

# BICHE



**PRODUCTION**  
UNPLUSH

**COPRODUCTION**  
DAMPZENTRALE BERNE (CH)

**PREMIERE** 21 JANVIER 2022

**DIFFUSION**  
LES PRODUCTIONS DE LA SEINE  
FLORENCE FRANCISCO & GABRIELLE BAILLE

A PROJECT SUPPORTED BY DANSE &  
DRAMATURGIE (D&D CH), AN INITIATIVE BY  
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ASSOCIATED WITH DAMPFZENTRALE BERN,  
ROXY BIRSFELDEN, SÜDPOL LUZERN,  
TANZHAUS ZÜRICH, TU-THEATRE DE L'USINE  
GENEVE

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**CONCEPT AND REALISATION**  
MARION ZURBACH

**PERFORMANCE AND CHOREOGRAPHY**  
GÉRALDINE CHOLLET

**DRAMATURGIE**  
ARTHUR ESKENAZI

**ARTISTIC ASSISTANCE**  
VITTORIO BERTOLLI

**COMPOSER**  
GIORGIO GRISTINA

**CANINE EXPERTS**  
FRÉDÉRIQUE LEPETIT  
GÉRALD CALDES WITH NIGER'S PARTICIPATION

**COSTUME DESIGN**  
SILVIA ROMANELLI

**LIGHT DESIGN**  
OLIVIER FAMIN

**MANAGEMENT**  
MAXINE DEVAUD

## ABSTRACT

*Biche is a solo performance inspired by the life of Frédérique Lepetit, known as Biche. The piece intertwines dance, theatre and performance and stages Marion Zurbach's interviews with Biche, in which she recounts the choices and events that wove her life together.*

Dancer until the age of thirty, Biche's life changes abruptly when she has a car accident. Body and mind bruised, she decides to become a dog groomer. By the side of these animals, she can gradually rebuild her life.

Observing the wounds, the precariousness, the choice of celibacy and the choice not to have children, the piece searches for happiness according to Biche. The relationship with animals, notably through the study of Donna J. Haraway's „Manifesto of Companion Species“, accompanies this reflection.

The performer Géraldine Chollet, will be the bearer of these words and of the physical investigation linked to the experience of Biche's body in relation to its injuries, repair and interaction with the so-called „companion species“.

What is our human capacity to build relationships of otherness that are not marked by domination, but by respect, affection, and love without it being anthropocentrism or anthropomorphism?

What about these ideals, how do they express themselves, which paths do they find during a lifetime? Biche's reality, her struggle for survival, her search for meaning, are the manifestation of her courage to live on the margins. Far from speeches and exemplary forms, she presents a practice that could well lend itself to more than just a smile.

## GENESIS

Presentation of Frédérique Lepetit, also known as Biche, and retranscription of our discussion on the 16th of February 2020.

Biche was born in a squat in Saint Louis, 15th district of Marseille in 1958, as number seven of eight siblings. Also in this squat, lived my family, another eight siblings, with my mother Mireille being the eldest. For my part, I met Biche when I was nine years old, living with her mother as my foster family. I was studying at the Ballet School of Marseille, she was a dancer, dark and long, her hair always in braids, I admired her.

When I met Biche again at the port of l'Estaque on the 16th of February 2020, she was sixty-two years old, being a groomer for twenty-six years. First, she talks to me about her working hours and salary. She is independent, earns between 1000 and 1400 euros per month and offers a special rate for the unemployed. She takes only a few holidays, four days at Christmas, four days in May and in August, she works part-time.

She then talks about her job, explaining that grooming is a three-way conversation, between the dog, it's master and her. She always asks, „How is the life of your dog?“. For her, it's easy with dogs, it's with their owners, she sometimes has trouble, because of their arrogance, their nastiness.

Biche and the dog watching the master leave is an important gesture, as the dog knows that it's master will find it there. Once they are alone, she starts the one-on-one relationship with the animal. There are specific procedures according to the breed. Roughing, untangling, hidden eyes, bathing, during the drying they usually play with the towels. It's a relationship of

mutual trust, with Biche still having to put her hands in their mouths to trim the beards. The dogs let themselves go, let themselves be suspended by straps, it seems comfortable. Two or three dogs can be groomed at the same time.

There is a string of anecdotes that has filled her life as a groomer, the one of the poodles that sings, the one of a man with his cocker spaniel who arrived early at the salon, cos even though the man was unsure of the address, the dog dragged him there so fast, that he could only let himself be pulled along. The cocker spaniel loves Biche's baths. She also tells me about common cheating in dog shows, for example adding a fake second testicle if the dog only has one. Then she tells me about her rapport with the customers, if the owners arrive late she yells at them, „I have a life after grooming“, if they arrive early she also yells at them „you don't come in, you stay out“, otherwise the dog gets distracted, two hours of work, it's an imperative.

Then, she finally tells me about her accident, her body in pieces, her multiple fractures, and scars. She will never be able to dance again. And teach? „Not like that, I don't want to be a teacher who gives classes sitting on a chair.“ Her re-education lasted for a year, she began to take an interest in becoming a physiotherapist, thinking she would like to do that, but she was not admitted to the training because of her fractures.

Biche had a car accident when she was 30 years old, she was the driver, manslaughter, her best friend died in the passenger seat. Her own mother has been calling her a murderer all her life. No children, self-punishment, no right to happiness, no rights at all. It took her 25 years to forgive herself.

She had many lovers, was in a threesome for five years and with a woman for a long time. Biche takes

care of other people's children, they call her daddy, because they think she is more of a father than a mother. She doesn't flirt, she doesn't like it, now she's with P., he's ten years older than her, has never introduced her to his children, she'll never be part of his family. Biche suffers from the distance he keeps her at, „when you're alone, people think you don't need anyone“.

She talks to me about racism, about the „crime of a dirty face“, telling me this anecdote that when a guy once called her a dirty Arab on the street, she told him that he was wrong, she wasn't dirty. She's not arab either, but she didn't want to claim that.

For 19 years, she lived on rue d'Aubagne, the street in the center of Marseille, where two buildings collapsed two years ago, leaving 8 dead, shattered lives and many injured.

Biche went to grooming school in the Luberon. First rule: don't lose the dog. The training was excessively expensive. Dogs are brought to them in impossible states, with huge hairy heads. She adopted Tétis, one of the bitches, five and a half years old, she had humor and a pearl collar. Since then, she didn't have any more dogs, she just couldn't cope with them passing.

And doesn't she miss dancing? Now she is doing ballet in a swimming pool, she says that in the end she has always been and always will be a student. She hasn't danced for a very long time, but she is starting to find pleasure in it again. She tells me that she can get her leg up to that point again. But the stage for example, or the studio? „Not at all“, and I feel that in this, there is something definite.

I tell her that her life choices and what she is telling me, inspires me. That her story is tragic, but also full of repair, care, animal presence and that there is something very beautiful to it. My

construction as a woman brings me closer and closer to her, I find.

I also tell her that she is like a witch, a magician surrounded by dogs. She responds that dogs have never disappointed her, that men are tough, it's difficult to be single, bi, polyamorous, independent at sixty, but fortunately there are animals. We laugh. She has been drawing me since the beginning of this discussion, in the end, she hands me my finished portrait.

„The old are thrown to the nettles Asylum in the castles of oblivion This is what awaits me tomorrow If I ever lose my way

I have other projects you see I'm going to fuck, drink and smoke I'm going to invent new skies for myself Ever larger and more precious

I'm old and I fuck you With my dragonfly look „

Brigitte Fontaine „Prohibition“

## Comments on *pages jaunes.fr* about Biche's grooming house *Aux mille chiens*

 kerhor ★ 5/5

Le 28 juin 2012 au sujet de Toilettage de chiens, de chats

Bonne maison !  
Très bonne connaissance de l'animal. Ne comptez pas sur elle pour faire des concessions sur ce qu'elle ne pense pas bon pour votre chien. Par contre, ses conseils et ses soins sont de qualité.

+ Les points positifs  
Exactitude et qualité des soins.

Accueil	—————
Conseils	—————
Disponibilité	—————
Qualité de la prestation	—————
Rapport qualité / prix	—————

***Very good knowledge of the animal. Don't count on her to make concessions on what she doesn't think is good for your dog. On the other hand, her advice and care are of high quality.***

 Lolaju ★ 5/5

Le 26 février 2013 au sujet de Toilettage de chiens, de chats

J'adore  
J'ai adoré la gentillesse de la dame qui s'est occupée de ma chienne et en plus qu'en je l'ai récupéré, elle était belle. Je suis ravie.

+ Les points positifs  
TOUT

- Les points négatifs  
RIEN

Accueil	—————
Conseils	—————
Disponibilité	—————
Qualité de la prestation	—————
Rapport qualité / prix	—————

***I loved the kindness of the lady who took care of my dog. And what's more, when I got it back it was beautiful. I am delighted.***

 HuguesRoger  
Vitrolles ★ 5/5

Le 4 avril 2018 au sujet de Toilettage de chiens, de chats  
Expérience vécue le 4 avril 2018

Enfin une personne compétente gentille avec les animaux toute en douceur réconfort et conseil adapté MERCI Je la recommande !!!!

[Propriétaire, répondez](#) [Signalez un abus](#) [J'aime](#)

***Finally, a competent person, kind to animals, gentle, comforting and with adapted advice. THANK YOU, I recommend her!***

## NOTE OF INTENT

*I consider dog writing to be a branch of feminist theory, or the other way around.<sup>1</sup>*

Our first meeting took place at my request, asking Biche's help in order to perform a dog grooming session on stage. While talking to her, I knew that I would have to see her again, to go further in our exchange.

I needed to listen to her journey and her idea of happiness again. This happiness being tailor-made by her, for her and not following the predominant model. It sometimes seems like a struggle, and within, I think there is something fundamental, especially for women.

I imagine that her particular story can also resonate with others, which brought me to the idea of staging our exchanges. The stories, dialogues and physical explorations will take the form of a solo performance, written for and with Géraldine Chollet.

Accompanying Biche's narrative we will investigate certain biological, philosophical, and mythical theories relating to humans' relationship with dogs, the living, feminism, and the deconstruction of the virile and capitalist Anthropocene.

### Relation to the animal

The profession of a groomer, often carried out by women, developed out of our desire to live with animals, according to a certain aesthetic and cleanliness criteria of urban modern-day lifestyle. The target group for this service offered are the wealthy, the one who can afford services which are not a basic necessity. However, for the animal, the grooming practice defines a

seasonal wellness ritual. The relationship that Biche has with her profession and the animals passing through her salon allows us to discover yet another point of view, what it's like for those who work with the dogs.

The observation of a grooming session, a human gesture towards an animal, allows us to get an insight into this sensitive relationship of care and exchange, beyond words. The woman and the animal meet in a sanitized place, a salon, far from nature, where they create a conversation which is personal and universal at the same time.

*Taking the relationship between dogs and humans seriously means establishing an ethic and a practice of "significant otherness", but also new stories, at the heart of territories that are too often misunderstood.<sup>2</sup>*

During our initial interview, Biche talked about her job first, then about her accident, the trauma and reconstruction towards a new life. Thereafter she talked about the bonds that unite her with others, like her family and love relationships. I would like to follow the same trajectory for the writing of the play, because it seems to me that this is how Biche's story unfolds most naturally.

Biche taught me the imperatives to respect for the animal's well-being when giving a live grooming session on stage. In order to fulfil these requirements, the work will be accompanied by Gérald Caldes, a professional dog trainer as well as the owner of Niger, a 4-year-old German Shepherd Dog, who will be Géraldine's companion during the grooming

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<sup>1</sup> Donna J. Haraway, "The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness"

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<sup>2</sup> Vinciane Despret, Preface of "The Companion Species Manifesto"

session. The grooming technique will be taught and filmed in Biche's salon in Vitrolles, France.

### Relation to the body

Biche has reconstructed herself beyond words, through the care she has given to animals, through the love she has shared with her lovers, through the attention she has been able to give and receive. About her trauma and the depression related to the accident, she remained succinct. We will not say more than she decides to share.

The history of Biche's body is written in her flesh and cells, affects, accidents, pleasures and habits incorporated. Practice and knowledge, as well as her past as a dancer aided her to understand and accompany her body through the pain and the difficulty to regain mobility. It was then that through the contact with animals, she regained the strength to live with humans.

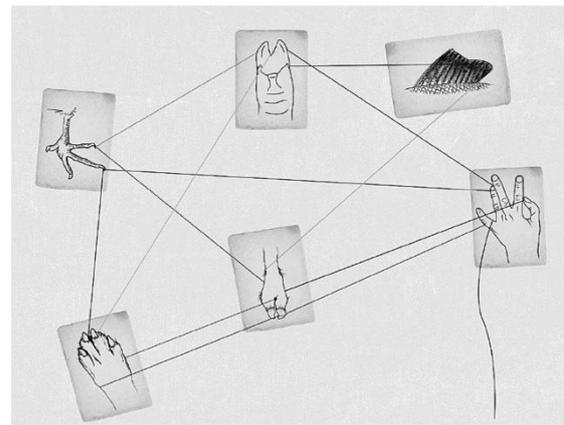
Darwin considered the astonishing ability of dogs to be able to cross the border between nature and culture. In the same way, the ancient pagans gave the canine deities the role of passers between worlds. *It is the dialectic nature of the dog that is most remarkable: half wolf, half man, half wild, half civilised. He has one foot in both worlds. He stands at the place of their stitches.*<sup>3</sup> Doe, back from the kingdom of the dead, with her wounds still open, she let herself be guided by dogs, to return to life among humans.

Biche's story is strongly linked to the story of all those who were transformed by her or with her. It will be explored through the ramifications that link her to the living, a *prosthetic*

composite being, an entity between *domesticated nature* and *savaged culture*<sup>4</sup>. An impure body, where culture and nature, prosthesis and animal, parasite and host are indistinguishable. Biche's body still finds the means to rejoice in life and, like its history, only asks to be listened to.

One can speak of ordinary struggle, or rave about the difficulties Biche has encountered in her life, her resilience, and her independence. For me, it's both, a political choice, to stage her life journey and knowledge and a personal choice, to tell the story of this woman with whom I feel strongly connected. Connected with who she was back then and who she is today.

Through Biche's story, we will explore relationships, connections, ways of relating to -, ways of thinking in the order, or rather in the disorder of the living. The storyline will not take the form of a tree, but rather that of a forged network of active intimacies, successful transformations, exchanges of properties and new inventions. What Darwin himself called: an inextricable network of affinities.



Multispecies Cat's Cradle, by Nasser Mufti

## BIOGRAPHIES

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Akizart, „Chiens“

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<sup>4</sup> Donna J. Haraway, “The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness”

## **MARION ZURBACH Concept and realisation**

In 2015, Marion founded the Bern-based artistic association UNPLUSH together with Vittorio Bertolli and started to choreograph for the company. Since its creation, UNPLUSH has collaborated regularly with the Dampfzentrale Bern, toured in Switzerland and abroad and has won several awards. In 2018, Marion completed her Master of Theatre and Performance degree at Bern University of the Arts (HKB). 2019-20, she initiated the project "Les promises", a piece made with teenage women living in the northern districts of Marseille. She also works as a dramaturg at festival Urban Dansdagen Eindhoven with the choreographer Johnny Lloyd, as a choreographer for the Cologne Opera House and creates the performance "Body lecture" with the osteopath Camelia Cabrera at the Schlachthaus Theater Bern (Tanzfest 2021 Swiss Dance Awards). 2020-21 she is part of the production "Dear Human Animals" by Daniel Hellmann, creates a series of workshops with the students from the Collège Marens commissioned by the far° - Fabrique des Arts Vivants Nyon. 2021-22 she joins Artagon Marseille, works on the new creation "Biche", co-produced by the Dampfzentrale Bern and gives mediation workshops for teenagers in Switzerland and Marseille.

## **GÉRALDINE CHOLLET Performance et choreography**

Géraldine Chollet trained at the Laban Centre (London). She then danced with various companies (Jessica Huber Company, Prototype-Status Company, Daniel Hellmann Company, Philippe Saire Company, Gaspard Buma Company, Fabienne Berger Company, Utilité Publique Company). She also worked as an actress with the Alakran and the Emilie Charriot Company,

especially in „King Kong Théorie“ from Virginie Despentes. Since 2006, she has been training with Ohad Naharin and the Batsheva Dance company to teach the Gaga movement language to professionals and amateurs in dance and theatre. She teaches in particular at the Manufacture (HETSR), Bern:Ballett and Cie Philippe Saire. Since 2011, Géraldine Chollet has been developing her own choreographic work, notably with the pieces IRA, ITMAR and „Ouverture\_ Pièce pour danseurs.euses et public cheminant“ at the Théâtre Sévelin 36.

## **VITTORIO BERTOLLI Artistic assistance**

Born in Napoli, Vittorio graduated from the Ecole Atelier Rudra Béjart Lausanne in 2002. During the following years he danced for several ballet and contemporary dance companies, such as the Béjart Ballet Lausanne, the Teatro alla Scala di Milano, the Compagnia Aterballetto and the Bern Ballet. After the encounter with David Zambrano in 2008, Vittorio's interest shifted to different ways of expressing his passion for dance. Since then, he works as a freelance performer and assistant choreographer in collaboration with artists coming from very different artistic backgrounds. Alongside his work as a performer, assistant choreographer, and dramaturge, Vittorio teaches Flying Low regularly at Tanzcompagnie Konzert Theater Bern and in several companies and education programs in Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Belgium, and France. In 2015 he co-founded with Marion Zurbach the dance-theatre company UNPLUSH. In 2018, he achieved the MAS program in Dance Science at the University of Bern.

## **ARTHUR ESKENAZI Dramaturgy**

Arthur Eskenazi graduated from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris in 2012 and obtained an "exercice" Master of Dance and Performance Research degree at the Centre Chorégraphique National de Montpellier in 2015. A visual artist but also a performer, his work casts a broad net over various media in both the visual and performing arts. He regularly provides guidance on dramaturgy and scenography for theatre and contemporary dance creations, putting together alternative research programmes. His work has been presented at a number of group exhibitions in France, Germany and Japan, as well as in various performance and dance festivals. Arthur Eskenazi has lived and worked in Marseille for three years.

#### **GIORGIO GRISTINA Composer**

Giorgio Gristina was born in Palermo, Italy. He holds a Master of Anthropology degree from the University of Turin and a diploma in sound recording and editing from the Scuola APM in Saluzzo. In 2010, he completed an internship at the Tempo Reale electronic music research centre in Florence. Since then, he has taken part in numerous performances and installations (Fabbrica Europa, Oficinas do Convento, Museu da Água, Espaço Alcantara, Negócio ZDB, Atalaia Artes Performativas, etc.) and worked on dozens of films and animated features (with Zelig, Stefilm, Evolution, Longshot, Terratreme, Elenfant and Videolotion). From 2012 to 2014, he worked as a sound engineer at Sankeys (Ibiza). Since 2015, he has been based in Lisbon, where he has collaborated on various artistic projects (with Zelig School, Ar.Co, Filmin, Il Sorpasso,

Ebano Collective and others) and has recently begun a doctorate at the Institute of Social Sciences. As a

DJ/producer, he appears under various pseudonyms and releases music with the "Brusio" label under the name "Jitter". He also works with various independent radio collectives and composes soundtracks for the label CusCus Discus.

#### **SILVIA ROMANELLI Costume design**

Silvia obtained a degree in Design and Fashion from the Università Iuav di Venezia in 2013, and in the same year, was one of ten candidates selected by ITS, an international competition for young talent in the world of art and fashion. After working as an assistant for various artists at the Venice Biennale (including Ai Wei Wei, Lola Shnabel and Rirkrit Tiravanija), she moved to Paris, where she worked as an assistant designer at the haute couture label Aganovich. Pursuing an interest in production and communication, she worked in events production from 2015 to 2017. After undergoing a journey of discovery, however, she returned to the world of art, deepening her involvement in the fields of theatre and performance by assisting various companies and working as a performer herself. In 2018, she began a collaboration with the choreography duo Paola Stella Minni and Konstantinos Rizos, which opened the door to collaborations with other international artists as an external advisor, textile artist, costume designer and scenographer.

## **UNPLUSH**

The company UNPLUSH builds its projects as sites for contact, dialogue and speculative research.

Since 2015, UNPLUSH has been presenting performances, organising clubbing events and workshops in dance and choreographic writing.

With its vast collaborations, formats and venues, UNPLUSH is actively involved in the swiss cultural scene and produces for a broad audience.

## **UNPLUSH COMPANY**

The company proposes works that result from the dialogue between people participating in the productions. The meeting between individuals with different life experiences or of different ages is seen as a stimulus for reflection and solidarity.

Under the artistic direction of Marion Zurbach, the performers work from their connection to a theme, with their imagination and history.

Between myth and realism, tragedy and humour, UNPLUSH observes constructions, existential strategies or non human life forms. A reflection on our conditionings, our struggles and what a space of speculation like the stage can produce.

## **PRIZES AND CREATIVE SUPPORT**

2019 – UNPLUSH receives the “June Johnson Dance Prize”

2018 – UNPLUSH receives three years of support from PRAIRIE, the Migros Culture Percentage’s co-production model for innovative Swiss theatre and dance companies.

2017 – “ACT-BAD Bilbao” prize for the piece LABOR at the ACT Festival Bilbao

– “Best Production of the 17/18 Season” prize for FLIPPER by the „Voyeure Bern“

## **DIFFUSION**

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