

The Inverted Realm Explores Human Folly and Hope at the 2026 Edinburgh Festival Fringe

Inspired by Bruegel's Netherlandish Proverbs, the surreal drama explores self-deception, ambition and the search for meaning.

EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND, UNITED KINGDOM, August 14, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Inverted Realm is a visually driven surreal drama in the 2026 Edinburgh Festival Fringe programme at the Ivy Studio, Greenside @ George Street, from 7 to 15 August. Conceived and produced by Xingyun Zhao, the 50-minute production combines physical storytelling, movement, sound and surreal stage imagery to explore how illusion, ambition and habitual ways of thinking can shape an individual's understanding of reality.

Inspired by Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Netherlandish Proverbs, the play follows the Traveller, a driven businessman whose car breaks down on a deserted road. He enters an inverted world of upside-down houses, impossible birds, villagers drawn from proverbs and an elusive Fool who tells him that only the lost can be found.

Within this world, people hoard what they cannot use, fight over scraps, pursue status without purpose and repeat behaviours that appear irrational when viewed from a distance. As the Traveller observes them, their absurdity begins to reflect the assumptions governing his own life.

The inverted world is more than a setting. By removing familiar behaviours from their usual context, the production makes them strange enough to be seen again. Ambition, competition, accumulation and conformity may appear ordinary within everyday life, yet become less certain



A scene from The Inverted Realm at the 2026 Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

when placed inside a world whose logic is visibly distorted.

In this way, *The Inverted Realm* asks not simply why people behave irrationally, but how ideas of what is normal, necessary or successful come to organise a life. As the play develops, the boundary between the ordered world and the inverted one begins to blur.

The production draws on psychological enquiry and Eastern philosophical ideas concerning the relationship between inner life and the surrounding world. Rather than offering a fixed moral, it creates a space in which assumptions can be observed, questioned and reconsidered.

“The piece hopes to encourage people to look inward, reflect on their own lives, and find a sense of meaning and resilience when facing personal and social challenges,” said Xingyun Zhao.

Xingyun Zhao’s background in clinical psychology, together with experience working in a psychiatric hospital, has informed the project’s interest in how people understand and communicate psychological distress. Rather than approaching inner conflict through diagnosis or instruction, the production uses image, humour, character and story to explore perception, uncertainty and self-understanding.

These questions extend beyond individual emotional experience. The work also considers how assumptions about status, scarcity, success and failure shape the way people understand themselves, and how greater awareness of those assumptions may influence their relationships with others and with the wider community.

[Create Abundance Foundation](#), a faith-based charitable organisation registered in Ireland, served as an academic consultant to the project. The Foundation understands abundance as a process



Producer Xingyun Zhao with members of *The Inverted Realm* cast and creative team at the 2026 Edinburgh Festival Fringe.



A performer in *The Inverted Realm* at the 2026 Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

of personal and communal growth grounded in ethical responsibility, reflection, creativity and service to others. This perspective finds a natural connection with the production's enquiry into how people define fulfilment, success and what it means to live well.

Bruegel's *Netherlandish Proverbs* gives these questions a historical dimension. The sixteenth-century painting presents human folly as something embedded within ordinary social life, raising the question of why patterns of competition, excess, conformity and misplaced ambition remain recognisable centuries later.



A scene from *The Inverted Realm* at the 2026 Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

The production does not suggest that ambition, achievement or material life are inherently empty. Instead, it asks what happens when pursuit becomes automatic, when inherited definitions of success cease to be examined and when familiar patterns continue after their meaning has become uncertain.

Its surreal form is central to that enquiry. Physical performance, movement, sound and visual imagery create distance from recognisable behaviour, allowing the familiar to appear unfamiliar. What first seems to belong to an irrational world gradually becomes a mirror through which ordinary life can be reconsidered.

Human folly is therefore not presented simply as something to ridicule or condemn. The work moves from observation towards recognition, and from recognition towards reflection and the possibility of change.

The title carries the same ambiguity. The inverted realm is not simply a world turned upside down. It becomes a way of questioning which world should be regarded as inverted in the first place.

The work leaves that question open. Seeing familiar life from an unfamiliar perspective becomes, instead, a possible beginning for greater awareness, connection and hope.

About The Inverted Realm Project

The Inverted Realm Project brings together theatre and psychological enquiry around questions of self-understanding, human behaviour and emotional wellbeing. Its 2026 Edinburgh Festival

Fringe production reinterprets Bruegel's Netherlandish Proverbs through text, movement, sound and visual storytelling, with a creative team drawn from different cultural and artistic backgrounds.

About Create Abundance Foundation

Create Abundance Foundation is a faith-based charitable organisation registered in Ireland. Its work explores personal and communal growth through ethical responsibility, reflection, creativity and service to others, with public activities spanning contemplative practice, community dialogue, education, publications and cross-cultural exchange.

Media Contact

Press information: info@theinvertedrealm.com

Producer: xingyun@theinvertedrealm.com

Xingyun Zhao

The Inverted Realm

xingyun@theinvertedrealm.com

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