

UNE TRAVERSÉE

A performance by Compagnie Belova-Iacobelli

Premiere scheduled for 9 March 2025 at Théâtre de Liège, Belgium

Freely inspired by *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* by Lewis Carroll

Planned duration: 60 minutes - For audiences of adults and children from 10 years



Picture of Liman Rouge Ukraine - 1ste octobre 2022

Production

Direction and dramaturgy: **Natacha Belova and Tita Iacobelli**

Puppet design: **Natacha Belova**

Performers: **Marta Pereira, Tita Iacobelli, and a third performer (casting in progress)**

Set design: **Aurélie Borremans**

Puppets: **Marta Pereira**

Sound design: **Simón González**

Costumes: **Jackye Fauconnier**

Choreography /Outside eye: **Nicole Mossoux**

Lighting: **Aurélie Perret**

Assistant direction: **Elise Reculeau**

Production: **Thérèse Coriou and Charlotte Evrard**

Sound and light technician: **Franco Peñaloza Soto**

Production: **Compagnie Belova-Iacobelli**

Production Compagnie Balova-Iacobelli, DC&J Création, with the support of Tax Shelter of Federal Gouvernement of Belgium and Inver Tax Shelter

Coproduction Théâtre de Liège, Atelier Théâtre Jean Vilar - Louvain-la-Neuve, Théâtre les Tanneurs, Maison de la Culture de Tournai, Théâtre de la Cité & Marionnettissimo - Toulouse, Théâtre Antoine Vitez - Scène d'Ivry, Festival Casteliers – MIAM - Montréal, Centre National de la Marionnette – Le Sablier, Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes de Charleville Mézières, Biennale Internationale des Arts de la Marionnette - Paris – with the support of Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles.

ORIGINS by Natacha Belova

March and November 2023

It's been more than a year since the start of the war between Russia and Ukraine. Often, during the interminable early days of the war, I thought, heard or read from my Russian and Ukrainian friends the same phrase: 'it's like a dream, a crazy dream'. The reality is such a frightening dream, and yet so hard to wake up from. It's as if the dream itself is no longer your own; rather, as in *Through the Looking-Glass*, it is the dream of the Red King and you're stuck inside it, paralysed.

'If that there King was to wake,' added Tweedledum, 'you'd go out—bang!—just like a candle!'

Mobilisation is beginning in Russia. On social networks I see the panic of young people, of the mothers, wives, friends and colleagues of those who could be called up at any moment. Civilians are being dragged into a war they didn't want, to kill people and be killed...

'I've sent them all!' the King cried in a tone of delight, on seeing Alice. [...] 'Just look along the road, and tell me if you can see either of them.'

'I see nobody on the road,' said Alice

'I only wish I had such eyes,' the King remarked in a fretful tone. 'To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance, too! Why, it's as much as I can do to see real people, by this light!'

I remember how Soviet and Russian propaganda used to work, but how could anyone believe in the impossible to support this war?

'There's no use trying,' said Alice: 'one can't believe impossible things.'

'I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.'

Millions of adults and children in Ukraine are trying to cope with this nightmare, living in basements, fleeing their homes, going mad, and... getting used to it, which is probably the worst thing of all. Since October 2023, the focus has shifted to Palestine and Israel and the war raging there. The media seize on these tragic events, the international community is divided, and the people are lost in a maze of (dis)information.

My brain cannot comprehend this reality. Making a performance inspired by *Through the Looking-Glass* wouldn't make sense if there were anything rational I could do about war. I didn't want to work on these specific conflicts, but on our ultimate suffering in the face of the disaster of war.

That's why I had to create *Une Traversée*.

It is a show about a child who plays her way through disaster. In her story, reality is stripped to the bone. By the absurd logic of fantasy, the origins of language are swept aside, words themselves are turned on their head, and the manipulation of discourse is countered, losing its power.

UNE TRAVERSÉE

Synopsis

A child must leave her home, which no longer exists.
No one knows where she and her family will go.
They can't take much with them.
Their journey will be a long one.



Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, April 1, 2022. (AP Photo/Felipe Dana)

A child plays with a small kitten in the ruins of her house while the adults are preparing to leave. A broken mirror, burned chess pieces, a rattle, a deck chair, a torn cushion, a shawl, scattered knitting needles – all part of the great game that awaits in the world beyond the mirror. The child's journey will take her to a land where everything is upside down. Where the future is a thing you can remember. Where you can run away from home, but keep coming across it. Where you can send yourself by post if you don't have a train ticket. Where running as fast as you can will leave you standing still. Where you can lose your name in the forgotten forest, only to find it again when you come back into the light. Where you can fight a war for a rattle (and finish in time for tea), become a Queen and throw your guests off their feet by pulling out the tablecloth at your coronation, or shake the Red King and turn him into a kitten.

But in the end... who is dreaming who?

Creation

Our starting point has been Lewis Carroll's novel, which lends itself perfectly to the theme we want to address: the absurdity of our world, seen through the eyes of a child. Starting with the story of a child who is undertaking a journey – a migration – creates a link with the reality around us.

In their own eccentric and playful way, the chapters of *Through the Looking-Glass* take us through a process by which a child adapts to our current world: first Alice is invisible, then she leaves her house only to find herself constantly back at her front door, then she has to run as fast as she can just to stay put...

At first, the narrative seems random. But in fact it is completely logical, following the rules of a game that is hidden to the child. It is a game of survival, compromise, despair, and finally empowerment – experiences which reflect the stages of growing up, but also speak to the state of society around us. The narrative is driven by the desire to get somewhere else, to not sink into stasis, while at the same time trying to avoid losing one's name and personality. It's a game, and this child is ready to play it, even as a mere pawn on the chessboard (though it's always better to be a queen).

The narrative isn't driven by the child, and the closer she gets to her destination, the further it seems to move away. But she is always ready to play the game. Taking it as real, clinging to the Queen as she runs away, to the Goat's beard, to the Knight who is slipping out of reach, she does everything she can not to fall, not to drop out of the game, not to become frozen in a fixed image, not to get used to the 'impossible', not to get stuck in someone else's dream.

The child observes the world of adults from the other side of the mirror; she even takes part in their games. Yet at the same time, she is not there. She is asleep, but she isn't afraid. When her incomprehension reaches its limit, she starts to shake the Red King and he turns into a kitten.

'[...] unless we're all part of the same dream. Only I do hope it's my dream, and not the Red King's! I don't like belonging to another person's dream.'

Stage, space and characters

A sea of unravelled black wool swallows up the remnants of the world 'before the crossing', a world that bears the scars of violence: walls have collapsed, the furniture has been burned, a bed and table flattened. The only thing left whole, alive and standing is the child. All the characters, spaces and props emerge from this swamp of black wool. This is where the life of a little girl unfolded, victim of a game played by two absent kings. The child conjures up ancient figures, which appear as mirages of her memory, a memory of the world, a memory of the future, eternally suspended in a game with vague rules and absurd language. She moves forward by drawing and erasing her counterparts, looking for the end of the road and to win the game.

The child, aged between 8 and 10, is played by a puppet, manipulated by a woman who we can imagine is her mother. The other characters are played by figures born from the rubble and manipulated by two puppeteers.

These actor-puppeteers give visual life to Alice's imagination and her changes of perspective. The child guides us, sparks worlds into being, and creates characters by combining traits, behaviours and details that have touched her deeply in the past. This practice of evoking, unfolding and playing encounters the hostility of the outside world, and in its senseless conflict, through a kind of inner struggle that calls into question the child's identity and her social belonging. Everything she has known until now as 'normal' begins to fall apart.

Characters and places are constructed and brought to life before the audience's eyes: an empty coat stands tall to become the King, black bin bags sweep together to make the Queen, gas masks and blankets become the twin soldiers, piles of paper transform into train conductors, the waxcloth bags of migrants become elephants that fly to the sound of drones. When a train window lifts it carries the child with it, shelves of burned goods block the road ahead, from a pile of clothes grow, like flowers, shirts and dresses that begin to speak, and, from time to time, the swamp itself breathes and snores: that's the Red King, off and dreaming. One must tread gently, as if through a minefield, so as not to wake him.

Some inspirations





Illustrations by Natacha Belova







'I don't understand why you say "you've lost your way," said the Red Queen, "all the paths here belong to me..."'



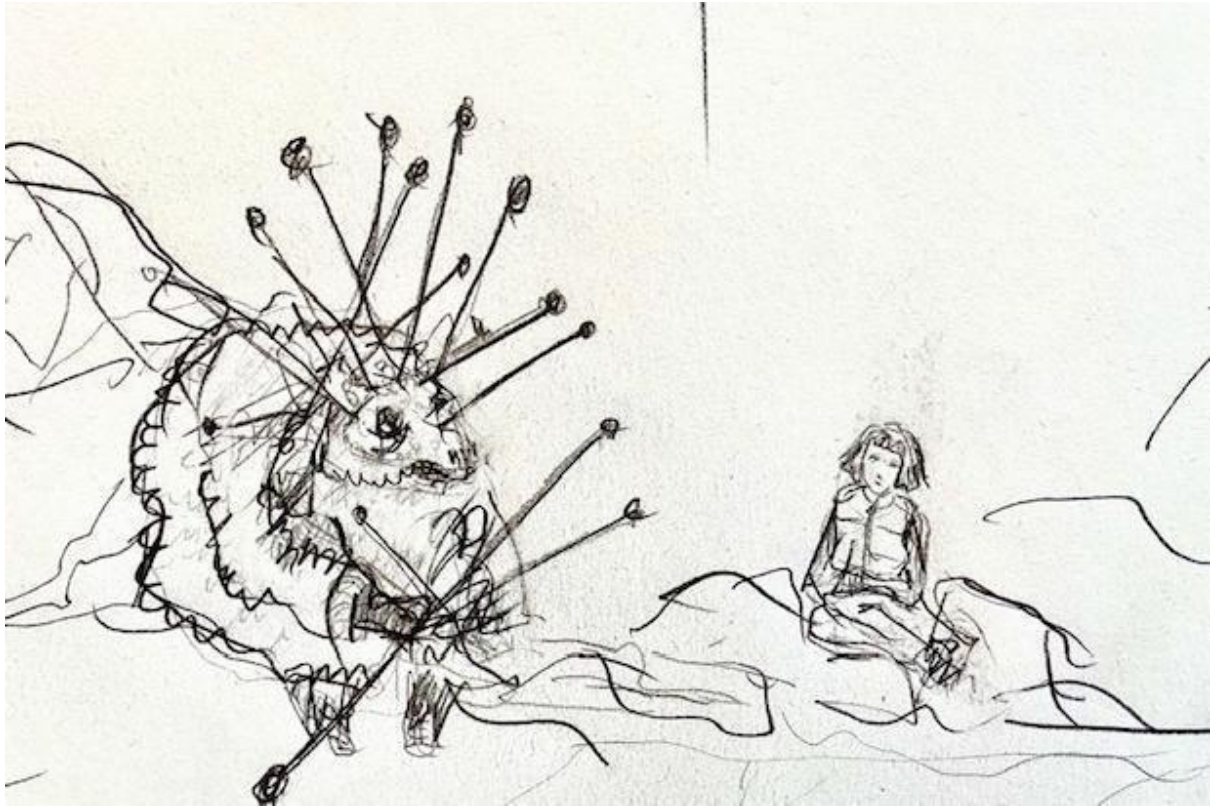
'Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!'

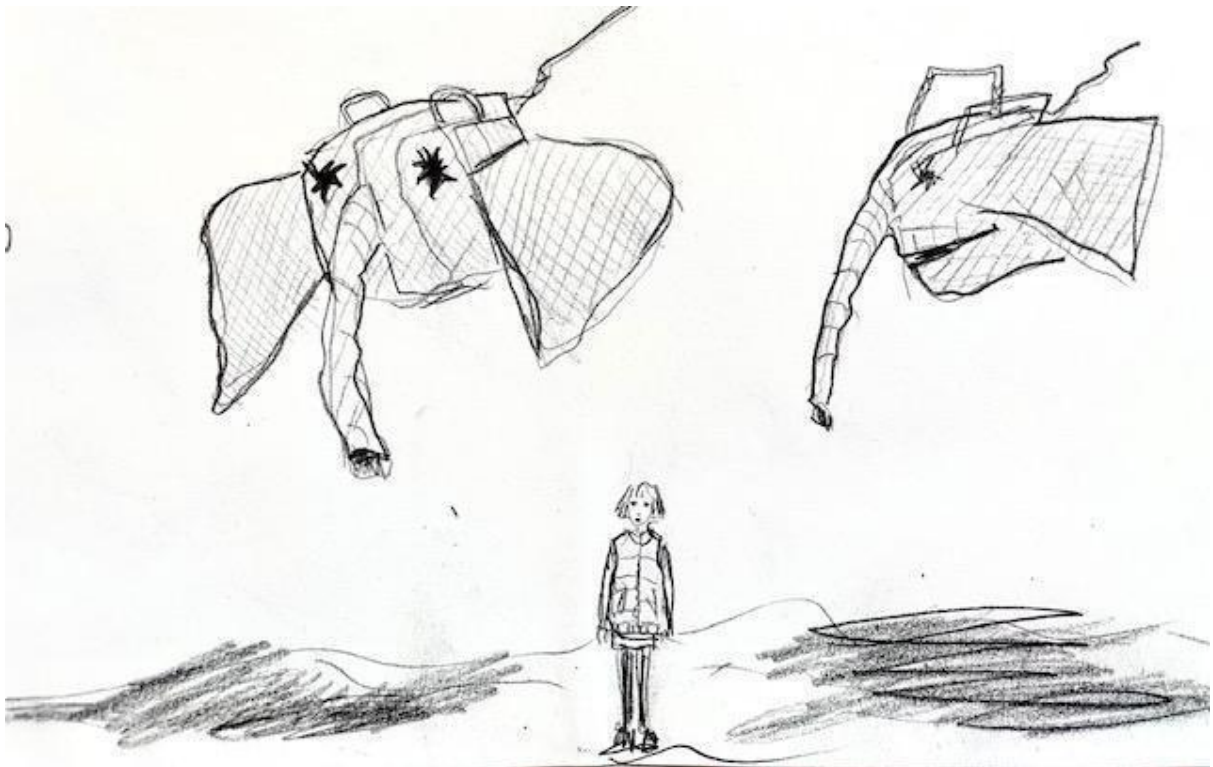


'So young a child,' said the gentleman sitting opposite to her (he was dressed in white paper), 'ought to know which way she's going, even if she doesn't know her own name!'

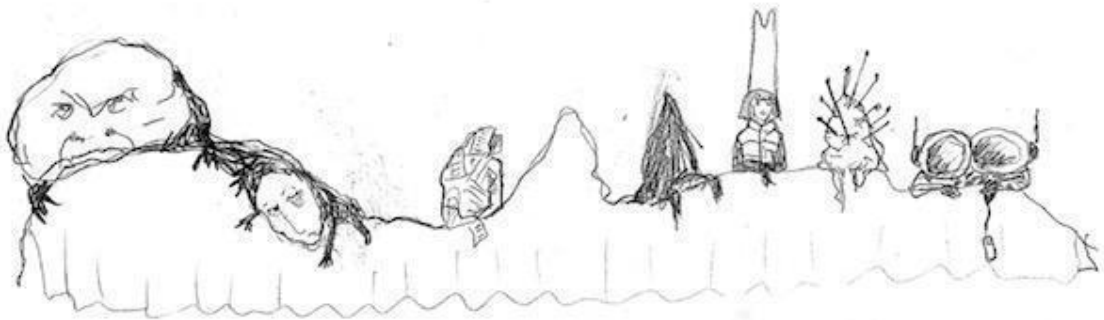
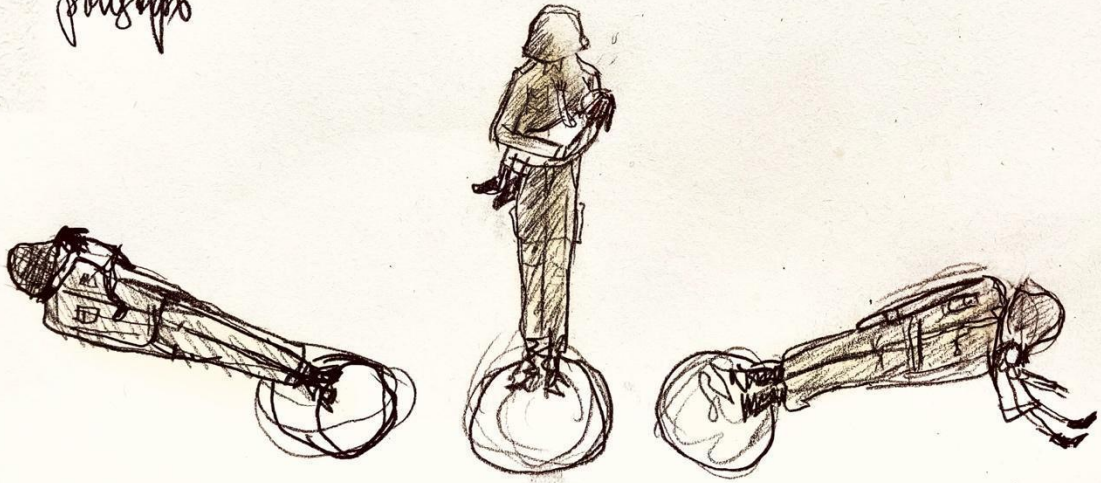
'She'll have to go back from here as luggage! [...] She must be labelled "Lass, with care" [...] She must go by post [...] She must be sent as a message by the telegraph...'

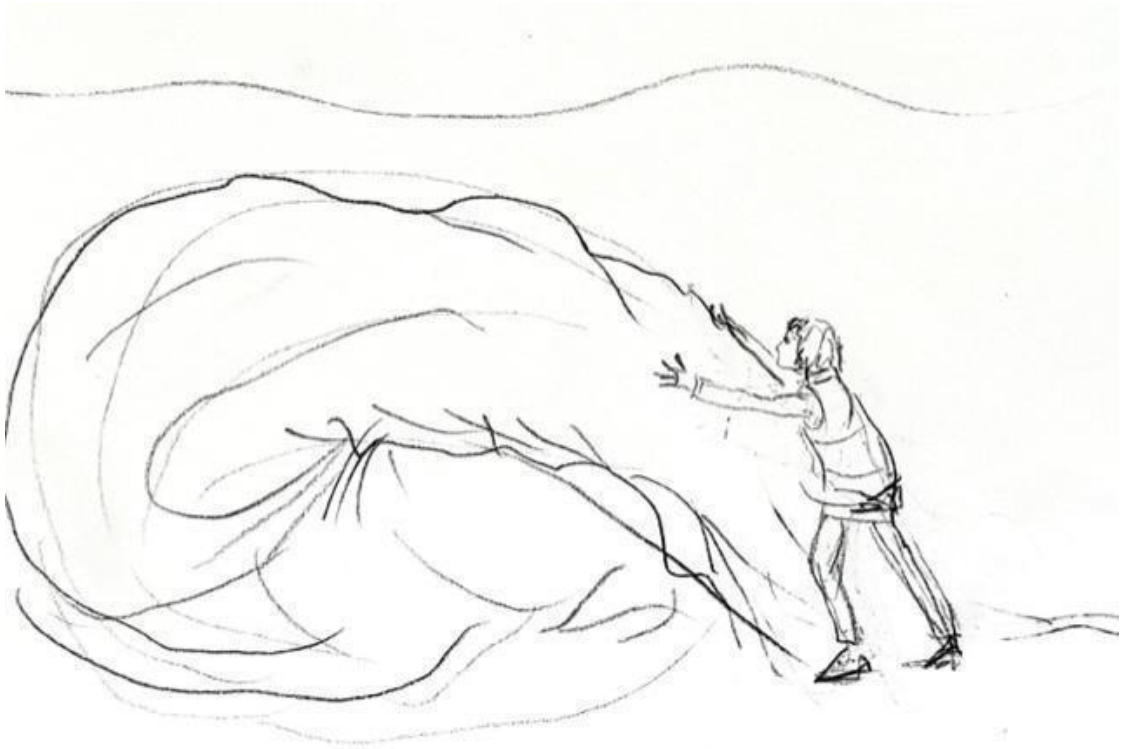






sketch





Provosional schedule

BRUSSELS - Zinneke	Dramaturgy	8-17 January 2024
MONTREAL - Festival Castelliers	Dramaturgy and rehearsals	19 February – 1 March 2024
BRUSSELS - Zinneke	Construction workshop	1-19 April 2024
BRUSSELS - Zinneke	Rehearsals / dramaturgy / workshops	10-28 June 2024 8-12 July 2024
BRUSSELS - Zinneke	Construction workshop	19 August - 13 September 2024
BRUSSELS - Zinneke	Rehearsals / dramaturgy / workshops	23 September - 18 October 2024
BRUSSELS - Zinneke +Salle avec l'éclairage)	Rehearsals / dramaturgy / workshops	4-29 November 2024
LIEGE - Théâtre de Liège	Rehearsals	17 February - 8 March 2025
LIEGE - Théâtre de Liège	6 performances (premiere), break on Monday	9-15 March 2025
TOURNAI - Maison de la Culture de Tournai	3 performances	19, 20, 21 March performances
BRUSSELS - Théâtre les Tanneurs	10 performances	25 March - 5 April performances
LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE - Atelier Théâtre Jean Vilar	7 performances	9-17 April 2025
PARIS - La Biennale Internationale des Arts de la Marionnette and IVRY Théâtre Antoine Vitez	? performances	May 2025
CHARLEVILLE MEZIERES - Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes	? performances	September 2025
TOULOUSE - Théâtre de la Cité	? performances	October 2025
CHILI - CorpArtes	? performances	October - November 2025
BRUSSELS - Théâtre National	? performances	2025-2026
MONTREAL - Festival Castelliers	? performances	February 2026

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