

# Frames

in situ (2025)

not/  
standing  
/alexander  
vantournhout  
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# introduction

In his famous essay *Parergon*, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida asks the reader the following question: “Suppose a burglar were to steal only the frames of the artworks in your home, and not the artworks themselves. What would change in your dealings with art?”

In his new production **Frames** (2025), Alexander Vantournhout turns this thought-experiment inside out: what if the burglar takes away the painting but not the frame? What does this frame still mean and do? What is its meaning and which potential does it hold? Is it a ‘parergon’ - a secondary, ancillary element - or just a structural element of the artwork?

*Frames* explores the theatre element that is commonly taken for granted, the element that makes theatre possible in the first place: the frame shaping the spectator’s gaze. The performance builds upon theatrical research explored in previous works like *Foreshadow* (2023), which brought the theatre’s back wall closer to the audience, and *Through the Grapevine* (2020), which challenged the proscenium theatre with a vantage point trapezium or trompe l’oeil floor.

Like *SCREWS* (2019), this new production invites the audience, outside the theatre walls, on a journey along 3 to 4 pavilions, in this case from one ‘frame’ to the next. These intentional viewing portals are strategically positioned in the public space, from a circular to a frontal and bifrontal audience set-up.

Alexander Vantournhout’s work has always been thoroughly cross-disciplinary, bridging the realms of dance, circus, and theater. *Frames* represents an expansion and an explicit approach to the world of visual arts, drawing inspiration from visual arts framing. Additionally, the scenography of the frames and the environment plays a crucial role, rendering the work almost architectural in nature.

1. *Foreshadow* (2023), photo by Bart Grietens
2. *Through the Grapevine* (2020), photo by Bart Grietens
3. *SCREWS* (2019), photo by Bart Grietens



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# frame as playground

Frames bring limitations. In Alexander Vantournhout's artistic universe however, limitation is never a negative but always a rich source of new possibilities. Visual frames both distinguish and connect an 'inside' and an 'outside'; they help the audience concentrate their gaze on what is shown; they make elements visible or withdraw them from our view (think of the 'off-screen' in cinema or the 'off-stage' in theater); the theatrical frame forces the director to consider sightlines, and so on. All these aspects are potential parameters to play with.

The frames will also have a choreographic impact: they restrict some movements and enable other unsuspected ones. Thus, a frame can become an 'agrès'. This term refers to instruments used in gymnastics and circus, such as a springboard, rings, a banquette, or a trapeze. The latter not only 'frames' the audience's gaze; it primarily enables the circus act itself. Action and frame are intertwined in such a way that they form a unit of action.

In *Frames*, the frames become instruments on which performers can hang, grab onto, on which they can lean, which enabling planking, etc. Vantournhout pays special attention to the material and shape of the frames. Through unusual materials and subtle distortions, certain references (such as the pedestal referring to sculpture or the banquette to the circus) can be abstracted. Additionally, they create a new perspective on the body, as certain body parts will often fall just outside the frame and will be hidden from the viewer's eye. What impact does the gaze have on a body when, for example, the feet or the head cannot be seen?

If a theatrical frame creates a 'fourth wall', with performers behaving as if the audience is not there, do you break that wall at a certain point? How do you organize the mise-en-corps within the visual frame as a choreographer? Do you create a flat two-dimensional image or do you create spatial depth? How do you position the audience in relation to the frame?

'Framing' is always a political act through the play with perception: what is made visible and what remains invisible? How inclusive or exclusive is the image? Who or what is worthy of being noticed? And above all: who determines the frame, the perspective, and thus the perception? How we see the world around us influences how we interact with it. Art can critically point out the power of framing or propose alternative frames.

# exploring within different frames

## window

We could define architecture as the organization or 'choreography' of interior and exterior space. The primary structural link between inside and outside is the window. In addition to ventilation and lighting, one of its important functions is framing. A window is comparable to the frame around a painting. It turns the environment into a landscape, a view, an image. This visual aspect is also found etymologically: the Latin word for window is 'specularia,' a word referring to 'looking.' In Old English, it was referred to as an 'eyethurl,' literally meaning 'eyehole.'

Le Corbusier once described the function of a room divider as something that should obstruct the view of a constant and overwhelming environment. Paradoxically, that obstruction can of course enhance the impact and meaning of a landscape.

What determines the focus? What comes to the foreground and what to the background? How do a frame and a dancing body relate to each other? Do we choose a frontal or bi-frontal audience setup, making the 'inside' for one viewer the 'outside' for another?

- 4. Le Corbusier, *Sainte Marie de la Tourette*
- 5. Le Corbusier, *villa by Lake Geneva*
- 6. *Frames (2025)*, photo by Bart Grietens



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# skylight

How often do we take the time to gaze at the sky? We know the names of so many pop stars... But how many stellar constellations can we name? And how many cloud formations, such as cirrus, cumulus, or stratus? The American artist James Turrell created several sky rooms where an audience can look at the sky through a roof-frame.

In *Frames*, Vantournhout also directs the viewer's gaze to the sky, inviting spectators to rediscover it. Clouds pass as in a Magritte painting, planes leave traces in this playground,... the background of this sky choreography is in constant motion.

What possibilities does such a setup create for acrobatics and its play with gravity? What happens if the fourth wall - a ceiling in this case - is broken, and performers descend from above into the audience? How does an audience perceive a dance that takes place - quite literally - above their heads?



7. *Frames* (2025), photo by Bart Grietens  
8. James Turrell, *PS1*  
9. *Frames* (2025), photo by Bart Grietens (next page)



## banquette/ring

The circular audience setup seems the most natural. People naturally tend to gather in a circle around a performance in public space, a particular situation, or an accident. Even ancient outdoor theaters were circular, albeit not 360 degrees around, as is the case with circus tents.



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Historically, a banquette was not a show attribute but a separation between the audience seating and the circus ring. The wooden ring structure only became an agrès when an acrobat stood on it to perform a somersault. This marked the beginning of a new circus discipline, the saltimbanques, where the banquette serves as an acrobatic springboard.

In this setup, the spectator becomes somewhat part of the scenography. Spectators watch both the acrobats and the other spectators. By observing others' reactions, one can infer what can be seen from a different perspective. This visual connectedness among spectators creates the feeling that they are experiencing the performance 'frontally' without actually seeing the front themselves. This 'via-viewing' creates a 'democratic' atmosphere that affects both the audience's cohesion and the way of viewing.

# pedestal

A pedestal is a framing element within the context of sculpture - and interesting in relation to the evolution in Vantournhout's oeuvre towards visual arts. A pedestal changes the spatial and visual relationship of a sculpture to a viewer and gives it additional symbolic value. Something similar happens with an elevated theater stage, as found in a classical theater, although such a stage usually results in a frontal rather than a circular audience setup.

In *Frames*, the pedestal will function as a high mini-stage on which acrobats negotiate with gravity alone or together. The stage is too small for two dancers at once, yet they will have to find balance together. Moreover, it creates the possibility of working with an 'underground level,' which creates a whole new space for movement possibilities.

12. *Frames* (2025), photo by Bart Grietens





# sound

When an artist ventures outside the walls of a theater, there are consequences on an auditory level too. Each location comes with its own sounds: the rustling of trees, the honking of cars, the murmurs of passersby,... In *Frames*, montages of pre-recorded sounds - arranged sonorities - will blend with the concrete ambient sounds of the moment. This will bring an element of surprise, alienation, and wonder (the idea is to work with invisible speakers, integrated into the scenography).

Are you hearing real birds or recorded sounds? What happens to your perception when ambient sounds are played that do not match at all with the environment in which the audience finds itself?

# finally

*Frames* simultaneously opens and closes the viewer's gaze. It situates itself outside the walls of a traditional theater, thereby broadening the viewer's perspective, not only on the performance itself but also on the environment in which it unfolds. Unnoticed things become remarkable again within a frame and focus of view. *Frames* directs our attention to those things we often overlook: a specific location, the impact of gravity, the collaboration and negotiation between bodies,...

This openness is countered at the same time by a directive handling of the viewer's gaze towards what happens within the frame of view. By mainly borrowing frames from the visual arts, it simultaneously 'exhibits' performing arts in a new perspective.



13. *Frames (2025)*, photo by Bart Grietens

## video

A first impression of what *Frames* could become can be discovered in [this video](#), the result of the first weeks of research.

# biography

**not standing** was founded by choreographer **Alexander Vantournhout**.

Alexander Vantournhout (Brussels, 1989) studied cyr wheel and juggling at ESAC (Ecole Supérieure des Arts du Cirque) and contemporary dance at P.A.R.T.S. (Performing Arts Research and Training Studios) in Brussels.

Alexander Vantournhout's physical language bears the influences of a varied education and working circumstances. However, it is marked by two constants: his search for the creative and kinetic potential in physical limitation, and the relationship or boundary between performer and object.

2014 marked the premiere of his first piece, *Caprices*, a choreographic solo set to the music of Sciarrino. *Aneckxander* (2015), a second solo, co-created with Bauke Lievens, won the CircusNext Prize, as well as the Young Theatre Prize and the Audience Prize at Theater Aan Zee (Ostend, 2015) and the Aerowaves network. His first duet *Raphael* (2017) was also co-created with Bauke Lievens. In 2018, Alexander Vantournhout created *La Rose en Céramique*, a movement solo that accompanied Scali Delpeyrat's theatrical solo at the Festival d'Avignon. His first piece for four men, *Red Haired Men*, followed shortly afterwards. In *SCREWS*, created in 2019, Alexander Vantournhout guides the audience, accompanied by 4 dancer-acrobats, on a journey of reverberating micro-performances, ranging from short solos and duets to group choreographies. With *Through the Grapevine* (2020), Alexander Vantournhout returns to the duet format. This is his first real duet and is to some extent inspired by the concept of *Aneckxander* (2015). The body is reintroduced in a very pure way and the performance dives into the creative and kinetic potential of physical limitations, a theme that is reflected throughout Alexander Vantournhout's work. In *Contre-jour* (2021) Alexander Vantournhout takes on the role of choreographer for the first time and gives the floor to a group of five performers from various backgrounds: dance, musical, theatre, circus, etc. In 2022 Alexander Vantournhout returns solo on stage with *VanThorhout. Foreshadow*, a project with 8 performers, premiered in 2023 at Julidans in Amsterdam. 2024 marks the premiere of *every\_body*. The new duet marks the next step in his journey to dissect and reinterpret everyday movements, continually challenging and redefining the limits of human physical expression.

*Aneckxander* as well as *SCREWS*, *Through the Grapevine* and *VanThorhout* were selected for het TheaterFestival, the prize for the most outstanding Belgian performances.

Alexander Vantournhout has created two dance films, *Screws & Stones* and *Snakearms*. The latter was selected for het TheaterFestival, NY Segal Film Festival and Cinedans Festival.

Alexander Vantournhout is artist-in-residence at the Kunstencentrum VIERNULVIJVER in Ghent and associate artist of the CENTQUATRE Paris. He is a cultural ambassador of the city of Roeselare and supported by the BNP Paribas Foundation for the development of his projects.



14. Alexander Vantournhout, foto door Bart Grietens

# credits

**Concept & choreography:** Alexander Vantournhout

**Created with and performed by:** Chia-Hung Chung, Axel Guérin, Emmi Väisänen & Alexander Vantournhout

**Dramaturgy:** Sébastien Hendrickx & Rudi Laermans

**Costumes:** Patty Eggerickx (tbc)

**Sound:** tbc

**Rehearsal director:** Esse Vanderbruggen

**Research collaborators:** Charlotte Cétaire, Mélusine Lavinet-Drouet, Petra Steindl & Esse Vanderbruggen

**Tour planning:** Frans Brood Productions

**Company management:** Esther Maas

**Technical coordination:** Bram Vandeghinste

**Production & tourmanagement:** Janne Coonen & Kiki Verschueren

**Communication:** Kiki Verschueren

**Images:** Bart Grietens

**Production:** not standing

**Co-production:** Kunstencentrum VIERNULVIER, Ghent (BE) & more to be announced

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# contact

**Alexander Vantournhout**

Artist  
info@notstanding.com

**Esther Maas**

Company manager  
esther@notstanding.com

**Janne Coonen**

Administration and production  
janne@notstanding.com

**Kiki Verschueren**

Tourmanagement / communication  
kiki@notstanding.com

**Bram Vandeghinste**

Technical coordination  
bram@notstanding.com

**Flore Roggeman - Frans Brood Productions**

Diffusion  
flore@fransbrood.com

**Not Standing vzw**

Beversesteenweg 78  
8800 Roeselare  
BELGIUM  
BTW: BE 0849 019 917

**Website**

<https://notstanding.com>

**Facebook**

<https://www.facebook.com/alexandervantournhoutofficial>

**Instagram**

<https://www.instagram.com/alexandervantournhout/>

**Vimeo**

<https://vimeo.com/user15396321>

**Youtube**

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYJuD22fASxeAqx-mdtyJUw>

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