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Title: As Below, So Above, Joshua Pether

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This month *Performance Review* is partnering with the Keir Choreographic Award (KCA) to bring you interviews with this year's finalists: Alan Schacher & WeiZen Ho (NSW); Alice Will Caroline (VIC); Jenni Large (TAS); Joshua Pether (WA); Lucky Lartey (NSW); Raghav Handa (NSW); Rebecca Jensen (VIC) and Tra Mi Dinh (VIC). In this interview Ainslie Templeton speaks with Joshua Pether about his KCA work *As Below, So Above*, 2022.



Joshua Pether, *As Below, So Above*, 2022. Photo by Josh Wells.

**AT: Thanks for speaking to me Joshua and big congratulations on being selected as a finalist for the Keir Choreographic Award. Your commissioned work is set to investigate ritual manifestation with five collaborators. Can you tell me more about your understanding of ritual as a device to create new realities in the world?**

JP: One thing I remember growing up was thinking I had a gift to see the sky behind the clouds and I wonder if my practice is now an extension of this gift. It definitely feels like I am uncovering lost or unknown knowledge. The uncovering or retracing of this knowledge often will involve a form of repetition and this becomes a powerful tool to enter into a trance-like state or a state of being that removes you from your physical body and puts you into your spiritual body. I found this through some of my earlier work, where moments of repetition would allow me to not only enter into a more familiar space but also uncover the hidden elements of that familiarity. Repetition allows the energy of this discovery to summon the power needed to move the ritual to a space that transcends both choreography and movement.

**AT: Your earlier work sought to explore the aesthetics of the disabled and colonised body, will that come into this work as well?**

JP: I think when I first began my exploration of dance within the context of my own body I would use this idea as a way to shift the power of what my experience was in dance institutions and the hierarchy that existed. As an independent artist, I needed to cleanse myself of the idealised notion of the dancerly body and instead focus on what I could offer. My early work definitely explored these concepts but my more recent work and particularly this piece for the KCA is more about a collective experience.

**AT: What are your hopes in broadening the scope of your work in this way?**

JP: I consider what I do to be a lifestyle as opposed to something that is turned on and off and I have also tried to embed these principles in the people I work with. The final product becomes more than just a performance, but rather an experience that transcends the individual and specific identities that follow. This leads to a process of decolonisation as we begin to deconstruct human understanding and narratives. It requires a certain amount of faith and trust that doesn't come from knowledge found in textbooks or the way we have been conditioned to construct meaning in things. I hope what I do taps into people's lost memory of what was once their knowledge as well. So what started out as quite a singular experience has evolved for me into a more collective consciousness.

**AT: You also have a new landmark disability arts festival launching at Arts Centre Melbourne in September. *Alter State* has the specific aim of fostering disability performance work led by First Nations voices within Australia and the Pasifika region. How do you feel about the upcoming in-person launch?**

JP: The response we've had to the Alter State program in general has been extremely positive and I look forward to seeing what happens when we launch the festival IRL so to speak. I am also happy to see that we are looking at experiences of disability through the lens of who we are in Australia, Aotearoa and the Pacific region rather than the UK which is often considered the yardstick for measuring success and artistry, particularly in the disability community.

**AT: Can you share some of your plans or ambitions for the Keir Choreographic Award development and how winning would affect these?**

JP: This is the third time I have applied for the KCA and weirdly there was a sense that I would get in this time. I felt the world wanted to hear what I had to say and it was this understanding that led me to be confident in the fact that we would be selected. Sometimes things happen for a reason and I suppose it goes back to the faith I talked about previously, where you just have to place a certain level of “faith” into something that you potentially have no control over. So for me, winning means more than the grand prize’s monetary value, but rather would be a significant judgement that what I am doing matters, people want more of what I have to offer and are hungry to learn from this.

Ainslie Templeton is an artist and writer whose work has been shown at Autoitalia, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Verge, Incinerator and the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. In 2019 she published a poetry book *The Tower* with Incendium Radical Library Press; her writing has also been published in *Minority Report*, *un Magazine*, *The Dutch Journal of Gender Studies* and *Volupté*. Ainslie was a founding member of the performance art vehicle *Embittered Swish* and has worked extensively with visionary Rafaela Pandolfini.

Joshua Pether is of Kalkadoon heritage but lives and works on Noongar country in Western Australia. He is an experimental performance artist, dancer and choreographer of movement, temporary ritual and imagined realities. His practice is influenced by his two cultural histories - indigeneity and disability and the hybridisation of the two with particular interest in the aesthetics of the disabled body and also that of the colonised body. As a ritual practitioner he is interested in the hidden knowledge the body has that can unlock the past history of the self and all its manifestations.

**Joshua Pether will perform *As Below, So Above* at Carriageworks on 23—25 June and at Dancehouse on 30 June—2 July.**

An innovative commissioning partnership between Dancehouse, The Keir Foundation and the Australia Council for the Arts, with presenting partner Carriageworks, the KCA is Australia’s largest contemporary dance award showcasing new, choreographic short works by eight Australian artists.

Held over two weeks, this year all eight commissioned works will be presented at both Dancehouse, Melbourne and Carriageworks, Sydney in a rotating program of two bills (four works each).

The KCA is an extraordinary, fully paid opportunity for independent Australian artists to develop and share works with audiences and an esteemed jury of dance luminaries. The jury of international dance leaders tasked with selecting the recipient of the 2022 Keir Choreographic Award and awarding the \$50,000 jury prize on Sunday 3 July at Carriageworks includes Daniel Riley (Wiradjuri/Australia); Eko Supriyanto (Indonesia); Laurie Uprichard (Ireland); Lemi Ponifasio (Aotearoa/New Zealand) and Nanako Nakajima (Japan).

Melbourne season at Dancehouse

23 June – 2 July

**Book tickets for Melbourne**

Sydney season at Carriageworks

23 June – 2 July

**Book tickets for Sydney**

# performance review

Performance Review acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate. We pay our respects to their Elders; past, present and emerging and recognise that sovereignty was never ceded.