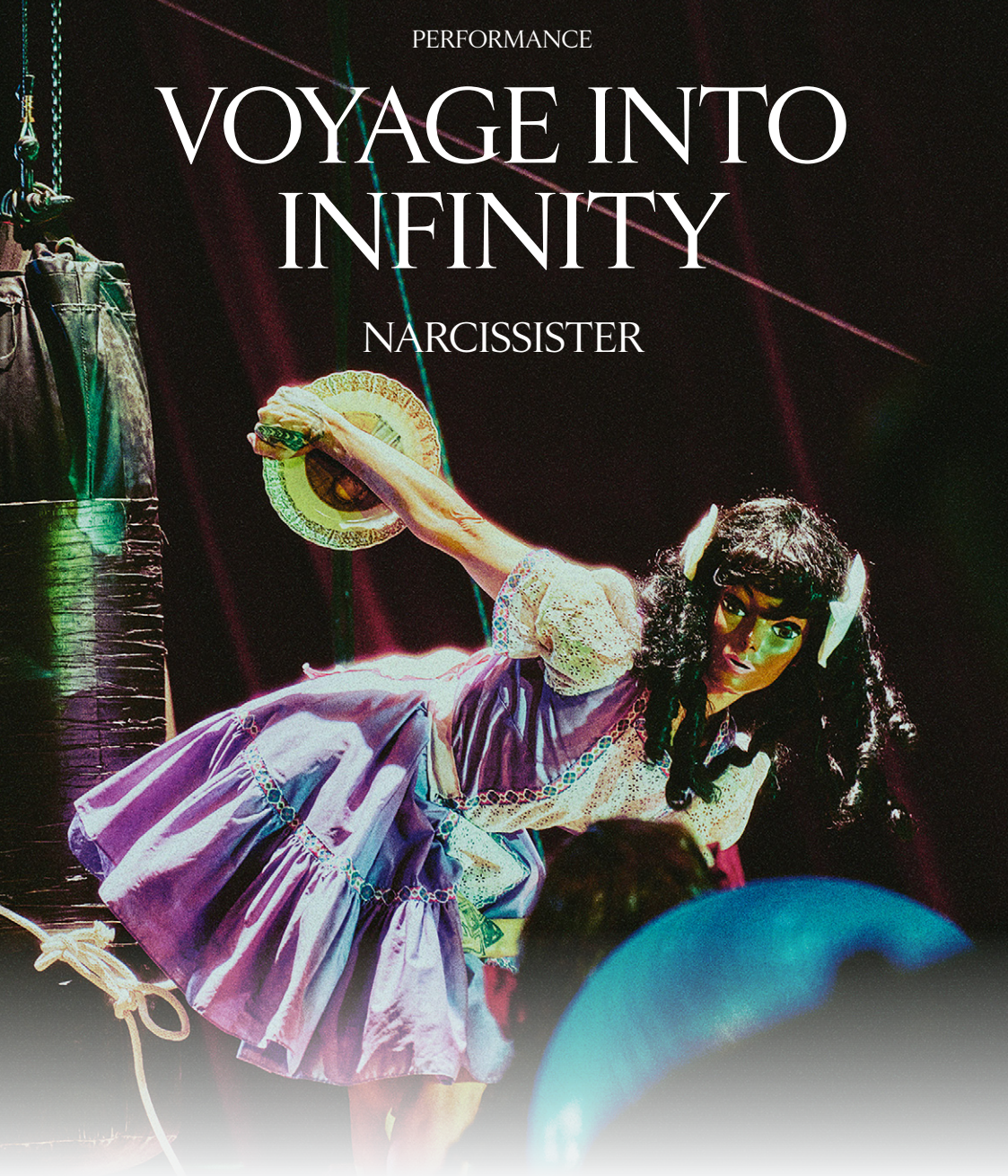


PERFORMANCE

VOYAGE INTO INFINITY

NARCISSISTER



FREE
REPUBLIC OF
VIENNA
FESTIVAL

20–22 May
Halle G
MuseumsQuartier

US performance star Narcissister's latest work is centred around an installation as she brings an oversized chain reaction machine made of recycled everyday objects to the stage. Three masked performers are driving the action. A falling discus thrower (pin-up boy of Nazi propaganda), a marble run that goes up in flames, vaginal fireworks are elements of a choreographed game about cause and effect. In contrast to the inspirational film *The Way Things Go* (1987) by Peter Fischli and David Weiss, which covered up the male interference (i. e., editing) in such a game, Narcissister is foregrounding the female, partly nude performers as driving forces. Equipped with emblematic, doll-like Narcissister masks, they become projection spaces and provide an eerie commentary on entrenched beauty ideals and the objectification of women. *Voyage Into Infinity* is humour, critique and visual spectacle rolled into one: raw energy and punk spirit.

Duration
approx. 70 mins


barrier-free access

Q&A
21 May, following
the performance

‘I don’t aim to make
provocative work. I aim to
make work that challenges
conventional notions of the
body – of women’s bodies, of
sexuality, of shame.’

NARCISSISTER

Direction, Performance Narcissister **Additional Narcissister performers** effie bowen, dorchel haqq
Music Holland Andrews **Live-band** Philipp Quehenberger, Christian Ingemann, Didi Kern
Pyrotechnics artist Alex Podger **Assosicate director** Reginald Robeson **Choreography, Movement
direction** Wanda Gala **Technical director, Assistant lighting designer** Robin Jossy **Stage management**
Trang Leslie Huynh **Lighting designer** Michael Zumbrun **Costume design** Narcissister, Karen Boyer
Assistant technical direction, Assistant stage management Booth McGowan
Tour produced in partnership with ArKtype / Thomas O. Kriegsmann

A **commission** by Pioneer Works (2024), curated by Gabriel Florenz.

executed by the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna
World Premiere September 2024, Pioneer Works (New York)

SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS

AN INTERVIEW WITH NARCISSISTER

Why did you title this piece after [...] a song of the band *Bad Brains*? How do you see the project relating to that song?

The song came to me unpredictably, as happens often with my work. I have a bunch of music loaded onto my laptop, and I was working in my studio with the music on shuffle and that song came up. I was reminded of how epic the intro and the outro are. It struck me as something that would be a really strong element for the work, and I was inspired to incorporate the song. When I was thinking of a title for the piece, the title of that song started to become more and more an anchor for the work. A couple more signifiers have emerged in the process of making the work. One is that, in preliminary research about this song, I learned that the singer of *Bad Brains* has made some homophobic statements, and as I have been playing the song and incorporating it into the piece, people have shared different stories that backed that up. I am interested in that, because we also have a statue in the piece that I found in a garden centre on Long Island [...]. When I started to research the statue, I discovered that it's a replica of a statue that Hitler owned and kept as some kind of symbol of the beauty and the potential of the Aryan race. There

are also pyrotechnics in the show, and we're incorporating something called the Catherine wheel. Historically, those wheels were used to torture women. I've just picked things that I've liked, whether it's the *Bad Brains* song, the statue or the visual of a pyrotechnic Catherine wheel, and then these other layers of meaning have emerged. We are reframing these symbols or signifiers through their inclusion in the work.

As far as the title goes, the piece is about many things and incorporates many of the themes that Narcissister has done for a long time, around issues of race, identity, femininity, feminism, sexual expression and free, self-loving eroticism. Something that my project has started to incorporate are questions around ageing for women – loving, accepting and honouring that passage. In a subtle way, and in the mix with all the other issues I just mentioned, *Voyage Into Infinity* seems an apt title for a piece that includes an exploration of ageing.

You are also referencing Fischli and Weiss's *The Way Things Go*. What attracted you to that video in particular?

I encountered that work as a younger artist, still dreaming of what my singular vision might be. I remember seeing that

piece and being struck by it – that that could be considered art – and fascinated and charmed by it, and just excited by the virtuosity of it. It stayed with me and expanded, in my mind, what could be considered art or framed as a work of art. Since I was a child, I have been very curious about the way things work. I would climb on top of the washer and dryer in our house to reach my dad's tool shelves and just loved poking around and seeing what was there, pulling tools out and building things. And my costumes have emerged from these interests. I learned to sew at a very young age, and my costumes are lo-fi feats of engineering, where I've had to learn how to make one thing segue very quickly into another thing and then another thing. It all seems like a similar practice to a Rube Goldberg machine, or to what was created in *The Way Things Go*.

More recently, I have been reframing the theatrical props that I've been making for a long time for my solo performances as participatory sculptures. Creating a monumental Rube Goldberg machine – installation, participatory sculpture, spectacle and performance stayed with me as a really juicy idea. [...]

Your performances always involve elements of sleight-of-hand, magic and spectacle, from the mask and elaborate costumes to doubled figures and more. How do you think about the veracity of the illusion? Is it important for viewers to be surprised or deceived in some way, or do you want them to also be aware of the artifice of what they are seeing?

Almost all the works I've made incorporate some aspect of lo-fi illusion or a DIY magic trick. That's something that's always been fascinating to me. It looks improbable, but somebody has figured out how to fool us, to create this suspension of disbelief, and there's a virtuosity and incredible skill in that. It's this way of thinking that I have been excited about since I was very young, and have done my best to incorporate in my work: believing that we can shift people's perceptions of something. We think we know what it is, but it's really not at all what we thought.

That destabilising experience of the reveal – I'm excited about the skill required to pull these things off and the virtuosity of it. I somehow have the kind of brain that can think about how to create these magic effects, or these illusions. One of my favourite things to watch is that TV show *Magic's Biggest Secrets Finally Revealed*. Even when they show you how they did it, it's still incredible.

And when you layer onto this sleight of hand and this destabilising creation of a world that isn't really the world that you think it is, the other issues in my work – around womanhood, race, ageing or just general questions of identity – it becomes very rich for me and very true to what our experiences are. I'm making it more literal by creating this feeling of illusion or magic or instability through the visuals. And doing it in a way that's a little bit rough and shows the seams, and the work behind it adds even more to that complexity.

You are working with a group of fellow performers for this piece. How do you approach that process? Do you have a script for them to follow, or is the performance developed collaboratively?

I've incorporated extra Narcissisters in my work almost since the beginning, so the performers who are in this piece with me have been in other works of mine, some of them for quite a long time. I've been creating the work with the builders [...] at Pioneer Works. We've been setting a lot of the moments that incorporate performers on me. And then relatively recently, the performers joined, and I've been teaching them how to interact with the machine. And now that the machine is basically finished, now is the time when the performers are here more intensively and we're discovering not only the things that I found interacting with the machine, but what are things that the other performers can find in interacting with it, what pictures can we create as a group, what's our relationship with the machine as a group? That process is unfolding now. There is a script – I think most Rube Goldberg machines have a script, or the list of steps. And then there's a score that's been created, which is what the performer involvement is about.
[...]

BIOGRAPHY

Narcissister is a Brooklyn-based artist and performer. Masked and merkin-ed, she works at the intersection of art, dance, and activism in a range of media including live performance, sculpture, collage, film, and video. She presents work worldwide in museums, galleries, festivals, and nightclubs. Among other awards, she won “Best Use of a Sex Toy” at Good Vibrations Erotic Film Festival, a Bessie nomination for the theatrical performance *Organ Player*, and Creative Capital and United States Artists Awards. Her first feature film *Narcissister Organ Player*, a hybrid performance/doc about her complex family history, premiered at Sundance 2018. Her activist short film *Narcissister Breast Work*, premiered at Sundance 2020 and won a Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary Short at Outfest 2021. *Voyage Into Infinity*, a large-scale performance commission, had its world premiere at Pioneer Works in 2024 and was presented at NYU Skirball during the 2026 Under The Radar Festival. Narcissister is a 2025 recipient of an Anonymous Was A Woman Award and of a 2025 Sir Peter Shaffer Charitable Foundation commission to develop a new theatrical piece at Playwrights Horizons in New York. Her sculpture *Almost All of My Dead Mother's Beautiful Things* is part of the touring Cult of Beauty exhibition currently at Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona through October 2026.

In 2017, Narcissister's performance and video works were presented in Vienna as part of *House of Realness*. With *Voyage Into Infinity*, Narcissister will appear for the first time at the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) with a full-length performance.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

Owner, Editor and Publisher Wiener Festwochen GesmbH, Lehnárgasse 11/1/6, 1060 Wien, T + 43 1 589 22 0, festwochen@festwochen.at | www.festwochen.at **General Management** Milo Rau, Artemis Vakianis **Artistic Direction** (responsible for the content) Milo Rau, **Artistic Direction Text references** p.3: Excerpt from an interview with Narcissister and Kristin Prim for *Noir*, source: <https://noirpourfemmes.fr/inconversation/narcissister> **Picture Credits** Cover © The Tinfoil Biter **Produced by** Print Alliance HAV Produktions GmbH (Bad Vöslau) **Design** SIRENE Studio **Layout** Valerie Eccli

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