

# VIDY THÉÂTRE LAUSANNE

Creation  
at Vidy



**NICOLAS STEMANN**

*Contre-enquêtes*

based on *The Meursault Investigation*  
by Kamel Daoud

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## **Contre-enquêtes**

based on *The Meursault Investigation* by Kamel Daoud

Length: ~1:20

Theatre

English surtitles available

## **Conception, adaptation, scenography**

Nicolas Stemann

## **Video**

Claudia Lehmann

## **Costumes**

Marysol del Castillo

## **Sound creation**

Paloma Colombe

Nicolas Stemann

## **Light creation**

Jonathan O'Hear

## **Dramaturgy**

Katinka Deecke

## **Assistant to the director**

Mathias Brossard

## **With**

Mounir Margoum

Thierry Raynaud

## **Production**

Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne

Schauspielhaus Zürich

The Cercle des mécènes du Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne supports the Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne for this show.

With the support of the production, technical, communication and administration teams of Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne

With this new creation, German director Nicolas Stemmann has taken the novel that was to demonstrate the incisive writing of Algerian Kamel Daoud to the world, complemented with other texts. This Algerian author, today one of the most unique voices in Francophone literature, is known for his strong stand against religious radicalisation, as well as against post-colonial hypocrisy. He positions himself in the breach that writing provides, pointing out hypocrisy and responsibility in the West as well as in the Muslim world.

**In his novel, Kamel Daoud gives voice to the alleged brother of the Arab killed by Meursault, the hero of *The Stranger* by Camus. A nameless Arab, even though he is the reason behind French colonial metaphysical thought on humankind's place in the world.**

**Following on from Daoud, Stemmann brings the victim to life through an interposed fiction. Two people holding the novels of Camus and Daoud are on stage: one is of North African descent and the other is the child of pieds-noirs, French people born in Algeria prior to its independence. They discuss Daoud's work and through it, that of Camus. They argue over who is the victim, both struggling under the weight of a history that immobilises and seems to imprison them.** They are trapped in a cycle that causes them to relive the same story, over and over again, each accusing the other of being the source of their unhappiness. Only a genuine encounter will allow them to throw off this burden and move forward as free men - but will they have the courage? Will it be the kind of courage necessary for them to accept the past and invent the present they so miss?

By creating a theatre adaptation of Kamel Daoud's novel, Nicolas Stemmann has found an author with whom he shares the foundations of his theatre: questioning fiction by playing with it (rather than simply illustrating it) and drawing out resonances with our present, to finally undo the fiction and reveal the concrete act of theatre, in the here and now.

ERIC VAUTRIN  
DRAMATURG OF THÉÂTRE VIDY-LAUSANNE

# HOW LITERATURE CAN ACT AGAINST CYNICISM

## THE THEATRE OF NICOLAS STEMANN

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Nicolas Stemann is interested in the classics of the repertoire, as well as in contemporary writing. By staging the effects and resonances that a text creates on those that grasp its meaning, rather than an interpretation of it, each project is again the opportunity to question theatrical form by continually calling on the codes and tools available, thus revealing the topical issues of a work while questioning it at the same time. After having worked with Germany's major theatre ensembles (Schauspielhaus Köln, Thalia Theater, Schaubühne Berlin, Münchner Kammerspiele...), Nicolas Stemann will be the future co-director of the Schauspielhaus Zürich in 2019 together with dramaturg Benjamin von Blomberg. At Vidy, he created *Werther!* in French in 2015, based on Goethe's work; *Nathan?!\** based on *Nathan the Wise* by G. E. Lessing ; and *Crassier/Bataclan* by Elfriede Jelinek in 2016.

With his new creation based on an adaptation of the novel *The Meursault Investigation* by Kamel Daoud, Nicolas Stemann continues his decoding of the post-colonial and neoliberal subtext at work behind the current socio-political issues in contemporary Europe, especially Islamic terrorism.

Some of these issues were already at play in his recent creations, in particular *Rage\** and *Nathan?!\*\**, which focus on the responsibility of Western society for the radicalisation of young Islamic fundamentalists. Is there a link between the madness of these attacks, apparently motivated by religion, and the suppressed history of repression and colonial contempt?

The main feature of Nicolas Stemann's theatre is a formal liberty that over and over again mixes genres and narrative structures. In this way, he is not so much seeking the audience's agreement with a reasoned critical reading, but rather to provide them with staged sequences that are meaningful by the very experience they convey. The interpreters therefore do not simply act out the text, but act with it: they reveal what effect the text has on them and what it is that resonates within it.

So, even if within one production Stemann's "writing for the stage" calls on all the available genres, technologies and theatrical conventions - comedy, grotesque, video, choral, classic dialogue theatre, addresses to the public, tragic tension, plastic arts, and music in particular - it relies on a keen reading of literary texts whose narrative framework is closely followed.

This variety of narrative structures is thus as much used to maintain the audience's attention as it is to comment on the text, multiplying the dramatic force while revealing what is implicit or what corresponds with the cultural or socio-political context of the performance. It is as much a question of discussing the ideas behind the author's text as examining, alongside him, contemporary echoes of the issues he is looking at, and the authority he is confronting.

From this point of view, in Daoud Stemann has found an ally. Rather than making a brilliant demonstration or developing a moral discourse, both of them, in their respective works, aim to awaken a form of lucidity, as much against cynicism as against idealism, calling on us to confront the issues at hand rather than solving them with confident and reassuring remarks. For both of them, fiction is a way of contrasting various points of view, of revealing paradox and of bringing into focus the contradictions that help appropriate and reformulate cultural as well as political questions. The regular collaboration between Nicolas Stemann and Elfriede Jelinek (Nobel Prize in Literature 2004) has resulted in similar portrayals of contemporary issues through the paradoxes found within a story, such as Stemann's production of *Nathan the Wise*, which was neither a literary criticism nor homage to one of German literature's classic texts, but, on the contrary, a way of following Lessing to the letter regarding tolerance and the importance of thinking about what the text is saying - even if it means criticising one's own idealism - while studying the echoes and similarities (striking in this case) with contemporary debates and issues.

This is theatre that is keen and free, as joyous in its irony as it is cruel, sometimes enraged, surprising and often powerful, employing all available fronts and the most audacious comparisons - in the service of a clairvoyant and keen awareness embodying the spirit of our times.

ERIC VAUTRIN



Exchanges between Kamel Daoud and the show team, November 2018, Lausanne



Picture from rehearsal, November 2018

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In a bar, somewhere in today's Algeria, one man is confiding in another. He claims to be the brother of the Arab killed by Meursault (the hero of *The Stranger* by Camus) on a beach in Algiers, one Sunday more than 60 years ago. A nameless victim whose murder was at the root of Meursault's powerful metaphysical reflections on destiny, fate and justice. Kamel Daoud's entire text is a dialogue with Camus, in the form of a critical homage across time, from one historical context to another. This dialogue between one fiction and another has in fact the same common background: how humankind's place in the world is founded and questioned by the creation of representations of self and the other. Opening lines:

*"I mean, it goes back more than half a century. It happened, and everyone talked about it. People still do, but they mention only one dead man, they feel no compunction about doing that, even though there were two of them, two dead men. Yes, two. Why does the other one get left out? Well, the original guy was such a good storyteller, he managed to make people forget his crime, whereas the other one was a poor illiterate God created apparently for the sole purpose of taking a bullet and returning to dust — an anonymous person who didn't even have the time to be given a name.*

*I'll tell you this up front: the other dead man, the murder victim, was my brother. There's nothing left of him. There's only me, left to speak in his place, sitting in this bar, waiting for condolences no one's ever going to offer. Laugh if you want, but this is more or less my mission: I peddle offstage silence, trying to sell my story while the theater empties out. As a matter of fact, that's the reason why I've learned to speak this language, and to write it too: so I can speak in the place of a dead man, so I can finish his sentences for him. The murderer got famous, and his story's too well written for me to get any ideas about imitating him. He wrote in his own language. Therefore I'm going to do what was done in this country after Independence: I'm going to take the stones from the old houses the colonists left behind, remove them one by one, and build my own house, my own language. The murderer's words and expressions are my unclaimed goods. Besides, the country's littered with words that don't belong to anyone anymore. You see them on the façades of old stores, in yellowing books, on people's faces, or transformed by the strange creole decolonization produces.*

*So it's been quite some time since the murderer died, and much too long since my brother ceased to exist for everyone but me. I know, you're eager to ask the type of questions I hate, but please listen to me instead, please give me your attention, and by and by you'll understand. This is no normal story. It's a story that begins at the end and goes back to the beginning. (...) Have you seen the way he writes? He's writing about a gunshot, and he makes it sound like poetry! His world is clean, clear, exact, honed by morning sunlight, enhanced with fragrances and horizons. **The only shadow is cast by "the Arabs," blurred, incongruous objects left over from "days gone by," like ghosts, with no language except the sound of a flute. (...) And everyone got the picture, right from the start: He had a man's name; my brother had the name of an incident.**"*





Picture from rehearsal, November 2018

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*“Actually, we would have had to start all over from the beginning and go a different way – the way of books, for example, and more specifically of one book, the one you bring with you every day to this bar. I read it twenty times after it came out, and it overwhelmed me with its sublime lying and its magical accord with my life. A strange story, isn’t it? Let’s summarize: We have a confession, written in the first person, but we have no other evidence to prove Meursault’s guilt; his mother never existed, for him least of all; Musa\* was an Arab replaceable by a thousand others of his kind, or by a crow, even, or a reed, or whatever else; the beach has disappeared, erased by footprints or agglomerations of concrete; the only witness was a star, namely the sun; the plaintiffs were illiterate and they moved out of town; and finally, the trial was a wicked travesty put on by idle colonials. What can you do with a man who meets you on a desert island and tells you that yesterday he killed a certain Friday? Nothing.”*

\* Musa is the name that the character in the novel gives to his murdered “brother”.

KAMEL DAOUD, *THE MEURSAULT INVESTIGATION*,  
TRANS. BY JOHN CULLEN, ONEWORLD PUBLICATIONS, 2015

# «THE PRESENT ONLY EXISTS BECAUSE ONE MAN REMEMBERS IT»

II

Kamel Daoud's latest novel, *Zabor ou les psaumes* [Zabor or the Psalms], is a parable about writing that echoes *The Meursault Investigation*: this time, through his stories, a man saves his fellow villagers from death. The novel clarifies Kamel Daoud's view of writing: a way of saving the present from death and oblivion by holding together the visible and invisible, the past and present, and knowledge and beliefs. Fiction thus becomes a concrete action against the dazzling myths of power and religion, a kind of symbolic *third space*, without truth, but that invites us to "review" what we thought we knew.

*"This is what I have been trying to pin down for years. The link between my writing and its culmination in the body of another. The magical consequence of words on the rhythm of a body. Reducing words down to their bones, to their last, intimate figure, to show that Necessity is a law that brings about a return to life but also acts as a firm and sobering link between writing and what is alive ; precision and resurrection, and permanence through memory. If I remember correctly, no one died, but in order to recollect I need the power of a precise language, richly swarming, reconstituted through flesh and breath, rediscovered word by word, with the patience of an investigator, pushed back right to the limits of accuracy. If creation was a book, I would have to rewrite it. All the time. Or maybe re-read it, just like the ancient mystics and alchemists. The sacred Book refers to itself as a version come down from above, but which remains preserved there, an antecedent like maternity. Here we call it the well-guarded Panel, the Mother of Books. The heavenly version that we are able to access through prayer and meditation, whose meaning is to be restored by asceticism and bodily sacrifice, until a state of light-headedness is reached. But all religions speak of such a book ; a book that must be the world or a beyond-world. They maintain that the pilgrim is a distracted reader, the believer a blind reader, the meditator a reader that hesitates to turn the page, and the writer simply one who copies. I don't believe in the theory of hidden meanings. **I believe in inventories and the superiority of memory over death. Things are now suspended in space and time because they have been inventoried within a spirit and preserved by language in a permanent immediacy. This is the story of a magical meeting: the present (and its universe) only exists because one man remembers it.**"*

KAMEL DAOUD, *ZABOR OU LES PSAUMES*,  
BARZAKH / ACTES SUD, 2017, P. 86  
(TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH)

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## ON NICOLAS STEMANN

- ▶ « L'art peut restaurer la complexité, en évitant les réponses toutes faites. » Interview with Nicolas Stemann in *Télerama*, « En Allemagne, le débat politique est paralysé » [In Germany, political debate is in a state of paralysis], 21.09.2017 (in French)
- ▶ Teaser for *Nathan?!*
- ▶ Press revue for *Nathan?!*
- ▶ Teaser for *Wut*

## ON KAMEL DAOUD

- ▶ A debate on otherness with Kamel Daoud at Vidy. At the beginning of their meeting, he read a text, which has since been published: *All Books are Sacred*.
- ▶ *Kamel Daoud l'indépendant*, La Grande Table, France Culture, 5.02.18
- ▶ *Kamel Daoud l'insoumis*, L'heure bleue, France Inter, 31.03.17

## BIBLIOGRAPHIE

- Albert Camus, *L'Étranger*, Gallimard, 1942
- Kamel Daoud, *Meursault contre-enquête*, Barzakh / Actes Sud, [2013] 2014. (Prix Goncourt for a first novel 2015)
- Kamel Daoud, *Mes indépendances - Chroniques*, Actes Sud, 2016. (182 of Kamel Daoud's columns for the newspaper *Quotidien d'Alger* between 2010 and 2016.)
- Kamel Daoud, *Zabor ou Les psaumes*, Barzakh / Actes Sud, 2017.
- Reading notes: *Meursault, contre-enquête de Kamel Daoud, résumé complet et analyse détaillée de l'œuvre*, le Petit littéraire, 2015 (Literary analysis designed for high school students)
- Kamel Daoud, *Le peintre dévorant la femme*, Stock, 2018.
- Peter Michalzik, *Backstage Stemann*, Theater der Zeit, December 2019

## Direction

Nicolas Stemann briefly studied philosophy and literature before turning to theatre. He studied directing at the Max Reinhardt Seminar in Vienna and at the Institute for Theatre, Music Theatre and Film in Hamburg. Tackling works both in the classic repertoire as well as contemporary writing, with a predilection for those of Elfriede Jelinek, Nicolas Stemann approaches his dramatic texts with a passion that is continually renewed. He questions the theatrical form in each of his projects in order to find the best ways of delivering the energy unique to a work. Nicolas Stemann began as a pianist, working for both theatre and opera, and later creating his own directing voice with the rigour and flexibility of a musician. Even though he creates scores that integrate the wide range of theatrical media available – texts, music, video, and plastic arts in particular – his shows call to mind political aspects of contemporary society ; its limits and its development.

In 2002, he came to critic's attention with a particularly free production of *Hamlet* in Hanover. Then in 2008, with Schiller's *The Robbers*, he began to implement a highly musical approach to theatrical text, considering it above all as a score, thus freeing even the characters from their restrictions. Each of his productions presents actors with new and iconoclastic ways of appropriating the text and making it heard by the public. The Francophone public discovered his work at the Avignon Festival with *Les Contrats du commerçant* [The Merchant's Contracts] in 2012, a "comedy of economics" by Elfriede Jelinek, followed by the complete *Faust I + II* in 2013. He was invited to the Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne in 2015 with *Werther!*, a creation in French based on Goethe's text, and then



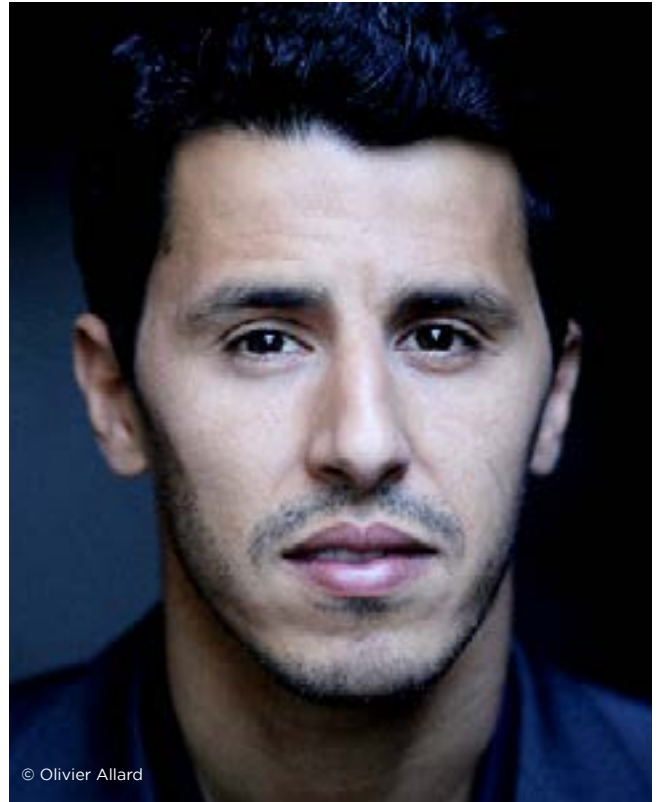
in 2016 with *Nathan?!* where he contrasts Lessing's ideals of tolerance with the contemporary violence of today's terrorist attacks. Since the 2015/2016 season, Nicolas Stemann has been the in-house director at the Münchner Kammerspiele (director Matthias Lilienthal). In April 2016, he produced *Wut (Rage)*, a text written by Elfriede Jelinek following the Paris attacks in January 2015. In 2017, he put on *Kein Licht* at the Opéra comique. Nicolas Stemann will be the future co-director of the Schauspielhaus Zürich in 2019 together with dramaturg Benjamin von Blomberg.

## Actor

Mounir Margoum is a graduate of the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique, where he studied under Denis Podalydès, Joël Jouanneau and Lukas Hemleb.

In the theatre world, he has worked a great deal under Jean-Louis Martinelli, for example, in *Une Virée* by Aziz Chouaki, Racine's *Phèdre*, *J'aurais voulu être égyptien* by Alaa el Aswany, and *Les fiancés de Loches* by Georges Feydeau. He is experienced in both the classical and contemporary repertoires, having worked with various directors: Arthur Nauzyciel in Chekhov's *The Seagull* (performed in the Pope's Palace in Avignon), Mathieu Baueur in *Alta Villa* by Hamelin, Laurent Fréchuret in *À portée de crachats* by T. Najib, and many others. Recently he performed in *Nathan?!* directed by Nicolas Stemmann at the Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne.

On screen, he has performed in major Anglo-Saxon productions such as *Rendition* by Gavin Hood (whose film *Tsotsi* won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 2006) and *House of Saddam*, produced by the BBC and HBO. In France, he played secondary roles in Catherine Corsini's *Trois mondes* and *Ombre des femmes* by Philippe Garrel, before playing the lead male role in *Par accident* by Camille Fontaine and *Timgad* by Fabrice Benchaouche. He also performed in *Divines* by Uda Benyamina, winner of the Caméra d'Or at the Festival de Cannes 2016. He has directed two short films, *Hollywood Inch'Allah* and *R. et Juliette*.



## Actor

Born in 1972, Thierry Raynaud met Hubert Colas in 1994 and began working closely with him, on stage productions of his own texts: *Visages*, *La Brûlure*, *La Croix des oiseaux*, *Traces*, *Sans Faim 1&2*, *Le Livre d'or de Jan*, and in *The Marriage* by Witold Gombrowicz, *Nouvelle Vague* and *La Fin de l'amour* by Christine Angot, *4.48 Psychosis* and *Cleansed* by Sarah Kane, *Comment cela est-il arrivé ?* by Joris Lacoste, *Jupiter* by Thomas Jonigk, *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, *Face to the Wall* by Martin Crimp, *Kolik* by Rainald Goetz and *Nécessaire et urgent* by Annie Zadek.

He has also performed under directors Jonathan Châtel in *Andreas* based on the work by Strindberg; Mikaël Serre in *Children of the Sun* by Gorki; Yan Duyvendak in *Please Continue Hamlet*; Cyril Teste in *Pour rire pour passer le temps* by Sylvain Levey and *Bedroom Eyes* by Frédéric Vossier; Mirabelle Rousseau in *If You Find This World Bad* by Philip K. Dick; and also Dominique Frot, Émilie Rousset, Alain Béhar, Mathieu Bertholet, and Lola Arias. He has also worked with authors Sonia Chiambretto, Joris Lacoste, Amo Calleja, Pierre Guéry, Jean-Jacques Viton, Liliane Giraudon, Claire Guezengar on their own texts. He is involved with various fiction work for France Culture radio. In 2008 he produced *Une petite randonnée* by Sonia Chiambretto, in collaboration with Pierre Laneyrie. In 2010, he created the installation *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Maurice Maeterlinck and four years later *Ah! L'amour*, an adaptation of Antoine Dufeu's book *Nous*.



## Text

In 1970, in Algeria, Kamel Daoud was born into a wealthy family, the only one of his six brothers and sisters to pursue an education. Once he had completed his university degree in literature, he was employed in 1994 as a journalist at the *Quotidien d'Oran*, a Francophone newspaper for which he was to become editor-in-chief. He quickly became known for his caustic style and outspokenness within a conservative environment (to circumvent censorship, he also communicates on social networks), and has been a subject of controversy more than once. He was once arrested during a protest, for example, and was also sentenced for heresy by a Salafist imam, who in turn received six months prison for this call for a fatwa.

In 2013, his first novel *The Meursault Investigation* was published in Algeria and then in France. It revisited the murder of the nameless Arab that Albert Camus described in his book *The Stranger* (also a first novel). Straddling the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, Kamel Daoud raises the issues of colonisation, independence, Islamism, and post-colonialism with a nuanced point of view, one that is unique and unflinching. In his latest book, *Zabor, ou, Les Psaumes*, he also addresses the necessity of fiction, the importance of writing and of the imagination and language – such crucial aspects.



**A meeting with Kamel Daoud** at the Pavillon in the Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne, at the first rehearsals of *Contre-enquête*. After reading his new text *Tous les livres sont sacrés* [All Texts Are Sacred], he talks about his work with Eric Vautrin, Vidy's dramaturg.



## Music

Paloma Colombe is a DJ and director of Franco-Algerian documentary films, whose politically active work aims to create bridges between the two cultures. Like her nomadic ancestors, she finds inspiration through travelling. Her mixes, which she refines in clubs and festivals across the continents, combine polyrhythmic trance with music that she picks up on her travels: from San Francisco, where she was introduced to a radical music scene during her studies, to the Algeria of her mother, where she widened the scope of her artistic project. Outside of the music scene, her powerful and emotive world takes form in documentaries (*Planet Malek*), curated sets (*Radio Amazigh* at the Mellotron, the Nova Club, and sets at the Quai Branly), and an intimate podcast talking about music (*Écoute-La*). So many ways to access a vibrant and committed world, resolutely open to an empowering artistic future.



## Dramaturgy

Katinka Deecke is a German dramaturg. After training in contemporary dance, she studied French literature and theatre studies in Paris. She then completed a master's degree in Frankfurt, where she worked at the University of Music and Performing Arts in the acting and directing departments. In 2010, she moved to Berlin to produce the *80\*87* project by Georg Diez and Christopher Roth. From 2012 to 2015, she was the operatic dramaturg at the Theater Bremen, where she worked with Benedikt von Peter, Anna-Sophie Mahler, Gintersdorfer/Klaßen, Schorsch Kamerun, and Robert Lehniger. While in Bremen she also worked on interdisciplinary projects. In 2015 she went with Matthias Lilienthal to Munich and became a dramaturg at the Münchner Kammerspiele, working with Trajal Harrell, Christopher Ruping, Amir Reza Koohestani, Lola Arias, and David Marton.

During this time, she participated in Stefanie Carp's first Ruhrtriennale in 2018, before going to Zurich in 2019 to become head dramaturg at Nicolas Stemann and Benjamin von Blomberg's Schauspielhaus Zurich.



## Video

Claudia Lehmann is a film-maker and video artist with a doctorate in elementary particle physics. Her works span short films, documentaries, and feature-length films, as well as musical and artistic videos, installations, and performances. Her film *Memory Effect* won the Shocking Short Award 2006 and her self-produced documentary *Hans im Glück* was invited to the Berlinale in 2009. With X-Filme Creative Pool, she adapted Juli Zeh's *Dark Matter* in 2012. In addition, she has been developing and creating video sets for theatre for almost twenty years, in particular for Nicolas Stemann (for example, for *Die Kontrakte des Kaufmanns*, *Faust I+II* and *Die Schutzbefohlenen*). While working with him, she began developing live video performances. She has been teaching digital media at the Weißensee Kunsthochschule Berlin since 2018. In 2014, with Konrad Hempel, she founded the Institute for Experimental Affairs IXA, which creates and launches scientific and philosophic projects, such as the documentary essay *The Symphony of Uncertainty*, to an expanding network of contacts. Claudia Lehmann also performs and sings with the Berlin group Hands Up - Excitement! and with Konrad Hempel in the group Elementarstrategien.



## Costumes

Marysol del Castillo studied costume design at the University of Arts and Media in Hanover under the direction of Professor Maren Christensen. From 1999 to 2002, she was an assistant to Anna Viebrock at the Hamburg Schauspielhaus and at Christoph Marthaler's Schauspielhaus Zurich. During this time, she created her own works with Christoph Schlingensiefel, Christoph Marthaler, Schorsch Kamerun, Studio Braun, and other artists in the group. She received an award for the Best Emerging Artist in the Best Costume Image category for the magazine *Theater Heute* and has continued to create costumes for opera and theatre productions with Nicolas Stemmann, Sebastian Baumgarten, Falk Richter, Stefan Pucher, Tom Kühnel, Studio Braun, Suse Wächter, Anna-Sophie Mahler, and Karin Baier, among others. She has been a visiting professor at the Hanover University and a mentor at UDK Berlin. Since 2019, she has been responsible for set and costume design at the Schauspielhaus Zurich, alongside Nicolas Stemmann and Benjamin von Blomberg.



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