

LA COLLINE
THÉÂTRE NATIONAL



The Unwomanly Face of War

Based on the book by **Svetlana Alexievitch**
Director **Julie Deliquet**

The Unwomanly Face of War

running time 2 h 30

based on the book by **Svetlana Alexievitch**
mise en scène **Julie Deliquet**

with

Julie André

Valentina (Sergeant, Anti-Aircraft Gun Commander)

Astrid Bayiha

Olga (Stretcher-Bearer, Rifle Company)

Évelyne Didi

Antonina (Intelligence Agent, Partisan Brigade)

Marina Keltchewsky

Tamara (Guards Sergeant, Stretcher-Bearer)

Odja Llorca

Alexandra (Guards Lieutenant, Pilot)

Marie Payen

Lioudmila (Doctor, Resistance Fighter)

Amandine Pudlo

Klavdia (Sniper)

Agnès Ramy

Nina (Sergeant Major, Stretcher-Bearer, Tank Battalion)

Blanche Ripoché

Svetlana (journalist, writer)

Hélène Viviès

Zinaïda (Stretcher-Bearer, Cavalry Squadrons)

translation **Galia Ackerman, Paul Lequesne**

stage version **Julie André, Julie Deliquet, Florence Seyvos**

artistic collaboration **Pascale Fournier, Annabelle Simon**

scénographie **Julie Deliquet, Zoé Pautet**

light **Vyara Stefanova**

costumes **Julie Scobeltzine**

general management **Pascal Gallepe**

set construction **Atelier du Théâtre Gérard Philipe – Centre dramatique national de Saint-Denis**

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Svetlana Alexievitch :

VOICES OF UTOPIA

A Belarusian professor, author and journalist, unfairly overlooked by the wider public, she became the first Russian woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2015 for her entire «polyphonic work, a memorial to suffering and courage in our time.»

Svetlana Alexievich's books seem to speak of the past, but actually expose state violence that remains present today. In this sense, she is an opponent through her very literature. She has also taken an active stance against the war in Ukraine and the rise of violence in Russian society.

From the Great Patriotic War to the collapse of the USSR, through the war in Afghanistan and the Chernobyl disaster, she revisits tragic episodes of history from the perspective of those who lived through them.

She works in the form of investigation, collecting the stories of people she meets in order to create not «a truthful object» but a genuine literature work:

«I don't ask about socialism, but about love, jealousy, childhood, old age. About the music, the dances, the haircuts. About the countless details of a vanished life. This is the only way to integrate the disaster within a familiar context and try to tell something, to guess something... History focuses solely on facts ; emotions always stay on the periphery. It's not customary to let them enter into history. As for me, I look at the world with the eyes of a writer – not a historian's.»



Women of all wars

"I think of Eleonora, a lieutenant colonel in my unit. When she speaks she always makes jokes that are so funny, because she's used to being only among groups of men."

Correspondence between a Ukrainian couple separated by war, 2024

Nineteenth-century Europe predominantly rejected the presence of women in the military and considered bearing arms incompatible with femininity, reserving it for men who held political power, from which it was inseparable. Female claims proved fruitless and transgressions of this gender norm were rare. In the twentieth century, the feminization of armies began, but initially only concerned medical care and logistical support. The two world wars and decolonization wars amplified female mobilization; it forced most European armies to establish an enduring legal framework to allow women to become soldiers like any others — in other words, like men.

At the end of the German-Soviet Pact, the Germans invaded the countries of the Soviet Union and women took up arms to fight the Hitlerian armies. According to figures, between eight hundred thousand and one million served in the army forces, not forgetting those who joined partisan groups similar to the French Resistance.

Although there are countless books about war (the earth has already known more than three thousand wars), Svetlana Alexievich notes that women are barely represented in them. Everything we know about war has been told to us by men. We are prisoners of "male" images and women always take refuge in silence.

The testimony of one of them in a journal gave her the idea to go interview others, and from meeting to meeting — more and more numerous as word spread that a woman was collecting the stories of women who had fought in the war — the idea was born of a text that would make heard not one of these voices, which would be representative of all the others, but all these voices.

The Unwomanly Face of War is her first text, a documentary essay constructed from these stories - captured on audiotape – of women who participated in the Great Patriotic War. Svetlana Alexievich devoted seven years of her life to it between the 1970s and early 1980s and travelled all over the USSR to meet them.

Hundreds of recorded cassettes, thousands of meters of magnetic tape and more than five hundred interviews relate the experiences of these women and make us live their epic while they evoke their memories where daily life, terror, and resistance intermingle.

For younger generations, this account bears witness to those terrible years of World War II, but also to what Stalinism was. As to us, the generation of Europeans who grew up in this rupture between West and East – the Fall of the Berlin Wall only dates from 1989 – we were immersed in the stories of World War II and then of the Cold War. These Soviet women had sisters in arms in the British army and in the resistance movements of all occupied countries.

Our thoughts turn to Charlotte Delbo, writer and resistance fighter, who returned from Auschwitz: *«Starting a new life, what an expression. I returned to my job [...] I live like a sleepwalker whom nothing shall awaken.»* The solitude of the person who «comes back from there», it is as if she were coming back from another world.

My meeting with Svetlana Alexievitch

Berlin, July 2024

Svetlana Alexievich has been living in exile in Berlin for four years now. Alexander Lukashenko's regime is threatening to seize her apartment back in Minsk. She welcomes us into her home and serves Turkish coffee in a beautiful *djezva*. When she hears us speaking French, she tells us how much she loves hearing the language—she lived in Paris for three years. When she first started writing *The Unwomanly Face of War*, she confides, everyone told her that everything had already been written on the subject, and more importantly, that she had no business writing it: what moral right did she have as a woman to write about war when she'd never even held a weapon?

THE WAR IN UKRAINE

We cannot start our interview without mentioning Russia's war against Ukraine. The greatest difficulty for Svetlana Alexievich today with *The Unwomanly Face of War* is that the Russians are currently doing what the Germans did in 1941. Russia is behaving today like the Nazis, she tells us: «Putin doesn't give a damn about Europe and human life, including that of Russians, just like Stalin in his time. And Trump threatens to come to power...»

She is currently writing based on interviews about the revolution of Belarusians and Ukrainians, but she is not writing directly about the war in Ukraine. She tells us it's up to the Ukrainians to do so, and they are doing it.

THE AGE OF WOMEN

Svetlana Alexievich tells us that when she interviewed her subjects, she spent entire days with them, they cooked together—she had to confide in them too to make them talk in turn. She took advantage of May 9th gatherings, Victory Day, to meet several at once.

They were all around 50 years old, and Svetlana Alexievich, from the height of her 20 years, found them "old." Her youth pleased the women; they trusted her. They were wary of journalists, but told her: "You, you can stay, we'll have a drink." They saw in her what they were when they were young on the front.



Julie Deliquet, Svetlana Alexievich, Marina Keltchewsky

WOMEN'S BODIES

Svetlana confides that at the time, women didn't want to talk about rape, but she remembers that when they went to the bathroom in the evening, they were afraid to pass in front of the men, and said to themselves, «How is this possible... I just saved him...» The rapes were there, present, but Svetlana found herself facing an older generation that didn't talk about that. The women declared: «I don't care to tell you more about it. You can just talk, like the others, about my decorations.»

Svetlana Alexievich began her investigation at 25, having just finished university. She tells us that today she would seek to go deeper into the question of rape, of amenorrhea, of the fact that women thought they could never give birth to children after the war. She herself says she was too young, too romantic, and she strongly encourages me to do it today and to go further on this question in my show.

THE STALINIST DICTATORSHIP

Regarding the numerous and similar declarations about the fierce desire to enlist to defend the homeland at such a young age, I ask her what part Soviet education played in this will to go fight. Svetlana Alexievich answers that it was a generation raised for that! In the 1970s, Svetlana could criticize Stalin, but the women avoided the subject. It was a generation like there will never be again. These women had been raised as equals to men, so for them, they could and should go fight like men.

At the fall of the USSR in 1991, some women called Svetlana back to add things about cruelty, about Stalin, about sexual abuse and this «other war» they had to face afterward. Before dying, people felt the desire and need to speak out, to finally talk.

TODAY...

Today, speaking would be impossible, she tells us. Fear and danger have returned, and people keep quiet again. It was a beautiful time when people still spoke, she brightens up! Perestroika was a period of liberation of speech. *The Unwomanly Face of War* was removed from school curricula by Alexandre Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin. Since Svetlana Alexievich officially declared herself against the war, her works can no longer be staged in theaters there. However, her books continue to sell and she receives royalties: it's a great contradiction.

We pause for a moment. Svetlana Alexievich spots an alert on her phone from the New York Times that just came out, naming *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets* among the hundred major works of the 21st century. She tells us that *The Unwomanly Face of War* was elected among the hundred major works of the 20th century.



Propaganda, invisibilization, oblivion then censorship

"Very early on, I took an interest in those who are not taken into account by History. These people who move in darkness without leaving a trace and who are asked nothing."

Svetlana Alexievich puts her finger where it hurts: the state's demand for sacrifice and broken lives. Was it worth it? There clash upholders of patriotic sacrifice and critics of totalitarian regimes. This same message runs through her entire work: what is the fate of human being facing the crushing state machine? Each of her books is a diagnosis that explores the unspoken and breaks taboos.

This is the first time a woman who has written about war has won the Nobel Prize in Literature. There have been stories and novels by women about war, but ultimately quite few, if we consider that they represent half the earth's population and suffer from war as much as men.

This precious account therefore brings new light to World War II. These hundreds of women's testimonies reveal an unknown part of our European history in ending Nazi barbarism. Their courage and acts of bravery did not receive rewards commensurate with their sacrifice, they will be forgotten in the official rhetoric. Despised, ignored, considered as «impure women» after they returned, they fell silent. These testimonies break forty years of collective silence.

"They were silent for so long that their silence, too, turned into history."

Upon its publication in 1985, the work was censored. Some accounts its voices were inaudible, contrary to the official version of history that Soviet propaganda guaranteed. When Svetlana Alexievich returned to this text in 2003, she therefore began by restoring what was suppressed at the time by censorship, but also by herself, who had anticipated it. In this latest version, we can discover raw confessions, both in the war facts recounted and in the intimacy revealed: women who see children die, who have their periods and cannot hide it from the men, who rejoice to hear the bones of enemies crack under their horses' hooves.



Starting from a documentary work

MIXING POLITICS AND HUMAN EXPERIENCE 1945-1975-2025

This is the second time, after *Welfare* by Frederick Wiseman, that I have the desire to adapt a documentary work. However, it is the first time that my medium is literary and not cinematographic and that the author is a woman.

I have almost always brought to the theater the voices of a generation other than my own and staged an era I had not directly experienced, but which spoke to me about us today. The dramas of an extraordinary epic daily life are universal. To be interested in human beings, to stage their experiences, feelings, thought processes, more than the facts themselves and their unfolding, is to privilege life stories over history.

Born shortly after victory, in 1948, Svetlana Alexievich also did not participate in the war. She writes for those who experienced war, which will forever be part of their destiny, but also for those who were born after and for whom these war stories are part of their history today.

"I write not the history of war or the State, but the history of men and women, thrown by their time into the epic depths of a colossal event."

This choral form of writing offers an unprecedented perspective on History and war, often related solely through the masculine prism.

The challenge of the play is to try the human experience of speech that gives itself and gives life to memory and the necessity of speaking, like a democratic collective reconstruction. To tell the reality of war: hunger, exhaustion, fear, cut hair, oversize boots and uniforms, devastated landscapes, abuse, irrational stubbornness that seeks to restore meaning to what has none, deep pains and unexpected joys.

"Don't be afraid of my tears. Don't pity me. No matter that I hurt, I am grateful to you, you offered me the means to find myself again. To find my youth again."

Women remember war as a period of their life. What becomes most important to them is the human part, the intimate part of their past. War is not composed only of great events; it is also made of small details that compose the ordinary of life. There, everything coexists: noble and vile, simple and terrible. But it's not horror that we retain, at least it's not horror so much as human resistance in the midst of horror. Their dignity and firmness. The way humans resist the inhuman; precisely because they are human.

Today, we think of the Ukrainian women of the invisible battalion, the Colombian women of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), and the Kurdish women of the Women's Defense Units fighting against ISIS in Syria. Behind the combat of these insurgents also plays out, implicitly, another struggle: that for women's emancipation.



These professions held by women

In 2019, with the Paris Opera, I produced *Violetta*, a film at the crossroads of documentary and fiction about two major institutions: Gustave Roussy hospital in Villejuif – Europe’s largest cancer center – and the Bastille Opera. I filmed the healthcare professions within the hospital: nursing assistants, nurses, oncology hairdressers, reception staff... And at the Opera, the technical professions: dressers, hairstylists, make-up artists, stage managers, show callers... All these professions were held by women.

Svetlana Alexievich says she had to resign herself to adopting a selection criterion to avoid being overwhelmed by all the testimonies that reached her. Her criterion would be that the interviewed women had at least two jobs during the war, to account for a less limited perspective on the broader phenomenon in which their experience was inscribed.

Each of us sees life through their profession, through the place they occupy in the world: a nurse saw a certain war, a tank driver another, a paratrooper a third, a pilot a fourth, the leader of a machine gun section a fifth... In war, each of these women had their own field of vision.

The first days of the war, recruitment offices found themselves overwhelmed by young girls who wanted to enlist as volunteers and take up arms. Most still high school students, they wanted to train as quickly as possible, and not just to be nurses, cooks, or telephone operators. For them, going to war meant being on the firing line, going to the front, as stretcher-bearers, snipers, sappers charged with clearing land of mines, fighter pilots, machine gun section lieutenants, doctors, tank drivers, surgeons, anti-aircraft gun servants, heavy tank driver-mechanics, anti-aircraft gun commanders, radio-telegraphers, foot soldiers, sailors, transmission agents. These words had no feminine form, because these professions had never yet been performed by women...



Painting by Molly Lamb Bobak, 1946
First woman to be appointed war artist in the Canadian army



Synopsis

RECORDINGS OF FORMER COMBATANTS

They came from the four corners of the country, some wearing medals and military jackets, others carrying lily of the valley and carnations. Former comrades from the front gather in the intimacy of a communal apartment, surrounded by countless sinks, water heaters, gas stoves, and drying laundry. In the spring of 1975, at the height of the Cold War, a young journalist has come to collect their testimonies on tape.

We enter then into an unknown world—an isolated continent where women live with their own memory. Hell cannot be told, can barely be imagined, so only they can understand each other. From the Nazi invasion in 1941, thousands of young Soviet girls enlisted to fight against Hitler's armies. As they tell their stories, History gets gradually humanized, and the women move away from myth to return to themselves. Into themselves. They no longer speak of the war, but of theirs—the very one that was stolen from them.

These women, thrown by their era into the epic depths of a colossal event, were not acknowledged by books, by the State, and remained silent for so long that their silence too became history.

By speaking out, these women are reborn to themselves, and it is not only the abject that is revealed—despite everything, humanity stands firm and resists. It rises up, denounces, and questions our duty of memory for generations to come and the evil that lies in wait for us and always will.

Characters

**Svetlana**

Journalist, Writer

Nina

Sergeant major, Stretcher-bearer in a tank battalion

Valentina

Sergeant, Anti-Aircraft Gun Commander

Olga

Stretcher-bearer in a rifle company

Alexandra

Guards Lieutenant, Pilot

Zinaïda

Stretcher-Bearer in cavalry squadrons

Antonina

Intelligence Agent, Partisan Brigade

Lioudmila

Doctor, Member of the Resistance

Klavdia

Sniper

Tamara

Guards Sergeant, Stretcher-bearer

A women's troupe

"The faces have faded away from my memory, only the voices remain."

The ensemble theater I champion is an art of listening. The actresses will listen to their characters and their partners just as Svetlana Alexievich listened to these women.

Through the numerous testimonies in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, I want to bring together a generation of actresses aged 45-50, adding one woman of 70 and another of 30, thus creating ten life journeys. Each female character will be led to encounter the other and their common territory: war. This human assembly will become a life experience, a reincarnation of the past played out live before the audience's eyes.

Under each woman's figure hide two faces: the one who tells her story today and the one she was long ago, at the time of the events.

A VIBRANT TRIBUTE TO ADOLESCENCE

This production is a creation exploring the ages of women, particularly two transitional ages. These soldier women were around 15 years old; some had their first periods at the front. Adolescence is an extremely recent concept—for a very long time, you were either a child or an adult. There was nothing in between. You passed directly from one age to another. Today, the World Health Organization defines adolescence as a "period of growth and human development between childhood and adulthood." Françoise Dolto, who worked extensively on these questions as a pediatrician and psychoanalyst, speaks of a "phase of mutation as crucial as birth is for the small child and the first fifteen days of life."



The stages of life

And now, how do we characterize the age group of 50 year-old women who speak in *The Unwomanly Face of War*? This difficulty in naming reflects a broader phenomenon of invisibility that affects women from age 50 onward. In her essay *The Second Sex*, in 1970, Simone de Beauvoir already noted the difficulty of tracing the history of women caught in the upheaval of menopause. Welcome to the «grey area.» Between young woman and idealized grandmother, girls lack models in this in-between age. Yet with experience and maturity, they emancipate themselves from social constraints and norms. They know who they are, free themselves from that inner eye that judges them. As essayist Belinda Cannone declares: «Let us be powerful, my sisters, because thus joy of living and fire will be maintained.»

What interests me about *The Unwomanly Face of War* is showing the construction of a collective through the ignored journeys of these women. By staging the testimonies of women who fought in yesterday's war, I try to question the condition of women, but also the place of women, children, and men affected by today's wars. To replay them each evening in the theater, to re-summon their words, is to give them life again through all their singularity and touch a form of universality.

«**Women's experience of their bodies is still too often unheard.**»

Claire Simon



After the October Revolution, Soviet women obtained the right to vote in 1917 along with equal rights with men, leading to major reforms, notably the authorization of abortion in 1920. The women's department of the Communist Party developed an original approach extending socialist feminism and aimed at changing women's place in the new Soviet society. Marginalized even before the beginning of Stalinist repression, this movement was short-lived, and Soviet dogma would be that the «women's question» had been resolved in the USSR, in Stalin's own terms.

In contemporary Russia, feminism is one of the few opposition movements not to have been destroyed by the waves of persecution led by Vladimir Putin's government. Dozens of militant feminist groups are active throughout the country and call on feminists worldwide to unite against the military aggression launched by Vladimir Putin's government.



Scenography: a communal home

"We are community folks. We share everything."

By deciding to turn them into a theater show, I have to find how these war memories can be told collectively. Therefore, I must find a common place.

After the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), the government decided that citizens would live together and created communal apartments by requisitioning private homes or by reorganizing state apartments into which local authorities crammed as many households as the apartment had bedrooms. Residents shared the kitchen and bathrooms. Due to the very large number of deaths and disappearances during the war, such a measure was not strictly necessary. Under the Soviet regime, housing was most often free or low-rent; it called on the people to combat the bourgeois way of life, which represented an obstacle to communism.

Daily life in communal apartments was strictly regulated by a set of rules. Each resident had only about thirty minutes per day to use the bathroom. During these few minutes, some had to bathe their children, wash themselves and their clothes. There was even a special schedule for drying clothes. Laundry was mostly hung in the bathroom and kitchen.

There could be up to fifteen rooms in a *kommunalka*, each housing a family. One can imagine the chaos that reigned in the kitchen! There were several burners as well as tables. Voices and the whistling of stoves formed an enormous racket, permanent steam escaped from the cooker, and the entire apartment was bathed in a mixture of different smells.

In the 1970s, more and more people began to have their own apartments and left the *kommunalki*, but others still lived there, notably former female combatants.

It is a gateway, a corridor between interior and exterior, between stolen youth and adulthood, between private and social life, between reality and memory, between testimony and imagination, between yesterday and today.

"The history of the USSR, its ideology, its people, its human behaviors that often perplex us are reflected in these apartments, when they are not their product."

Like a film set

Built entirely from recycled frames from former productions (Comédie Française and previous shows) and furnished with props and furniture also recycled (stock from the Odéon – Théâtre de l'Europe and Théâtre Gérard Philipe), the space resembles a film set with its visible stands and projectors.

On stage, a corridor in the background, then a large chaotic kitchen with a cold, neutral appearance, lit by a large double window and rows of laundry drying on separate lines according to which family they belong to. Stage right, a corner of a white-tiled bathroom, lit by a bare bulb, and stage left a small room with a bed and dining corner.

The space can both play with cinematic codes and project us into the 1970s Soviet era, or be completely stripped bare to reveal the artifice of today's reconstruction set, playing with theatrical codes.



Adaptation: from Testimonies to Stage

RECONSTRUCTING ORALITY

The challenge of adaptation is to work on life and the desire to live, not on war. We must recompose a story from these pieces of lived destinies to build a fragmented fiction in ten life journeys.

Svetlana Alexievich's voices come to us from the extreme, from the depths of human experience, bordered by the unspeakable, and they call for theater. We must assemble all these monologues, all these solitary voices, to form a collective body in dialogue.

The adaptation begins ahead of rehearsals, with three heads: Florence Seyvos, screenwriter and writer; Julie André, actress and artistic collaborator; and myself, director and scenographer. Florence is responsible for the literature and dramaturgy, Julie for the actors and the transition to theater, and I for the scenic transposition, notably the development of the set, which is done in parallel. We have already worked on these same bases for adaptations of Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Eight Hours Don't Make a Day*, and Frederick Wiseman's *Welfare*. This collective organization aims to create from the original work a true theatrical version.

Women's war has its own language. Svetlana Alexievich's journalistic work is based on oral testimonies, but the way these words are assembled is completely reconstructed by the author to establish her own literary dramaturgy. We move from pure journalistic work to very deep poetic work. Each testimony will be scrupulously studied according to its identity, theme, war professions, singularity, then a deconstruction of the general framework will operate, and a recomposition phase will begin by breaking the isolation of sequences and reconstructing an overall structure. This new editing phase will aim to represent the work by sheltering it «under a new skin» to make it an original version. Our obsession remains that the author's work is never distorted but also not «imitated.» We must be in line with the original work while taking into account that theatrical representation requires a transformation of the original material.

Documents are living beings; they must lead to change along with the progress of work over the course of rehearsals. We must be able to endlessly draw something from them. Those who tell their stories will not only be witnesses but actresses and creators.

Speech will be the main character of our production and our true object of study. Our adaptation process rests entirely on orality and its specificities, with what these women say, what they don't say, and especially how they take the floor.

I deeply believe in imperfection, hence this approach to adaptation that consists of keeping only the very essence of scenes to privilege the moment over the story. Not to give the audience how it happened, but what the individual experienced, to make it a sensible experience on stage.

Excerpt

We girls from the front have known our share of trials. Quite a few of them after the war, because we then had to face another war. Also atrocious. The men abandoned us. Did not protect us. At the front, it was different. You're there crawling... a shell fragment flies, or a bullet... The guys watch out: "Get down, sister!" Someone shouts that and at the same time falls on you, covers you with his body. And the bullet is for him... He is dead or wounded. I was saved like this three times.

The children's stores that sell war toys... Planes, tanks... Who had such an idea? It turns my soul... I never bought, never gave war toys to children. Neither to mine nor to others'. Once, someone brought to our house a little fighter plane and a plastic machine gun... I immediately threw them in the trash... Because human life is such a gift... A sublime gift...

You know what idea we all had throughout the war? We dreamed: "Ah! guys, if only we could live until then... How happy people will be after the war! How happy and beautiful the life they will know will be! Humans, after suffering so much, will have pity on each other. They will love each other. Humanity will be transformed."

And yet, nothing has changed. Nothing. We continue to hate and kill each other. For me, this is the most incomprehensible thing...

I teach history. I am an old teacher. During my career, history has already been rewritten three times. I have taught it from three different textbooks... I am afraid that our life too will be rewritten. For us, in our place. Better that I tell it myself... We ourselves... Don't speak for us and don't judge us...

But who will take over? What will remain after us?

—

Tamara, guards sergeant, stretcher-bearer

Rehearsals

Our rehearsals begin with self-managed collective work that serves as the genesis of our rehearsals; they symbolize the intimate journey to be made between us and the reference work: how will reality become fiction?

And then, as in documentary film-making, where one investigates extensively before sorting and editing the collected material, I rehearse enormously. Each day, we test a study where I expect the actresses to take power, a dispossession. I then position myself more as observer, analyst, which allows the actresses to collectively assert themselves in the creation. They play the embryo of the production, and day after day, this embryo develops. Not from a pre-established mechanical construction but according to a daily roadmap of group attempts. I am included, even immersed in this pregnancy. I know and don't know where I'm going. I await a manifestation whose signs I now know perfectly how to recognize. I await the metamorphosis like Louis Malle in *Vanya on 42nd Street*. Then I take the floor again.

Centered on the performer and the present moment of representation, our theater tends to demythologize everyone's place and to valorize the actor's status by defending the idea of a collective theatrical gesture. Supporting this notion of dependence and common investment in staging opens a form of infinity. The gesture constantly mutates, which also forces me to accept its imperfections.

I want to build with the team a common dramaturgy that addresses the place each character will have, will take. I insist on porosity between fiction and the present moment. The notion of reality remains linked to a form of theatricality, and if there is in my identity a dimension that resembles a cinematic gesture, I affirm, on the other hand, a very theatrical aesthetic.

In my stagings, which are silent, without demonstration, the stage is in direct contact with the world. While avoiding naturalism, it is about giving the impression that everything happens live. These are sequence shots that allow continuous play of the actresses together on stage, which induces a different connection to time. It is this vertigo of the instantaneous that I seek in my directing work, day after day... The oral material offered by *The Unwomanly Face of War* means that taking the floor gives these women a social and civic condition. By speaking, they make their stories and those of all wars no longer invisible.



Svetlana Alexievitch

Author

"I have three homes: my Belarusian land, my father's homeland where I have lived all my life, Ukraine, my mother's homeland where I was born, and the great Russian culture..."

Svetlana Alexievich was born on May 31, 1948 into a family of teachers in western Ukraine. She first worked as an educator and history and German teacher, then began a career as a journalist in a rural newspaper. Her first book, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, a collection of testimonies from female veterans of the Second World War, was published in 1985 and caused huge controversy. The work was deemed as «unpatriotic, naturalistic, degrading» and amounting to high treason. Supported by Mikhail Gorbachev, millions of copies were sold nevertheless.

Also published in 1985, *Last Witnesses*, the war seen by women and men who, at the time, were children. *Boys in Zinc* (1990), a collection of testimonies from Soviet soldiers sent to fight in Afghanistan, was a new scandal followed by a trial. *Enchanted by Death* (1993), about the suicides which followed the fall of the USSR, was published before *Chernobyl Prayer: a Chronicle of the Future* (1997) and is still banned in Belarus today. *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets* (2013), about the end of the USSR and what followed, was awarded the 2013 Médicis Prize. In 2015, Svetlana Alexievich was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

She took an active part in the Belarusian revolution of 2020, which was triggered by the last presidential election fraudulently won by Alexander Lukashenko. Threatened with arrest, she was forced to seek exile in Berlin where she currently resides.

Her books are always on the side of the individual against the *raison d'état*. In this respect, they are radically incompatible with Soviet ideology, but also with the modern Russia ideology.



Julie Deliquet

Artistic Director

After studying cinema and completing her training at the Conservatoire de Montpellier and the Studio-Théâtre d'Asnières, Julie Deliquet continued her studies at the École internationale de théâtre Jacques Lecoq. She founded the In Vitro collective in 2009 and presented Jean-Luc Lagarce's *Derniers Remords avant l'oubli* (2nd part of the trilogy "From the 1970s to the present day...") as part of the Young Directors competition at the Théâtre 13, where she received the audience award. In 2011, she created Brecht's *La Noce* (1st part of the trilogy) at the Théâtre de Vanves and then at the CentQuatre as part of the Festival Impatience, followed in 2013 by *Nous sommes seuls maintenant*, a collective creation and the 3rd part of the trilogy. The trilogy was revived in full at the Théâtre de la Ville and at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe – Centre dramatique national de Saint-Denis, as part of the Festival d'Automne 2014.

In 2015, she directed *Gabriel(le)* for the "Adolescence et territoire(s)" project at the Odéon – Théâtre de l'Europe, and created *Catherine et Christian (fin de partie)*, the epilogue to the trilogy, at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe for the Festival d'Automne 2015. In September 2016, she directed *Vania* after Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* at the Comédie-Française. She created *Mélancolie(s)* in October 2017 after Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and *Ivanov* at the Théâtre de Lorient, CDN de Bretagne, subsequently revived at the Théâtre de la Bastille for the Festival d'Automne 2017.

In 2019, Julie Deliquet created *Fanny et Alexandre* after Ingmar Bergman's screenplay at the Comédie-Française, and directed a short film, *Violetta*, as part of the "3rd scene" program of the Paris Opera, released in cinemas during the pandemic under the title *Celles qui chantent* alongside films by Sergei Loznitsa, Karim Moussaoui, and Jafar Panahi. This film was to be presented in the Official Selection at the 2020 Cannes Film Festival.

In autumn 2019, she created *Un conte de Noël* after Arnaud Desplechin at the Comédie de Saint-Étienne – CDN, subsequently revived at the Odéon – Théâtre de l'Europe for the Festival d'Automne 2019. Julie Deliquet served as patron of the 29th cohort of the École supérieure d'art dramatique de la Comédie de Saint-Étienne, creating with them a stage-writing on the set piece, *Le ciel bascule*, in June 2020.

In 2020, Julie Deliquet took up her position as director of the Théâtre Gérard Philipe – Centre dramatique national de Saint-Denis. In 2021, she created Fassbinder's *Eight Hours Don't Make a Day* at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe and co-directed in 2022 *Fille(s) de* alongside Lorraine de Sagazan, Leïla Anis and the actresses of the In Vitro collective. That same year, she created with the Troupe of the Comédie-Française, *Jean-Baptiste, Madeleine, Armande and the others...* from Molière, Salle Richelieu. In July 2023, she created *Welfare* after the film by Frederick Wiseman at the Festival d'Avignon in the Cour d'Honneur of the Palais des Papes, and in December 2023 *Une nuit invisible nous enveloppe*, the graduation production of the 2023 cohort of the Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique – PSL. In May 2025, she created *The Unwomanly Face of War* after Svetlana Alexievich's book, a choral performance driven by women's voices. Created for the opening of the 39th edition of the Printemps des Comédiens festival, the production is now continuing its tour. In July 2026, Julie will create *Oiseau*, based on the novel *Impossible Farewells* by Han Kang, as a performance-reading in the Cour d'Honneur of the Palais des Papes at the Avignon Festival.

On March 6, 2026, Julie Deliquet took up her position as director of La Colline – National Theatre.

On Tour

- **Théâtre-Sénart — Scène nationale - Lieusaint**
3rd-5th November
- **Théâtre Firmin Gémier / Patrick Devedjian / L'Azimut - Antony**
19th & 20th November
- **Théâtre de l'Union — Centre dramatique national du Limousin,**
24th-26th November
- **Comédie de Colmar — Centre national Grand Est Alsace**
3rd & 4th December
- **Le Carreau — Scène nationale de Forbach et de l'Est mosellan**
8th December
- **La Comédie de Béthune**
16th & 17th December
- **Mixt — Terrain d'arts en Loire-Atlantique — Nantes**
5th-7th January
- **Les Quinconces et l'Espal — Scène nationale du Mans**
14th & 15th January
- **La Coursive — Scène nationale de La Rochelle**
20th & 21st January
- **Le Quai — Centre dramatique national Angers**
26th & 27th January
- **Théâtre d'Angoulême — Scène nationale**
3rd & 4th February
- **tnba - Théâtre national Bordeaux Aquitaine**
9th-12th February
- **CDNO – Centre dramatique national Orléans**
17th & 18th February
- **Théâtre Romain Rolland - Villejuif**
26th & 27th February
- **Comédie de Valence — Centre dramatique national Drôme-Ardèche**
3rd & 4th March
- **Théâtre Olympia – Centre dramatique national de Tours**
9th-11th March
- **Espace Michel-Simon – Noisy-le-Grand**
18th & 19th March
- **La Criée – Théâtre national de Marseille — Centre dramatique national,**
25th-27th March
- **Centre dramatique national de Normandie-Rouen**
1st & 2nd April
- **La Colline — théâtre national**
6th-28th May
- **Théâtre national de Strasbourg**
1st-11th June



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