

BACK TO BACK THEATRE'S ANNOUNCEMENT AS THE 2026 FESTIVAL D'AUTOMNE 'PORTRAIT' ARTIST CONFIRMS THE COMPANY AS A LEADER ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

Back to Back Theatre is delighted to announce that **The Festival d'Automne à Paris** has this week confirmed the company as the featured **'Portrait' artist for 2026**, marking the first ever 'Portrait' presentation of an Australian artist in the festival.

This outstanding opportunity represents a significant moment for Australian contemporary performance and recognises Back to Back Theatre as a leader on the global stage, building on recent honours, including the **International Ibsen Award (2022)** and the **Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in Theatre at the Venice Biennale (2024)**.

The Festival d'Automne à Paris is one of the world's most important contemporary festivals with an artistic standard that makes it a global reference. Taking place from September to January, it presents over eighty events in some sixty partner venues across Paris and Île-de-France attracting audiences of around two hundred and fifty thousand from across Europe and the globe.

Each year the Festival presents "Portraits" of outstanding figures on the international scene.

The selected artist is showcased through the presentation of multiple works across an extended residency. These 'Portraits' become a festival within themselves, offering a unique opportunity for deep exploration and immersion into an artist's body of work, and insight into their creative practice and evolution. Past 'Portrait' artists have included Robert Wilson (USA), William Forsythe (Germany), Romeo Castellucci (Italy), Unsuik Chin (Korea), Krystian Lupa (Poland), Irvine Arditti & Quatuor Arditti (UK), and Lucinda Childs (USA). Australia's Back To Back Theatre has now joined this list.

Announcing the selection, the **Festival d'Automne à Paris Director Francesca Corrona said:**

The Portraits are unique opportunities to enter deeply into the world of a singular artistic voice. In the case of Back to Back Theatre, an extraordinary collective imagination. Presenting five works by Back to Back Theatre across four venues and public spaces feels both essential and overdue. This Portrait fills a real gap in the French cultural landscape, offering Parisian audiences a rare and ambitious encounter with a company whose work has profoundly transformed contemporary performance. From works created in 2005 to the open rehearsals of Neanderthal, their future creation, nearly 12 000 spectators will experience a body of work that moves between theatre and public space, and that speaks powerfully to the communities and realities of our time.

The **Federal Arts Minister, the Honorable Tony Burke** said:

I love it when the world honours one of Australia's finest theatre companies. Back to Back deserve every recognition they receive.

Back to Back Ensemble said:

In Geelong and other cultural epicentres of Australia we have some kind of fame but in Paris we are going to be on some pretty big stages that will put us in front of new audience members. We might feel a little bit nervous but we will remind ourselves that we have been touring the world with Back to Back for two decades and we are really good at making theatre. We will trust our instincts and know

that what matters to us in the world will matter to audiences in Paris or wherever. We look forward to performing at Festival D'Automne.

Bruce Gladwin, Artistic Director said:

Presenting 5 works at Festival D'Automne is an amazing opportunity to see the catalogue of Back to Back Theatre's creative practice spanning twenty one years. Retrospectives are usually the bastion of the most respected cinema, music and the visual arts, so as a theatre company it feels exciting and humbling to be bestowed with this Paris Portrait. The invitation is a tribute to the long list of artists who have fed Back to Back's creative fire since its inception in 1987.

Realising the delivery of 5 theatrical works across eight weeks will require stamina, logistical precision and refined artistry. Our ensemble of actors and their collaborators are ready for the challenge. As the Artistic Director I am thrilled and honoured to be part of the experience. "

Rose Hiscock, Chair of Back to Back Theatre said:

We are delighted to share Back to Back Theatre's distinctive voice with the world. This is an exciting opportunity for the company and our audiences - we are grateful to Festival d'Automne and the many supporters who underpin our work.

As the 2026 Portrait artist, Back to Back Theatre will take up residence in Paris for 8 weeks across November and December, presenting a substantial program of activity including:

- FOOD COURT at Odéon Théâtre de l'Europe, season (14 performances)
- SMALL METAL OBJECTS at Canopée des Halles (5 performances)
- GANESH VERSUS THE THIRD REICH at Théâtre de la Cité Internationale (5 performances)
- RADIAL at Ménagerie de Verre and LaBriqueterie (2 new film outcomes)
- NEANDERTHAL: Histoire(s) du Théâtre VIII (creative development) at the Odéon (2 weeks)
- Masterclasses, workshops, and public discussions

Ahead of its Paris Season, Ganesh Versus the Third Reich will also be performed for a limited season with University of Melbourne Arts and Culture (UMAC) at the Union Theatre, June 17 – 19.

About Back to Back Theatre

Based in the Victorian regional centre of Geelong, Back to Back Theatre is widely recognised as an Australian theatre company of national and international significance. The company is driven by an ensemble of actors who identify as having an intellectual disability or as neurodivergent and is considered one of Australia's most important cultural exporters.

From 2009 to 2026, the company has undertaken 88 national and 147 international seasons of its work. This includes presentations and screenings at the world's pre-eminent contemporary arts festivals and venues such as the Edinburgh International Festival, London's V&A Museum and the Barbican, Vienna Festival, Holland Festival and Theater der Welt, the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, the Public Theater in New York, Festival Tokyo, West Kowloon Cultural District Authority in Hong Kong, and Buenos Aires International Festival.

Since 2009, the company has delivered community and education workshops to over 34,000 participants, with a focus on artistic excellence and inclusive practice.

Back to Back Theatre has received 22 national and international awards including the International Ibsen Award, a Helpmann Award for Best Australian Work, an Edinburgh International Festival Herald Angel Critics' Award, two Age Critics' Awards, a New York Bessie and the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Group Award for our long-standing contribution to the development of Australian theatre. In 2015, Artistic Director Bruce Gladwin received the Australia Council for the Arts' Inaugural Award for Outstanding Achievement in Theatre. The ensemble was awarded the 'Best Ensemble' in the 2019 Green Room Awards.

<https://backtobacktheatre.com/>

Download footage of Back to Back and their work [here](#).

Back to Back images are available [here](#).

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