

5 - 9 JUL
JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY

THEY



MIF

manchester
international
festival
2023 ^{29 Jun}
- ^{16 Jul}



THEY

5 – 9 JUL

JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY

Written by **Kay Dick**.

Adapted and co-created

by **Maxine Peake, Sarah Frankcom**
and **Imogen Knight**.

Maxine Peake Performer

Sarah Frankcom Dramaturg

Imogen Knight Movement Director

Joseph Lynn Filmmaker

Amy Mae Lighting Designer

Melanie Wilson Composition and
Sound Designer

John Krausa Costume Designer

Rose Stachniewska Singer

Helen Gorton Production Manager

Scott McDonald Company Stage
Manager

Adam Steed Lighting and Sound
Operator

Siobhán Rocks BSL Interpreter

Anne Hornsby Audio Description

Michael Cretu, Hafsah Aneela Bashir,

Sarah Wilde, Cherry Chung, Alison

Waters, Jennifer Jackson, Richard

Shields, Dana Ismaili Atrium Artists

LAST AUGUST I GOT A CALL FROM SARAH FRANKCOM: 'I KNOW YOU'VE PROBABLY SIGNED OFF ON THE PROGRAMME FOR THE FESTIVAL BY NOW [WE HAD], AND COMMITTED ALL THE FUNDS [WE HAD], BUT MAX, IMOGEN AND I HAVE AN IDEA, AND IT FEELS KIND OF URGENT...'

Of course, Sarah and Maxine Peake have produced some of the Festival's most memorable moments across the years, and have gathered brilliant collaborators such as Imogen Knight around them, so I had to hear the idea.

Sarah told me about the rediscovered book by Kay Dick, *They*. I ordered it right away and read it a few days later. Written in the 1970s, it feels set both in the past and in the future. Perhaps it is set at the edge of our imaginations, living in the fear that somehow stalks every artist's mind. What if all this creativity were no longer allowed?

We never discover the political context of the artists and outsiders who live in the world of *They*. We don't know the particular nature of the repression they are dealing with, but we sense a world all too familiar – where ideas are no longer worth the risk, where orthodoxies

patrol their boundaries in search of any behaviour that could threaten their worldview. Importantly, in *They*, it is not any one set of beliefs or ideas that is under threat, but creativity itself, the act of the artist.

Reading, and now staging, it in our current context of book bans and so-called cancel culture, we see a question emerge that is quite different to all our arguments about content. Is the very presence of the artist, the act of creativity, the greatest threat to political power structures? It's an urgent question, and I'm very glad we found a way to help Sarah, Max and Imogen ask it.

John McGrath

Artistic Director & Chief Executive,
Manchester International Festival



MAKING THEY

MAXINE PEAKE, IMOGEN KNIGHT AND SARAH FRANKCOM



Last summer we had a series of meetings to explore what we would like to collaborate on next. *They* by Kay Dick was something that first appeared as a chance purchase on the way home from one of these days. We all read it quickly and fell immediately under its uneasy spell. There is an economy and poetry to the way Kay Dick imagines our world in the future. The world she describes, writing in 1977, feels very reminiscent of our present, today.

We were moved by the evocation of friendship and love between artists, their belief in the power of creativity and their courage in the face of censorship and violence. What sits at the heart of every community and experience represented in the book is a celebration of making and of sharing art as a basic human right and means of survival. We didn't know how we were going to work with Kay Dick's forgotten masterpiece, but we felt immediately compelled to start an adventure with it.

All of the work we've made, for Manchester International Festival and beyond the city, has been in response to buildings and has taken audiences into stories and spaces in unexpected ways. These buildings have impacted the form of what we've made. In *The Nico Project*, we explored Nico's artistry and legacy in The Stoller Hall with a small orchestra of young female classical musicians. We presented *The Masque of Anarchy* in the newly renovated Albert Hall, metres away from the site of the Peterloo Massacre. So it was a no-brainer that we would need to find a library in which to present *They...*

Manchester has some of the oldest and most beautiful libraries in the world. As soon as we stepped inside the cathedral-like John Rylands with the book of *They* in our heads, it felt a perfect place to take over after hours. The library has a collection of some of the rarest and oldest books in the world, including William Caxton's first edition of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and *The Fragment of the Gospel of St John*, widely regarded

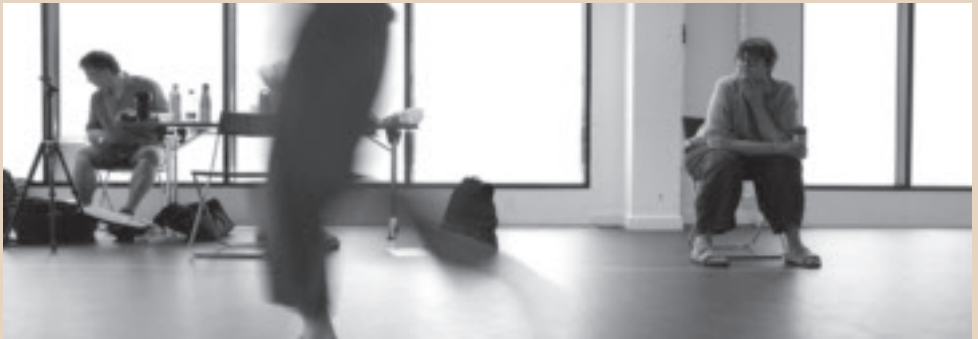
to be the oldest fragment of the *New Testament* ever found. It is also a busy working library filled with people reading, researching and writing every day.

At a time when artists around the world continue to be censored and imprisoned for their ideas and art, and when there is both unprecedented interference with, and a deafening lack of government support for arts and culture, *They* asks us to take courage and speak truth to power – even when times are tough and it might feel as though no one is interested in what we have to say. In the words offered by Rick, a photographer in *They*, to strengthen a frightened writer: 'We must use our time as creatively as possible, in talk, in work, in love. Communication lines must be preserved, kept open for others to use when they need them.'

**THEY INSPIRES
A CALL TO ACTION
FOR TODAY.**



Photography: Joseph Lynn



MAAT – a collective adventure to make new work in conversation with Music, Art, Activism and Theatre led by Maxine Peake, Imogen Knight and Sarah Frankcom.

A SEQUENCE OF UNEASE

Lucy Scholes explores the writing, reception and rediscovery of Kay Dick's dystopian masterpiece, *They*.

Originally published in 1977, *They: A Sequence of Unease* was unlike any of the English writer and editor Kay Dick's previous novels. These – published between the late 1940s and the early 1960s – are Proustian tales of romantic or familial attachments in urbane European settings. *They*, by comparison, is an eerie dystopia in which maundering bands of violent Luddites roam the country destroying art in all its forms, from books to musical instruments, and punishing those artists or craftspeople who refuse to abide by this largely inexplicable, terrifying mob-rule.

Dick wrote the novel after a period of intense bereavement and suffering. Her long-term relationship with the novelist Kathleen Farrell – with whom she'd lived for over two decades in London's Hampstead – had broken down; this was followed by an affair with a married woman who subsequently killed herself, after which Dick attempted suicide herself. These experiences all appear to have been funneled into *They* in a variety of different guises. The novel is suffused with loss and grief – people mysteriously disappear, others are forcibly taken, their livelihoods and talents are suddenly forbidden them, some reappear having undergone shadowy reprogramming. (The novel carries a copyright credit referencing a 1975 *Sunday Times* article called *Coping with Grief* that described a new psychiatric treatment for bereavement in which emotions are 'burnt out' of the sufferer.) But Dick's prose style had also undergone a significant transformation: here it's pared-down, stripped back, unsentimental and muscular.

They can be interpreted in many ways – as a straightforward satire, a sequence of vividly-drawn nightmares, even as a metaphor for artistic struggle – but what comes across most potently is the plea Dick seems to be making for individual and artistic freedoms. As she writes in her book *Friends and Friendship* (1974), a series of interviews with literary friends of hers, published just three years before *They*: 'it is an extremely courageous act to be a writer, painter, composer, because you are out on your own, in limbo, totally unprotected, not much encouraged, driven only by some inner conviction and strength, and the discipline is yours alone.' *They* is a grim portrait of a world ruled by the most draconian censorship, but it forces us to think about some of the bowdlerization we're witnessing here in the UK today in the fields of both art and culture.

Notably though, it's not just artistic sensibility that's perceived as a threat in the novel. People who are single are looked on suspiciously. 'Non-conformity is an illness. We're possible sources of contagion', one character says ominously. 'We're offered opportunities to [...] integrate.' As Eli Cugini wrote in *Xtra Magazine*, 'the book's paranoia feels very queer: the collective is always watching you, taking books off your shelves, punishing expression that goes 'beyond the accepted limit'.' Dick's decision to neither name nor assign a gender to her narrator only adds to the novel's queer sensibility. In a 1968 interview with the *Guardian*, she describes the

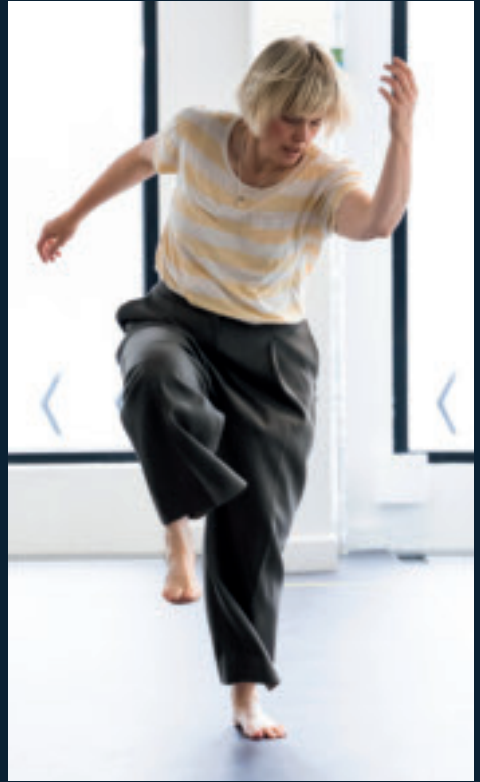
‘IT IS AN EXTREMELY COURAGEOUS ACT TO BE A WRITER, PAINTER, COMPOSER, BECAUSE YOU ARE OUT ON YOUR OWN, IN LIMBO, TOTALLY UNPROTECTED, NOT MUCH ENCOURAGED, DRIVEN ONLY BY SOME INNER CONVICTION AND STRENGTH, AND THE **DISCIPLINE IS YOURS ALONE.**’

‘overall tone’ of the personal relationships in her novels as always being bisexual – which is how she herself identifies. Although attracted to both men and women, she explains that there is ‘something extra’ – ‘this love, this emotion’ – in her relationships with the latter. But she is in any case uninterested in binaries. ‘I have certain prejudices and one of them is that I cannot bear apartheid of any kind – class, colour or sex’, she continues. ‘Gender is of no bloody account.’

While some critics responded well to the novel on its initial publication – the *Sunday Telegraph*, for example, applauded its ‘underlying air of menace’ – for the most part it was greeted with a degree of confusion, and damned with the faintest of praise. As ‘a fantasy sprouting from some collective menopausal spasm in the national unconsciousness, *They* has a certain nagging, nudging, low-voltage power’, admitted the *Sunday Times* grudgingly. Sales were poor, and it had fallen out of print before the end of the decade.

The novel’s recent international reissue has been a different story. Intrigued by something I read about Dick, I hunted down a copy of the novel back in early 2020, writing about it in my *Re-Covered* column for the *Paris Review* that August. Coincidentally, that very same summer, the literary agent Becky Brown, who specializes in the estates of dead authors, found a copy in a secondhand bookshop. We both agreed that we’d stumbled across something special, and Brown put her skills to good use tracking down Dick’s estate, then swiftly selling the book in multiple territories.





**THERE'S THE ADDED
ALLURE OF DICK HERSELF;
A TALENTED, QUEER
TRAILBLAZER WHO'S EVERY
BIT AS EXCITING AN
ANOMALY AS HER NOVEL IS.**

The early copies of Faber's new UK edition elicited incredible responses from some of our best contemporary writers. 'A masterpiece of creeping dread', declared Emily St. John Mandel, while Edna O'Brien praised Dick's writing as possessing 'the signature of an enchantress'. Claire-Louise Bennett called *They* 'a masterwork of English pastoral horror: eerie and bewitching'. 'Lush, hypnotic, compulsive', declared Eimear McBride, 'a reminder of where groupthink leads'.

Timing, it appears, is everything. As Sam Knight surmised writing about the book's rediscovery in *The New Yorker*: 'It has taken global misfortune and some sliding towards the abyss for *They* to speak fully and be heard.'

As Knight elaborates, it isn't just that the novel itself seems so timely – 'creepily prescient', as the doyenne of speculative fiction, Margaret Atwood, put it when she tweeted about the novel's reissue – there's the added allure of Dick herself; a talented, queer trailblazer who's every bit as exciting an anomaly as her novel is. A woman way ahead of her time. Born to an illegitimate mother in London in 1915, and educated in establishments in both England and Switzerland, at the age of 26, Dick became the first woman director in English publishing, at P. S. King & Son.

Later she was the editor of *The Windmill* (under the pen name Edward Lane), a short-lived but acclaimed literary periodical: it was she who commissioned and then published, in the magazine in 1946, Orwell's now famous essay in defence of P. G. Wodehouse, and she and Orwell were close friends.

Clearly no shrinking violet, she spent her youth frequenting the gay bars and cafes of London's Soho, in which she and her bisexual friend Tony gaddled about together, both wearing cloaks and carrying walking sticks. (In later life she was rarely seen without her elegant cigarette holder in hand and sporting a dashing eye glass – according to friends, she never allowed anyone to call it a monocle.) 'I ran to the artists and writers we'd now call the Alternative Society', she recalled in the mid-1980s: 'We were very politically motivated, the Spanish Civil War was our Mecca.'



A woman who bucked the trend, broke with all manner of traditions and lived life on her own terms, Dick never married, nor did she have children. Instead, long before the term 'chosen family' had entered the collective cultural lexicon, she was someone whose friends were by far the most important people in her life. And this sentiment creeps into *They* too. The novel doesn't just remind us of the value of art and culture, it's also a fictional exposition of this impassioned cry from *Friends and Friendship*, for what Dick most holds dear: 'I shall never wish to stop reading the books I love, looking at paintings, listening to music, and, more than that, I should wish to know my friends forever.'

Anyone who knew her admits that Dick could certainly be bolshy, but first and foremost she was extremely loyal and generous with her time, attention, and her money too – on the rare occasions that she had any. She was especially lavish on all fronts when it came to meeting young people. 'She encouraged almost every youngster she ever met to write', recalls the journalist Roy Greenslade, who was her friend and neighbour for many years in Brighton, 'lauding their efforts to the skies in public, while offering helpful criticism in private'.

And even though Dick died in 2001, at the age of 86, this care and encouragement extends to the present day. Any author who receives the royalties they're due for the free loan of their books through the UK public library system owes her a debt of gratitude. Alongside her good friends Brigid Brophy and Maureen Duffy, she was one of a dedicated cohort of writers whose tireless campaigning saw the Public Lending Rights Bill passed in 1979. As such, it couldn't be more fitting to see *They* performed in the iconic John Rylands Library. Dick knew that libraries are sacred places; and not only because of the worlds one can access through the books that they house. As a shared public space where everyone is welcome, they're not just where people go to read, they also provide somewhere for people to meet, to write, and to reflect. As the narrator writes in the opening episode of *They*: 'Karr and I sat in the library, which was also a way of loving.'

Lucy Scholes is Senior Editor at McNally Editions, a series of paperbacks devoted to hidden gems that published the American re-issue of Kay Dick's They.



CREATIVE TEAM



KAY DICK AUTHOR

Kay Dick was a celebrated novelist, writer and editor. Her life began as unconventionally as she was to live it. She was born in London in 1915 to a penniless part-Irish actress and 'baptised' in the Café Royal by her bohemian friends. Educated in London and Geneva, she worked at Foyles bookshop and became the first female director of an English publishing house, P.S. King & Son, aged just 26 (George Orwell inscribed her copy of *Animal Farm*: 'Kay - To make it and me acceptable' in recognition of her editorial work). She later wrote for the *New Statesman* and reviewed for the *Times*, *Spectator* and *Punch*, as well as editing literary magazine *The Windmill* under the pseudonym Edward Lane.

Dick wrote five novels including *They* (1977), which won the South-East Arts Literature Prize but soon went out of print; it was recently rediscovered and celebrated as 'a lost dystopian masterpiece' (*Paris Review*) before being republished with a new foreword by Carmen Maria Machado. Dick also researched biographies of Colette, Carlyle and the character of Pierrot, edited anthologies of stories and interviews and tirelessly campaigned for the Public Lending Rights Bill alongside Brigid Brophy. For 22 years she lived with her long-term partner, the novelist Kathleen Farrell, in Hampstead, before moving to Brighton, where she championed young writers in a book-lined flat with 'cigarettes, cream teas and martinis'. Dick died in 2001.



MAXINE PEAKE PERFORMER

As one of the nation's favourite actresses, RADA trained Maxine Peake has enjoyed a prolific career in theatre, television and film, with many career highlights including Mike Leigh's *Peterloo* (Amazon/eOne), *Anne* (ITV), *Black Mirror* (Netflix), *Funny Cow* (eOne), *Red Riding* (Channel 4), *The Devil's Whore* (Channel 4), *The Theory of Everything* (Working Title Films), *The Falling* (BBC Films/BFI), *Shameless* (Channel 4), an extensive list of dramas for the BBC including *The Village*, *Silk*, *Criminal Justice*, *The Hollow Crown*, *Dinnerladies*, *Three Girls* and many award-winning TV dramas and theatre productions. Constantly looking for new challenges and surprising audiences, she has already played a range of colourful and award-winning characters, most notably Myra Hindley in *See No Evil: The Moors Murders* and the title role in *Hamlet*, which was at the Royal Exchange Theatre and then filmed and released

as a feature film in cinemas in the UK and USA. In theatre, her work includes the iconic role of Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, directed by Sarah Frankcom, who has directed many critically acclaimed productions with Peake: *The Nico Project*, *Happy Days*, *The Skriker*, *The Masque of Anarchy*, *Miss Julie*, *The Children's Hour* and *Hamlet*. Further theatre credits include: *How To Hold Your Breath* and *Mother Teresa Is Dead* (Royal Court); and *The Welkin*, *Luther*, *The Relapse* and *The Cherry Orchard* (all National Theatre).

As a writer, she has retold fascinating stories of women through British history who've achieved greatness or faced adversity, with plays including *Beryl*, *The Last Testament Of Lillian Bilocca*, *Queens of the Coal Age* and *Betty! A Sort of Musical*.



SARAH FRANKCOM DRAMATURG

Sarah has worked extensively as a director and dramaturg making theatre in a range of participatory, training and professional settings. After joining the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester as Literary Manager she created the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting and became Artistic Director between 2014 and 2019.

Her directing work at the Royal Exchange Theatre includes acclaimed collaborations with Maxine Peake on *Hamlet*, *Miss Julie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Happy Days*. She has also collaborated with the playwright Simon Stephens on *On the Shore of the Wide World* (winner of Best New Play at the Olivier Awards), *Punk Rock* (winner of Best Production at the Manchester Evening News Theatre Awards), *Blindsided* and *Light Falls*. Other recent work includes: *West Side*

Story, *Death of a Salesman* and *Our Town* (for which she won Best Director at the UK Theatre Awards 2018) at the Royal Exchange Theatre; *The Masque of Anarchy* (2013), *The Skriker* (2015) and *The Nico Project* (2019) at Manchester International Festival; and *The Last Testament of Lillian Bilocca* for Hull UK City of Culture 2017.

Her most recent work has included a *Macbeth for Schools* at Shakespeare's Globe, *The Breach* at Hampstead Theatre and *Betty! A Sort of Musical* at the Royal Exchange Theatre.



IMOGEN KNIGHT MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

Imogen Knight is a director, movement director and somatic therapist based in London. She is part of the MAAT collective with Sarah Frankcom and Maxine Peake; they have created multiple works together since 2015, including the highly acclaimed *The Nico Project* for MIF19, *The Skriker* for MIF15 and *The Last Testament of Lillian Bilocca*.

Imogen works across multiple disciplines: theatre, film, classical and electronic music, television, performance and visual art, photography, and opera. She has directed work with orchestras and musicians from the London Sinfonietta, Brass and Mandolin Orchestra of Esch-sur-Alzette in Luxembourg, Southbank Sinfonia, Royal College of Music and Royal Northern College of Music. She collaborates with composers and musicians including

Matthew Herbert, Common, Keeley Forsyth, Alicia Jane Turner and the NYX electronic drone choir.

Imogen was the movement director for the multi-award-winning *Chernobyl* (HBO).



JOSEPH LYNN FILMMAKER

Joseph is a director and photographer based in London who works within theatre, film and television. As a photographer, Joseph works as a unit stills and behind the scenes provider for studios such as Sky and E4. Bringing his visual eye to a design brief in a versatile way, Joseph has also shot campaign material for Cineworld, Studio Canal and London Screen Academy. Working extensively with actors, musicians and comedians, Joseph's blend of playful portraiture and cinematically inflected taste sees his work used as publicity shots and poster material for projects across many mediums.

As a filmmaker Joseph had his first two shorts commissioned by Channel 4's Random Acts platform, and has gone on to carve out a distinct visual style with a particular interest in movement and performance. Hired by establishments such as The Royal Court, Manchester International Festival, LAMDA, and the Southbank Sinfonia, Joseph combines his skillset to create promotional content for theatrical productions in a manner that compliments the piece whilst making something entirely new.



AMY MAE LIGHTING DESIGNER

Amy Mae graduated from the University of Winchester with a BA (Hons) in Stage Management and Performing Arts and went on to study at RADA, where she gained a merit in her Postgraduate Diploma in Stage Electrics and Lighting. She won a Knight of Illumination Award in the Musicals category for *Sweeney Todd* in 2015 and was part of the creative team on *The Last Return*, winner of a Scotsman Edinburgh Fringe First Award in 2022.

Her theatre credits include: *Girl on an Altar* (Abbey Theatre, Belfast and Kiln Theatre); *Falkland Sound* (Royal Shakespeare Company); *A Passionate Woman* and *There Are No Beginnings* (Leeds Playhouse); *Say Yes to Tess – A New Musical* (Leeds Playhouse and Camden People's Theatre); *Retrograde* (Kiln Theatre); *Wildfire Road* and *How a City Can Save the World* (Sheffield Theatres); *Shut Up, I'm Dreaming* (National Theatre and touring); *Vincent In Brixton*, *The Seagull*, *Prize Fights* and *Henry V* (RADA); *The Boy with Two Hearts* (Wales Millennium Centre and National Theatre); *The Last Return* (Galway International Festival and Edinburgh Festival); *When We Dead Awaken* and *Babette's Feast* (The Print Room at the Coronet); and *Ambivalence* (Lakeside Arts Centre).



MELANIE WILSON **COMPOSITION AND SOUND** **DESIGNER**

Melanie Wilson is a UK based, multi-disciplinary performance maker. Her acclaimed work is founded on the contemporary interplay between sound art, experimental forms of composition, language, technology and live performance.

Recent collaborations include: *little scratch*, dir Katie Mitchell (Hampstead Theatre, score); *Unsere Zeit*, dir Simon Stone (Residenztheater, Munich, score); *Extinct*, dir Kirsty Housley (Theatre Royal Stratford East, soundtrack); *Current Rising*, dir Netia Jones (Royal Opera House, libretto); *Where I Go (When I Can't Be Where I Am)*, dir Rachel Bagshaw (BBC Arts – Culture in Quarantine, score); and *Orlando*, dir Katie Mitchell (Schaubühne, Berlin, soundtrack).

Melanie's own recent work includes *glass human* (Glyndebourne Tour), *Women of Record (A Woman's Place* exhibition, Knole), *Opera for the Unknown Woman* (Wales Millennium Centre and UK tour) and *Landscape II* (Dublin Fringe Festival and UK tour).

PRODUCTION CREDITS

FACTORY INTERNATIONAL

Ric Watts Senior Producer

Richard Morgan Producer

Rebecca Burgess Production
Administrator

Chris Clay for Dock Street Events
Festival Head of Production

Programme edited by **Polly
Checkland Harding**

For a full list of **Manchester
International Festival / Factory
International** staff, please see
[factoryinternational.org/mif23/
staff-list](http://factoryinternational.org/mif23/staff-list)

JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY

Dominic Marsh Services Manager

Emily Tan Visitor Experience Manager

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO

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Nathaniel from the **Kay Dick Estate,**
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Battcock** from **Curtis Brown, Punam
Ramchurn, Sandra Blue.**

Manchester International Festival (MIF) is one of the world's leading arts festivals and the first to be entirely focused on making ambitious new work. Every two years MIF brings the most exciting artists on the planet to the city – and invites the people of Greater Manchester to help shape its programme.

Run by the Factory International team, MIF is staged all over Manchester. Since its first edition in 2007, the Festival has brought together the best in the performing and visual arts, music and pop culture. Events happen in all kinds of spaces – from theatres, galleries and concert halls to railway depots, churches and car parks – pushing boundaries and mixing up genres.

MIF23 is the first Festival to take place at Factory International's new home and Manchester's latest cultural landmark, Aviva Studios – while continuing to pop up all over the city.

factoryinternational.org / [#MIF23](https://twitter.com/MIF23)

Written by Kay Dick. Adapted by Maxine Peake, Sarah Frankcom and Imogen Knight.
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