**La Biennale di Venezia**

**19th International Festival of Contemporary Dance**

***Myth Makers***

**Director Wayne McGregor**

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Introduction by Wayne McGregor

Director of the Dance Department of La Biennale di Venezia

***Myth Makers***

**Myths** have played a crucial role throughout history by providing a framework for understanding existence, morality, and the cosmos. They aid us express our fears, aspirations, and the mysteries of life. As societies evolve, so do their myths. **In times of turmoil or transition, when traditional beliefs and structures begin to break down, humanity often seeks new narratives to cope with uncertainty and inspire hope.** These fresh myths can emerge from various sources—science, philosophy, collective experiences shared across communities, and most vitally, from the vivid realm of art.

Consider the remarkable **creative acts of the past**: the Nubian pyramids, the ancient cave paintings of Azerbaijan, the mosaics of Iran, the classical texts, music, sculpture, and poetry, as well as the extraordinary performance rituals, dances, and songs that continue to haunt, inspire, evoke, stimulate, challenge, and shake us.

Through their inexplicable creativity quest, **artists have always been the mythmakers of their day**, and it is in their legacy that we delve into the depths of their/our inner selves while articulating universal truths that resonate across times and cultures. Artists are the mythmakers of *our* day, too, and it is in their creativity that they craft ancient, speculative and contemporary narratives in mark marking, modelling, writing, and performing to enchant, beguile and endure. In a contemporary society, with rapid technological advancements and global challenges such as climate change and social inequality, there is an urgent need for myths that **resonate with the current human experience**. These new narratives can foster a sense of connection, belonging, and purpose, guiding individuals and communities through difficult times.

**Mythmaking, then, is fundamentally an act of profound and multifaceted creativity**, integrating imagination, storytelling, and the exploration of human emotion in both processes. Creativity is both a reason for existence and a way of being. It is ephemeral yet concrete, a process and a practice. It can be random or deliberate, giddy or profound. Creativity serves as both a playground and a well-equipped workshop. It is a continually evolving and deeply personal combination of skills, knowledge, techniques, experiences, inspirations, insights, and intuitions grounded in both the body and mind. This combination can be applied in countless ways. If we think of the body as a constellation of movement patterns suspended in a force field of gravity, then creativity can be seen as a cosmos of movable ideas suspended in a force field of possibility. **Creation is a genesis**; it suggests and presents a version of reality through attention, perception, cognition, emotion, and communication techniques. **This process offers a portal to transcendence**, allowing individuals to leave behind their current selves and explore new realms.

**For the audience**, there is a hope that the impact of creation can evoke a shift, proposing new directions for seeing, being, and understanding, thus propelling their own journey. While fixity has its role—since nothing is made without decision-making—art invites viewers, listeners, readers, and players—**each a creative cosmos in their own right**—**to experience, feel, interpret, and respond**. Even seemingly unchanging stone works can escape stasis and shape-shift through this engagement. Although its effects might be alchemical, creativity itself is not some mysterious calling. As humans, we each possess the gift of invention – whether we access it most, some or none of the time is a choice. Imagination is a universal trait. Everybody is born able to access and express unique ideas and conceptions. The urge to create is a powerful drive that compels us to explore and seek without any clear idea of what we might discover. It involves engaging, questioning, flowing, and making. This process allows us to project a piece of our uniqueness, our “you-ness,” into the world. Our contributions can have a ripple effect, nourishing, inspiring, provoking, and generating creative energies that extend far beyond our own – often for epochs.

**Through movement, motion and meaning, the dance artists of Biennale Danza 2025 have created transformative modern myths that invite us to glimpse into alternate realities and explore diverse ways of existing**. The rhythmic flow of their dance mirrors the complexities of life, allowing us to process emotions and express what often remains unspoken. As dancers embody their stories, they offer audiences a shared space for reflection, healing, and connection, illuminating paths of resilience and inspiration. In this shared experience, as we discuss what we have just seen and compare it to what we have seen before, as we remember, process and project, as we touch the work in a broad range of dimensions and ways, we too become an integral part of the mythmaking. Intoxicating, powerful and alive – we seek an ‘enlargement of our being’ (CS Lewis). In our own way, we, too, are the creative ***MYTH MAKERS***.

**Biennale Danza 2025** will evolve our 5 strands to our programme: **live**, **installations, collaborations, archive (talks/workshops/films),** **Biennale College.**

We are delighted to commission and co-commission new work this year in a Festival of **8 World premieres and co-commissions** (including work by Bianchi, Kratz, Bullyache, Carvalho, Morau, and McGregor) and thrilled to present **7 European premieres** and **5 Italian premieres** from iconic dance world leaders to emerging innovative new voices. **Over 160 artists** will be live in Venice, with **75 events** across **17 days**.

Past themes have focused on the uniqueness of our physical intelligence: Touch, Interaction, Interoception (chemical self), and Sensation. This year, we will concentrate on the fluency that unites these discrete elements in a creative exchange to tell both linear and non-linear narratives... how we utilise creativity to tell stories in a multiplicity of ways. All of the invited artists speak to this theme and no more so than in the linchpins of the festival our Golden and Silver Lions.

**Golden Lion**

Our Golden Lion for 2025, the artist **Twyla Tharp** is nothing short of a phenomenon. Her revolutionary contributions to the global dance ecology are unrivalled with work that combines rigour and play, classical discipline and ballet technique with modern dance and natural movements - and radically innovative choreography for stage and film. Twyla Tharp is one of the most important contemporary dance choreographers alive.

Beginning the Biennale Danza 2025 as U.S. modern dance legend Twyla Tharp celebrates her 60th choreographic anniversary and 84th birthday with the European premiere of her groundbreaking new collaboration with music icon Philip Glass ***Slacktide***. A breathtaking dance set to Glass’s music performed live by **Third Coast Percussion** on a unique collection of custom-designed percussion instruments. In addition, her ***Diabelli Variations***, set to Beethoven’s intensely demanding masterpiece, reveal its elegant humour and technical prowess.

**Silver Lion**

**Carolina Bianchi** is a Brazilian playwright, author and performer based in Amsterdam. She mixes literary, visual and cinematic references in her work, filled with musical mashups to confront reality. Her research inhabits spaces between theatre, performance and dance, addressing issues of gender in crisis, sexual violence and art history. In 2023, Bianchi premiered the first chapter of her trilogy *The Bride and Goodnight Cinderella*, delving into the profound horrors of sexist violence, akin to a Dantesque descent into the deepest realms of hell, immersing us in a space where memories intertwine and become indistinct.

Drawing inspiration from the artist Pippa Bacca, she employs her own body as a central element of her work, firmly rooting herself in the tradition of feminine performing arts while simultaneously critiquing it. As she evolves her sensationalist trilogy of works, Bianchi remains at the cutting edge of radical performance, reminding us of the essential need for such uncompromising new artistic voices.

Bianchi will present Chapter II of her provocative and confrontational trilogy, ***Cadela Força - The Brotherhood*.** Delving into the complexity of some pacts of masculinity, the origins of brotherhood between men, and their codes inscribed in violence, Bianchi creates a challenging dialogue between dramaturgy and trauma, possession and radical poetry, the origins of misogyny, and a sexuality in crisis.

Investment in artists to make work they want to make is critical to our vision for Biennale Danza. Our Silver Lions, younger artists who have a lot more to say in their work and time to say it, are not only celebrated in Venice but are given a financial prize to support their next big project.

**TAO Dance Theater** – Winners of the Silver Lion at Biennale Danza 2023, return to Venice for the European premiere of two new works from their ***Numerical Series 16+17***, a co-commission by Biennale Danza

A series that, production after production, develops their innovative approach to movement, through the technique known as the **Circular Movement System**, a dance marked by the ritualistic repetition of the body’s natural movements, which focuses the viewer’s attention to a gesture devoid of all ornamentation.

Conceived on the basis of a simple creative concept and a pure aesthetic of the body, the two new pieces in the series focus, in *16*, on all the movements of the head, which in its most hidden and least visible areas becomes the linchpin of movement; and in *17* explore the relationship between the shape of sound and the movement of the body, of what choreographers call “a kinaesthetic imagining of sound”.

All the pieces in the long collection of the *Numerical Series* showcase pure dance and ravishing experiments that delve deeper into body movement, further enhancing the richness of the Circular Movement Technique while exploring the practice of Eastern somaesthetics. Inspired by the concept of following its inertia, the works create endless possibilities for instant flow.

In an Italian premiere and Biennale Danza co-commission, dance maverick **William Forsythe** collaborates with **Rauf “Rubberlegz” Yasit, Lex Ishimoto, Riley Watts, Brigel Gjoka**, and the **JA Collective** (Aidan Carberry & Jordan Johnson) in a new work that explores the origins of folk dance, hip hop, and ballet. This choreography highlights movement as a universal language that transcends cultural barriers and fosters deeper connections. The dancers engage in a dialogue about their styles, celebrating both similarities and differences.

**Virginie Brunelle**’s imagination is filled with themes of awe, and wonder. In the European premiere of ***Fables***, is set at Monte Verità—the famous mountain that was the birthplace of an idealistic micro-society in the early 1900s, which preceded the hippie counterculture of the 1960s. Against the backdrop of the chaos of an era turned upside down, Fables projects us into fantastical spaces from which larger-than-life characters emerge: contemporary female archetypes who paved the way to freedom from invisible yet real barriers. A universe of great evocative power, close to dance theatre, echoing a crying need for utopia, hope and humanity.

The darkness and creative beauty that **Marcos Morau** has been developing over the last fifteen years in diﬀerent fields is as enigmatic as it is universal, as rebellious as it is fatalistic. A world premiere and Biennale co-commission from him and his eponymous company **La Veronal**: ***Death & Spring*** is certain to engage and surprise. Based on the posthumous and unfinished (but not incomplete) work of Catalan author Mercè Rodoreda’s, Morau builds an allegory about creative freedom, social commitment and the ability that art oﬀers us as salvation and refuge to confront the anguish of the creation-destruction cycle in which we are immersed.

**Investment in the future – New Voices/Transparency**

Every year, we hold a **Choreographer Call Out** for young choreographers – one for Italian companies and choreographers and one for international artists. Every year, we are inundated with ideas, projects and visions, and this year, we selected from a brilliant cohort of **361 applicants from around the world**. This is a rare opportunity for emergent companies to have accelerated growth, profile and nurturing as we commission and produce brand new work and offer all the resources of Biennale to support that creation, including essential mentoring.

The choreographers **Philippe Kratz** and **Pablo Girolami** with the **Nuovo Balletto di Toscana** and the duo **Bullyache** - **Courtney Garratt** and **Jacob Samuel** are the winners for 2025.

In a thrilling new chapter for Florence-based, **Nuovo Balletto di Toscana** - one of Italy’s oldest contemporary dance companies, Biennale Danza 2025 will commission and host the relaunch and new direction of this esteemed entity. Choreographer Philippe Kratz, the new artistic director, will present his first full-length program after a one-year hiatus. Co-created with fellow choreographer Pablo Girolami, the works draw inspiration from the 1950s Theatre of the Absurd, influenced by writers such as Sartre, Genet and Beckett. This existential reflection on a doomed identity choosing happiness informs the two independent but interconnected works, exploring the dizzying absurdity of life along with the power of personal choice and resilience.

***A Good Man is Hard to Find*** is the choreographic project by Bullyache inspired by the 2008 financial crisis and focused on the dynamics of power. Bullyache choreograph, direct, score, and conceptualize spectacular original works. They layer, contrast, and move between dance theatre, performance, and live music to construct unforgettable sequences of images in movement. *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, is a momentous mix of music, cinematic imagery, songs, and stories that explore institutional exploitation. How can we exist and find/touch humanity in a world such as this, filled with consumerism, race riots, worldwide governmental oppression, war, and financial cuts?

Trained at the Rambert School, Garratt’s roots trace back to dance halls and Latin-American dances and also established as musician and filmmaker. Samuel is a multidisciplinary artist who works mainly on texts and sounds. Both a dance company and a musical duo, Bullyache explores the queer and working-class identities of its two founding members in performances that merge dance, music and theatre.

**Technology in partnership with artistic creation.** AI, VR, AR, and Immersive systems. This year, we have two projects that highlight this burgeoning expansion of artistic practice.

***U>N>I>T>E>D*** is the latest work in the canon of Australian powerhouse company **Chunky Move** and Artistic Director **Antony Hamilton**’s‘speculative future’ performances

Exploring ‘machine mysticism’ and the persistence of spirituality in a post-industrial digital era *U>N>I>T>E>D* transforms six extraordinary dancers into post-human cyborgs, the centaurs of a mythological era. Armed with robotic exoskeletons, “artificial muscle” that multiplies its power, agility and speed thanks to the most advanced animatronics by the global leaders Creature Technology Co., the dancers move to techno sounds infused with gamelan and inspired by the Javanese trance of the Indonesian duo Gabber Modus Operandi bringing to the stage a universe both barbaric and science-fiction at the same time, like an archaeology of the future. This production is based on “the notion that tools and machines are not just utilitarian, but are also sacred art objects that represent our self-awareness, our creative intellect and our spiritual nature as a species.”

**Kor’sia** has quickly established itself on the international scene by carving a unique path. Their innovative work lies in the synergy of aesthetic, dramaturgical, and technological elements, which together bring interdisciplinary performances to life. Drawing inspiration from various disciplines—including painting, cinema, fashion, technology, design, music, literature, and philosophy - ***Simulacro*** introduces us to a fresh and authentic form of narration.

French performance artist, acrobat and director **Yoann Bourgeois** has long been fascinated by ideas of weightlessness and constantly strives to break down the boundaries between distinct artistic approaches. United by a shared passion for poetry and activism Bourgeois and Canadian musician **Patrick Watson** have created a profoundly powerful and playful show directing a questioning gaze on our world today.

With his Escher-like stage devices, where staircases connect to spinning platforms, surrounded by jutting trampolines, folding chairs and extendable tables in a play of balance over the abyss, Bourgeois reaches “a suspension point”. The protagonist of a living, radically multidisciplinary and innovative art form.

A journey into Sufi spirituality explores the dense and rhythmic flow of Islamic verses, conveyed through the highly refined form of the Kathak tradition with the **Aakash Odedra Company.**

Born in Birmingham and trained in the classical Indian Kathak and Bharatanatyam dance styles, **Odedra** is a global ambassador for a dynamic approach that intertwines tradition with the contemporary and the physical with the spiritual. As seen in ***Songs of the Bulbul*,** the bulbul represents a nightingale central to a myth in Sufi culture. With its melodious and unmistakable song, it symbolises the beauty of the natural world and the divine. In the myth, the nightingale is captured and confined in a cage, from which it desperately seeks to escape, finding its lost freedom only through ultimate sacrifice. Choreographer **Rani Khanam**, who has infused Kathak with her highly personal style and the wisdom of Sufi texts, directs dancer Aakash Odedra in a poignant narrative about the quest for freedom, serving as a metaphor for the fleeting nature of dance and art. She raises the question of whether we, like the caged bird, will remain tethered to the material world or if we will discover a way to soar towards a higher existence, towards freedom and the divine. She adopts the style of Sufi Kathak, blending the sensual movements of Indian Kathak with the spiritual suggestions of Islamic poetry (in Islam, Sufism is a doctrine of spiritual refinement). The work is further enriched by the music of **Rushil Ranjan**, who reimagines the mesmerising qualities of Sufi sounds with lush orchestral scores.

Fuelled by a deep fascination with the forces that shape our inner worlds and human experiences **Tânia Carvahlo** new solo a world premiere transcends fear to access higher realms of creativity, celebrating beauty, joy, and love. Her choreography fuses classical precision with expressive, chaotic movement, mirroring life’s unpredictability. This blend captures the complexity of our beauty and shadows, inviting the audience to connect with their deeper emotions and instincts. It creates a space to explore our humanity, embracing both light and dark, and experience the shared energy that unites us all.

**Installation**

***On the Other Earth*** – a new post-cinematic choreographic installation, inspired by my latest live stage work – *Deepstaria* (2024) – refracts, evolves and re-imagines the work’s conceptual DNA into a startlingly original new form of experience.

Leveraging the interaction paradigms of **Jeffrey Shaw’s** pioneering media art practice, *On the Other Earth* will take place in Shaw’s new radically immersive **nVis installation** - the world’s first 360-degreestereoscopic LED cinematic screen. Its 26-million-pixel panoramic imagery is experienced inside an enveloping cylindrical architecture that is eight metres wide and four metres tall. Inviting an intimate interplay, groups of twenty to thirty experience the immersive digital installation together. A 32.4-channel surround sound system further substantiates the installation’s immersive qualities.

A core aesthetic and operational feature of Shaw’s nVis is its innovative instrumentarium of tracking and sensing technologies that enable individuals and groups of visitors to interact with the audio-visual surround. This provides an AI-informed and ‘mixed reality’ platform where inhabitants of both the real and virtual worlds are mutually interacting and together creating an emergent ‘co-evolutionary narrative’.

In exploring these unique visualisation and interaction paradigms, ***On the Other Earth***combines dance performance, choreography, digital imaging, multi-modal sensing, AI, audience interactivity and spatialised sound into a humanly thought-provoking and magical 21st-century experience.’

**Biennale College**

Biennale College has been a highlight of all the iterations of Biennale Danza, with a programme that has evolved and sharpened since its inception. Our ambition to connect our burgeoning young talent with unrivalled **learning, training, mentoring, and creative opportunities** has been fortified by the excellent teaching and mentoring we have experienced through internationally respected artists like Pite, Forsythe, Xie Xin, Teshigawara, Forti, Caprioli, and others. Each season we reflect on and revise our offer, working towards a gold standard in dance training in the context of this wonderful international series of Biennale festivals.

Again, **16 young dancers from around the world and two young choreographers will be resident at Biennale Danza 2025 for 3 months**, taking classes, workshops, rep, and vitally creating new works work.

In an introductory residency, my team will concentrate on exploring evolved **Physical Thinking** through choreographic and performance practices. This intensive program will enhance the group’s collaborative skills in preparation for creating work together, while also sharing techniques for generating dance material and composition.

Renowned choreographer **Sasha Waltz** will present an evening of dance with Biennale College Danza, showcasing her adaptation of Terry Riley's iconic work, ***In C***. Created as a variable dance interpretation of this piece, intentionally designed not to be a fixed stage performance, this is an experimental system of 53 choreographic figures for a structured improvisation with clear rules and laws: *In C* is a dynamic, modular piece that examines the dialogue between dance, music and space, both digitally and in real life.

In a unique site-specific project ***The Herds***, Biennale College will collaborate on an unprecedented large-scale public art and climate change initiative. As Herds of life-size puppet animals invade city centres from Kinshasa to the furthest edge of Norway, fleeing the depredation of their environment due to climate change – Biennale College Danza will encounter The Herds in Venice creating a bespoke choreographic intervention by hip hop star **Anthony Matsena**.

Continuing our ambition to have the greatest living dance artists in dialogue and collaboration with Biennale College (past years have included Alessandra Ferri, Carlos Acosta, Saburo Teshigawara, Shiro Takatani, Cristina Caprioli, Carolyn Carlson and more), our students will have our 2025 Golden Lion superstar polymath Twyla Tharp as guest speaker.

**Collaborations**

**Indigo Lewin** has been our photographer-in-residence since 2000 capturing the intimate, prosaic and transformative moments of each edition of Biennale Danza. Her beguiling and unexpected images have been profiled in exhibition, catalogue and large-scale formats.

To celebrate the remarkable photographic archive documenting my first 4 years as Director of Biennale Danza, and to bid farewell to Lewin in collaboration with the Biennale Archive, we will create and publish an impressive dance photography book. This book is set to be launched during the festival. Additionally, we will showcase a selection of her stunning photographs in a large-scale.

**Talks/Workshops**

Curated conversation and discussion opportunities to meet artists pre and post shows - to delve deeper into their work and their artistic vision is both revelatory and insightful. We will provide extra opportunities for these encounters in 2025. Continuing and nurturing our in-conversation mentoring programme with the Biennale’s new group of young dance journalists and curators, we will provide a solid foundation for their future career paths as well as exciting our audiences with liberating debate.

Each artist performing or presenting work in the Biennale Danza 25 will offer a workshop for a broad range of participants during our festival itself. This workshop programme allows a diverse audience of professional and non-professional dancers to experience live the incredible physical worlds of our Biennale talent. Many of these workshops will be open to the public and actively encourage amateur dancers to participate and enjoy the power of dance in action.

**Call-to Action**

Finally, the arts world is in a precarious position at the moment. After COVID-19, we as a community promised to build back better – to nurture an arts ecosystem that is developmental, powerful and fair. The importance of the arts in our lives, as a force for empathetic connection and building bridges to understanding our differences and encouraging divergent thinking, is as vital now - in a climate of conservatism, fear, huge reduction of funding, and potential obliteration of the arts to affect change, as ever before.

Artists and arts organisations need championing right now. Artists in the margins need to be advocated for, and the pervading erosion of the cultural landscape needs to be provoked and challenged not only by artists, producers, cultural leaders, incredible organisations like Biennale and the arts press - who have a different way of looking at the world – fresh eyes, fresh visions, fresh perspectives. We can each play our part. You are all here because you are arts lovers, arts advocates and arts champions – together we can all push harder, open up more fully, and be more evangelical. So please - push your editors to give you more space to cover the arts, write more news, more editorials, more online, put more of the arts more TV (and a shout out to Rai who do an incredible job of profile the arts in a range of dimensions) Keep the arts in the public’s consciousness. We all understand what it’s worth truly fighting for. Thank-you for fighting!