



# THÉÂTRE DE LIÈGE

*The Vegetarian & Strange Beauty*

A collaboration between the Théâtre de Liège and  
the National Theater Company of Korea



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국립극단

NATIONAL THEATER  
COMPANY OF KOREA



## Foreword

For several years, the Théâtre de Liège has enjoyed a special relationship with South Korean cultural figures and artists, in theatre, dance and the plastic arts. The innovative and eccentric choreographer Eun-Me Ahn has already honoured two editions of the Pays de Danses festival with her work. This festival dedicated its 2014 edition to South Korean dancers and choreographers. Recent seasons have seen artists from the Wallonia-Brussels Federation – including Ayelen Parolin, Jean-Michel d’Hoop and more – create shows with South Korean artists and companies. These have encompassed both dance and theatre and been performed both in Belgium and Korea and on international tours.

Within this relationship, cross-collaboration and bilateral exchanges seem to be essential for the success of each project and are particularly enjoyed by the participating artists.

In order to maintain these long-standing bilateral exchanges, the Théâtre de Liège has started a ‘cross-collaborative co-production’ project with the National Theater Company of Korea. The first two productions are ‘The Vegetarian’, an adaptation of Han Kang’s novel by our artist-in-residence, Selma Alaoui, and ‘Strange Beauty’, a piece led by Korean-born Yo-Sup Bae that bridges theatre, dance and the visual arts. The aim is to produce a show with a Belgian director and a Korean crew and vice versa. A major number of artists from the Wallonia-Brussels Federation are associated with this project: the production designers Sabine Theunissen and Karolien De Schepper, videographer Bruno Tracq and sound engineer Loup Mormont will join Selma Alaoui’s crew, while the actor/dancer Clément Thirion, dancer/choreographer Maria Clara Villa Lobos and composer Paola Pisciotano will join Yo-Sup Bae’s crew. A plastic artist and a multimedia artist will also be included. The other artists come primarily from the Korean company. As part of this co-production collaboration, the two institutions have agreed on how to divide the expenses: each will pay for the travel and salaries of the artists in their employ and accepts responsibility for the accommodation and expenses of the teams they are hosting. The copyright and transport costs are shared between the two parties. Expenses such as those relating to the creation and construction of sets and costumes are covered by the creating theatre.

The visibility of these projects in Wallonia and Brussels will obviously be part of the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations established between Belgium and Korea (<https://koreabelgium120.com/international-theater-collaboration-between-liege-and-seoul/>).

In addition to the artistic and creative relationship, we have also worked with our South Korean partners to establish international networks and, as a result, improve the visibility of artists from the Wallonia-Brussels Federation in South Korea and throughout East Asia.

## The Vegetarian

Alongside seven artists from the National Theater Company of Korea in Seoul, Selma Alaoui put together her adaptation of *The Vegetarian*, an intriguing novel by the South Korean author Han Kang. Inspired by a dream, Yŏnghye suddenly decides to stop eating meat. Leaving herself behind, she aspires to become a vegetable and escapes into the calm and inaccessible existence of trees and plants. Trapped between reverie and resistance all the aspects of her life as an ordinary wife, the young woman begins stripping as a way of life. Confused by her strange behaviour and the erotic and floral power of Yŏnghye's nudity, those around her, in turn, begin to free fall. They experience crushed dreams, a desire for something else and the solitude of mankind, all while trapped in contemporary, dream-like cityscapes. This organic and sensual show explores the boundaries of reality, in a slow descent towards sweet madness and the ecstatic mystery that is inherent in any quest for the absolute. It is an interrogation of our fear of casting off the narrow constraints that prevent our aspirations towards change and the unexpected.

Published in 2016, this novel found enormous success in South Korea and internationally, having earned its author the *International Booker Prize* in 2016. Han Kang has never granted the rights to adapt this work before, so this will be a world-first production.

### Dates

- **Seoul** (BaekJang Theater) 1–20 September 2021
- **Liège** ("Grande Main" theatre) 7-11 December 2021

### Cast and Crew

**With** Sae-Byul JUNG, Won-Jo JUNG, Jung-Won SHIN, Seok-Kwang BAEK, Yong-U PARK, Seong-Ik JANG, Guk-Hyang CHEON

**Director** Selma Alaoui

**Assistant director** Ye-Eun CHO

**Script** Han KANG

**Set design** Sabine Theunissen & Karolien De Schepper

**Artistic advisor** Hansol YOON

**Dramaturgy assistant** Hyun-Joo LEE

**Translation and adaptation assistant** Jung-Eun CHOI

**Videography** Bruno Tracq

**Sound design** Loup Mormont

**Lighting** Mi-Lim SUNG

**Costume design** Eun-Kyung LEE

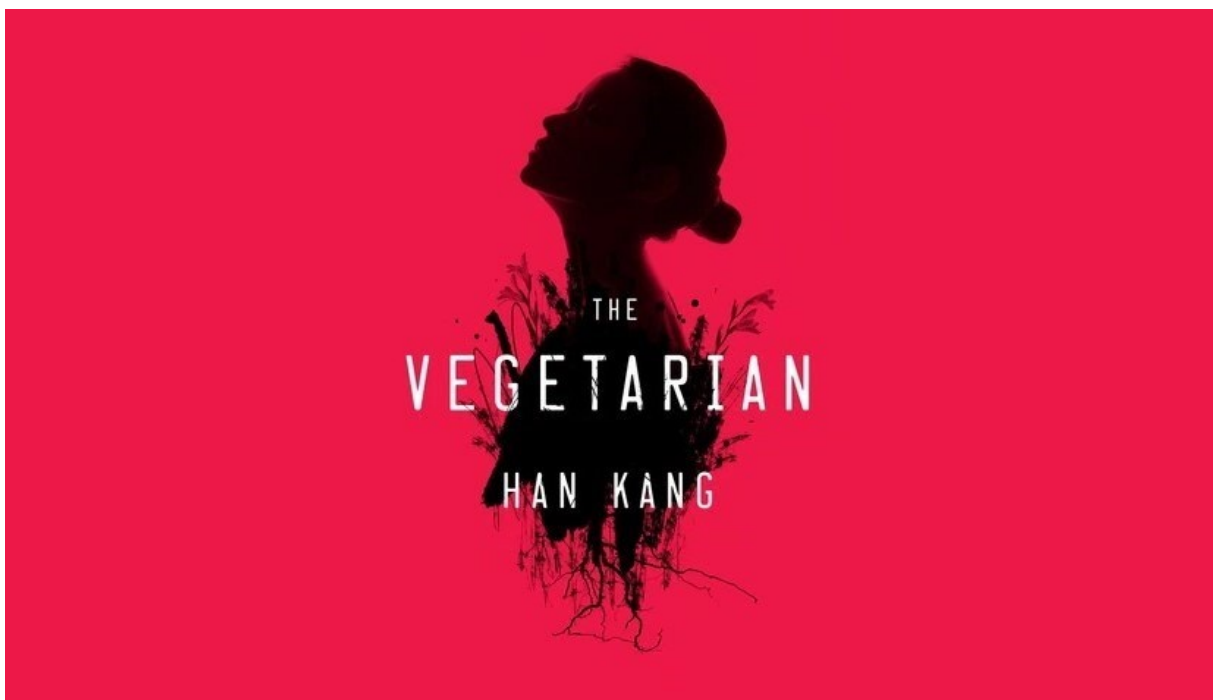
**Make-up** Ji-Young BAEK

**Co-production** National Theater Company of Korea, Théâtre de Liège

**With the support of the** Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Selma Alaoui is an artist-in-residence at the Théâtre de Liège (2018–2022).

Statement of intent : *'The Vegetarian', a novel by South Korean author Han Kang, tells the story of Yŏnghye, a young woman who begins to behave strangely once she stops eating meat. She becomes introverted, seems absent, trapped between reverie and resistance to the elements that comprised her life as an 'ordinary wife'. This mysterious new attitude baffles everyone around her. The entire family will fall apart, little by little. Her husband is helpless, her sister, Inhye, perplexed and her brother-in-law, Jae, irrepressibly drawn to her. The more the young woman slips into sweet madness, the more her loved ones seem to waver in a troubled world. Nothing will ever be the same again. Han Kang's book is a curious story. Like a waking dream, the author describes a very real and contemporary urban setting, one that appears strange and then reshapes itself into a dreamlike ambiance in which the characters show both their impulses and their vulnerability. These four figures – two men and two women – form the nucleus around which we can see the solitude of men who are drowning in large cities, their stifled dreams and fantasies and their desire for a life other than the one they are stuck in. The show will explore this situation, which exists at the boundaries of reality. This will take the form of scenes from daily life that become strange, in an atmosphere that is very organic – sensual even – which brings to mind the novel. The set will resemble a movie scene, with scattered chunks of wall that recall an apartment blown into several pieces. It is possible to make out an interior: part of a kitchen, a corner of the bedroom, the remains of a living room. The video, which is projected onto the walls like an impressionist painting, will occasionally transport the actors into a different dimension: their reality will slowly descend into a more imaginary world, where the things that they would normally never dare to do are now possible. 'The Vegetarian' offers up a stunning show, which calls into question our habits and our fear of venturing outside of the limitations that stand in the way of our deep desire for change.*



© Han Kang

## **Strange Beauty**

Following an initial collaboration involving the adaptation of 'The Vegetarian', the Théâtre de Liège is now inviting the Korean director Yo-Sup Bae, a rising star in Korean art who was trained in Berlin and is supported by the National Theater Company of Korea, to create a multimedia performance within its walls. Its distribution will primarily entail varied artistic avenues offered by the Wallonia-Brussels Foundation. Based around a dialogue between the performing arts, the actor and dancer Clément Thirion, dancer and choreographer Maria Clara Villa Lobos and sound designer Paola Pisciotano are all part of the adventure, soon to be joined by a Belgian videographer and plastic artist. Finding regular inspiration in the beauty of art, Yo-Sup Bae devotes himself to this unpredictable and recurring phenomenon here, by leading his crew through a multi-disciplinary process that bridges theatre, dance and the visual arts. Let there be beauty.

## **Dates**

- **Seoul** (Theater PAN) 1–20 September 2021
- **Liège** ("Œil vert" theatre) 7-11 December 2021

## **Cast and Crew**

**With** Clément Thirion, Maria Clara Villa Lobos, Hye-Ran HWANG

**Director** Yo-Sup BAE

**Artistic advisor** Hansol YOON

**Dramaturgy assistant** Hye-Ran HWANG

**Creation of the art installation** Aimé Mpane

**Videography** Hugo Brilmaker & Yong-Seok CHOI

**Sound design** Paola Pisciotano

**Set design** Théâtre de Liège workshops

**Costume designer** Théâtre de Liège workshops

**Technical coordination** Nathalie Borlée & Yannick Fontaine

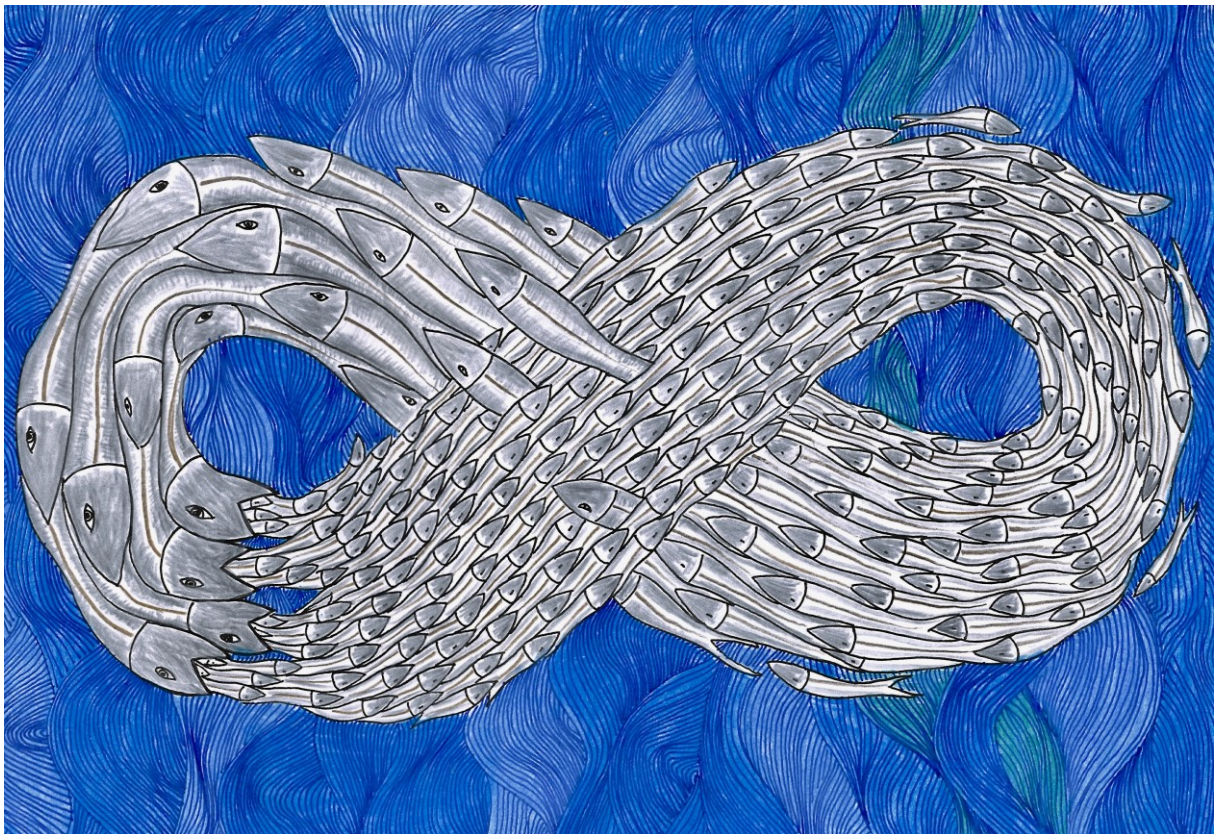
**Co-production** Théâtre de Liège, National Theater Company of Korea

**With the support of** the Federal Government of Belgium's Tax Shelter, Inver Tax Shelter and Wallonia-Brussels International

Statement of intent (translated from English): *More than ten years ago, I decided to take time off after a showing of my piece, 'The Tale of Haruk', in Linz, Austria. As I was contemplating the works of Egon Schiele at the Leopold art Museum in Vienna, I stopped in front of a painting. Why did I freeze in front of this piece, which depicted dark-coloured houses? A warm feeling – the source and motivation for which I did not know – spread in my heart. It wasn't until warm drops dripped down my hand that I realised I was crying. Now I know that what I experienced in that moment was 'beauty'.*

*During my twenty-year career as an artist, I have experienced moments like this in one way or another. These are not moments that one can learn lessons from; they are pure experiences that are difficult to put into words. It is as though those moments warmed me and seized my attention. In those moments, I felt as though I was crying inside. It is impossible to compare this to any sensation or feeling. It leaves me with an impression and an experience that is more fundamental, one that cannot be defined in words. Now, I understand that those moments are really encounters with 'beauty'.*

*However, I cannot predict when those moments will come, because they are not dictated by logic. I admit that I approach them in an intuitive manner, though. This also explains my intuitive approach to art. I think – I am even convinced – that I follow my intuition. Art has no meaning if it does not allow you to discover beauty. My work would have no meaning if I could not experience beauty myself when creating it. The result is not just a work of art, though. I call my work art, but, in reality, it is a pursuit of an experience of 'beauty'.*



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