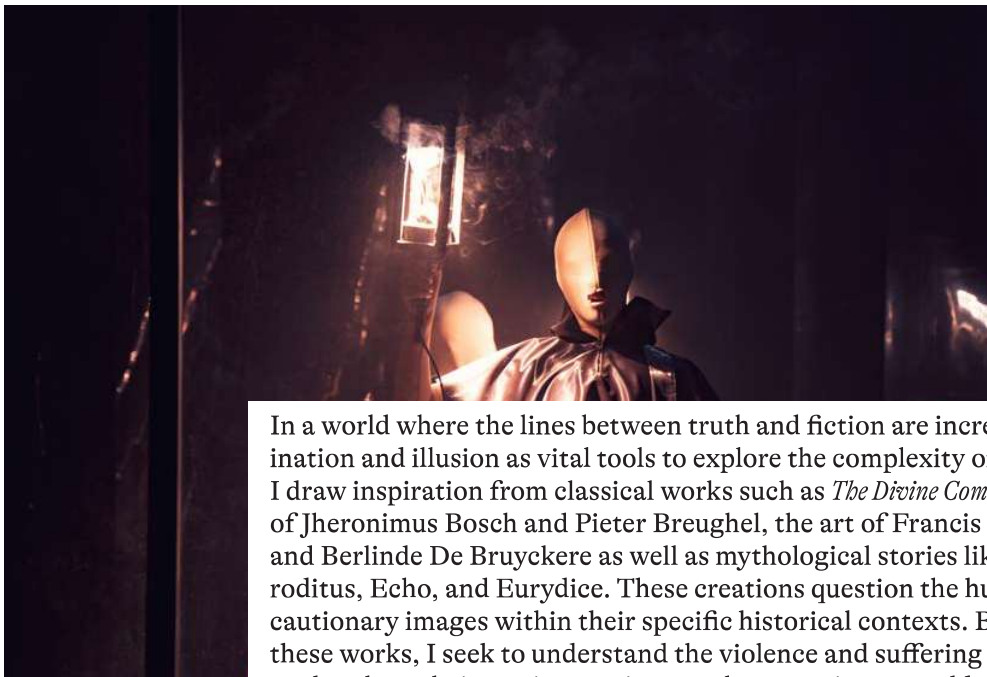


“I see beauty not as ornamentation but as a transformative force that connects us to our shared fragility. Beauty, when paired with slowness, becomes an act of resistance in a world obsessed with speed”

## Director's note

I am Ferenc Balcaen, a theater maker based in Ghent, Belgium. With a degree in Drama and Directing from RITCS school of arts, my work proposes a visual and multisensory experience that combines theatre, choreography, literature, music and visual arts. Rooted in the human body as a vessel of history and identity. In my work, I explore themes such as sexual and gender diversity, pain, care, concealment, melancholy, longing, transgression... The body is central to my work and by incorporating faceless figures, I strip away familiar constructs of gender and identity, exposing the vulnerability beneath. The body has its own language and is not dependent on spoken language. None of the figures in my work are a protagonist; they are duplicates of one another, facets of a collective, but also of the “other”. These figures simultaneously obscure and liberate, allowing performers to embody archetypal roles that bridge the personal and the universal. This tension invites spectators to confront their own narratives, fostering an emotional, intimate dialogue that blurs the boundaries of individual and collective experience.



In a world where the lines between truth and fiction are increasingly obscured, I see imagination and illusion as vital tools to explore the complexity of the human experience. Here I draw inspiration from classical works such as *The Divine Comedy* by Dante, the paintings of Jheronimus Bosch and Pieter Breughel, the art of Francis Bacon, Louise Bourgeois and Berlinde De Bruyckere as well as mythological stories like those of Icarus, Hermaphroditus, Echo, and Eurydice. These creations question the human condition or served as cautionary images within their specific historical contexts. By engaging in dialogue with these works, I seek to understand the violence and suffering attributed to these figures and explore how their stories continue to shape our inner worlds and worldviews.

Sound is an important element in my creations. By experimenting with the deconstruction of voice and music, I can weave sound into the fabric of my performances. In *SCAPEGOAT*, for example, *Flow My Tears* by John Dowland is deconstructed and combined with Gregorian chants and vocal cries, creating an emotionally resonant soundscape that reflects the complexity of the themes in my work. The interplay between image and sound amplifies the tension between beauty and pain, violence and redemption.

I often create “in-between spaces” in the theatre, where I explore stillness. But the images I create are never static; they are constantly changing. I want the initial interpretation of an image to evolve, transform and open liminal spaces for multiple associations and illusions. Illusion, for me, has a duality: it seduces but also provokes, inviting audiences to navigate their own subconscious responses. Rather than providing answers, I aim to evoke resonance—an experience that transcends intellectual frame of reference and speaks directly to the senses. Like an echo within, it gives shape to everything unsaid yet deeply felt, with the body as the ultimate vessel for this emotional connection.

— Ferenc Balcaen