

PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND
GERTRUDE PRESENT

Contact High

*Dance,
dance*

18 JANUARY

Performance Review, Gertrude and the exhibiting artists acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which this project takes place. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging and recognise that sovereignty was never ceded.

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CONTACT HIGH 2024: *Dance, dance*
CURATED BY ANADOR WALSH

This iteration of Contact High, subtitled *Dance, dance* features performances by: Sarah Aiken, Mara Galagher with Andrea Illés and Nelly Clifton, and Harrison Ritchie-Jones.

Dance, dance responds to the increased presence of dance in the visual arts, and is both a celebration of and critical engagement with this medium.

Due to the overwhelming audience response to previous editions of Contact High, this year's performance night will be held at Gertrude, Preston, located at 21-31 High Street, instead of Gertrude Glasshouse.

Piloted in 2022, Contact High is a three-year partnership between Gertrude and Performance Review exploring the transference that occurs between performers and audiences in the gallery. This is the final year of this program.

For the month of January, these three artists have been given full access to Gertrude's galleries to develop, rehearse and workshop new and existing performance works. This period of experimentation will culminate in a public presentation on Thursday 18 January.

Thursday 18 January, 5:30–8:00pm

Harrison Ritchie-Jones, *Cold Tooth*, 2024

Mara Galagher with Andrea Illés and Nelly Clifton, *unnamed work*, 2024

Sarah Aiken, *Body Corp (iteration no.4)*, 2024

Performance Review will publish a report in late 2024 reflecting on our learnings from this program. This report will include artist feedback and make tangible suggestions for improved ways of working with performance in the gallery.

THE SHOW MUST NOT GO ON ANADOR WALSH

I write about *Dance, dance*, the third and final iteration of Contact High, with a heavy heart and a deep sense of conflict. Though I firmly believe in the importance of this program and the works being presented, I want to acknowledge how strange it feels to be making and facilitating art at this moment in time. Despite the supposed function of the black box of the theatre and the white cube of the gallery (the two realms that performance straddles) as neutral framing devices, the work that is presented there is never truly devoid of context. It is always foregrounded by and connected to what is happening in the world beyond these four walls and our experiences – both as performers and audiences – of it. This is particularly so for embodied practices that use the body as a material and site of exchange.

Whilst I want to talk about dance, specifically dance in the gallery, I want to first acknowledge the genocide in Palestine and the privilege inherent in being able to write about and show art from the safety of Naarm, while tens of thousands of Palestinians are being killed and those who survive are without access to food, water, electricity or healthcare. As do I want to acknowledge that this is an escalation of Israel's ongoing colonisation of Palestine, and that colonisation is an enduring project of dispossession and subjugation.

Contact High 2024: *Dance, dance* comes at a time when the Naarm dance ecology – which feeds into and overlaps with the visual arts – has recently suffered two significant blows. The dissolution of the FRAME Biennial of Dance (formerly Dance Massive) and the threat of closure faced by Temperance Hall, both due to a lack of funding and resourcing, drastically reduces the number of opportunities available to emerging

dancers and choreographers to experiment, take risks and explore new ideas. The defunding of these platforms is effectively an act of cutting Naarm's contemporary dance scene off at the knees.

Dance, like all artistic practices, does not simply emerge fully formed within the hyper-professional context of festivals like RISING or institutions like Arts Centre Melbourne or The National Gallery of Victoria. Nor does it just suddenly appear in visual art performance programs like this one. It takes time to develop and requires safe spaces in the small-medium part of the dance sector that facilitate the pursuit of transgressive ideas and the pushing of boundaries. It is in these spaces that marginalised and queer voices find an audience and communities of support begin to emerge. It is also in these spaces that some of Naarm's most impactful and critically rigorous dance is born.

Eora-based choreographer Angela Goh once told me she “recognises the impact of recognition,” and echoing this, I want to recognise the impact of these spaces and the dancers, choreographers and artists they have produced: Phillip Adams, Brooke Stamp, Luke George, Deanne Butterworth, Jo Lloyd, Rebecca Jensen, Lucy Guerin, Gabriella Imrichova, Alexander Powers and Atlanta Eke (to name just a few). As do I want to acknowledge that without spaces like these, I would not have come across the practices of the three artists – Sarah Aiken, Mara Gallagher and Harrison Ritchie-Jones – showing in this year's Contact High. Nor several of the other artists I have curated into this program over the last three years. *I recognise the impact of recognition* and acknowledge that programs like Contact High are not possible without platforms such as these providing the infrastructure for these artists' practices and a space for curators like me

access to their work.

We have been told often since the onset of COVID-19 – a virus this program has run in parallel to – that the show must go on. We were told we must stay home till further notice but continue working. *The show must go on.* We were told that live performance must pivot into being digitally presented. *The show must go on.* We were told we must upskill and be as ‘productive’ as possible with our ‘new-found’ time. *The show must go on.* Then we were told to get vaccinated and return to the office, to public transport and public space. We were told we had to support the economy. *The show must go on.*

I have been thinking a lot about this lately and what it means to resist the imperative to persist in the face of crisis. What if the show did *not* go on? Moving into 2024, Performance Review is interested in inviting the Naarm visual arts, performance and dance scenes into conversation to understand what is needed of a performance-focused platform at this time. We want to build something new; an alternative mode of instituting that presents and critically engages with performance in a way that best serves these overlapping communities. We want to develop new ways of working that are actively engaged in processes of unlearning and decolonisation, and to pursue new avenues of ethically aligned funding. We want to rally behind our colleagues at Temperance Hall and support and create space for emerging performance artists. We want to influence the workings of larger institutions, by modelling best practice, and we want to bring our community together more often, to make their voices heard. *More on this soon.*

Contact High has, since its inception, been a reaction to COVID conditions and the digitisation of performance during lockdowns. Its aim has been to emphasise that which is lost through digital dissemination – namely copresence and proximity – and to focus on the transference that occurs between performers and audiences in the gallery. In exploring this, dance has featured heavily in Contact High. Both as a means of looking at its increased presence in the visual arts and out

of an interest in the structural and conceptual developments that this mode of performance practice has undergone since 2020. And, on a more personal note, simply because *I love dance.*

All three of the performances in this program employ what Dance theorist Bojana Cvejic calls ‘conceptual dance,’ and which Art historian Claire Bishop describes as “the ideas-led approach of a younger generation” of dancer/choreographers.¹ Sarah Aiken’s *Body Corp (iteration no. 4)* explores the conflation of the physical and digital body in motion. Harrison Ritchie-Jones’ *Cold-tooth* plays with romantic and pop cultural horror tropes, and Mara Galagher’s *unnamed work* probes the potential of a public footpath. They also all utilise video and the screen to mimic surveillance, focus attention and as an interface between performer and audience. Technology’s presence in dance, though not a new thing, has increased dramatically of late, and I would suggest that the conflation of performance with the screen during periods of COVID-19-related lockdowns has played a significant hand in this.

All of this in mind, and if you too love dance, I’d encourage you to consider a few things while experiencing *Dance, dance*. Consider the privilege it is to spectate and share space at this moment. Consider your reactions – what thoughts and feelings do these performances elicit? What do you take away from them? Then consider what it would mean if boundary pushing and experimental works like these were to disappear, due to a lack of support in their infancy. Consider what needs to change structurally, to stop this from happening, and consider what else must change too. *The show must not go on.* It’s time for something new.

1. Claire Bishop, ‘Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention,’ *The Drama Review* 62, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 28. Referencing Bojana Cvejic, *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in Contemporary Dance and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

ARTIST STATEMENTS

Sarah Aiken

Body Corp (iteration no.4), 2024

Video and live performance

An assembled choreography for video and live performance, this work considers the body as a conglomerate - tracing imagined histories of our matter and iterations of self across mediums. Working between corporeal and digital, the uneven cuts, slips and rough joins expose the mechanisms and temporary relationships between parts, material yearnings for connection, longing and belonging, transforming and reforming, creating fractured wholes and superhuman forms. The dancer does magic at the border of the screen - to create the unreal, travel in time and transfigure the self.

Mara Galagher

unnamed performance, 2024

Video and live performance

Curbside cooked cunt. Extreme saturation and the byproduct of that, pathetically absent of input. U do not want to be here.

Harrison Ritchie-Jones

Cold Tooth, 2024

Dirt, coffin, saxophone, straw, plastic chicken head, camera, screen,
video and live performance

Cold tooth wakes into the gothic realm and explores the multifaceted intimacies and sounds of romance and horror.

BIOGRAPHIES

SARAH AIKEN

Sarah Aiken is a Naarm-based dancer and choreographer from Bellingen NSW with an extensive body of work presented nationally and internationally. Her solo and collaborative projects investigate assemblage; authorship; scale and the self; looking at illusion and the roles of audience, performer, subject and object and connecting tangibly with audiences, to consider performance as a site for empathy and exchange. Her recent work *Make Your Life Count* considers the individual, swollen to grotesque importance and reduced to an invisible impotence, in universal scales.

Co-director of Deep Soulful Sweats, Aiken works with Rebecca Jensen to create work that engages rigorously with participation, waste and excess - recycling content to consider materiality and how we come together. Their zodiac themed participatory dance events have been running for 10 years, inviting audiences into cathartic and thoughtful performative experiences.

A recipient of the Chloe Munro Independent Artist Fellowship, Australia Council/HIAP Residency (Helsinki 2022), Centre for Projection Art Residency (2023), the Creators Fund (2020) and Performance Space Micro-fellowship (2021) Aiken has an expanded choreographic practice and is developing new works for stage, screen and gallery spaces.

MARA GALAGHER

Mara Gallagher is a performance artist based in Naarm. She works within dance, performance art and video art.

Recently she performed in Alicia Frankovich's work *Rich in World, Poor in World* as a part of NGV's MelbourneNow performance program. Gallagher has worked with Gabriella Imrichova on multiple projects, most notably "24.01.23-25.01.23" for Contact High, Gertrude Glasshouse; and performed in Alexander Powers' work for *Aliens of Extraordinary Ability*, Temperance Hall and *WHAT A MYTH CAN DO* presented by Liquid Architecture. Other artists she's worked with include Jo Lloyd, Tasdance and Lilian Steiner.

Gallagher is forming a practice around decay and degeneracy, highlighting the least flattering moments and being a sacrifice for others' disturbed wants by succumbing to a repulsive form. She grew up training and performing Russian, Serbian and Ukrainian Folk dance as well as classical ballet. Having this foundation in stoic and disciplined artforms is something she both acknowledges and dismisses when moving and making.

HARRISON RITCHIE-JONES

Harrison Ritchie-Jones is an independent dancer, choreographer and filmmaker based in Naarm (Melbourne). Ritchie-Jones' choreographic practice celebrates dance and is fuelled by a curiosity in techniques, drawn from a range of physical practices. Upskilling and blending forms, he uses dance to carve out spaces for absurdity, humour and

physical virtuosity to work together in surreal and expressive explorations of storytelling. His work celebrates movement, authenticity, obsession, determination and risk. Ritchie-Jones graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Dance) in 2014. In 2013, he was awarded a Victorian College of the Arts Undergraduate Most Outstanding Creative Scholarship. In 2018 he was nominated for a Green Room Award for Best Male Performer for Stephanie Lake's *Pile of Bones*. In 2018 he was selected for Next Wave's kickstart program and premiered his work *Shimmer Of The Numinous* in Next Wave Festival. In 2023 he presented his latest major dance work *CUDDLE*, which premiered at Chunky Move as a part of FRAME Biennial of Dance. His recent dance film *Banshee Cried Silver* was presented in FRAME Biennial of Dance at The Substation and *Dance lens* in Melbourne and will be shared later this year in Sydney and Perth. Ritchie-Jones has worked with, and performed in creations by some of this country's best choreographers including Stephanie Lake, Jo Lloyd, Antony Hamilton, Lucy Guerin, Graeme Murphy, Alistaire Macindoe, Prue Lang, Shelly Lasica, Rebecca Hilton and Rebecca Jensen

ANADOR WALSH

Anador Walsh is a Naarm-based curator, writer and the founding director of Performance Review. In 2020, Walsh took part in the Gertrude Emerging Writers Program and was the 2019 recipient of the BLINDSIDE Emerging Curator Mentorship. She is the curator of Contact High, Gertrude and Performance Review's annual performance program and in 2022 curated the Naarm premiere of Angela Goh's *Body Loss* at the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia for Melbourne Art Fair. She has written for Art Guide Australia, Runway Journal, Memo Review, The Taipei Centre for Performing Arts, ACCA, PICA and the NGV. Until 2018, Walsh was Gertrude's Marketing and Development Manager.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Performance Review (established 2021) is a platform supporting performance practice. They publish discursive and experimental writing about live art. Since 2022, Performance Review has partnered with organisations including Gertrude, Melbourne Art Fair and the Keir Choreographic Award to present performance programs and cover theatre-based dance. They are committed to prioritising new opportunities for emerging writers and artists engaged with this medium.

GERTRUDE

Gertrude has been building the careers of Australia's artists for almost 40 years.

Since our establishment in 1985, Gertrude has played an essential role in the local visual arts sector, shaping the careers of many of Australia's most celebrated artists.

We are an incubator and launching pad for contemporary artists. Our artistic program – including our studio and exhibition program – is unique in its equal emphasis on the production and presentation of contemporary art. This enables us to support artists to explore new ideas and present work at pivotal points in their careers.

Gertrude gives audiences unique insight into the creative development of artists. Our audiences engage with risk-taking, formative moments that define artist careers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SARAH AIKEN

Previous iterations of *Body Corp* have been shown during residencies at Dancenorth (QLD) and HIAP (Australia Council International Residency- Finland) and in programs for STRUT (WA) and APHIDS (VIC).

MARA GALAGHER

The artist would like to thank Andrea Illés and Nelly Clit for their continued and immense support, love and work.

ANADOR WALSH

I'd like to thank Mara, Sarah and Harrison for being a part of *Dance, dance* and to extend this thanks to all of the artists who have featured in Contact High over the life of this program: Arini Byng with Rebecca Jensen, Lilian Steiner and Rohan Rebeiro; Sophie Gargan; Gabriella Imrichova with Anika De Ruyter, Mara Galagher and Sophie Gargan; Rebecca Jensen with Enzo Nazario and Lydia Connolly-Hiatt; Marcus Ian McKenzie; Kori Miles; Alexander Powers; Diego Ramírez; Kenneth Suico and Ari Tampubolon. It's been a pleasure working with and getting to know you all. I'd also like to thank the Gertrude team, including past staff, for this opportunity and all of the support you've shown Performance Review and I over the last three years: Ian Bunyi, Tracy Burgess, Mark Feary, Sharon Flynn, Brigit Ryan, Siobhan Sloper, Tim Riley Walsh and Amelia Winata. I'd also like to thank Keelan O'Hehir, Machiko Abe, Helen Grogan of Open Practice Studios, Diego Ramírez and Fraser Stanley and Julian Hutton of New Association for all of your contributions

to the documentation, editing and design of Contact High. This has been one of the most rewarding projects of my career to date and I'm excited to share Performance Review's reflections on Contact High 2022-2024 as a report later this year. Last, but by no means least, I'd like to thank Felix Webb for his love, generosity and support.

Design by Julian Hutton and Fraser Stanley of New Association.

performance review

*Dance,
dance*

GERTRUDE