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MANCHESTER INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL PRESENTS POSTCARDS FROM NOW

**New films from artists under lockdown**

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The global COVID-19 pandemic is changing our world in countless ways: some already visible, others as yet unknown. It has shattered much of what we knew and understood about our lives. But could this tragedy also be an opportunity – a moment for us to reimagine, reshape and rebuild society to be fairer, brighter, better?

*Postcards from Now* presents five distinct perspectives from leading international artists of every stripe – choreographers, musicians, visual artists, theatre-makers, animators and more. Commissioned and created at the height of the global lockdown, these five films explore everything from community to communication, patriarchy to power. And in very different ways, they consider the question that we’ve all been asking ourselves and others: *what happens next?*

Manchester International Festival Artistic Director & Chief Executive, **John McGrath** says*: “MIF has always been a Festival like no other – with almost all the work being created especially for us in the months and years leading up to each Festival edition. But who would have guessed two years ago what a changed world the artists making work for our 2021 Festival would be working in?*

*From legendary Argentinian artist Marta Minujin’s decision to give the world’s most famous clock, Big Ben, a temporary new home in Manchester to Cephas Williams’ celebratory activist artwork Portrait of Black Britain, the ways in which artists have used the opportunity of the Festival to reflect on life now has been inspiring. Our programme is very different to the one we had almost-fully planned at the start of last year, but I hope it feels urgent and right.”*

*“We hope MIF21 will provide a time and place to reflect on our world now, to celebrate the differing ways we can be together, and to emphasise, despite all that has happened, the importance of our creative connections – locally and globally.”*

**Breathless Puppets**

*Akram Khan & Naaman Azhari*

Forced apart in childhood by the expectations of their cultures and the disapproval of their fathers, two men with a passion for dance reconnect through the tragedy of the pandemic. Choreographed by Akram Khan and directed by Naaman Azhari, this powerful short film uses rotoscope animation, created by hand-drawing over live action footage.

Akram Khan is one of the most celebrated and respected dance artists of today. In just over 19 years he has created a body of work that has contributed significantly to the arts in the UK and abroad. His reputation has been built on the success of imaginative, highly accessible and relevant productions such as *XENOS*, *Until the Lions*, *Kaash*, *iTMOi* (in the mind of igor), *DESH*, *Vertical Road*, *Gnosis* and *zero degrees*.

As an instinctive and natural collaborator, Khan has been a magnet to world-class artists from other cultures and disciplines. His previous collaborators include the National Ballet of China, actress Juliette Binoche, ballerina Sylvie Guillem, choreographers/dancers Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Israel Galván, singer Kylie Minogue, indie rock band Florence and the Machine, visual artists Anish Kapoor, Antony Gormley and Tim Yip, writer Hanif Kureishi and composers Steve Reich, Nitin Sawhney, Jocelyn Pook and Ben Frost.

Khan’s work is recognised as being profoundly moving, in which his intelligently crafted storytelling is effortlessly intimate and epic. Described by the Financial Times as an artist “who speaks tremendously of tremendous things”, a highlight of his career was the creation of a section of the London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony that was received with unanimous acclaim.

As a choreographer, Khan has developed a close collaboration with English National Ballet and its Artistic Director Tamara Rojo. He created the short piece *Dust*, part of the *Lest We Forget* programme, which led to an invitation to create his own critically acclaimed version of the iconic romantic ballet *Giselle.* This received its world premiere in Manchester, presented by MIF as a pre-Factory Event.

Akram Khan said: "*The project is a response to Covid 19....it is about 2 men who are friends. Their history and how that affects their future..... it reflects life: Life is never clear, you recognise some parts of life, you think you are in control of some parts of life and really, you are not.*"

Naaman Azhari is a British/Lebanese animator and film director.

His latest film, *The Magic Boat*, tells the story of a mother and son fleeing the conflict in Syria; it uses rotoscoping, an animation technique involving hand-drawing over live-action footage, to explore this familiar tale from a humane perspective. It was nominated for Best British Short Animation at the BAFTA Film Awards 2020 and selected for inclusion in the Aesthetica Short Film Festival and Encounters Short Film Festival in 2019. Azhari used the same techniques in his earlier film *The Sunshine Boy* to show the gulf in understanding between a parent and child.

Azhari is a graduate of Goldsmiths, University of London.

Naaman Azhari said: “*It's been a real honour and privilege to be collaborating with Akram Khan and MIF on this project. Working with Akram has opened my eyes to the world of dance and its power in storytelling. He is an incredibly generous artist and I couldn't be luckier to have worked with him on this piece. This would not have been possible without MIF, who have given consistent support and the freedom and flexibility that any artist would wish for.*”

**Far Away From Russia**

*Lola Arias*

The pandemic has excluded elderly people from social and political life, exposing their carers to more stressful and precarious working conditions than ever before. Everybody speaks in the names of those who are older and in the care of others - but who’s really taking care of whom? In Lola Arias’s film, the daily routine of one elderly person and their carer becomes an unexpected act of love and resistance.

Lola Arias (Argentina, 1976) is a writer, theatre and film director. She is a multifaceted artist whose work brings together people from different backgrounds (war veterans, former communists, migrant children, etc.) in theatre, film, literature, music and visual art projects.

Arias’ productions play with the overlap between reality and fiction. “Sitting in the theatre, wandering a site-specific location or watching a film, we are inculcated into others’ narratives, wound into their complexities, joys and disappointments. At the same time, we are also invited and at times confronted, in an extraordinary and acute way, to reflect on the contingencies and fragilities of our own stories, individual and collective, as well as on our shifting, unresolved relation to the precarious and dangerous machinery that is social and political history.” (Etchells, in *Re-enacting Life*, 2019).

Arias studied Literature at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, and Dramaturgy at the Escuela de Artes Dramáticas (Buenos Aires), the Royal Court Theatre (London) and Casa de América (Madrid). In 2014 she completed the Film Laboratory Programme at the Universidad Di Tella (Buenos Aires), one of the most prestigious cinema programmes in Argentina.

Between 2001 and 2007 she wrote and directed six fictional pieces *The Squalid Family*, *Studies of Loving Memory*, *Poses for Sleeping* and the trilogy *Love is a Sniper*, *Revolver Dream* and *Striptease*.

Since 2007 she has worked in the field of documentary theatre, creating over twelve plays in collaboration with people who have lived through different events or historical experiences. People who have, one way or another, survived.

*My Life After* (CTBA, Buenos Aires, 2009) is based on the biography of six performers who re-enact their parents’ lives during the dictatorship in Argentina. *Familienbande* (Münchner Kammerspiele, Munich, 2009) deals with role models in a contemporary family with three parents. *That Enemy Within* (HAU, Berlin, 2010) is a project about identity made in collaboration with two identical twins. *The Year I was Born* (Teatro a Mil, Santiago, 2012) is based on biographies of people born during Pinochet’s dictatorship. *Melancholy and Demonstrations* (Wiener Festwochen, Vienna, 2012) is a play about her mother’s depression. *The Art of Making Money* (Stadttheater Bremen, 2013) takes a concept from *The Threepenny Opera* by Brecht for a play performed by beggars, prostitutes and street musicians from the city of Bremen. And *The Art of Arriving* (Stadttheater Bremen, 2015) uses the example of Bulgarian kids living in Germany to develop a scenic tutorial that reflects on how to start a new life in another country.

Her most recent plays are *Minefield* (Royal Court Theatre, London, 2016), which brings together British and Argentinian veterans of the Falklands/Malvinas War to share their experience of the conflict and life since then, *Atlas des Kommunismus* (Maxim-Gorki Theatre, Berlin, 2016), which gathers stories of women between the ages of 8 and 84 with backgrounds in the GDR, *What they want to hear* (Münchner Kammerspiele, Munich, 2018), the reconstruction of the real case of a Syrian archaeologist trapped in German bureaucracy without any legal status for four years, and *Futureland* (Maxim-Gorki Theatre, Berlin, 2019), a science-fiction documentary piece with unaccompanied minors, teenagers who escaped from war, poverty and violence and travelled to Germany on their own.

Lola began her film career with the video installation *Veterans* (Battersea Art Centre, London, 2014), the starting point of her multi-disciplinary art project about the Falklands/Malvinas War. In this series, veterans reconstruct their experience of the war in a space they inhabit in the present day.

Her first feature film *Theatre of War* (2018) was selected for the 68th Forum of the Berlinale Film Festival and received several prizes including the CICAE Art Cinema Award, the International Confederation of Art House Cinemas Award and the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury. Arias also won the Best Director Award at the 20th BAFICI Festival in Buenos Aires and the film received the Movistar+ Prize for Best Documentary Film at Documenta Madrid and the Silver Condor Award for Best Adapted Script.

Arias is currently working on her next film *Reas* [working title], supported by IDFA Bertha Fund and selected for the Pitching du Réel at the Visions du Réel Festival, which brings together the stories of women and trans people in Ezeiza Prison, Buenos Aires, reinventing the musical genre in documentary form, mixing scenes and stories from the inmates’ real lives with music and choreographies.

In the visual arts and curating field, she developed *My Documents* (Buenos Aires, 2012-2017; Milan, 2018; Lisboa, 2020), a lecture-performance cycle where artists from different backgrounds present personal research, a radical experience, a story that secretly obsessed them. She also conceived the durational performance *Audition for a Demonstration* (Berlin, 2014; Athens, 2015; Prague, 2015; Buenos Aires, 2017; Berlin, 2019); she created the exhibitions *Stunt Double* (Buenos Aires, 2016), in which four different installations rebuilt the last 40 years of Argentinian social and political history through documents, reenactments, interviews and popular songs; and *Ways of walking with a book in your hand* (Buenos Aires, 2017), a site-specific project for readers in libraries and public spaces.

With Ulises Conti she released the albums *Love is a sniper* (2007) and *Those who do not sleep* (2011), and with Stefan Kaegi she developed the projects *Chácara Paraíso* (2007), *Airport Kids* (2008) and *Ciudades Paralelas* (2010), a festival of urban interventions in Berlin, Buenos Aires, Warsaw, Zurich and other cities.

She has published poetry, fiction and plays: *Love is a sniper* (2007, Entropía), *The postnuclear ones* (2011, Emecé), *My Life After and other plays* (2016, Penguin Random House) and a bilingual edition of her play *Minefield* (2017, Oberon Books). In 2019, Performance Research Studies published *Re-enacting Life*, a book that gathers articles, screenplays and documents from her whole career.

Lola Arias has received very prestigious prizes for her works, including the Premio Konex 2014 and the Preis der Autoren 2018, and her work has been performed at festivals including: Lift Festival, London; Under the Radar, New York; Festival d’Avignon; Theater Spektakel, Zurich; Wiener Festwochen; Festival Theaterformen, Brunswick/Hanover; Spielart Festival, Munich; and Berlinale; as well as at venues including Théâtre de la Ville, Paris; REDCAT, Los Angeles; Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis; Parque de la Memoria, Buenos Aires; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; and Royal Court Theatre, London.

**Download and Run Zoom**

**Lucinda Childs meets (LA) HORDE**

**Building Momentum Under Lockdown**

*Lucinda Childs & (LA)HORDE*

When travel restrictions forced Lucinda Childs to postpone a project with the Ballet national de Marseille, the American choreographer began meeting the Ballet’s Artistic Directors – LA(HORDE) – via Zoom. Intimate, playful and relatable, this short film chronicles their ongoing digital collaboration, and explores how the distances enforced by the pandemic raise unexpected possibilities for creative interaction.

Born in 1940, Lucinda Childs has been passionate about dance and theatre since childhood. Her encounter with Merce Cunningham determined the direction she would go in and she joined forces with an arts’ collective that included Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton and Trisha Brown at the Judson Dance Theater. She embarked on her choreographic career in 1963 with *Pastime* before going on in 1968 to apply a logic of deconstruction to the classical vocabulary she was simultaneously learning. She established her own company in 1973, developing a minimalist style of dance. In 1976 she took part in *Einstein on the Beach*, Bob Wilson’s opera set to music by Philip Glass in which she performed choreographies by Andy de Groat.

*Dance*, created in 1979, was her first large-scale collective ballet and it was followed by several works in collaboration with other artists such as Available Light in 1983 with sets by Frank Gehry. For the Paris Opera Ballet she created *Premier Orage* in 1984, and *Perfect Stranger* for the Lyon Opera Ballet in 1990. She staged Gluck’s *Orpheus and Eurydice* again for Theater Kiel. Lucinda Childs also recreated ten years ago a company of young dancers who are breathing life into her repertoire.

Established in 2013, (LA)HORDE is a collective of three artists: Marine Brutti, Jonathan Debrouwer and Arthur Harel. Together they challenge the codes of various artistic disciplines, particularly in performance and contemporary art. Leading the Ballet National de Marseille since September 2019, (LA)HORDE creates choreographic pieces, films, video installations and performances centred on the moving body. With a variety of media, they develop scenarios and actions embedded in contemporary issues and provide several narrative spaces.

*(LA)HORDE collaborates with communities of individuals on the fringes of mainstream culture and heads off on artistic journeys that show solidarity: people in their seventies, the visually impaired, smokers, teenagers ... Against any form of hierarchy or cultural appropriation, their practical approach is based on interrelationships and cooperation. Restless and always on the look out, they remain alert. The body is at the heart of their creation. They create works that emerge from their encounters with different communities online in order to define the effects of the internet’s arrival on dance, a topic of great interest to (LA)HORDE, which has led the members of the collective to define the phenomenon as post-internet dance.*

Claire Diez (journalist and dramaturge, dance specialist)

**Love Campus. ABCD, 2019-2021**

*Ibrahim Mahama*

The Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art and Red Clay Studios, established by Ghanaian visual artist Ibrahim Mahama (Parliament of Ghosts, MIF19) in his hometown of Tamale, run a series of experimental programmes designed to educate, stimulate and encourage young people from communities with high levels of poverty and low levels of education. This film tells their story.

Ibrahim Mahama lives and works in Ghana. For MIF19 he created the major exhibition *Parliament of Ghosts* at the Whitworth. Known for creating monumental public realm art installations, he has presented work at international exhibitions such as Ghana's first national pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale; the Norval Foundation, Cape Town; Documenta 14, Athens and Kassel; and All the World’s Futures, 56th Venice Biennale.

Mahama often examines how workers are affected by state or corporate policies and practices, and in many cases created his own temporary workforce in the making of his art. His expansive practice includes creating education and cultural infrastructures, such as the Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art (SCCA) in Tamale, an institution conceived as a studio space and exhibition venue. In April 2021, Mahama opens his third venue, Nkrumah Voli, to the public. Located in central Tamale, the silo will function as an exhibition space and repository for ecological forms and archaeological artefacts from the region.

For this project, he is creating a film about the activation of *Parliament of Ghosts* and the additional education spaces he is building in Tamale.

Ibrahim Mahama said: *“Love Campus takes on the promises of technology as a starting point through establishing relationships between old airplanes and modern drones. These relationships manifest themselves through a series of workshops within the cockpit and fuselage of airplanes transported across the country in Ghana to a rural settling for renewed social and ideological reconditioning. What happens when two technologies from different timelines occupy the same space? Is there a possibility of a singularity and what promises or potentials does it have for another generation? The birth of new imaginations promises another era of rethinking life on all levels beyond the human experience.”*

A trailer will also be released for a film being made by Angélique Kidjo that will be released in full later in the year.

Series commissioned by Manchester International Festival, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Théâtre du Châtelet and Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. Breathless Puppets is also commissioned by Sadler’s Wells. Series produced by Manchester International Festival. Far Away From Russia produced by Manchester International Festival in association with Staatstheater Hannover

**ENDS**

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**NOTES TO EDITORS**

**About Manchester International Festival**

Manchester International Festival (MIF) is an artist-led festival of original, new work and special events reflecting the spectrum of performing arts, visual arts and popular culture. MIF21 takes place from 1 - 18 July 2021.

Staged every two years in Manchester, MIF has commissioned, produced and presented world premieres by artists including Marina Abramović, Damon Albarn, Laurie Anderson, Björk, Boris Charmatz, Jeremy Deller, Idris Elba and Kwame Kwei-Armah, Elbow, Philip Glass and Phelim McDermott, David Lynch, Wayne McGregor, Steve McQueen, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Yoko Ono, Thomas Ostermeier, Maxine Peake, Punchdrunk, Skepta, The xx, Robert Wilson and Zaha Hadid Architects.

These and other world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work, staged in venues across Greater Manchester – from theatres, galleries and concert halls to railway depots, churches and car parks. MIF works closely with venues, festivals and other cultural organisations globally, whose financial and creative input helps to make many of these projects possible and ensures that work made at MIF goes on to be seen around the world.

MIF supports a year-round Creative Engagement programme, bringing opportunities for people from all backgrounds, ages and from all corners of the city to get involved during the Festival and year-round, as volunteers, as participants in shows, through skills development and a host of creative activities, such as Festival in My House.

MIF will also run The Factory, the new landmark cultural space currently being built in the heart of Manchester and designed by the internationally-renowned architect Ellen van Loon of Rem Koolhaas’ OMA. The Factory will commission, present and produce one of Europe’s most ambitious and adventurous year-round creative programmes, featuring bold new work from the world’s greatest artists and offering a space to create, invent and play.

Attracting up to 850,000 visitors annually, The Factory will add up to £1.1 billion to the economy over a decade and create up to 1,500 direct and indirect jobs. Its pioneering programme of skills, training and engagement will benefit local people and the next generation of creative talent from across the city, whilst apprenticeships and trainee schemes are already underway during the construction phase.

MIF’s Artistic Director and Chief Executive is John McGrath.

[mif.co.uk](https://mif.co.uk)