

Esplanade Presents

## da:ns focus – Connect Asia Now (CAN)

4 – 6 Oct 2024

[www.esplanade.com/dans](http://www.esplanade.com/dans)



Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay presents *da:ns focus – Connect Asia Now (CAN)*, a weekend dedicated to contemporary works by Asian dancemakers, from 4 – 6 Oct 2024. In this second edition, *CAN* features the internationally acclaimed *butoh* troupe **Sankai Juku**; two boundary-breaking dance artists **Eisa Jocson** and **Venuri Perera** in a first-time collaboration; and rising multidisciplinary artist **Joshua Serafin**.

*CAN* takes place annually as part of *da:ns focus*, our year-round dance season comprising five themed weekends. It is a dedicated platform where we support artists from the region and introduce their work to Singapore audiences, carrying on from our efforts over the past 17 years as part of *da:ns festival*. It is also a gathering place for artists, practitioners, producers and international presenters to come together, to connect and further develop Asia's contemporary dance scene. The title is also a playful reference to our colloquial way of saying "yes!" in Singapore.

This year, we present new dance productions which engage deeply with the embodiment of ritual, resistance and metamorphosis. **Sankai Juku** (Japan) returns to Esplanade after eight years with the international premiere of their latest work, *TOTEM – Void and Height*, choreographed and directed by the late Ushio Amagatsu. Sadly, Amagatsu passed away in March this year, making *TOTEM* his last choreographic work. Known for creating minimalistic and elegant visual spectacles, his works helped popularise the art form of *butoh*, which originated in Japan in the 1960s, among international audiences and artists. His legacy continues not only through his company's performances but also through a younger generation of dancemakers who explore themes such as our bodies' relationship with gravity and the environment, or pose the fundamental question of what it means to "dance" with our own unique bodies. On *Esplanade Offstage*, a video recording from Esplanade's archives featuring the late Amagatsu in an artist talk on Sankai Juku's philosophy and practice will be

available for viewing from 1 Sep – 31 Dec 2024. The talk was recorded at Esplanade in 2014 as part of *ConversAsians*, a by-invitation only conference that brought extraordinary Asian artists and arts industry professionals together.

As part of the *CAN* weekend, Esplanade will co-produce and present new works by three choreographers from the Philippines and Sri Lanka. Both works will be Asian premieres.

*Magic Maids* marks the first collaboration between two female artists, **Eisa Jocson** (Philippines) and **Venuri Perera** (Sri Lanka). Eisa Jocson is no stranger to Esplanade, having presented several works that expose body politics in the service and entertainment industry. It is our first time presenting Venuri, whose practice deals with patriarchy, colonial heritage, and class. The two artists come from countries known for exporting domestic workers, and *Magic Maids* will examine oppressive power structures through an embodied inquiry into the entanglements between witch hunts and female labour.

**Joshua Serafin** (Philippines/Belgium) has performed at Esplanade in *Manila Zoo* by Eisa Jocson (*da:ns festival 2021*) and at *VECTOR#3* in 2023, presented by Dance Nucleus in collaboration with Esplanade. In the last year, Joshua has been touring Europe, performing in significant platforms and art centres. They were nominated for the 2023 ANTI Festival International Prize for Live Art in Finland and were officially invited to participate in the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. In *PEARLS*, their second full-length choreographic work, they attempt to reclaim pre-colonial bodies and wrestle with the fractures imprinted by empire on the body, soul, and community. Through *PEARLS*, we listen to the pains and memories from the past, as well as voices of strength and hope for the future.

*CAN* is a gathering place where artists, practitioners, producers, festival directors and curators from Singapore and overseas come together to further develop the contemporary dance scene in Asia. This is possible because of our partners. We continue to work closely with National Arts Council on International Presenters Visit Programme, where we invite ten international presenters, festival directors and producers as delegates. In addition to watching *CAN* shows, the delegates will meet and exchange with artists, practitioners and producers from Singapore and the region. Dance Nucleus also remains an important partner for the development of choreographic practices and networks for independent artists in the region. We will present *da:ns lab*, an annual artist meeting curated by Daniel Kok, the artistic director of Dance Nucleus. This year's edition is designed as a coaching programme where four choreographers from Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and India will work with a mentor to further develop their works and share about their process at the end. *VECTOR#5*, an exhibition of contemporary performance produced by Dance Nucleus, will return to Esplanade Annexe Studio this year, presenting experimental works from Singapore and the region.

We are excited to bring these very distinct and important Asian voices to our audience, and we look forward to the exchanges and dialogues that will come out of *CAN* as a key platform for dance and performance from Asia.

**Izumi Asakawa**

Producer, The Esplanade Co Ltd

## About Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay

Esplanade is Singapore's national performing arts centre. It hosts a year-round line-up of about 3,500 live performances and activities presented by Esplanade, its partners and hirers. As an arts centre for everyone, Esplanade also creates opportunities for seniors, youth, children and underserved communities to experience the arts. More than 70% of the shows that take place each year at the centre are free for all to enjoy.

Esplanade also brings the arts virtually to audiences in Singapore and beyond, through its diverse range of digital programmes on [Esplanade Offstage](#), an all-access backstage pass to the performing arts and guide to Singapore and Asian arts and culture, with videos, podcasts, articles, quizzes and resources.

The centre works in close partnership with local, regional and international artists to develop artistic capabilities and content, push artistic boundaries and engage audiences. Esplanade supports the creation of artistic content by commissioning and producing new Singapore and Asian work for the international stage. It also develops technical capabilities for the industry nationally.

Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay is operated by The Esplanade Co Ltd (TECL), which is a not-for-profit organisation, a registered Charity and an Institution of a Public Character. The Charity Council awarded TECL the Charity Governance Award – Special Commendation for Clarity of Strategy in 2016 and 2022, and the Charity Transparency Award from 2016 – 2023. Esplanade is Singapore's first Dementia-Friendly Arts Venue and a certified Dementia Go-To Point, as well as a guide/assistance dog friendly centre.

TECL receives funding support from Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and its Community Programmes are supported by Tote Board Family, comprising Tote Board, Singapore Pools and Singapore Turf Club.

Visit [Esplanade.com](https://www.esplanade.com) for more information.

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Issued by *The Esplanade Co Ltd*.

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## Annexe

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4 – 6 Oct 2024

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#### About *da:ns focus*

Having transformed from *da:ns festival* to *da:ns focus* in 2023/24, *da:ns focus* continues with an exciting year-round season of five themed weekends in 2024/25. Experience interconnected programmes that offer their own counterpoints, dialogues and encounters in a focused exploration.

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### **TOTEM – Void and Height** by Sankai Juku (Japan)

4 – 6 Oct 2024

Fri & Sat, 7.30pm

Sun, 3pm

Singtel Waterfront Theatre at Esplanade



Photo Credit: Sankai Juku

After eight years, one of the world's most well-known *butoh* companies returns to Esplanade with their latest work, *TOTEM – Void and Height*.

Carrying on the legacy of the company's acclaimed founder and choreographer Ushio Amagatsu, who passed away in March 2024, Sankai Juku presents his last choreographic work. *TOTEM* bears all the hallmarks of an Amagatsu work: minimalist yet elegant; a stunning visual spectacle created by the performers' spellbinding physicality.

One of the world's most influential and respected dance choreographers, Amagatsu created moving works of art for close to 50 years, each one anchored in deeply universal themes of birth, death, and the relationship between the body and gravity, as well as between gravity, earth and the environment. This is a chance for both fans of *butoh* and new audiences to experience the final piece of the choreographer's artistry, a work that at once challenges your senses and welcomes you into a world of heightened beauty.

"There are several definitions of what a totem is. It can be a specific object that functions as a mark or a symbol of a certain group, tribe or blood relations, and in some cases, it can be a wild animal or a wild plant. The subtitle this time, *Void and Height*, was chosen as a concept inspired by a particular work of stage art created by Natsuyuki Nakanishi. It refers to the space that rises between four places." – Ushio Amagatsu

The international premiere of this work is presented as part of *da:ns focus – Connect Asia Now (CAN)*, a weekend that spotlights contemporary dance works by Asian artists focusing on distinct voices and creative impulses from the region.

#### Production Credits

Direction, Choreography and Conception by Ushio Amagatsu

Set by Natsuyuki Nakanishi from *Quartet -- Series X of Touching Down on Land and Touching Down on Water*

Music by Takashi Kako and Yoichiro Yoshikawa

Performed by Semimaru, Sho Takeuchi, Akihito Ichihara, Dai Matsuoka, Norihito Ishii, Taiki Iwamoto, Makoto Takase and Sotaro Ito

Co-produced by Kitakyusu Performing Arts Center, Japan and Sankai Juku

#### About Ushio Amagatsu

Born in Yokosuka, Japan in 1949, Ushio Amagatsu founded the *butoh* company Sankai Juku in 1975.

He created *Amagatsu Sho* (1977), *Kinkan Shonen* (1978) and *Sholiba* (1979) before embarking on his first world tour in 1980. He started working and creating in France in 1981, particularly at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris. That same year, he created *Bakki* for the Festival d'Avignon. With Théâtre de la Ville, Paris, he has created and co-produced 16 productions since 1982.

Amagatsu also worked independently outside Sankai Juku. In 1988, he created *Fushi* on the invitation of Jacob's Pillow Foundation (USA), with music by Philip Glass. In 1989, he was appointed Artistic Director of the Spiral Hall in Tokyo where he directed *Apocalypse* (1989), and *Fifth-V* (1990).

In February 1997, he directed the opera *Bluebeard's Castle* by Bartok conducted by Peter Eötvös at the Tokyo International Forum. In March 1998 at Opéra National de Lyon, France, he directed the world premiere of Peter Eötvös's opera *Three Sisters*, which received the Prix du Syndicat National de la Critique Award in France. *Three Sisters* has been staged for the 2001–2002 season at Théâtre du Chatelet in Paris, Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, at Opéra National de Lyon, and at Wiener Festwochen, Austria, in 2002.

In March 2008, Amagatsu directed another opera by Peter Eötvös, *Lady Sarashina*, which premiered at Opéra National de Lyon and received the Prix du Syndicat National de la Critique, France. It was later staged in Opera Comique in February 2009 and in Teatr Wielki, Polish National Opera, Warsaw in April 2013.

Amagatsu has also presided on the jury of International Choreographic Competition of National Academy of Dance, Italy (2011), the Jury of the Toyota Choreography award (2002–2005) and the Jury of the International Meeting of Dance of Bagnolet (1992).

Awards and merits received include: Commandeur de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres by French Cultural Ministry (2014), the Purple-Ribbon Medal by the Japanese government (2011), Geijyutsu Sensho Prize (Art Encouragement Prize) by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2004) and Chevalier de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres by French Cultural Ministry (1992). The work *HIBIKI* received the 26th Laurence Olivier Awards (UK) for Best New Dance Production (2002).

Amagatsu passed in March 2024 at the age of 74.

#### About Sankai Juku

Sankai Juku is a *butoh* dance company founded by the director and choreographer Ushio Amagatsu in 1975.

Since 1982, Sankai Juku has premiered a new work approximately once every two years, 17 of which were commissioned by Théâtre de la Ville, Paris. Sankai Juku has performed in 47 countries and visited more than 700 cities in the world.

1hr 15mins, no intermission  
Admission for 6 and above

\$45<sup>^</sup>, \$65<sup>^\*</sup>

Limited concessions for students, NSFs and seniors: \$52<sup>\*</sup>

Limited concessions for PWDs: \$36

<sup>^</sup>Esplanade&Me Specials Early Bird (18 – 31 Jul 2024)

Black/White: 20% savings

Discover (min. 2 for the same show or across shows): 15% savings

<sup>^</sup>Esplanade&Me Specials (From 1 Aug 2024)

Black/White: 15% savings

Discover (min. 2 for the same show or across shows): 10% savings

An Esplanade Co-production

## **Magic Maids**

**by Eisa Jocson & Venuri Perera (Philippines & Sri Lanka)**

4 – 6 Oct 2024

Fri, 7.30pm

Sat, 5pm

Sun, 5pm

Esplanade Annexe Studio



Photo Courtesy of National Gallery Singapore

Interweaving ritual, pageantry, performance and possession, *Magic Maids* presents an encounter with two figures engaged in the ritual act of sweeping. The broom, a domestic tool for cleaning and the vehicle of the witch, becomes a symbol of both oppression and resistance. It is an extension of the body and a portal for metamorphosis. The art workers and their brooms exist in a continuous state of becoming.

Eisa Jocson and Venuri Perera are from the Philippines and Sri Lanka respectively, two countries known for their significant export of domestic workers. Their collaboration began in 2022 when they noticed the absence of women at Basel Museum of Pharmaceutical History in Switzerland. This observation sparked their investigation of the historical persecution of witches; in Europe and its implications for the exploitation of female labour in colonised regions. They discovered that the accusation of witchcraft continues to be a tool for persecuting migrant workers from the Global South.

*Magic Maids* is a bodily response to their grappling with these complex entanglements. They call upon practices of incantation and intention, using their bodies to traverse multiple territories: physical, conceptual, transnational, emotional, and gendered. The labour in performance enables an embodied inquiry into questions of representation, political subjecthood and histories of oppression. Having individually presented solo work across international festivals and platforms that follows this line of inquiry, Jocson and Perera come

together for the first time to sweep out and unsettle oppressive power structures. Rewilding the domestic, they aim to release, reclaim, rejoice, and reconnect with the primal energies.

*Magic Maids* is an invitation to witness and reflect on the visibility of the working body, the power of female solidarity, and the enduring impact of historical injustices on modern labour practices.

The Asian premiere of this production is presented as part of *da:ns focus – Connect Asia Now (CAN)*, a weekend that spotlights contemporary dance works by Asian artists focusing on distinct voices and creative impulses from the region.

#### Production Credits

Concept, Creation, Dramaturgy, Performance: Eisa Jocson, Venuri Perera

Light Design: Ariana Battaglia

Sound Design: Soraya Bonaventure

Artistic Advice: Rasa Alksnyte

Text Advice: Ruhanie Perera

Spiritual Advice: Nenet Ocson Babaylan-Vaigaland

Outside Eyes and Ears: Arco Renz, Tang Fu Kuen

In-House Dramaturgical Support: Anna Wagner, Alexandra Hennig

Production Advice: Sandro Lunin

Technical Production: Seok Hui Yap

Producer: Katja Armknecht, Anne Kleiner

Production Management: Paula Elena Noack, Greta Katharina Klein

*Magic Maids* by Eisa Jocson and Venuri Perera is a production of Künstler\*innenhaus Mousonturm in co-production with Frascati Producties (supported by Ammodo), Tanzquartier Wien, HAU Hebbel am Ufer, SPRING Performing Arts Festival, Festival Theaterformen, DDD – Festival Dias da Dança, Kampnagel, Arsenic – Centre d'art scénique contemporain, La briqueterie CDCN du Val-de-Marne, Points Communs – nouvelle scène nationale Cergy-Pontoise / Val d'Oise, Maillon, Théâtre de Strasbourg – Scène européenne and Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

Funded as part of the Alliance of International Production Houses by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media and the Hessian Ministry of Science and Arts. This project was supported with residences by Kaserne Basel, Puón Institute Philippines, Goethe-Institut Sri Lanka, Dance Nucleus Singapore, Studio Plesungan Indonesia and Colomboscope Contemporary Art Festival 2024.

With gratitude to the wonderful wise working women who generously shared their knowledge and stories with us.

#### About Eisa Jocson

Eisa Jocson is a visual artist and choreographer based in Manila. She came to contemporary dance through pole dance. In her pieces, she explores the entanglements of gender, affective labour, migration and corporeality. She has explored the economies of pole dancing, appropriated macho dancing—a form of hypermasculine erotic dance practiced primarily in Filipino gay bars—and examined the expressive and movement vocabulary of Disney characters such as Snow White, a role denied to Filipino performers in amusement parks. She regularly presents her pieces at renowned theatres and international festivals in Asia and Europe, such as Tanz im August, TPAM Yokohama, Zürcher Theaterspektakel and Frankfurter Positionen. In 2018, she received the Culture Centre of the Philippines 13 Artists Award and in 2019, the Hugo Boss Asia Art Award.



### About Venuri Perera

Venuri Perera is a choreographer, performance artist, curator and educator from Colombo. Exploring the power dynamics of visibility and opacity, she attempts to destabilise how we perceive the 'other.' Her solo and collaborative creations deal with violent nationalism, patriarchy, immigration, colonial heritage and class and were invited to festivals, biennales and symposia across Europe, South and East Asia, Middle East and Africa since 2008. She has closely collaborated with choreographers Geumhyung Jeong (SK) (Theatre Spektakel/ Monsoon Australia) and Natsuko Tezuka (JP) (Kyoto Experiment/SIFA Singapore). Venuri conceived and curated the projects of the Colombo Dance Platform (2015–2020, Goethe-Institut) and is committed to continue creating support networks for the independent dance scene in Sri Lanka. A graduate of DAS Theatre, she is currently based in Amsterdam.

1hr 20mins, no intermission

Admission age: 6 and above. Recommended for 14 and above. Children below the age of 14 should be accompanied by an adult.

#### Advisory:

- Latecomers will not be admitted once the performance has begun. There will be no re-admission for this performance.
- There may be floor-seating for this performance.
- There will be a post-show dialogue after each performance.

\$30^

Limited concessions for students, NSFs, seniors and PWDs: \$24

^Esplanade&Me Specials Early Bird (18 – 31 Jul 2024)

Black/White: 20% savings

Discover (min. 2 for the same show or across shows): 15% savings

^Esplanade&Me Specials (From 1 Aug 2024)

Black/White: 15% savings

Discover (min. 2 for the same show or across shows): 10% savings

An Esplanade Co-production

## **PEARLS**

by **Joshua Serafin (Philippines/ Belgium)**

4 – 6 Oct 2024

Fri, 9pm

Sat, 7.30pm

Sun, 3pm

Esplanade Theatre Studio



Photo Credit: Michiel Devijver

“The power of Serafin’s *PEARLS* comes from its poetry, its imagination, and the performance of Serafin, Quismundo, and Cadag, whose intentionality and intensity of movement unfold on their own unique time.” – etcetera magazine

In their artistic exploration, Joshua Serafin wrestles with the fractures and wounds imprinted by empire on the body, soul, and community. For the work *PEARLS*, the multi-media artist draws inspiration from nonnormative genders celebrated in precolonial Philippines. Together with fellow artists Lukresia Quismundo and Bunny Cadag, Serafin abandons the binary they have inherited from colonial culture and returns to the ancient past in search of the spiritual roots of Filipino society.

With a gaze toward and away from imperial history, the three performers advance gender-diverse existence as an alternative blueprint for the future. *PEARLS* thus becomes an exercise of healing that offers an opportunity for queer and trans people of colour to transfigure dark and traumatic histories into something beautiful, similar to pearls formed from foreign particles which irritate the oyster’s mantle. *PEARLS* is the last part of the trilogy *Cosmological Gangbang*. Joshua has been touring in Europe in the last year, performing in significant platforms and art centres. They were nominated for 2023 ANTI Festival International Prize for Live Art in Finland and were officially invited to participate in the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.

The Asian premiere of this production is presented as part of *da:ns focus – Connect Asia Now (CAN)*, a weekend that spotlights contemporary dance works by Asian artists focusing on distinct voices and creative impulses from the region.

#### Production Credits

Concept: Joshua Serafin

Performance: Joshua Serafin, Lukresia Quismundo & Bunny Cadag

Sound: Pablo Lilienfeld

Scenography: RV

Light: Ryoya Fudetani

Costumes: Katrien Baetslé

Video: Federico Vladimir Strate Pezdirc

Artistic Assistance: Rasa Alksnyte

Theory and Poetry: Jaya Jacobo

Outside Eye: Arco Renz

Co-production: VIERNULVIER (BE), BIT Teatergarasjen (NO), HAU Hebbel Am Ufer (DE), beursschouburg (BE), STUK (BE), WpZimmer & C-TAKT (BE), Theater Rotterdam (NL), Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay (SG)

Supported by Vlaamse Gemeenschap, Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie

Residencies: Emerging Islands

Acknowledgement: Talaandig-Manobo community and Kulahi in Bukidnon

The text includes translations by Christian Jil Benitez, Rica Paras and Macky Torrechilla.

#### About Joshua Serafin

Joshua Serafin is a multi-disciplinary artist who combines dance, performance, visual arts, and choreography. Born in the Philippines, they are currently based in Brussels. They are a house artist of VIERNULVIER for the season 2023–2027.

Having graduated from the Philippine High School for the Arts where they majored in Theatre Arts, they moved on to major in contemporary dance at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. Joshua graduated from P.A.R.T.S. later on in 2019, and gained their Bachelor's degree in performance from KASK in 2021, where they also completed their Masters in Fine Arts in Visual Arts in 2022 with great distinction. Their Masters work additionally earned them the Horliet-Dapsens Prij 2022. They premiered their first solo work *Miss* in VIERNULVIER and have collaborated with multiple artists in Asia and Europe ranging from performance to visual arts. Their work has been shown internationally, most notably at Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay in Singapore, BIT Teatergarasjen in Norway, ANTI Festival in Finland, Nightshift in Ostende, beursschouburg in Brussels, Tai Kwun Contemporary in Hong Kong, Haus Der Kulturen der Welt HKW, and in the coming months, HAU Hebbel am Ufer in Berlin.

They have been officially invited to participate in the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia curated by Adriano Pedrosa.

Exploring themes of transmigration and queer politics, Joshua centres their practice on Otherness, aiming to translate ideas of alterity and otherworldly narratives into embodied performance and forms of speculation. Their series *Cosmological Gangbang* is the result of their most recent artistic research, having unfolded in several iterations across different media, namely: *Timawo*, *Creation Paradigm*, *VOID* and *PEARLS*, for which they are currently touring. Serafin's artistic process is an intense sociological exorcism of Filipino identity about global ideologies and contemporary phenomena, unpacking the historical violence of its feudal contemporary society and its dehumanising normality. Enfolding these sites of creation into queer and trans methodologies intuited from within tropical myth but also inspired by the dreamwork of a nonbinary cosmopolis, populated by figures emancipated from colonial gender

and embodied by turns in diverse states of solemnity and play. Joshua's globally acclaimed performance is committed to dwelling within interstitial spaces, a refusal to participate in dimorphic structures so they can craft an idiom where they can speak from the said in-betweenness.

1hr 10mins, no intermission  
Admission age 18 and above.

Advisory:

- Rating: R18
- Contains mature themes, nudity and strobe lighting.
- Latecomers will not be admitted once the performance has begun. There will be no re-admission for this performance.
- There will be post-show dialogues on 5 & 6 Oct 2024.

\$30^

Limited concessions for students, NSFs, seniors and PWDs: \$24

^Esplanade&Me Specials Early Bird (18 – 31 Jul 2024)

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