



# Playing

# with Kantor

# 4 – 15.11.2024

# Programme

**cricoteka**

INSTYTUT KRAJOWY  
WISNOSC I ARTYSTYCZNA  
WARSZAWA

MALOPOLSKA

Nadwiślańska 2–4  
[www.cricoteka.pl](http://www.cricoteka.pl)

curator:  
**Karolina Czerska**

At the centre of this year's Playing with Kantor Festival is a relatively young country, one with difficult history and complex identity, one that fosters its separateness seeing it as a wealth in its own right – Belgium.

The theme of the festival, “double-ness,” is present at more than one level. Three languages and three communities make Belgium; two of the communities make a point of underlining their separateness: (Dutch-speaking) Flanders and (mostly French-speaking) Wallonia. The late nineteenth century witnessed a debate that took place in Belgian art press surrounding the “Belgian soul,” whether it existed, and – if so – whether it was a synthesis of the German and Latin souls, a peculiar amalgamation of the attributes of two significant cultures which were, at first sight, mutually exclusive: mysticism and rationalism.

Bilingualism and double identity are among the main points of reference for *Far from Linden*, based on Veronika

Mabardi's play. Part a documentary, part a chronicle, the play depicts an impossible conversation between two Belgian women, the playwright's “dear departed” (to use the phrase from Kantor's theatre) grandmothers divided by language, culture and social class.

The complex, double identity is true also about two great figures in Belgian theatre – Maurice Maeterlinck, a Nobelist and creator of Symbolist drama, and Michel de Ghelderode whose plays are evocative of painting. The first was a Fleming, the other did not speak Flemish but was brought up in a family that cherished Flemish folklore to the point that it played a formative role; the aura of the region of “northern fogs” significantly affected the literary output of both writers, even if both wrote in French. An ingenious conflation of the French language and Nordic nature largely determined the originality of their work. Significant in the context of this year's Playing with Kantor Festival is the phrase “the theatre →

→ of death" that was frequently used by critics in reference to Maeterlinck and Ghelderode's plays, while their works occupied a prominent role in the "Belgian school of the bizarre," a trend in Belgian literature and art.

The choices Kantor made at turnings points of his theatrical career were informed by the Belgian playwrights' plays and ideas about theatre. Here doubleness re-emerges: the creator of the *Dead Class* staged Maeterlinck's *Death of Tintagiles* twice. Shortly before the outbreak of WWII, when he was about to finish his education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, Kantor and his friends gave (possibly) one performance of the play as the Ephemeral Puppet Theatre. In the first production ever staged by the future theatre giant the roles were played by puppets animated by actors, and the Symbolist text was "clothed" in an avant-garde form inspired by Bauhaus. In this early work, Kantor pointed at the possibility for marrying Symbolism with avant-garde, a path that was followed in theatrical tradition, significantly by the Nouveau Théâtre. Almost fifty years passed before Kantor revisited Maeterlinck's play in his cricotage called *The Machine of Love and Death* where actors were accompanied by large wooden marionettes. Thus a frame was formed connecting the beginnings of Tadeusz Kantor's career in theatre with its final period. The Polish artist was familiar with Maeterlinck's other plays and theoretical essays on theatre and greatly influenced by the Symbolist.

Both double and prominent will be Maeterlinck's presence at this year's Playing with Kantor Festival. Light will be shed, on the one hand, on his "theatre of androids" which, in this day and age can benefit from technological progress and take a highly advanced form within the theatre, and, on the other hand, on his concept of the "tragedy in everyday life." When his Symbolist theatre first emerged towards the end of the 20th century, both these concepts were equally innovative. At the Festival we will be able not only to see the impact of Kantor's both productions of Maeterlinck's play on theatre, we will also discover how contemporary artists draw on Maeterlinck's ideas, how his thought is rendered into virtual reality, and witness his ongoing influence on performative arts.

Kantor never staged any of Ghelderode's plays although he intended to do so – in the early days of the Cricot 2 Theatre, in the second half of the 1950s before he chose Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz to be his fetish for years to come. Kantor got in touch with the Belgian writer and obtained his consent for putting on the play *The Actor Makes His Exit* – on condition that no cuts would be made in the original text. No wonder the play was not performed – Kantor's approach to the text of any drama was anything but reverent.

Kantor's fascination with Ghelderode's theatre is by no means surprising, considering its Flemish explicitness, perverter corporeality, the aura of carnival that reverses the existing order, the mingling of the sacred with the profane, and unexpected transformations of space.

Ghelderode's theatrical work, like Kantor's, directly references paintings – old Dutch and Flemish masters (Pieter Bruegel, Hieronymus Bosch, Jacob Jordaens) to contemporary compatriots (James Ensor).

The connection between theatre and painting is still a characteristic feature of the work of many significant figures in Belgian theatre, including those drawing inspiration from Kantor.

The Belgian version of the Playing with Kantor Festival follows a bidirectional path: we wish to highlight the influence that Belgian theatre exerted on Kantor's work, and to present how his theatrical achievement affected Belgian artists. In Belgium, Cricot 2's productions – especially *The Dead Class* (1977 in Ghent) and *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1984 in Louvain-la-Neuve) came as an aesthetic shock. They left an imprint on several generations of Belgian artists, starting from the so-called Flemish wave which set trends in the theatre from the last decades of the 20th century, including Jan Lauwers, Jan Fabre, Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker and Luk Perceval. It is worth mentioning that the first two, like Kantor, were educated in fine arts and active in the art world not only as theatre creators but also as visual artists.

Some of the events in our programme will reintroduce the Polish public to the specific and unique nature of Belgian theatre, others will elucidate the connections between Tadeusz Kantor's theatre and Belgian culture. Apart from live and screened performances, the Playing with Kantor programme offers meetings with Belgian and Polish theatre artists and Polish researchers of Belgian culture, lectures on eminent Belgian playwrights, and a possibility for immersing oneself in virtual reality inspired by Kantor's ideas for the stage, while being an implementation of one of Maeterlinck's key concepts.

Karolina Czerska

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# Monday 4.11 / 6:00 p.m.

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Cricoteka, theatre hall

Opening of the festival and meeting with the creators of VR *Cricoterie*, *Tale of Tales*

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# Tuesday 5.11 / 6:00 p.m.

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Cricoteka, theatre hall



photo: Michiel Devijver

## An Evening with Maeterlinck

A talk and screenings of two performances based on Maurice Maeterlinck's plays.

Karolina Czerna will discuss the main ideas put forward by the Belgian Nobel laureate that revolutionised the world theatre in the 20th and 21st centuries.

***Wnętrze [Interior]* – screening of a performance directed by Wojtek Rodak**

The production was put on in 2020 within the framework of the cycle *Młodzi w Starym* [The Young at the Old] at the National Old Theatre in Kraków. In the time of the pandemic, the play was only live-streamed thrice. It was the first Maeterlinck's play performed in a Polish theatre in many years. Importantly, the hundred-year-old translation was revisited by a young director, still a student at the time, now an award-winning director and playwright.

***Theater Immobiel / Maison Maeterlinck* – screening of a performance directed by Thom Luz**

The Swiss director's first production in Belgium was premiered in 2023 at the NTGent Theatre. Based on Maeterlinck's theoretical essays and plays, its visual and sound space was designed by the director in response to Maeterlinck's demand for a reduced presence of living actors on stage.

Talk held in Polish, *Wnętrze* performed in Polish, *Theater Immobiel/Maison Maeterlinck* performed in Dutch and French, English subtitles, free admission

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# Wednesday 6.11 / 6:00 p.m.

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Groteska Theatre, Kopułowia hall

## Kantor, Ghelderode, lalki i marionety

[Kantor, Ghelderode, Puppets and Marionettes] – discussion: Joanna Braun, Karol Suszczyński, Włodzimierz Szturc  
Conducted by Karolina Czerska

Discussion will centre on the tradition of puppet theatre in Belgium and Poland and two productions of Michel de Ghelderode's plays at the Teatre Groteska.

In 1970, *La Farce de la Mort qui faillit trésser* (The Farce of Death Who Almost Died) was directed by Stanisław Rychlicki, a Cricot 2 actor who also took a role in it, and in 1991 the Belgian director Jules van Houtte put on *Le Soleil se couche* (The Sun is Setting). Participating in the discussion will be people involved in those productions (staging, stage design and translation).

Discussion held in Polish, translated into Polish sign language, free admission

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# Saturday 9.11 / 6:00 p.m.\* Sunday 10.11 / 6:00 p.m.

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Cricoteka, theatre hall

## Far from Linden

Directed by Giuseppe Lonobile,  
based on Veronika Mabardi's play

Premiered in 2015 and performed since on a regular basis, it was presented at the Off Festival in Avignon to great critical acclaim. The low-key production is based on the biographies of the playwright's grandmothers and represents (based on conversations recorded by the artists) an impossible dialogue between them – impossible, amongst others, for linguistic reasons; one of them only spoke Flemish, while the other was a French-speaking Belgian woman with no knowledge of Flemish. The linguistic difference is only one element of the highly complicated identity issues faced by Belgians today.

Performed in French, Polish subtitles,  
tickets PLN 30/50

\* Saturday 9.11 / 8:00 p.m.

Meeting with the creators of *Far from Linden* Valérie Bauchau, Véronique Dumont, Giuseppe Lonobile i Veroniką Mabardi  
Conducted by Justyna Michalik-Tomala

Discussion about matters that affected the making of the performance and a broader context of Belgian theatre in the last dozen or so years. It takes the playwright's biography intertwined with civil unrest in Leuven in the early 1970s as its point of departure. A private story becomes inscribed into universal history. The participants will also analyse similar solutions adopted by Kantor in *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*, as well as the interrelations between a universal reading of both performances and the autobiographical elements they contain.

Conversation held in French, translated into Polish, free admission



photo: Alice Piemme

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# Thursday 14.11 / 7:30 p.m.

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Cricoteka, theatre hall

## Meeting with Luk Perceval

Conducted by Dorota Semenowicz

One of the most important contemporary Belgian theatre directors, Luk Perceval described his encounter with Cricot 2 in the following way: "This theatre took possession of my mind for days on end,

like I was a madman, not only through the images but also the emotions it stirred up inside me. I knew that was the kind of theatre, the kind of experience, that I wanted to make." The talk will explore Perceval's main theatrical inspirations and the peculiarities of Flemish theatre.

Conversation held in English, translated into Polish, free admission

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# Friday 15.11 / 7:00 p.m.

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Cricoteka, theatre hall

## An evening with Jan Lauwers and Needcompany

A lecture by Anna Róża Burzyńska, who came up with the idea for *Playing with Kantor* and curated its first editions, and a screening of *The Blind Poet* by Needcompany, based on Jan Lauwers's text, with his set design and directed by him (2015).

Jan Lauwers, a leading figure in the transformation of Flemish theater in the 1980s, began his career as a visual artist, like Tadeusz Kantor. The lecture will introduce contexts relevant to Lauwers's work and to the activities of Needcompany.

Talk in Polish, screening with Polish subtitles, free admission



photo: Maarten Vanden Abeele

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# from Monday 4–10.11

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Cricoteka, educational room

## VR Cricoterie

Virtual reality simulation by Tale of Tales

Michaël Samyn and Auriea Harvey (a Ghent-based art duo called Tale of Tales) have created *Cricoterie*, a virtual space that poses the question about the status of objects and figures in the virtual world. The work takes the player into the universe of Tadeusz Kantor's art and allows them to freely manipulate objects and characters from Cricot 2 productions. The project was carried out during the artists' residency at the Tadeusz Kantor and Maria Stangret's House in Hucisko in collaboration with the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Tadeusz Kantor Foundation and VAF.

Tickets PLN 10

Opening: 4th November 6:00 p.m., theatre hall  
5–10 November, godz. 11.00 a.m.–7.00 p.m.



photo: Michael Samyn & Auriea Harvey

# from Monday 4–17.11

## Cricoteka, foyer

### Exhibition of Carlos Dekeyrel's photographs from Cricot 2's performances

A presentation of black-and-white photographs by the Belgian graphic artist who documented Cricot 2's legendary performances: *The Dead Class* (Ghent, 1977) and *Wielopole, Wielopole* (Paris, 1980).

Multimedia presentation devoted to Maurice Maeterlinck's life and work, prepared by the team of the Archives & Musée de la Littérature in Brussels, including archive materials from the AML Collection.

Opening: 4th November, 6.00 p.m.  
Tuesday–Sunday, 11:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.,  
free admission



photo: Carlos Dekeyrel

## Collateral events 7.11–15.11

### 7 November (Thursday)

#### *Poésie à la voix et à la basse*

An evening with the poetry of Veronica Mabardi accompanied by the music of Karolina Czerska and the premiere of the Polish edition of Veronika Mabardi's play *Far from Linden* translated by Karolina Czerska

Lokator Bookstore, 7:00 p.m., poems read in French, free admission

### 12 November (Tuesday)

#### Lecture by Karolina Czerska: *Michel de Ghelderode. Teatr okrucieństwa [Michel de Ghelderode. The Theatre of Cruelty]*

Institute of Romance Studies UJ, 1:30 p.m., lecture held in Polish

### 13 November (Wednesday)

#### Lecture by Agnieszka Kukuryk: *René Kalisky. Przewrotne oblicza totalitaryzmów XX wieku w teatrze [René Kalisky. A Subversive Image of 20th-c Totalitarianisms in Theatre]*

University of the National Education Commission, 5:00 p.m., lecture held in Polish

### 15 November (Friday)

#### Lecture by Przemysław Szczur: *Antoine Pickels. Dramaty kłirowe [Antoine Pickels. Queer Dramas]*

University of the National Education Commission, 5:00 p.m., lecture held in Polish

Organizer

**cricoteka**

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MAŁOPOLSKIEGO

MAŁOPOLSKA

Collaboration

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8 TEATR  
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## Educational Programme Saturday 9.11

We will work with space at different levels. We will look at our reflections and double ourselves by visual means of expression. Two separate groups will join their efforts to create an art installation, which will be put on display in the lobby of Cricoteka

Cricoteka, hall, workshops in Polish, tickets PLN 30 per child, admission for parents is free.

### 10.30 a.m. – 11.30 a.m.

#### Reflections in space

Workshop for children aged 2–3 years / Kaleidoscope of Art

### 12.00 p.m. – 1.00 p.m.

#### Double bodies

Workshop for children aged 4–8 years / Art Machine

Run by: Luna Sawka

## Tickets also available at → [bilety.cricoteka.pl](https://bilety.cricoteka.pl)

Curator: Karolina Czerska Coordinator: Wiktor Bury

Visual identity: Kuba Sowiński

Project team: Mariusz Gąsior, Małgorzata Kmita-Fugiel, Anna Lejtkowska, Magdalena Link-Lenczowska, Zofia Mikołajska, Aldona Mikulska, Andrea Nikolov, Anna Rejowska, Luna Sawka, Tomasz Stefaniak, Aleksandra Treder, Monika Ujma, Michał Warmusz

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