And it is this great gap between this often over-simplified, media-glutted fantasy and the complexity and richness of our contemporary societies that triggers this growing split. Our societies are becoming more fragmented, tensions are rising, and this is accompanied by growing suspicion towards people who do not fit the norm, rising from those who, willingly or not, consciously or not, embody that norm.

## COMMON STORIES, A PLACE OF TRANSFORMATION

**HA:** The virtue of European cooperation projects is that they give concrete form to abstract desires. This includes the deadlines that bind us, the meetings where we report on our work to each other. This forces us to really try out new experiences, both for our institutions and with a view to sharing them more widely.

In the *Good Practices* part of the project, we shared a fundamental question: diversity. And three interrogations to start unravelling that question: what is diversity and how can we understand it? Why do we perceive this issue as radical and not self-evident? And, since we had a feeling that things would take time: What is duration? As we had decided not to be too prescriptive, each of us embarked on a very different process within our own theatre. There were as many paths as there were partners. None of our approaches could be modelled, but they were all inspiring and fed off each other. Moving forward together gave us the courage to tackle this fundamental social issue of racial discrimination. I hope that the documentation we are producing will encourage others to take the plunge themselves, despite the lack of a model to follow.

**VD:** In the initial project as I had imagined it, the actions to be implemented within the framework of the *Good Practices Factory* were more clearly defined. But working remotely with teams who don't know each other on common themes is a pipe dream!

Faced with reality – the contexts, desires, operating methods, specifications and methodologies of the teams, or projects already underway – the only thing to do, to maintain meaning for each partner, was to break the mould.

And perhaps that is the very nature of this project: how to create bonds, listen to each other, find complementarities, reflect on our own practices and circulation, beyond our differences? This, of course, without creating a model or a ready-made recipe, because that would be dangerous. One of the successes of the project is that it has managed to find ways of working together, helping us understand each other and adapting, remotely and without any disruption.

## THE LANGUAGE OF DIVERSITY

**HA:** Working on this issue of diversity for three years has enabled us to find a new language, a new way of telling stories. Words are not neutral, and this is a fascinating challenge for people who work in the performing arts. Should we say 'black' or 'Afro-descendant', 'diversity' or 'difference'? Does the term 'difference' imply the existence of a norm? Internally, this question of the norm has come up a lot. Today, the change in the perception of the norm is accelerating. A revolution in representations and demands is underway, but it is unevenly distributed within society. As a result, I believe that the differences in the definition of this norm have rarely been so great. This is an ongoing issue that we must deal with on an almost daily basis, which was not the case ten years ago. How can we find the right approach, the right tone, the right vocabulary, the right use of words?

**VD:** Many white people, for example, are uncomfortable with the term 'racialised', whereas minority groups often use it to make demands. We need to be able to listen to that. The spectre of race is complex. As a social construct, race has always been there and active, and I believe it will remain so. So how do we talk about it?

In Germany, the use of the word 'race' has been banned in all public texts. But just because we ban a word that scares people doesn't mean that reality disappears. In the same way, I am sometimes shocked to hear grand declarations of global solidarity or 'against violence' in certain theatres that avoid naming anything. Yet recognition comes precisely from naming. From giving a name.

Imagining *Common Stories* also meant accepting that our certainties would be shaken. Most often, we can accept being shaken up when our survival depends on it, or when we have a framework that is solid enough to weather the shock. Institutions have that foundation: a history, a philosophy, an economic base that allows them to accept being jolted by stories, narratives and people who do not come from the same place. For me, that's what

Common Stories was all about: how we can open ourselves up to the unknown and produce something that transcends discomfort and fear by transforming those emotions into shared energy.

## TIME AND TRUST

**HA:** I always find people or institutions that seem to have solved all the problems suspicious. We have to accept that real change takes time, that it cannot be decreed, but that we must question ourselves, shake ourselves up, get emotional, get moving – in short, get to work. And we must do it gently, otherwise it won't work.

**VD:** The question of time is indeed essential. Three years is not long. We first need to get to know each other in order to establish the minimum level of trust necessary for any collaboration. The question of scale is just as important. Having supported 25 artists through *CommonLAB* may not seem like much. But for many of them, this experience has really changed the game in a lasting way.

On the institutional level, it was important to embody things, which brings us back to the need to name them. Diversity is not just an idea: it is about faces, names, sometimes difficult trajectories, and people with sensitivities and fragilities linked to their history and their status as emerging and migrant artists.

You mentioned gentleness, Hortense, and I would add kindness and listening as well. Providing a trusting environment is essential for welcoming artists who are sometimes in precarious situations, with heavy baggage, and who arrive with a certain frustration towards an institution that has not, until now, identified, recognised, or supported them. The relationship is complex to enact. But when we manage to resolve misunderstandings, the inevitable frictions and tensions, and clarify everyone's expectations and intentions, it becomes extremely rewarding for both sides. Creating familiarity changes everything and allows us to build over the long term

**HA:** Indeed, the articulation of *Good Practices* and *CommonLAB* – identifying, supporting and welcoming these 25 artists into our homes – has been very important. I feel that it has accelerated the artists' careers and saved them time. I am also very touched by the fact that they have created an artistic community that is completely beyond our control. If Common Stories had been just that, it would have been great. But it also invited us to take a critical look at our practices, to rethink the way we produce, programme and communicate. Until then, the MC93 had done little work on emerging creation. It also raised new questions of a social, psychological and even mental health nature. I don't know if this is linked to our societies'

resistance to change, but some artists arrive very wounded. They are extremely sensitive to behaviours that might seem insignificant to us. We need to be aware of this and try to move forward anyway, without letting this completely paralyse us. The trust you mention, Virginie, allows us to name violence, both suffered and committed. Being able to say and hear that a gesture or a phrase was violent, even if that was not the intention, helps everyone. Together, we delve into the substance of a possible shared narrative.

## EMERGENCE AND PRECARITY

**HA:** Virginie has brought up precarity. There are kinds of insecurity that are tied to paths of life, of arrival, of loneliness, and of language; and those linked to social standing. Both paths often cross down the road, and we are not prepared for that. When an artist says he's been taking his shower in his art school's kitchen because nobody noticed he was on the streets before, that's saying something... Many cultural institutions are helpless in the face of precarity, which is all the same on the rise in artistic circles. We have to work with what's social, life off the stage, fragility, and vulnerability.

Producing and welcoming emerging practices through the *FOCUS*<sup>1</sup> festival is rather unheard-of for the MC93. And that brings up new questions, about the kind of accompaniment that is needed, for example...

**VD:** In the context of *Common Stories*, it was important to offer a certain level of comfort to artists who don't always enjoy comfort in their work process. But it was also important for us that these young artists have an 'extra-European' experience – in Cairo or Maputo – to experience how things get done elsewhere, differently, often in tense situations.

Beyond that, it is thrilling to create porosity between great institutions like the Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles, the Riksteatern, Culturgest or the MC93, as well as festivals like Alcantara and africologne, and independent artists who are working on their first projects. So that these artists may understand how institutions function and have access to those who direct and drive them. And so that these teams might throw into question the ways they produce and welcome.... Porosities that are a bit torn and then create openings and circulation, that make room – room to welcome, to grow, and to build, a bit otherwise, I would hope.

### Interview by Aïnhua Jean-Calmettes, October 2025

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<sup>1</sup> From 22 to 25 October 2025, the MC93, in collaboration with the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers and the Théâtre L'Échangeur, offered a highlight featuring the artists of *CommonLAB*, with five projects on display.





© A. Fabregat

Navigating between the African continent, France and Portugal, where she lives, **Virginie Dupray** has been accompanying artists and dreams, writing and implementing projects for over twenty years.

Director of Communications at the Centre National de la Danse from 1999 to 2003, she then co-directed Studios Kabako in the DRC alongside Faustin Linyekula until 2020.

For the past five years, she has been working more specifically with three powerful women, Nadia Beugré, Dorothee Munyaneza and Marcela Santander Corvalán, and has written the *Common Stories* project with Hortense Archambault, which she has been coordinating for three years.

Passionate about the issue of emergence, she has taught or regularly teaches project production and management in the DRC, Ivory Coast, Togo, France and elsewhere.



© Julien Pebrel

**Hortense Archambault** has been Director of the Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis (MC93) since 2015, where she has developed a public theatre project open to the city and intended for everyone — a place that constantly re-examines the question of the common grounds.

Hortense began her career in the production department of the Festival d'Avignon, before becoming administrator of the Augusto Boal's Théâtre de l'Opprimé in Paris the following year, and then the production administrator of the Parc et la Grande Halle de la Villette public institution until 1999. She returned to Avignon, at first as an administrator, in 1999, alongside Vincent Baudriller, before the duo succeeded Bernard Faivre d'Arcier as directors of the Festival from the 2004 edition onwards. Together, they re-established the Festival team in Avignon and developed the programme in collaboration with different associate artists each year. Their last edition in July 2013 was marked by the opening of the FabricA, a residence and rehearsal space for the Festival.

# COMMONLAB: THE SPECIFICS ARE IMPORTANT!

A CONVERSATION WITH CARLA NOBRE SOUSA AND DAVID CABECINHA

For three years, Carla Nobre Sousa and David Cabecinha have hosted three cohorts of *CommonLAB* and devised trajectories with young artists between Lisbon, Europe and non-European contexts. They recount their journey...

Three years, twenty-five artists, how did this companionship with such a multiplicity of artists, stories and practices transform Alcantara as an organisation and impact both of you at a more personal level?

**Carla Nobre Sousa (CNS):** This project was like a really good workout. We got to use a lot of different muscles as an organisation and in our individual roles as artistic directors. It was quite intense to produce the lab every year, but that repetition also allowed us to learn and change things from year to year.

2023, the first year had a really packed schedule, with a lot of short workshops and with six of the eight weeks running back-to-back. By the end in 2025, we had a more balanced schedule, with fewer, longer workshops and more time for digesting and individual work. We brought back collaborators we really liked — like the dramaturge Sarah Lewis-Cappellari — who created formats that allowed the participants to bring in their own work and interests. That was a recurring request, to have more time to dig into each other's work.

We also added more low-key ways for the *CommonLAB* artists to meet local artists — in our case, that meant hosting a brunch with local artists right at the beginning of the lab, as well as having local artists involved in offering warm-ups or city tours.

And then to have prolonged the experience of the lab by producing and presenting work by some of the artists was important, too. The relationship changes when you have bought into a specific project that the artist has proposed. Then you are stepping into their world in a more concrete way. So yes, it's much more impactful than a one-off experience.



**David Cabecinha (DC):** To me, *CommonLAB* really underlined how many interesting artists there are whose narratives and aesthetics remain marginal to many institutions and to our societies. It made it really clear that there is still significant work to be done on the institutional side, so that this conversation can evolve without being patronizing.

**CNS:** Yes, of course, on the institutional side in general and in our own institution in particular. But that's one of the things that can happen when you have a longer relationship. On the one hand, you can't just roll over those pain points. And on the other, you have real opportunities to do better.

### Over these three years, what have you 'done better' and what could still be improved?

**CNS:** I really loved that Alcantara was the first stop for *CommonLAB* in 2024 and 2025. Even though it's a big responsibility, it's also cool to have a real role in setting the tone for the whole trajectory.

The challenge we set for ourselves as hosts was to design the specific contents of the labs only after selecting the participants. That's not the normal order of things. It's a bit risky. The artists don't know the details of what they're signing up for, and the partners have to keep things open and flexible far longer than they normally would.

When I wasn't worrying about the time crunch, I found it a really energising challenge to think about the 8 or 9 artists we had selected and what might be useful for them. Rather than putting together a generically interesting programme for an abstract group of nameless, faceless people, we really tried to engage with what we knew about the cohort of that specific year. Not that we always hit the mark, but I liked the process of imagining what resonances might exist within the cohort and with the guest artists.

**DC:** In one of the cohorts, we had a workshop that didn't resonate with most of the artists. We realised that the workshop wasn't well framed or aligned with what many in the group needed, and that we could perhaps have provided more context to both the mentor to better define the proposal and the participants to help them engage better with the proposal. Even so, this moment became unexpectedly important for one of the artists. Through the exercises offered in that workshop, this artist found the central thread of his creation and an insight that reframed his research and the dramaturgy of their piece. What we had initially perceived as a failure in the design of the programme became a reminder that, even when an approach doesn't work for the whole group, it can open a decisive path for someone within it.

**CNS:** We have a long strip of masking tape on one of the walls downstairs with a note from one of the cohorts — something like, 'Thanks for making us feel at home.' I'm happy that some of the groups really did feel that the space was theirs.

But there were so many things we didn't account for. We wanted to be responsive to all kinds of different situations but weren't prepared to deal with every specificity in one single group, obviously. I guess the lesson was that a general sense of openness is not enough. The specifics are important. What I mean is that although we designed a call that encouraged applications across abilities, ethnicities, gender identities, ages, socioeconomic statuses..., we didn't always have procedures in place across the partners to accommodate this. I'm grateful for the artists who coached us through this, meeting with each partner to discuss specific access provisions, for example. But I know we could have made the process smoother if we had more conversations between the partners about each one's expectations and experiences ahead of time.

### Having participated in the three selection processes and hosted the three cohorts, are there any common features that emerge from these different individual journeys, and what do these artists seem to expect most?

**CNS:** It's hard to generalise about the twenty-five artists, or even the three groups. The common threads are perhaps related to the precarity of artistic labour, and many, many pertinent questions about how to engage with the people and institutions that control access to resources in the field.

**DC:** Indeed, I would say that the most recurring theme was the request for more transparency in how institutions work with artists. Across the three cohorts, participants asked about the choices we make in terms of programming and about the concrete conditions we offer. They wanted to understand how we decide what is sufficient, including the availability of working spaces, the technical conditions we can provide and the time dedicated to residencies.

There was also a strong interest in finding ways for the methodologies, artistic techniques and research processes developed by several of these artists to be shared more widely with other artists and audiences.

Finally, most artists expressed a clear wish to build communities and help strengthen them.

**Carla, you mentioned the importance of this companionship with two Lisbon-based artists in producing their work... What was/is to be learnt in the process?**

**CNS:** Producing work is something that we do regularly, often with artists who have a similar profile to the *CommonLAB* artists, in the sense that they usually have some project funding but they are not connected to a production house or producer. That's a gap we try to fill in our local scene.

I think we learn the same lesson over and over again – that every project is specific and needs support on its own terms. And will resist most efforts to fit into existing moulds. It's really a constant effort to not put the procedures before the people or the projects.

**DC:** In fact, these two productions are a clear example of that. The practices were very different, and so were the needs and the moments in which we were invited to be in dialogue. What we learn, time and again, is the importance of staying open, also at the level of content and form. As artistic directors and programmers, our role is to protect the creation process while still bringing our critical vision. Each project asks for a different kind of presence and accompanying them means recognising and adapting to that. This is something we keep in mind, and it remains a challenge every time.

The projects have just premiered, and I'm genuinely curious to hear from the artists whether this relationship was as meaningful as we hoped it would be.

**More generally, what does it mean for an organisation like Alcantara to accompany emerging practices?**

**DC:** Supporting emerging artists is part of our mission and part of the future we want to help shape. When we talk about emerging practices, we are talking about artists who are already around, who are working, and whose perspectives often remain under-recognised. Accompanying their work means being attentive, creating space and welcoming what they bring. In practice, this takes the form of hosting residencies, promoting encounters, producing or coproducing pieces that give them the conditions to test ideas and strengthen their practice.

It also involves nurturing spaces for learning and unlearning, and opening paths for narratives that reflect the plurality, diversity and decentralisation of our context in Portugal and in Europe.

Ultimately, it is about listening to what is already emerging and creating the conditions for these practices to take root and grow.

**CNS:** I'll tell you what it has sometimes meant for me: second-guessing my initial reactions. Being ok with not yet knowing how to talk about a specific work or practice. Learning how to ask better questions – or just stay quiet.

Being reminded too of a power dynamic that is there, even when I think I have made an effort to undo it. It's a reality check, in a way. In that sense it keeps us grounded in what we are doing and why we do it.

**How might narratives from across Europe that are influenced by non-European backgrounds and cultures contribute to the building of Europe? And this in an increasingly tense political climate where extreme-right parties and ideas, even in Portugal, are growing?**

**CNS:** It's hard not to feel pessimistic about how sharp the divides are. But it also feels important – and within our reach – to be good hosts to those artists and to normalise the existence of those stories in the public sphere as much as possible.

**DC:** We're in the middle of the Alcantara Festival 2025. In the first weekend we presented projects that moved me deeply and reminded me how much there is to learn from narratives shaped by non-European contexts, as well as from artists who are part of our own cultural landscape, even if they are not yet fully recognised within it.

Over the past days, encountering the practices of Dorothée Munyaneza, for example, I was reminded of how limited our vocabularies have become and of how detached we are from the variety of experiences and ways of inhabiting the world, not only those that are geographically distant but also those that exist alongside us and also those that form part of our own cultural inheritances, which have often been forgotten. This is something I hope we can address through the projects we support, by reviving ways of being together, by broadening our references and, ultimately, by recognising that cultural integration in Europe depends on acknowledging the richness of these narratives rather than excluding them.

**What could be next for *Common Stories*?**

**DC:** May be intertwine even more clearly the two levels we have been working with: the experience of artists who are already present in international circuits and known to audiences, and the work of emerging artists who are still entering these spaces. Bringing these groups together through laboratories and shared research formats could create a field of exchange that is less hierarchical and more mutually enriching. We cannot afford to see these artists as exceptions or as the sole representatives of diversity. We need a broader, more plural landscape where many voices are recognised and supported. If we can work in that direction, our institutions



and our festival can become more democratic, more accessible and more genuinely representative of the cities and contexts we inhabit.

**CNS:** I agree it would be useful to bridge those levels. The ‘consolidated’ work is important for engaging with audiences, and they are a really important part of this puzzle. Maybe that’s a dimension that can be further explored – strategies for making sure the work has the audiences it needs.

Interview by Virginie Dupray, November 2025



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**Carla Nobre Sousa** is the Co-Artistic Director of Alkantara since 2018. Her curatorial interests span performance, movement, and interdisciplinary practices that reflect political, poetic, and social urgencies. Prior to her role at Alkantara, she produced and toured work by artists such as Marcelo Evelin, Sofia Dias & Vitor Roriz, and Tiago Guedes at *Materiais Diversos*.

She holds a master’s degree in Performing Arts Studies (Université Libre de Bruxelles/Université de Nice-Sophia Antipolis) and a BA in Theatre and Political Science from McGill University.



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**David Cabecinha** is the Co-Artistic Director of Alkantara since 2018. He has worked across theatre, dance and film since 2008 as a dramaturgist, co-scriptwriter, actor, producer, assistant director with choreographers Dinis Machado, João dos Santos Martins, Ritó Natálio, filmmakers Jorge Jácome, Carlos Conceição, and theatre companies Teatro da Garagem and Mala Voadora.

From 2016 to 2017, he led the artistic direction of the *Temps d’Images* Lisboa festival. David Cabecinha holds a degree in Theatre – Acting from the Lisbon Theatre and Film School.

**(...) SELF-CARE  
IS NOT INDULGENCE,  
BUT SURVIVAL.**

AUDRE LORDE

# INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY: OBSERVATIONS AND LIVED REALITIES

BY DR. SARAH YOUSSEF

Artistic director of the Orangerie Theater in Cologne, Sarah Youssef was at the heart of the *Good Practices Factory* Cologne group organised by afriCOLOGNE, and is one of the guests invited to *Decentering the Stage*.

Here, she reports on the discussions that took place on 12 December between twenty *CommonLAB* and Brussels-based artists on common themes: Family & Utopia; Memory & Mourning; Gender, Body and Resistance.

Over the past decade, diversity has become one of the most visible terms in European cultural discourse. It appears in mission statements, funding criteria, and policy frameworks, signalling a shift from marginal concern to institutional priority. Yet, as the three-year European cooperation project *Common Stories* made particularly clear, the proliferation of diversity language has not necessarily translated into structural transformation. What institutions say about diversity, and how diversity is lived within them, often remain misaligned. The concluding conference of *Common Stories* functioned not as a showcase of best practices, but as a diagnostic space. Through workshops, round tables, and collective reflection, participants examined institutions from the inside: through everyday procedures, informal hierarchies, affective labour, and embodied experience. A central question emerged repeatedly: do recent reforms and cultural policies facilitate meaningful change, or do they reinforce superficial strategies that leave power relations intact?

Across discussions, one concept surfaced persistently: inertia. Not inertia as lack of goodwill, but as the accumulated weight of inherited structures, norms, and risk-averse habits that absorb critique without being reshaped by it. As several participants noted, institutions increasingly programme diversity while governance, decision-making, and resource distribution remain largely unchanged. This observation echoes Sara Ahmed's analysis of diversity as institutional performance: something that can be documented and displayed without redistributing power (Ahmed, 2012). Institutional inertia operates on multiple levels. Structurally, cultural



institutions are designed to stabilise: fixed governance models, funding cycles privileging continuity, and recruitment processes that reproduce existing cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993). Culturally, informal norms determine who speaks with authority, who is allowed uncertainty, and whose presence remains conditional. Emotionally, diversity work is often sustained by a small number of individuals who carry disproportionate labour, leading to exhaustion rather than transformation (Ahmed, 2017). Politically, institutions operate under increasing pressure to remain ‘neutral’ in polarised contexts, turning caution into a strategy of survival.

And yet, inertia was not the whole story. Alongside it, *Common Stories* revealed moments of momentum: fragile shifts enabled by alliances, leadership decisions, and artistic interventions that forced institutions to rethink assumptions. Momentum appeared not as radical rupture, but as relational and contingent — dependent on trust, conflict, and the willingness to remain uncomfortable (Gielen, 2015).

These dynamics became particularly visible in discussions centred on bodies, gender, and resistance. One working group, Gender, Body & Resistance, foregrounded a shared understanding: the body is never neutral. It enters institutional space before language or artistic intent, already marked by race, gender, sexuality, disability, and colonial history (Butler, 1993; Ahmed, 2006). Artists described how their bodies are read before their work is encountered, and how visibility often comes with demands for representation and explanation. Drawing on Fanon’s notion of the racialised body as ‘overdetermined from without’ (Fanon, 2008), participants articulated how institutional diversity can relocate labour onto artists’ bodies. Exposure is invited, while structures remain unchanged. Shame emerged as a recurring affect — produced by repeated demands to disclose trauma or identity for the sake of legibility (Sedgwick, 2003). The term ‘trauma porn on stage’ surfaced as a critique of extractive inclusion: when pain becomes cultural capital without corresponding care. Afrofeminist perspectives sharpened this critique. Artists reflected on how colonial memory operates not only historically, but somatically — shaping perception, expectation, and self-protection within European institutions. Afro-feminism was articulated as an embodied epistemology: a refusal of extraction, a resistance to legibility, and a commitment to relational, care-oriented knowledge production (Oyěwùmí, 1997; Glissant, 1997). Importantly, resistance was not framed solely as confrontation. Participants emphasised refusal, opacity, care, and softness as political practices. As Audre Lorde reminds us, self-care is not indulgence, but survival (Lorde, 1984). These practices challenged dominant institutional norms of productivity, speed, and control.

Policy discussions revealed a parallel tension. While diversity and accessibility frameworks have gained prominence at EU, national, and municipal levels, reforms often function as add-ons rather than structural interventions. Nancy Fraser’s distinction between recognition and redistribution proved instructive: visibility without redistribution risks symbolic repair rather than justice (Fraser, 1995; 2000).

Accessibility emerged as a critical example. Legal frameworks in Germany and at EU level prioritise audience access, while artists’ working conditions remain insufficiently addressed. Front-of-house accessibility can coexist with inaccessible rehearsal spaces, rigid production timelines, and unresourced care needs. This gap contradicts the human-rights framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which recognises participation in cultural life as a right of creators, not only audiences (UN, 2006). Accessibility, in this sense, functions as a stress test for reform: revealing how inclusion remains partial when it does not redistribute responsibility and resources.

Across the conference, a shared insight emerged: diversity cannot remain a matter of hospitality. Hospitality preserves asymmetry; institutions remain hosts in control. What is required instead is co-responsibility — shared risk, shared care, and shared accountability. Care must be understood not as personal virtue, but as institutional infrastructure: embedded in contracts, timelines, mediation structures, and governance (Tronto, 2013; Hamraie, 2017).

This leads to a final distinction: between radicality and sustainable transformation. *Common Stories* did not advocate for rapid rupture, but for consistency, education, and reflexive practice. Sustainable transformation requires institutions to acknowledge their historical positioning, to accept discomfort without defensiveness, and, crucially, to allow certain inherited structures to become obsolete. Diversity that does not change structures remains performative. As Édouard Glissant writes, ‘Consent not to be a single being.’ If institutions can hold this consent — remaining open to relation, uncertainty, and change — diversity may move beyond appearance and become lived reality: reflective of the world as it is, and as it could be.

**Sarah Youssef** is an Egyptian-German artist and scholar. She holds a BA in Theatre (AUC Cairo), two MAs in London (RADA/ King’s College, Goldsmiths), and a PhD from the University of Cologne on prison theatre in the UK/US. Since 2022-23, she is Artistic Director of Orangerie Theater Cologne.

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# TWO DAYS OF REFLECTION, DISCUSSION AND ACTIVATION

Over the course of two days, *Decentering the Stage* brought together artists, European cultural institution managers, researchers and performing arts professionals to address a central question: how can we collectively rethink our narratives, practices and structures in the face of challenges related to diversity, equality and social justice?



The first day of the symposium opened with an exchange of practices between the partner organisations centring on how diversity is addressed within their respective institutions. For diversity is not something that can be decreed; it must be lived, practised and given shape, sometimes through friction, often through encounters, as in the *Common Stories* project. Working groups were set up in Lisbon, Bobigny, Cologne, Brussels, Stockholm and Warsaw to reflect collectively and explore very different



approaches depending on the national contexts in Europe. The aim was to compare experiences in the artistic field with those of institutions, paying particular attention to concrete practices already tried out by the partners.

From the outset of the discussions, one question stood out: how can we support the emergence of new narratives on contemporary stages without reproducing the hierarchies and mechanisms of exclusion already at work in our institutions? This question permeated all the exchanges, revealing the tensions between the desire for transformation and structural inertia, between stated discourse and day-to-day reality.

Several institutions shared initiatives implemented over the last three years as part of the *Good Practices Factory*. These included, among others, mandatory training on racial discrimination, diversity awareness programmes for management teams, programming, and national and international networking projects. These experiences highlighted the importance of collective learning, based on tools adapted to the different professions within cultural institutions, so that the responsibility for change does not rest with those directly affected by discrimination, but is shared collectively by all teams, including those in technical, administrative and decision-making roles.



The discussions also brought to light the need to elaborate collective learning strategies based on practical tools. The development of specific checklists, manuals and protocols was seen not as an end in itself, but as a means of embedding equality and diversity issues in everyday practices on a long-term basis. In this perspective, the integration of anti-discrimination issues into internal procedures and the fundamental values of organisations stood out as an essential lever, but also as an area of resistance, indicative of the contradictions existing between institutional norms and political commitments.

Collaboration with collectives of committed artists and professionals was put forward as a necessary counterpoint to dominant institutional principles. These partnerships make it possible to shift the usual frameworks, question time frames and highlight the importance of long-term work, consisting of discussions, workshops, public meetings and cross-sectoral publications. They also remind us that knowledge and expertise also take shape in spaces that are often marginalised or made invisible.

Artist residency programmes were described as spaces for mutual learning, but also as places with a strong emotional and political charge, particularly for racialised artists. The discussions highlighted the responsibility of institutions and trusted individuals to take this charge into account, recalling the need to move beyond any instrumentalisation of narratives and bodies, which are often called on to embody diversity without the structures themselves undergoing real change.

The need to understand racism and other forms of discrimination as systemic phenomena was affirmed, as was the need for collective resistance. This approach made it possible to go beyond individualising or moralizing interpretations and to question the institutional mechanisms that feed and perpetuate inequalities. The introduction of compulsory workshops for all staff was put forward as an important tool for identifying the microaggressions experienced daily, while raising the question of their inclusion in a comprehensive long-term strategy.

Participants widely brought attention to the structural constraints weighing on teams: reduced staff numbers, fragmented schedules, lack of resources, the precarious nature of cultural work, and difficulties in maintaining collective momentum. These realities highlighted the gap between the scale of the expected transformations and the resources actually allocated to support them. They also underlined the importance of making space and time dedicated to reflection, listening and experimentation, essential conditions for any in-depth transformation.



Furthermore, the conversations broadened the discussion to include the social and political role of cultural institutions. The economic obstacles that limit the access of certain groups to cultural venues, the rise of reactionary discourses and the political setbacks observed in several European countries were widely discussed. Examples of backlash – among others in Germany, where the minister of culture decided to abandon the use of certain inclusive terms – illustrated the fragility of diversity policies and the contradictions existing between institutional initiatives and government policy. These contexts reinforce the idea that cultural work cannot be dissociated from the political and social power relations in which it takes place.

In light of these observations, the importance of alliances emerged as a common thread in the discussions: alliances between individuals, departments, artists and institutions, but also with trusted organisations and local communities. These alliances were described as forms of collective resistance, capable of creating ‘living bridges’ between cultures and of supporting long-term movements of transformation, beyond project-based time frames and fleeting trends.

The need to open the doors of institutions that often tend to remain closed was also underlined, and this in order to make their internal realities and structural operations visible. Work on diversity was thus once more defined as a profoundly human endeavour, involving individuals as much as organisations.

Diversity was addressed as a shifting concept, one influenced by social, economic and cultural contexts. It was presented as a structural reality rather than a simple public statement, highlighting the persistent gap between discourse and practice. Entrenched hierarchies, implicit resistance and systemic inequalities were brought to attention, as was the need for gradual change, emotional work and a structural redistribution of resources. The importance of collective courage and political support was also emphasised in order to enable lasting change, beyond symbolic measures.

At the end of the first day, artists and European cultural institution managers attended a performance, *Anatomie de la riposte*, by Laurence Rosier, a professor at ULB. Through a lively and incisive presentation, the linguist and passionate author explored the many ways of responding to insults, to sexist, racist and homophobic attacks, and to injustices and abuses of power. Rosier gives a voice to those who know how to say no, stand up and fight back.



The second day of reflection was structured around round-table discussions dealing with different themes: Family & Utopia, moderated by Youness Anzane; Memory & Mourning, moderated by Peggy Pierrot; and Gender, Body & Resistance, moderated by Dr Sarah Youssef.

Discussions focused among others on the hierarchy and often closed character of cultural institutions as well as on ways to bridge the gap between the concepts of family and utopia. The concept of ‘family familiarity’ was explored, highlighting the importance of recognising what we have in common in order to overcome institutional barriers. Institutional tokenism was criticised, particularly when diversity is used to protect the image of organisations rather than to genuinely redistribute power.

Discussions addressed the duality at play in the work of racialised artists as well as the need to embrace this complexity in order to preserve their mental health. They also evoked representations of life and death as a spiral, understood differently according to religious and cultural traditions. The institutional weight bearing down on racialized artists and the need to imagine artistic paths that are less symbolically and emotionally charged were also raised.

The conversations explored how embodied experiences shape forms of artistic resistance as well as the projection of identities and political expectations onto the bodies of artists. The need for artists to protect themselves emotionally when their bodies become political symbols was



widely discussed. The use of provocative questions and visual aids made it possible to transform the exchanges into horizontal conversations, fostering solidarity and relation-based curiosity.

The interventions highlighted the way in which colonial legacies, patriarchal hierarchies and institutional norms permeate contemporary artistic practices. They underlined the importance of recognising spaces of silence, vulnerability and emotional protection as essential dimensions of artistic and political work. The question of who has the power to say no to racist, sexist or transphobic projects was also raised and heard by the cultural organisations present.

A critical analysis was also carried out on cultural institutions led by minority figures but still embedded in patriarchal and white structures, highlighting the limitations of certain symbolic representations of power. Participants were then invited to a closing conference titled *Decentering the Stage*, moderated by Safia Kessas. On this occasion, Mame-Fatou Niang, Hortense Archambault, Pankaj Tiwari and Emmanuel Ndefo – four voices embodying possible transformations – shared their views on issues of speaking out, decision-making power and how the common is narrated today.

A central point of discussion was the place of conflict and discomfort in processes of transformation. Several speakers emphasised the need to go through moments of friction, disagreement and self-questioning in order to deconstruct prejudices and mechanisms of domination. These at times trying confrontations showed their direct impact on programmes, modes of collaboration and long-term commitments. They also revealed the limitations of consensual approaches, which are often favoured by institutions at the expense of genuine critical work.

The discussion then centred on the complexity of relations with institutions, among others in the context of colonial legacies and systemic oppression. Participants debated the importance of radicalism, honesty and the need to invent new norms within institutional structures themselves.

The point was made that refusal and fugitive thinking were essential tools for challenging existing norms. The idea of building alternative institutions, while investing in, repurposing and transforming the existing ones in order to create more inclusive and equitable spaces, was also defended.

Lastly, the discussions highlighted the need for artists to navigate these institutions while preserving their integrity and vision. Transformation strategies were discussed, such as the metaphor of ‘turning rice into biryani’ – integrating their perspectives and narratives into sometimes restrictive frameworks.

In conclusion, the *Common Stories* symposium reasserted a shared conviction: diversity cannot be reduced to an image, label or communication strategy. It involves structural transformations, which are slow and often conflictual, requiring risk-taking, time and a genuine redistribution of resources and power. While progress remains fragile and uneven, these two days of discussion highlighted the importance of maintaining demanding spaces for dialogue, capable of accommodating complexity, disagreements and contradictions, in order to continue to collectively think about and build cultural institutions that are fairer, more responsible and truly welcoming.



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**A COMMON STORIES  
DNA EXISTS,  
DISCREET BUT REAL,  
AND IT CONTINUES  
TO SHAPE MY  
PRACTICE TODAY.**

AVILDSEEN BHEEKHOO

# COMMON STORIES AND COMMONLAB ARTISTS TESTIMONIALS

Artists from different *CommonLAB* promotions talk about how their participation in this travelling laboratory has impacted their careers and projects, as well as their relationships with partners and institutions in general.

How did Common Stories impact your artistic project or your way of working?

**Saphir Belkheir (*CommonLAB 2023*):** *Common Stories* helped me to advance with *Sycomore*<sup>1</sup> by allowing me to develop the piece in residence and to explore further lines of research through exchanges with other artists and with the audiences I encountered. This context also allowed me to develop a more serene relationship with the organisations, giving me the time and space I needed to experiment, try out materials and adjust my process. It also helped me to better understand how my work could circulate in various institutional contexts.

**Avildseen Bheekhoo (*CommonLAB 2024*):** *Common Stories* had a profound impact on my development. It was a rare opportunity to meet artists whose backgrounds, stories and aesthetics resonated with my own. These encounters created real connections: I've worked with Lucía García Pullés<sup>2</sup> on *HOLLANDA*, and a joint project is already in the works with two other participants. The programme allowed me to visit institutions in four countries, understand other methodologies and hear how people create and survive elsewhere. The discussions – sometimes difficult, often necessary – about our obstacles, doubts, strategies and legacies opened up a space of genuine solidarity. I sincerely believe that we influenced each other: fragments, obsessions, ways of thinking slipped from one project into another. A *Common Stories* DNA exists, discreet but real, and it continues to shape my practice today.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sycomore*, a choreographic piece by Saphir Belkheir (2025), produced by MC93, in partnership with afriCOLOGNE, Alkantara and Riksteatern, as part of *CommonPROD*.

<sup>2</sup> Artist from *CommonLAB 2024*.

**Jin Xuan Mao (CommonLAB 2024):** My project, *Mon Odyssée*<sup>3</sup>, was still in an embryonic state when I entered *CommonLAB*. Above all, the programme gave me time as well as space, not only physical but above all mental, to think about the project. Being able to focus solely on this work was invaluable and absolutely necessary for me to think about the true artistic gesture. Then there were the encounters. The one with Sonya Lindfors<sup>4</sup> was a powerful inspiration. She responded with concrete proposals to my desire to work and create differently. The tools and ideas she shared with me have permanently enriched me and are now shaping the process of creating *Mon Odyssée* with my team. I met friends, including Agathe Yamina Meziani and Lucía García Pullés<sup>5</sup>, who are now working with me. And other artists and people I met throughout the journey who, from near and far, inspired, encouraged and motivated me to continue my creation. I'm deeply grateful to them.

**Massandje Sanogo (CommonLAB 2025):** The programme provided me with a space in which to reflect with other artists on our relationship with the art world, and it allowed me to develop new ways of thinking and approaching my creative processes. By moving off-centre, I was able to open up new perspectives, enrich my tools and broaden my artistic vision. I'd now like to see this work continue in a concrete way through the partner organisations: artistic support, co-productions, residencies or touring opportunities. These commitments would add real value to the programme and would make it possible to transform this experience into genuine support for the development of my projects.

**Maria Mercedes Flores Mujica (CommonLAB 2025):** At the time of applying for *Common Stories*, there was only one thing that I could think of doing, which was the project I applied with: *the day love died*. Writing this project reconnected me with a sense of urgency about making art: what is longing to take form, and what my body is wilfully gestating to make it happen, no matter what. This residency (which has been my first non-creation-directed residency) led me to partly divert from the goal of producing and made me pay far more attention to the connections, experiences, discourses, and life around the times and locations during *CommonLAB*. I feel all of this brought me to stay close to the core of my idea. It informed my way of working toward a simplicity that I am sure translates into crafting my work with very clear intent, while allowing it to permeate the lived experiences throughout the creative process. It's a feeling that awakens a sense of fun, the unknown, and playfulness, and I'm very glad about it.

3 Play by Jin Xuan Mao, currently in development and produced by MC93 as part of *CommonPROD*.

4 Cameroonian-Finnish choreographer and activist, contributor to the *CommonLAB* 2024.

5 Artists from *CommonLAB* 2024.

**Emmanuel Ndefo (CommonLAB 2025):** *Common Stories* has helped me further situate my artistic practice and vision within a broader framework of people, artists, and institutions working in a European context. It affirms that we cannot act alone in the effort to imagine and work toward the future we desire. I look at *Common Stories'* impact on my work through the lens of unknown possibilities – as a kind of symbolic watering, an unexpected rain that the seed in my artistic practice needed to encounter.

**In your opinion, what impact did *Common Stories* have on the organisation(s) you collaborated with in the context of the project?**

**Saphir Belkheir:** The project gave me the opportunity to observe how several organisations operated from up close: MC93 and Riksteatern as well as the D-CAF and Alcantara festivals. I observed how they differed in organisational terms according to their mission, size and sociocultural profile. *Common Stories* created a space where these organisations could closely follow my research – which, in my view, facilitated dialogue and a better understanding of the specific needs involved in creating *Sycomore*.

**Avildseen Bheekhoo:** In terms of the organisations, I felt that those that really listened opened up a fertile space: a place where our practices and obstacles – often linked to our minority positions in Europe – were taken seriously. There wasn't anything symbolic about it, there was a real desire for dialogue, curiosity and responsibility. In a fragile cultural context, this attention was a strong signal: proof that some institutions still want to tell other stories, let voices in that shift the boundaries. I want to believe that the impact was reciprocal, that something changed on both sides: a more open relationship between artists and institutions, a form of trust that is being built. Opening up your space to others means accepting that your own home will change somewhat. And this transformation – discreet but tangible – is, for me, one of the most valuable benefits of *Common Stories*.

**Jin Xuan Mao:** I'm not the best person to answer this question, but I do know that by organising the *Common Stories Focus*<sup>6</sup> festival at MC93, thanks to the artists who were programmed, people came who'd never been to MC93 before. In particular, I met a Chinese audience member who told me that she lived right next door but had never set foot in the venue, and that she had only come to the presentation of *Mon Odyssée* because she had seen that it was by a Chinese artist. Other artists attracted people to the theatre for the very first time. This may seem insignificant, but I believe that this is how real change happens. We often talk about the difficulty of

6 From 22 to 25 October 2025, the MC93, in collaboration with the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers and the Théâtre L'Échangeur, offered a highlight featuring the artists of *CommonLAB*, with five projects on display.

expanding the audience for performing arts, but I'm convinced that the audience responds when there is a genuine presence of artists from the global majority on stage.

**Massandje Sanogo:** I'd be delighted to hear the organisations' views on this question. I couldn't answer on their behalf.

**Maria Mercedes Flores Mujica:** My experience of the *CommonLAB* felt full of enriching encounters, which were mostly organised or moderated by these houses or festivals. These encounters allowed an interweaving of knowledges, resonances, and dissonances. For me, as an artist not directly active within any institution, they also offered an important perspective on the possibilities and willingness of different institutions to gather around an idea of what 'diversity' could be inside the places that we inhabit with our work, our minds, our bodies, and our stories. I hope the impact *Common Stories* has on these active organisations will lead to building a sustainable network of collaborations that will take us toward a more human, compassionate, and eye-to-eye communication in relationships with and within institutions, creating an understanding that artists, theatres, and audiences share a fine, symbiotic, and interdependent relationship simply to exist, especially in current sociopolitical times.

**Emmanuel Ndefo:** Uncertain European politics, alongside new technologies such as social media, artificial intelligence, and emerging ways of experiencing art, will continue to test the resilience of theatre and performance institutions in the years ahead. The alarm has been sounded, yet some organisations choose to remain asleep. Any organisation that hopes to make any real change in our society, or even hopes to survive in the long term, must take the consequential act of re-evaluating its foundational stories. In my opinion, this will be the impact that *Common Stories* will have on its host institutions: to open up cracks within the rigidity inherent in institutions – cracks from which fresh ideas and plural institutional behaviours will emerge, helping to navigate this uncertain moment.



# WHEN

BY JOËLLE SAMBI, ASSOCIATE AUTHOR AT THÉÂTRE NATIONAL WALLONIE-BRUXELLES

When do you start boiling inside?  
What equations attest to our values?

I'm not good at maths.  
Counting, calculating, I'm no good at it, I don't know.  
So when? Tell me, when.  
How many bodies does it take? How many piles? How many legs, how many  
arms? How many ashes blown away? Which destinies to give up on? How  
many roads not taken? How many ambitions curtailed, passions destroyed  
and lives mapped out? How many renunciations? How many births? How  
many children must be raised? How many loves in our blind spot? How much  
remorse for our old age? How many mass graves to discover? How many  
skeletons in our closets, in our heads and on our TVs? How many lifeless  
bodies? How many serene hearts? How many men to satisfy? And what if  
everyone did their own dusting?

I'm not good at maths. Counting, calculating, I'm no good at it, I don't  
know. So when? Tell me, when... How many bombs have to be planted?  
How many of us, of you, of everything and everyone? When is it enough?  
How many fires set?

At what point does anger become lava, lava saliva, and saliva the fire that  
flows and ravages kilometres of all-too-common injustices? How many times  
must we say 'no'? When is 'no' enough? How many nobodies, busybodies?  
From what height is the watchtower no longer a danger?

I'm not good at maths.  
Counting, calculating, I'm no good at it, I don't know.  
So when? Tell me, when...

How many dead in the Mediterranean? How many families torn apart,  
how many deported? How many houses razed? How many towers erected?  
How many boosted speedboats, chartered planes? How many shouts  
in the night? How many 'cockroach' workers, abused children, raped  
women, neglected seniors, despised poor people, exploited immigrants?  
How many irons to brand us? How many kilos to weigh on our conscience?  
How many Tasers with approved darts? How many threats to make us crawl?  
How many gags and pillows to suffocate us? How many batons to beat us  
with? How many marks, how many swastikas? How many graves must we dig?  
How many tears, how much mourning, how much black, how much white for

our clothes? How many banknotes must we amass? How many banknotes for our pensions? How much dough, bread, loot, moolah, dosh, gravy? When is enough enough? How many leaves must fall? How many books must be written? Which pages will I burn? How many slams must be recited? How far shall I push my luck? What does a good immigrant look like? What does she look like? What does a well-integrated woman look like, an ‘évoluée’?

Text from *Et vos corps seront caillasses* (Éd. L’Arche)



© Lise Ishimwe

Born in Belgium and having grown up partly in Kinshasa, **Joëlle Sambi** lives in Brussels, where she works as a writer alongside her professional activity within a feminist movement. A poet, slam performer, feminist, lesbian, LGBTQIA+ activist, and permanent exile, Joëlle Sambi is one of the most committed and compelling figures on today’s cultural scene in Belgium.

She forges a path in which poetry becomes performance, at the crossroads of artistic forms and political struggles. Her voice resonates both in activist spaces and on national stages, such as the Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles, where she is an associate writer.

# THOSE BEHIND COMMON STORIES

Over three years, *Common Stories* brought together a wide range of contributors from Europe and beyond, including partner teams, *CommonLAB* artists, speakers, performing arts professionals, and associated personalities...

*Common Stories* greatly benefited from these exchanges and circulations of ideas, experiences, and practices across borders.

We would like to thank everyone who joined us on this amazing journey!

## COMMON STORIES PARTNER TEAMS

### MC93 — MAISON DE LA CULTURE DE SEINE-SAINT-DENIS

Common Stories Board Members:

- **Hortense Archambault**, Director
- **Tristan Marseille**, Administrative and Financial Director

General coordination:

- **Virginie Dupray**, General Coordinator, member of the *Common Stories* Board
- **Nouria Tirou**, Coordination Assistant

And:

- **Margault Chavaroché**, Head of Public Department
- **Chloé Pataud**, Head of Production
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- **Manola Juliano**, Sound Manager
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- **Mathias Wauters-Naumot**, Technician
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- **Raphaël Hubert**, Communications Officer

As well as all MC93 team members...

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- **Kerstin Ortmeier**, Co-Founder, Artistic Director
- **Marie Deuflhard**, Co-Director (since 2025)

And:

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- **Yaël Koutouan**, Curator of africologneLOCAL
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*Common Stories* Board Members:

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- **Sezen Tonguz**, Production Officer
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- **Maria João Bilro**, Communications Officer
- **Maria Tsukamoto**, Communications Officer (until March 2024)

As well as Alcantara team members...



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→ **Liliana Coutinho**, Conferences & Debates Programming Officer  
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→ **Clara Troni**, Producer  
→ **Cataria Medina**, Communication director  
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→ **Stefan Karsberg**, Director of Production

And:  
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→ **Christer Uhre**, Administrative Head of the Theatre Department (until 2024)  
→ **Joacim Gustafsson**, Communication Manager  
As well as Riksteatern team members...

COMMON STORIES ASSOCIATE TEAM

TR WARSZAWA

→ **Anna Rochowska**, Theatre Director  
→ **Agata Kołacz**, Head of International Projects (until August 2024)  
→ **Katarzyna Batarowska**, Head of the Pedagogy & Accessibility Department  
→ **Anna Kurelska**, Head of the Pedagogy & Accessibility Department (until September 2024)  
→ **Helena Świegocka**, Accessibility Officer  
→ **Magda Igielska**, Deputy Director of the Production Department  
→ **Anka Herbut** and **Justyna Lipko-Konieczna**, In Charge of the Artistic Programme  
→ **Aleksandra Wiśniewska**, Deputy Director for Organisation and Finance Department  
→ **Aleksandra Bratkowska**, Audio Describer  
→ **Gabriela Flis** and **Sonia Szkriba**, In Charge of the Polish Subtitles for Deaf People  
→ **Katarzyna Głozak** and **Marta Kalinowska**, PolishSign Language Interpreters  
As well as TR Warszawa team members...

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→ **Valérie Martino**, Head of Production and Touring and Programming Advisor

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→ **Lisa Gilot**, Assistant to the Communications Manager  
As well as Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles team members...

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

→ **Safia Kessas**, Journalist, Documentary Filmmaker  
→ **Agata Kolacz**, Head of the Arts and Culture Kulczyk Foundation, Curator of the Malta Festival  
→ **Raquel Lima**, Artist, Scholar and Activist

COMMONLAB ARTISTS AND COLLABORATORS

COMMONLAB 2023

→ Artists:  
**Saphir Belkheir**, **Carys Coburn**, **Hang Hang**, **Stephanie Kayal**, **Nancy Ofori**, **Anna Ten**, **Billie Willett** and **Maíra Zenun**.

→ Guest speakers and practitioners:  
**Salma Abdelsalam**, **Haris Agic**, **May Al-Ibrashy**, **Farnaz Arbabi**, **Malin Axelsson**, **Nassef Azmi**, **Nacera Belaza**, **Alexander Charlamov**, **Mindy Drapsa**, **Heba El Cheikh**, **Hassan El Geretly**, **Ahmed El Maghrabi**, **Nathan Ellis**, **Robert Fux**, **Smaïl Kanouté**, **Sarah Lewis-Cappellari**, **Jani Lohikari**, **Omar Nagati**, **Calixto Neto**, **Nora Nilsson**, **Sébastien Radouan**, **Adeline Rosenstein**, **Åsa Sima**, **Talu**, **Ninna Tersman**, **Anna Vnuk**, **Nadia Yala Kisukidi**, **Salam Yousry**.

COMMONLAB 2024

→ Artists:  
**Nadim Bahsoun**, **Avildseen Bheekhoo**, **Diego Bragà**, **Azani V. Ebengou**, **Lucía García Pullés**, **Pankaj Tiwari**, **Inés Sybille Vooduness**, **Jin Xuan Mao** and **Agathe Yamina Meziani**.

→ Guest speakers and practitioners:  
**Youness Anzane**, **Panaibra Gabriel Canda**, **Keli Freitas**, **Albane Guinet-Ahrens**, **Sandra Iché**, **Sonya Lindfors**, **François Makanga**, **Calixto Neto**, **Sello Pesa**, **Gisèle Vienne**.

COMMONLAB 2025

→ Artists:  
**Bruno Brandolino**, **Eslam Elnebishy**, **Maria Mercedes Flores Mujica**, **Keli Freitas**, **Xirley Harthey Ubilla**, **Sepideh Khodarahmi**, **Emmanuel Ndefo** and **Massandje Sanogo**.

→ Guest speakers and practitioners:  
**Youness Anzane**, **Shari Asha Crosson**, **Prince Barry Sadjó**, **Saphir Belkheir**, **Nadia Beugré**, **DeLaVallet Bidiefono**, **Lucia Garcia Pullès**, **Aminata Labor**, **Sarah Lewis-Cappellari**, **Raquel Lima**, **Gio Lourenço**, **Gaya de Medeiros**, **Joanna Peprah**, **Phyllis Quartey**, **Adeline Rosenstein**, **Shaymaa Shoukry**, **Laila Soliman**, **Inés Sybille Vooduness**, **Jin Xuan Mao**.

# COMMONLAB PARTNERS

## ORIENT PRODUCTIONS / D-CAF

- **Ahmed El Attar**, General Manager and Artistic Director
- **Yasmeen Fahim**, Executive Manager
- **Aihab Mohammad, Lina Sakr, Maryam Shafik, Menna Walid, Nour Yehia...**

## CULTURARTE

- **Panaibra Gabriel Canda**, Director
- **Elton David**, In Charge of Production and Documentation

# THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY GUEST COLLABORATORS

## GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN BOBIGNY

- Guest speakers:
- **Lydia Amarouche, Aminata Labor, Léonora Miano, Prisca Ratovonasy, Houyem Reba, Pankaj Tiwari**
  - **Aïnhua Jean-Calmettes**, Documentation

## GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN BRUSSELS

- **Safia Kessas**, journalist, filmmaker, member of the Advisory Committee of *Common Stories*
- **Laurie Hanquinet**, Professor of Sociology at the Université Libre de Bruxelles
- **Isabelle Collard**, Head of Audience Relations and Cultural Mediation, Théâtre National And the Human Resources team of the Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles

- With contributions from:
- **Annalisa Casini**, Professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Université de Louvain
  - **Maak&Transmettre**, a collective of textile designers
  - **Aurélié de Schoutheete**, Meditation Instructor
  - **Alena Sander**, Researcher in feminist development studies
  - **Youness Anzane**, Playwright and Artistic Collaborator

## LES RÉCRÉÂTRALES

- **Aristide Tarnagda**, Director

## GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN LISBON

- União Negra das Artes (UNA) :
- **Raquel Lima**, Performer, Poet, Art Educator, Cultural Manager, Curator, Member of Common Stories Advisory Committee
  - **Dori Nigro**, Artist, Performer, Art Educator, Researcher
  - **Melissa Rodrigues**, Visual Artist, Performer, Art Educator, Cultural Mediator, Curator
  - **Cléo Tavares**, Actor, Theatre Maker, Film Performer
  - **Íris De Brito**, Choreographer, Project Manager, Educator
  - **Maíra Zenun**, Film Director & Editor, Film Curator, Urban Photographer & Self-Portrait Artist, *CommonLAB* 2023 Artist
  - **Nádia Yracema**, Actor, Playwright, Director, Theatre Maker
  - **Rita de Cássia**, Artist-Researcher, Author, Director, Art Educator, Anthropologist, Human Rights Activist
- As well as UNA members...

## GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN COLOGNE

- **Dr. Sarah Youssef**, Artistic Director, Orangerie Theater
- **Andrea Bleikamp** (WEHR51), **Simon Eifeler & Janna Huttebraucker** (de Bridgeworks), **Ines Langel** (Orangerie Theater), **Lisa Lehnen** (Overhead), **Laurenz Leky** (Theater im Bauturm), **Glenda Obermuller** (Theodor Wonja Michael Library), **Bernd Schlenkrich** (Theater im Bauturm), **Andrea Tedone** (Comedia Theater)
- **Marie Yan**, writer and playwright

## GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN STOCKHOLM

- The Riksteatern Team:
- **Kajsa Åsheim, Marzena Baranowska, Sylvia Carlsdotter, Sara Högdin** (Halland association), **Hediye Güzel, Daniel Jönsson** (Halmstad association), **Jessica Karlsson, Mia Larsson, Ann-Cathrin Larsson** (Tierp association), **Sofia Axelsson Lekare, Lisa Lindén, Leif Persson** (Karlstad association), **Vera Renberg** (Piteå association), **Helena Ringvold, Birgitta Sandgren** (Jönköping Län association), **Hanna Wallensteen, Ninos Yosef...**

## GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN WARSAW

- **Monika Frajczyk, Katarzyna Parzuchowska-Tercz, Adam Stoyanov...**

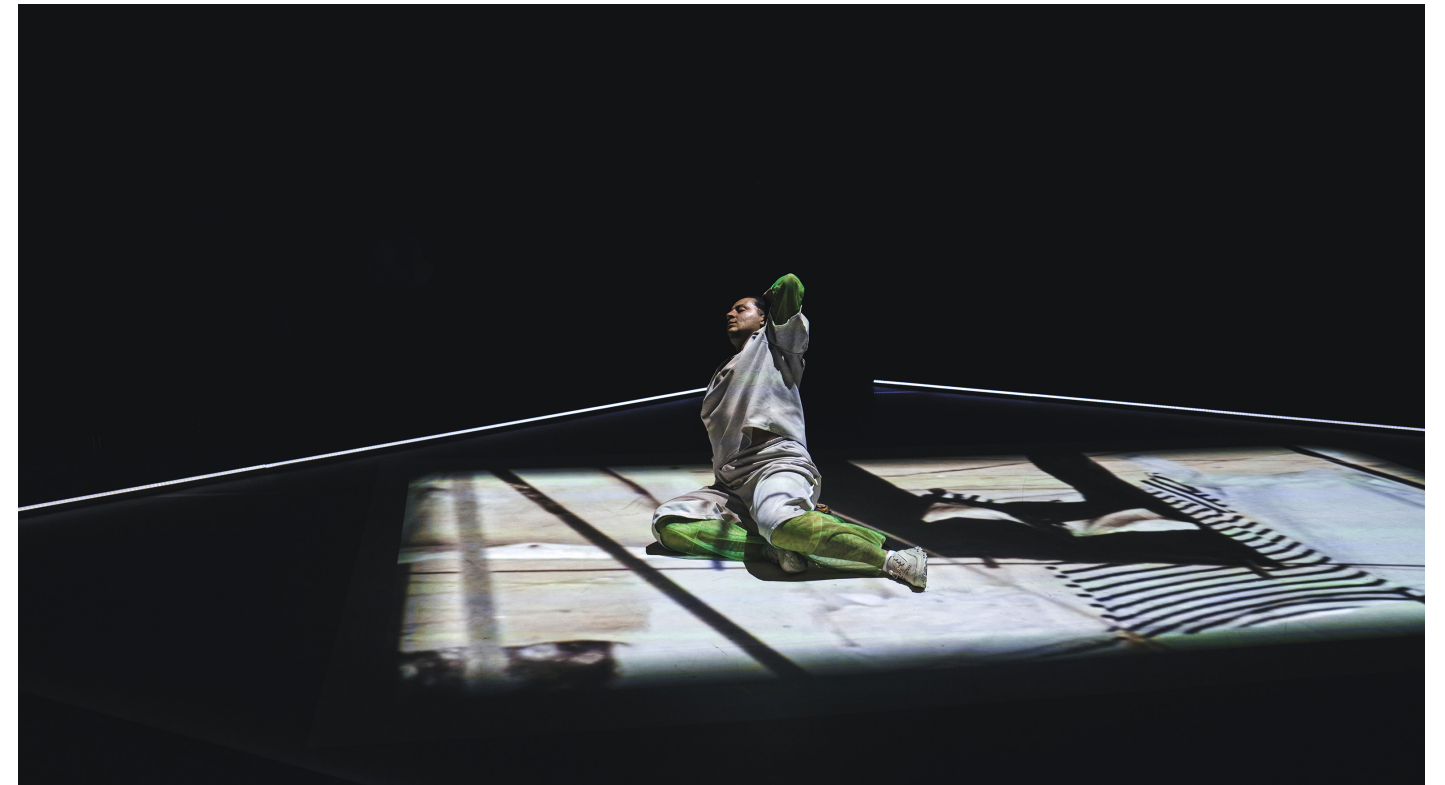
- The team behind the project  
‘Teatr od pierwszego wejrzenia — (po)zdrowienia’  
(Theatre at First Sight — Greetings):
- **Marta Bernatowicz, Rafał Kłopotowski, Anna Kurelska, Grzegorz Laszuk, Katarzyna Parzuchowska-Tercz, Katarzyna Szczerbowski, Magdalena Szymczak**

# COMMON STORIES SHOWS, PERFORMANCES & PUBLICATIONS

From 2024 to 2025, several shows and performances of *CommonLAB* 2023 and 2024 artists have been supported, as part of the *Common Stories* project.

## ARTISTS AND PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY *COMMONLAB* 2023

*Sycomore* by Saphir Belkheir



Is it possible to dream a family tree? In this immersive solo performance, Saphir Belkheir borrows from the symbolism of the sycamore tree — a fig tree whose many branches grow back when cut — to adopt distant ancestors and create his own family.

**A production** MC93 — Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis. Co-production afroTopia e.V. / africologne FESTIVAL, Alkantara, Riksteatern, as part of *Common Stories*, a Creative Europe programme funded by the European Union.

Fund Transfabrik — Franco-German Performing Arts Fund.

**With the support of** RheinEnergieStiftung Kultur and Parallèle — Emerging International Artistic Practices.

**Residency:** ICI-CCN in Montpellier; La Briqueterie CDCN in Val-de-Marne; Point Éphémère; Les Ateliers Médicis; Théâtre Joliette, Scène Conventionnée d'intérêt national 'Art et Création' for diversity in contemporary writing.

© Louisa Ben



Portrait d'une femme ordinaire dans un océan de coquelicots by Anna Ten



Women artists often speak of the ‘50-year tunnel’, an eloquent metaphor for the absence of roles that makes them invisible. What place is there on our stages for women who have passed the sell-by date imposed by the entertainment world? *Portrait d'une femme ordinaire...* tells the story of a seventy-two-year-old woman, artist, activist, whimsical and full of humour. Alone on stage, Josiane Vincent shares her daily life, her great moments, her dreams...

**A co-production** Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles and MC93 — Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis, as part of *Common Stories*, a Creative Europe programme funded by the European Union.

**With the support of** Happy Nest (Superamas), Regards Complices Prête-moi ton œil / Danse dans le milieu scolaire programme, Lille, Le Dansarium, Piscine d'en face, Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois, Le 188 Lille, Centre culturel Jacques Tati, Amiens, Grégoire and co — Le Lieu.

© Chloé Signés

Galactic Crush 2: Into the Cold by Stephanie Kayal and Abed Kobeissy



*Galactic Crush 2: Into the Cold*, which was supposed to be the second instalment in the tribulations of two Don Quixote-like antiheroes, friends and lovers, who decide to flee mass exoduses and global crisis in a makeshift spaceship, becomes a reflection on the difficulty of creating in the face of genocide and an uncertain future.

**A co-production** Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles and Alkantara, as part of *Common Stories*, a Creative Europe programme funded by the European Union.

**With the support of** Ettijahat – Independent Culture, workspacebrussels, ISAC – Institut Supérieur des Arts et des Chorégraphies ArBa-EsA, Studio Le Labeur — Dame de Pic / Cie Karine Ponties.

© Firas El Hallak

Théâtre de la Vie, Brussels.  
Kunstencentrum Buda, Kortrijk.  
Parallèle – Emerging International Artistic Practices.





Upon her arrival in France, Hăng Hăng followed her mother’s advice and joined several nail salons in the Paris suburbs. Repetitive and tiring, the work exposed her to toxic products on a daily basis. Partly inspired by her personal experience, *Carré Arrondi* immediately carries us elsewhere, far away, into a timeless, floating world. Perhaps we exist in multiple places at once, drifting between dream, nightmare, and reality, between past, present, and future. Actions and words repeat, looping in a hypnotic rhythm, gradually bending our sense of time.

A co-production MC93 — Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis (France), as part of *Common Stories*, a Creative Europe programme funded by the European Union.

Doc Paris (France), as part of the Performing Arts residency. A-turma (Porto, Portugal), as part of the Inresidence 2024 residency. Kunstencentrum BUDA (Kortrijk, Belgium), as part of a residency.

© Francisco Lobo

*Cadences créoles dix mille fois dédoublées* by Inés Sybille Vooduness



Drawing inspiration from Angolan Kuduro, Dominican Gagá and Dembow, and Yanvalou voodoo rhythm, Inés Sybille Vooduness and Malvin Montero invent a unique, fascinating and shifting place, a spiritual cosmogony, drawing on technologies, Haitian syncretism and memories rooted in the Afro-diasporic space.

An Alkantara production, co-produced by Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles and the MC93 — Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis, as part of *Common Stories*, a Creative Europe programme funded by the European Union.

Creative grant: O Espaço do Tempo with the support of BPI and the '1a Caixa' Foundation, 2024. Residency: Moussem Nomadic Arts Centre (Brussels).

© Diana Tinoco





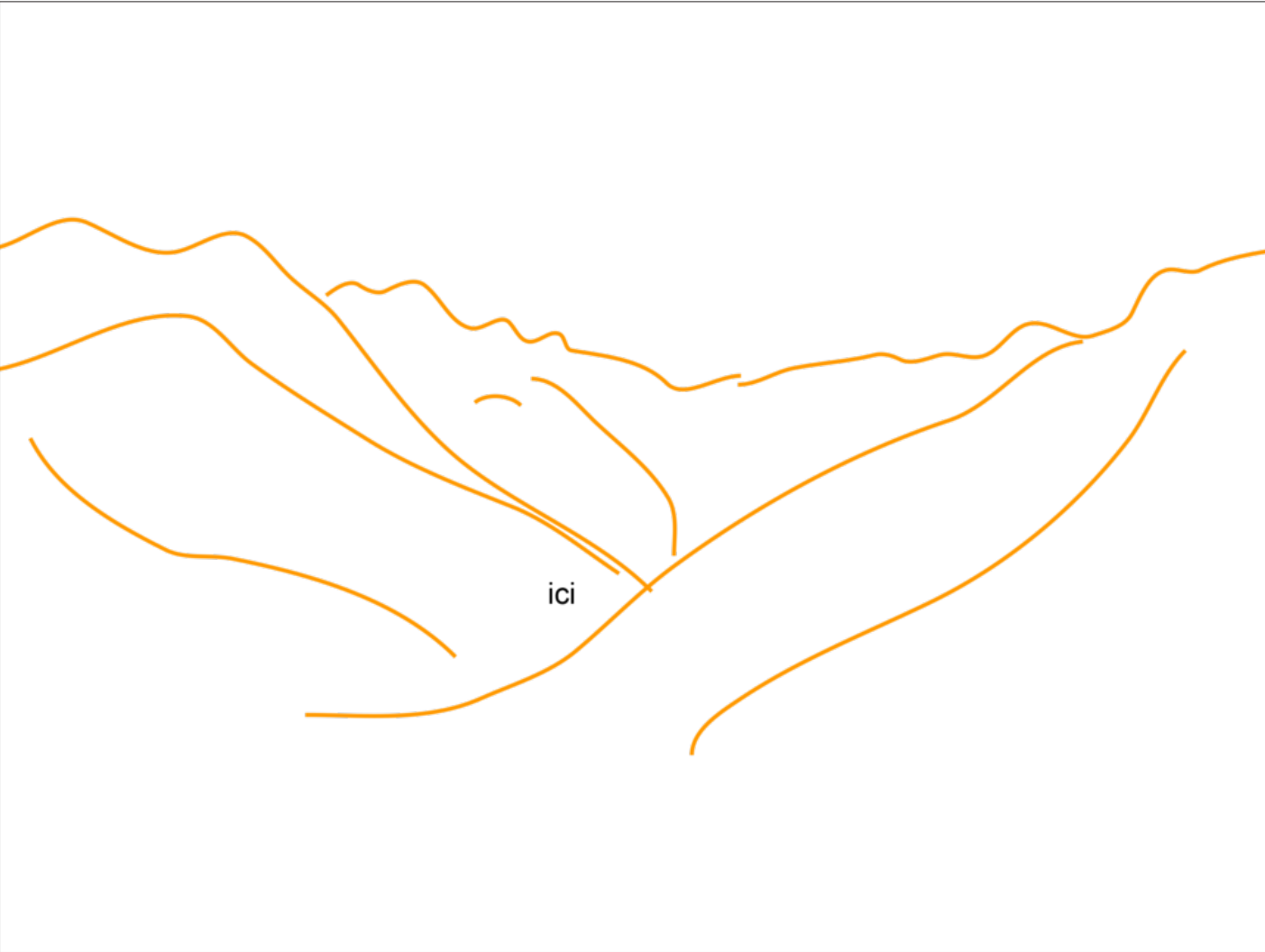
An androgynous pop opera inspired by the life of Richard Wagner, Braga’s uncle, and the disco years under Brazil’s dictatorship, *We at the Nightclub Suffer Together* blends real archive and fiction to reinterpret homoerotic themes in a utopian club, inhabited by ghosts, and celebrate a possible better future together.

An Alcantara production, co-produced by afriCOLOGNE, as part of *Common Stories*, a Creative Europe programme funded by the European Union.

OPART, E.P.E./Estúdios Victor Córdon and TalentLAB / Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, Moussem Nomadic Arts Centre (Brussels), CAMPUS / Rivoli, END Festival, Teatro Oficina Writing grant.

Creative grant: O Espaço do Tempo with the support of BPI and the 'la Caixa' Foundation, 2024.

© Rui Palma



Alone on stage, Agathe Yamina Meziani talks about her father through Kabylie, and about Kabylie through her father. She recalls car journeys, music played too loudly, jokes that weren’t always funny, family archives, Kabyle legends, and her double first name — Agathe or Yamina, it depends....

Through a series of short, funny and poignant stories, she reconstructs a fragmented and sensitive memory, navigating between childhood memories, complex family ties and cultural heritage. It’s an attempt at reconciliation without forgiveness, a puzzle where the intimate and the political are woven together through humour, doubt and silence.

*Kabylifornie* is a journey between the images we keep, those we invent and those we would like to forget. With tenderness and lucidity, Meziani searches for what we receive without having asked for it, what we choose in spite of ourselves, and what we pass on — sometimes transforming it.

Production Les Halles de Schaerbeek.  
A co-production MC93 — Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis, as part of *Common Stories*, a Creative Europe programme funded by the European Union.  
Atelier 210.

Residency & support: Wallonia-Brussels Federation — Interdisciplinary project grant, La Bellone, Compagnie Tristero, Studio L’envers, La Verrière, Piano Fabrick, Compagnie Mossoux Bonté, Kunst festival.

© Agathe Yamina Meziani





A young Chinese man embarks on an odyssey in search of reconciliation. With a mother who does not accept his homosexuality? With himself perhaps? With the pain of rejection?

The odyssey is also that of this journey through France and Europe in 2017, the chance discovery, the tensions, two lives once so intimately linked that struggle to look at each other. The violence of the past returns, the violence of childhood... A mysterious inert mannequin, a woman filmed, a son playing mother... Anything goes along the way, even if it means reinventing the world. Landscapes, languages, sounds, gestures, what we keep hidden and what we reveal...

**A production** MC93 - Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis as part of *Common Stories*, a Creative Europe programme funded by the European Union. © Jin Xuan Mao

**Residency:** TalentLAB 2025, Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg.



A solo performance dialoguing with sound, *Mother Tongue* blends the need to survive, the fear of disappearing and the desire for fiction. It tells Lucía García Pullés’ personal story between tongues, and with her tongue, to trace possible echoes.

**A co-production** MC93 — Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis and Riksteatern, as part of *Common Stories*, a Creative Europe programme funded by the European Union.

**With the support of:** La Ménagerie de Verre, Carreau du Temple, Danse Dense, Centre National de la Danse, La Compagnie DCA in Saint-Denis, Festival Solos al Mediodía, Théâtre Solis. © Paul Flé

Charleroi Danse, La Manufacture CDCN Nouvelle Aquitaine  
Bordeaux La Rochelle, Théâtre de Vanves  
DRAC Ile-de-France (project grant).





A performative, participatory, and immersive walk, *CIS-TEM Error* invites the audience on a quest for a lost sense of security and belonging. How can we define security when our bodies are marked by migration, colonisation, queerness, and racialisation?

A co-production Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles and Riksteatern, as part of *Common Stories*, a Creative Europe programme funded by the European Union.

© Nadim Bahsoun

Mophradat, Next Festival and BUDA Kunstencentrum, Kortrijk.



A theatrical saga in eight episodes, *Kongo Chroniques* deals with history, memory, colonisation and slavery, transgenerational trauma and heritage, the future of Africans and people of African descent, joy, and reparation.

A co-production afriCOLOGNE and Riksteatern, as part of *Common Stories*, a Creative Europe programme funded by the European Union.

© Azani V. Ebengou

French Institute of Congo, the Label Jeunes Textes en Liberté, the City of Saint-Etienne, La Comédie de Saint-Etienne, La Machinerie Vénissieux Theatre.

# PUBLICATIONS

## GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY 2023

This first edition took stock of each partner’s actions and reflections on diverse themes: representativeness, access policies, internal dynamics, possible discriminations within teams...

Between a space for dissonance and a sounding board, it bears witness to the issues that drive the teams at the MC93, Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles, Culturgest, Riksteatern, africologne and TR Warszawa on a daily basis.

→ [Good Practices Factory 2023](#)

## GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY 2024

Halfway through the *Common Stories* project, which came to an end on December 31st, 2025, the Good Practices Factory 2024 reviews and reflects on our production, touring, artist support, and audience development practices in our six partner cities, from Lisbon to Brussels, from Bobigny to Cologne, from Stockholm to Warsaw.

→ [Good Practices Factory 2024](#)

## GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY 2025

Through texts and interviews, this third and final 2025 publication reviews unique journeys around a common theme: Radicality, a long-term transformation towards diversity?

From a reflection on racism within the theatre in Bobigny and Lisbon, in partnership with the União Negra das Artes, to perceptions of notions of diversity within teams in Brussels and Stockholm, from the development of a common Code of Conduct for cultural venues in Cologne to greater accessibility of the theatre for audiences experiencing mental health crises in Warsaw, our journeys towards more valuable practices have taken different paths over the past three years.

→ [Good Practices Factory 2025](#)

# NEWSLETTERS

Discover below the nine newsletters sent out as part of the *Common Stories* project, reflecting on the project’s progress.

- [Newsletter #1](#)  
→ [Newsletter #2](#)  
→ [Newsletter #3](#)  
→ [Newsletter #4](#)  
→ [Newsletter #5](#)
- [Newsletter #6](#)  
→ [Newsletter #7](#)  
→ [Newsletter #8](#)  
→ [Newsletter #9](#)

# A LOOK BACK AT *COMMON STORIES*

- [Annual film Common Stories 2023](#)  
→ [Annual film Common Stories 2024](#)

# THE PUBLICATION TEAM

A publication coordinated by Virginie Dupray, Benoît Henken, and Mélissa Boneté.

**Editorial Board**  
Hortense Archambault  
Mélissa Boneté  
David Cabecinha  
Virginie Dupray  
Carla Nobre Sousa  
Joëlle Sambi  
Dr Sarah Youssef

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# COMMON STORIES

A Creative Europe programme

[www.commonstories.eu](http://www.commonstories.eu)



Co-funded by  
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ALKANTARA



africologyne

