

# ~~DARK~~MATTER

[creation 2022]  
a production by  
Cherish Menzo/GRIP & Frascati Producties



© Yaqine Hamzaoui & Yema Gieskes

*premiere: May 12-15, 2022 at Kunstenfestivaldesarts/Beursschouwburg,  
Brussels*

*Body can you become (be) hypothetical, a galaxy, in full gear  
acceleration, a liquid star monster, failing to die?*

## **0. TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1. PUBLICITY TEXT	p. 02
2. CHERISH ON <del>DARK</del> MATTER	p. 03
a. the urgency	p. 03
b. the content	p. 04
c. the form	p. 05
d. the movement research	p. 05
3. CREDITS	p. 06
4. BIOGRAPHY	p. 08
5. ON GRIP	p. 08
6. CONTACT	p. 08
7. VIDEO AND PHOTO MATERIAL	p. 09
8. PRESS QUOTES AND NOMINATIONS JEZEBEL	p. 09
9. ONLINE	p. 09

## **1. PUBLICITY TEXT**

In the duet ~~DARK~~MATTER, with the help of a Distorted Rap Choir, Cherish Menzo and her onstage partner Camilo Mejía Cortés, look for ways to detach their bodies, and the daily reality in which they move, from an imposed perception.

For ~~DARK~~MATTER, Menzo draws inspiration from post-humanism, in which the physical gets transcended. She also studies Afrofuturism, which looks at mainly science-fiction, technology, and fantasy from an African or black perspective. The human form becomes something real and allows us to dream. Menzo also weaves a poetic layer into it for which she gets the mustard from astronomy. Among other things, she looks at dark matter and at black holes that meet and collide to give birth to a new, futuristic and enigmatic body.

~~DARK~~MATTER wants to get rid of a biased way of looking at one's own body and that of the other - and the stories we attribute to it. Menzo also throws her own body into battle, which results in a complex conversation that she wants to both enter into and transcend - a duality that feeds ~~DARK~~MATTER.

Just as in JEZEBEL, she stretches her movement language further by integrating techniques from hip-hop music. In this way, she applies the Chopped and Screwed method to her movement language, a process in which the music's tempo is sharply reduced. By stretching the notions of time, the register changes and the performing body manages to generate new readings. A ten-piece choir of local performers - the Distorted Rap Choir - accompanies the two performers with their alienating rap anthems.

~~DARKMATTER~~ wants to create a thorough reshuffle of our atoms, looking for a new form for - and way of looking at - our body and the complex outside world to which it relates.

## **2. CHERISH MENZO ON ~~DARKMATTER~~**

### A. THE URGENCY

In the past four years, next to playing as a performer in other people's work, I also started to develop more as a maker. I see the creation process within dance and performance as something in constant motion, continuous research that doesn't choose the easy path and has a broad scope.

I am fascinated by the transformation of the body on stage and the "embodiment" of different entities. Images that seem recognizable at first glance. By emphasizing the complexity and the contradiction within the image, I try to generate new forms. In this way, I continuously try to express what is going on inside me and look for new forms of movement and being, placing the beauty and the grotesque on a similar level. This often has an alienating effect used in my work to estrange the viewer and myself from what we (think we) know. Away from what we sometimes take too quickly for 'truth.'

The themes addressed in my previous production, *JEZEBEL*, were triggered by how black women are portrayed in our visual culture, and more specifically how particular narrative processes and stereotypes frame the dark/black body. During the creation process, the complexity and contradictions that emerged within this theme made me long - and search - for ways to look further and dream beyond the (present) reality. From this, a protagonist (the Video Vixen) emerged, who took control and confirmed existing stereotypes and roles, but also hollowed them out, or turned them upside down.

For ~~DARKMATTER~~, the black body and blackness - and its associations - are again a starting point. Even though this feels logical, some questions remain firmly present. What happens if I focus on the black body or blackness anew? Won't that body immediately be labeled as 'the other' again? Does it remain merely an attempt to prove and/or search for recognition and dignity? Do the intentions and intrinsic value of this work matter, or is the perception - no matter what I bring to the table - already established in advance?

In this new project, I want to bend further and disconnect my personal view of stories linked to the dark body and blackness. Is there room to dream and to rethink and redraw this body? Can this process be disconnected from historical and existing ways of thinking, or are

these fertile seeds that I should take with me in my work process? Finally, how do I open up this research and turn it into a more collective story?

In the performance, I once again throw my own body into battle. This will result in a complex conversation that I want to engage in and transcend - a duality that feeds ~~DARK~~MATTER.

However, I am not alone on stage. The performance will be a duet in which my onstage partner and I, with the help of a *Distorted Rap Choir*, search for ways to detach our bodies, and the daily reality in which they move, from an imposed perception.

## B. THE CONTENT

The title ~~DARK~~MATTER is derived from dark matter, an astronomical phenomenon, and refers to the skin color of the performers' bodies. The unfathomable dark matter incites curiosity. It is almost invisible, just as the dark body is in certain parts of society. In the title, I deliberately crossed out the word DARK, as an opening for the dark body to disconnect, to detach itself from particular stories and stereotypes. The crossing out also creates a possible contradiction: by removing something invisible, does it become more visible?

In the research phase of this production, I study astronomical phenomena such as dark matter and three specific movements: posthumanism, transhumanism, and Afrofuturism. What fascinates me about these studies is that they turn the human form into something hypothetical and socially manufacturable, allowing the imagination to run wild. I am mesmerized by the 'breaking open' of the human shell in transhumanism to find a new, improved form for it. With its more specific approach, Afrofuturism can be seen as an alternative way of representing a world that was not constructed through centuries of cultural domination. Afrofuturism is a valuable offshoot - and correction to - Western-centric posthumanism where the white gaze prevailed. These studies offer a tool to distance oneself from an enforced realism: not to flee, but to be able to think up a new reality.

With these elements as building blocks, I try to create a playground where my source material inspires me to make the body and space malleable in search of a continuous transformation. Is it possible to experience and use the body as matter?

A matter that continually transforms itself, takes on new forms, and thus helps form the fabric of the performance. A material that makes personal truths connect and meet but also clash.



~~DARK~~MATTER is a voyage of discovery that wants to lead to another reading of the (black) body: futuristic and enigmatic.

### C. THE FORM

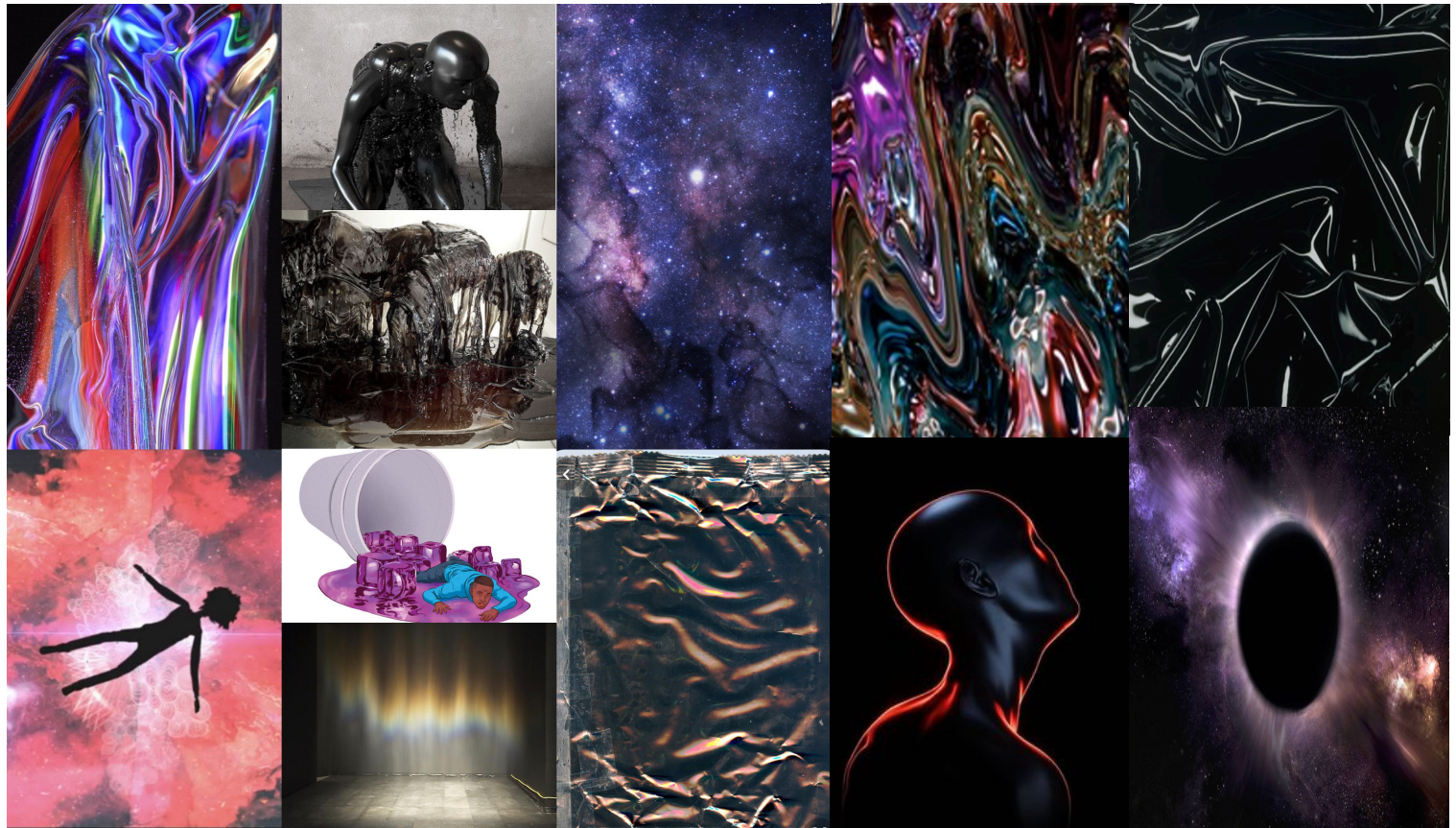
Bringing together different media ensures that ~~DARK~~MATTER is, once again, a holistic experience. As in *JEZEBEL*, all components are of great importance: the movement, the music, the lyrics, the scenography, the lighting design, and the choir's voices can merge and moments later dissolve to stand on their own. In addition to the fluid play between these elements, time is manipulated in an alienating way. We find ourselves in a dimension where everything happens in slow time. Movements and music turn tranquil and/or over-articulated and stretched out. All of this together forms the dark matter/dark mass that gives body to the performance.

Throughout the performance, two performers are on stage. They carry a fluid, ambiguous duality within them, to the effect that how they physically differ and relate to each other is in a state of permanent transformation. The recognizable gradually becomes unrecognizable and vice versa.

A ten-person choir (the *Distorted Rap Choir*) joins the performers onstage at the beginning and the end of the performance, performing alienating rap anthems. During the intro anthem, the twelve characters appear identical. They form a mass that slowly disintegrates and fades into the duo, who then claim time and space.

### D. THE MOVEMENT RESEARCH

Just as in *JEZEBEL*, I further stretch the movement language by integrating techniques from hip-hop music. I apply the Chopped And Screwed process to the movement language, for example, a method in which the music's tempo is sharply reduced. In combination with a few other techniques, this creates a form of disruption, accentuation and saturation. By stretching time and disrupting the natural flow, the register changes, and the performing body can generate new readings. For me, this technique is an appropriate tool in the overarching investigation of how to make new connections - and experiences - between the body and the space in which it moves. This delay also offers the possibility of making even the smallest transformations visible and blurring the beginning and end notion.



***DARK MATTER** is a sort of speculative lacuna between the body and the space that surrounds it. It is an unknown, elusive place where dreams and reality aren't defined yet, an abyss of speculations and perceptions. Infinite, in-between worlds and time, without edges, blurry, upside down, fiction, fantasy, dystopia, and utopia.*

### **3. CREDITS & DATES**

**PREMIERE** 12-15 May 2022, Beursschouwburg/Kunstenfestivaldesarts  
Brussels

**CONCEPT AND CHOREOGRAPHY:** Cherish Menzo

**CREATION AND PERFORMANCE:** Camilo Mejía Cortés and Cherish Menzo

**LIGHTING DESIGN:** Niels Runderkamp

**MUSIC COMPOSITION:** Gagi Petrovic and Michael Nunes

**MASTERING:** Gagi Petrovic and Michael Nunes

**COSTUME DESIGN:** JustTatty.com

**SCENOGRAPHY:** Morgana Machado Marques

**DRAMATURGY:** Renée Copraij

**SINGING AND VOCAL COACHES:** Daniël Bonsu and Shari Kok-Sey-Tjong

**ARTISTIC ADVICE:** Benjamin Kahn, Christian Yav and Nicole Geertruida

**PRODUCTION INTERN:** Pauline Van Nuffel

**PRODUCTION:** GRIP, Frascati Producties

**COPRODUCTION:** Kunstenfestivaldesarts (Brussels, BE), CCN-Ballet  
national de Marseille dans le cadre de l'accueil studio / Ministère

de la Culture (FR), actoral festival (Marseille, FR), STUK (Leuven, BE), La Villette (Paris, FR), Festival d'Automne à Paris (FR), Beursschouwburg (Brussels, BE), Perpodium (BE)

**RESIDENCIES:** STUK (Leuven, BE), La Villette (Paris, FR), Frascati (Amsterdam, NL), Beursschouwburg (Brussels, BE), CCN-Ballet national de Marseille dans le cadre de l'accueil studio / Ministère de la Culture (FR)

**IN COLLABORATION WITH:** Trill (Leuven, BE), WijzijnDOX (Utrecht, NL), De Coproducers (NL)

**WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF:** the Flemish Government, The Performing Arts Fund NL, Tax Shelter of the Belgian Federal Government and Cronos Invest

some dates are still under embargo, thanks for not communicating this list towards an audience.

12-15.05.2022	kunstenfestivaldesarts / beursschouwburg BRUSSELS BE
25-28.05.2022	frascati AMSTERDAM NL
july 2022	julidans AMSTERDAM NL
august 2022	la bâtie GENEVA CH
fall 2022	campo GHENT BE
fall 2022	festival d'automne / la Villette PARIS FR
september 2022	short theatre ROME IT
september 2022	actoral festival MARSEILLE FR
november 2022	next festival COURTRAI BE
06-07.12.2022	kunstencentrum nona MECHELEN BE
05-07.01.2023	frascati AMSTERDAM NL
28.01.2023	lux NIJMEGEN NL
03-04.02.2023	het nationale theater THE HAGUE NL
11-12.02.2023	theater kikker UTRECHT NL
17-18.02.2023	theater ins blau LEIDEN NL
24-25.02.2023	de schuur HAARLEM NL
03-04.03.2023	theater rotterdam ROTTERDAM NL
07-08.03.2023	theater aan de rijen ARNHEM NL
10-11.03.2023	verkadefabriek DEN BOSCH NL
16-17.03.2023	zwolse theaters ZWOLLE NL
21-22.03.2023	de nieuwe vorst TILBURG NL
24-25.03.2022	de lieve vrouw AMERSFOORT NL
spring 2023	stuk LEUVEN BE

## **4. BIOGRAPHY**



Cherish Menzo (°1988, The Netherlands) is a performing artist and choreographer, based in Amsterdam and Brussels. For her artistic work she is interested in the transformation of the body on stage and in the "embodiment" of different physical images. Images seem recognisable at first glance, but by highlighting their complexity and contradiction, Cherish questions the apparent norm and creates universes in which the black body stands central. She floats between the nostalgia of 90s and 00s hip-hop, industrial hip-hop, rap lyrics, sci-fi, manga and speculative futures. Using these elements as tools to give shape to - and materialise - uncanny, enigmatic forms and realities.

She graduated in 2013 from The Urban Contemporary program (JMD) of the Hogeschool voor de Kunsten in Amsterdam and since danced in productions by choreographers such as Eszter Salamon, Akram

Khan, Leo Lerus, Hanzel Nezza, Benjamin Kahn, Olivier Dubois, Ula Sickie, Lisbeth Gruwez, Jan Martens, and Nicole Beutler. Besides performing in other people's productions, she has been creating her own work for the last seven years: *EFES* (2016 - together with Nicole Geertruida), *LIVE* (2018 - with Müşfik Can Müftüoğlu) and *JEZEBEL* (2019), the predecessor to *DARKMATTER*. Since 2018 she also performs the solo *Sorry, But I Feel Slightly Disidentified...* by choreographer Benjamin Kahn. A performance which resulted from a close collaboration that started in 2017. The work of Cherish is supported and produced by GRIP and Frascati Producties. [photo by Mélanie Musisi]

## **5. ON GRIP**

GRIP is a platform led by choreographer Jan Martens and business leader Klaartje Oerlemans, founded in 2014. GRIP produces and supports both Martens' work and that of three other choreographers: Cherish Menzo, Steven Michel and Femke Gyselinck (from 2023 onwards). More info via [www.grip.house](http://www.grip.house)

## **6. CONTACT**

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## **7. VIDEO & PHOTO**

first photos via [bit.ly/cherish-darkmatter](https://bit.ly/cherish-darkmatter)

## **8. PRESS QUOTES AND NOMINATIONS JEZEBEL**

*'a dazzling dance performance, full of details and dramatic moments that convey both admiration and confusion. [...] the whole performance [balances] on the boundary line between threat and seduction, [...] alienation and temptation.'*  
Kester Freriks, critic's choice in Theaterkrant, 06 November 2020

*'Menzo is a force to be reckoned with, not only as a dancer, but also as a brave maker of her own work. [...] Thought-provoking and witty, well-structured and well-paced, Jezebel is effective on many levels.'*  
Jordi Ribot Thunissen, Movement Exposed, 10 November 2020

*'With Jezebel, Cherish Menzo moves somewhere between dance and performance. She takes us into a slowed-down, deconstructed video clip with a video vixen centre stage. Using minimal means, she is able to make the iconography of this oversexualised woman powerfully theatrical. The vixen "created" by Menzo evolves and appeals to our imagination - even for an audience that may not be at home in this world. The jury were impressed by the choices Menzo makes in relation to revealing her protagonist. Unexpectedly, Menzo chooses to decelerate. Starting from stylisation, the tempo picks up and the character then - literally and metaphorically - explodes. With Jezebel, Menzo manages in an original way to place the icon of the black woman in hip hop culture in a new perspective.'*  
**jury report BNG Bank Theaterprijs 2020**

awarded an Amsterdam Fringe Award and International Bursary [2019].  
nominated for the BNG Bank Theaterprijs [2020].  
nominated for the Nederlandse Dansdagen [2020].

## **9. ONLINE**

**www** [www.grip.house](http://www.grip.house) / [www.frascatiproducties.nl](http://www.frascatiproducties.nl)

**f** [grip.artists](https://www.facebook.com/grip.artists) / [Cherish Menzo](https://www.facebook.com/CherishMenzo) / [frascatitheater](https://www.facebook.com/frascatitheater)

**@** [grip.artists](https://www.instagram.com/grip.artists) / [Cherish Menzo](https://www.instagram.com/CherishMenzo) / [frascatiamsterdam](https://www.instagram.com/frascatiamsterdam)

**t** [grip\\_janmartens](https://twitter.com/grip_janmartens)

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The Flemish Government (2017-21)**

