

DISTILLING THE DANCE

- BY KIRAN KUMAR -



PRESENTED BY CENTRE 42 **THE VAULT** AND DANCE NUCLEUS **ELEMENT RESIDENCY**

ARTIST'S MESSAGE

ESSAY PERFORMANCE

DEAR DEAD DANCER

2 JULY 3.30PM CENTRE 42 BLACK BOX

4 JULY 8.00PM DANCE NUCLEUS STUDIO

AUDIO INSTALLATION

THERE IS NO DANCE

2-6 JULY 5.00PM-10.00PM CENTRE 42 BLACK BOX

EXHIBITION

EXPANDED WRITING

2-6 JULY 5.00PM-10.00PM CENTRE 42 LIBRARY

WORKSHOP

DISTILLING THE DANCE: SOMATIC PRINCIPLES

5 JULY 7.30PM DANCE NUCLEUS STUDIO



Image Credit: Dance Nucleus

Kiran Kumar (b.1983, Bangalore) is an interdisciplinary artist, researcher and writer. His practice comprises somatic and writing strands: the former rooted in Hatha-Yoga and the Odissi dance tradition, and the latter in auto-ethnography. His works have ranged from performance, video, installation and exhibition, to writing and archiving. He holds an MA in Solo Dance Authorship from the University of Arts Berlin and an MFA in New Media Art from the City University of Hong Kong.

Dear Visitor,

From 2-6 July 2016, Dance Nucleus and Centre 42 are jointly presenting my research over the past 6 months. During this time my focus has been on two concurrent practices: a somatic practice in Hatha-Yoga and the Odissi and Javanese dance traditions, as well as an 'expanded writing' practice which positions artist-as-ethnographer.

'Distilling the Dance' is a presentation at the six-month mark of this research. This presentation comprises four configurations of thinking and doing: an essay-performance, an audio-installation, an exhibition and a workshop. Together the four configurations may be seen as a curatorial experiment in presenting dance outside the frame of performance.

The details of the presentation are enclosed here, as are a few notes on the process. This introductory note frames the contents of this resource pack, just as this resource pack serves to frame the four configurations of the presentation, even as the configurations aim to circumscribe a certain subtlety in dance.

I warmly invite you into an entrapment of nested framings, and towards distilling the dance.

Kiran

“In my somatic practice, I have been journeying between the Odissi and Javanese dance traditions as well as Hatha-Yoga, finding within them proposals for subtle dancing.”

ESSAY PERFORMANCE

DEAR DEAD DANCER

2 JULY 3.00PM CENTRE 42 BLACK BOX
4 JULY 8.00PM DANCE NUCLEUS STUDIO

This process of actively seeking subtlety has thrown open some fundamental, critical questions on pedagogy, aesthetics and philosophy in dance. This essay-performance takes the form of a reading of an open letter addressed to Kelucharan Mahapatra, the late Odissi guru and a pioneer of the dance's reconstruction, with the intention of relating the aesthetic and the critical dimensions of my journey.

EXHIBITION

EXPANDED WRITING

2-6 JULY 5.00PM-10.00PM CENTRE 42 LIBRARY

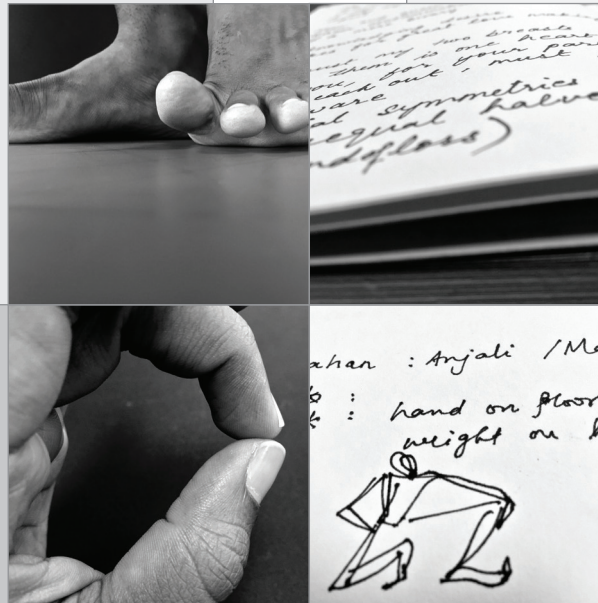
Through this journey I have attempted to unpack the aesthetics of subtle dancing through a practice of 'expanded writing'. Reading is also fundamental to a writing practice. So this exhibition serves as a library of reading and writing materials that are structured into five strands. These strands may seem to rest as static references on the book shelf, but transform through continuous, dynamic intersections on the reading table. Each visitor may have a unique access point in to materials in this library.

AUDIO INSTALLATION

THERE IS NO DANCE

2-6 JULY 5.00PM-10.00PM
CENTRE 42 BLACK BOX

Yet, the notion of 'presenting subtle dancing' inheres a delicate contradiction. This audio-installation addresses such a contradiction. It is situated in a theatre black box and it engages a structural set-up for a performance. But there is no dance. There are a few audio recordings, placed on fewer seats; each different from the other, yet all pointing to a common absence.



WORKSHOP

DISTILLING THE DANCE: SOMATIC PRINCIPLES

5 JULY 7.30PM DANCE NUCLEUS STUDIO

In this workshop we will draw on practices of posture (Asana) and mindfulness (Dhyana) in Hatha-Yoga to construct somatic pathways for the body-mind. The pathways are constructed through modulations of breath and gaze, and through ideas of inhabiting shape and isolating movements. Through these pathways I intend to offer you access to a certain subtle notion of 'form' as drawn from the Odissi and Javanese dance traditions. The workshop is designed for participants ranging from beginners to dance professionals.

PROCESS NOTES

DANCE NUCLEUS **ELEMENT RESIDENCY**

Over the past six months, Dance Nucleus's ELEMENT residency has provided a very conducive context for me to delve into my movement research, allowing me time, space and resources to ask and answer, to refine and retrace questions. I have come to sense a fundamental dissonance between dancing and watching dance, that is, between the action of dance and the image of this action. Consequently my choreographic investigations have tended to self-consciously widen the bridge between action and image in dance.

In recent years, my interest in the action of dancing has been in the often silent and invisible somatic pathways of movement, as opposed to audio-visual compositions of movement for performance. In the present investigation, I place three practices in close proximity to understand the somatic pathways that they implicitly propose. My nine-year-long practices of Hatha-Yoga and Odissi dance have, for me, come into an intuitive connection with traditional Javanese court dance. My investigation of these three traditions thus far, has been for their movement principles rather than movement morphology, for their meditative capacity rather than performativity, for their subtle rather than gross form.

I would like to acknowledge the support of my teachers in these traditions: Noah McKenna in Hatha-Yoga, Raka Maitra in Odissi, Bijoy Kumar Barik in Odissi rhythm and Ravindra Parchure in Hindustani music. My exposure to traditional Indonesian dance has been through workshops taught by Bamabang Besar Suryono, Ibu Sekar and Danang Pamungkas. Following these workshops, I travelled to Surakarta in Central Java to train with Daryono Darmorejono. The five weeks of living and dancing in Surakarta has been a phenomenal experience in the reflective process of this research. I must also acknowledge the support of institutions in forging these pedagogic relationships: Chowk Productions, Maya Dance Theatre, Dance Nucleus, Temple of Fine Arts, National Arts Council (Singapore), Mystic School (Mysore) and the Mangkunegaran Palace (Surakarta).

The sharing of this point in the movement research will be made through a somatic workshop. The workshop format may be seen as a curatorial experiment in presenting dance outside the frame of performance.



PROCESS NOTES

CENTRE 42 **THE VAULT**

When Centre 42 put forward the invitation to respond as a dance artist to Singapore text as part of The Vault series, my instinctive response was to revisit spell #7's audio guided walks. I particularly remember taking the 'Desire Paths' audio-walk a few years ago around Little India, and being fascinated by how the conventional role of an actor was replaced, as it were, by a voice in my head. I found myself being both performer and audience simultaneously. But soon enough on the walk, these roles did not seem to matter at all. The focus was instead placed on theatrical frames through which to encounter reality. These frames were self-reflexively provisional ("I'll meet you on track 7", a voice says at one point) and affective nonetheless. This experience has stayed with me through the years.

I have since been interested in challenging the convention in dance of 'spectators watching dancers perform'. In my view, there is the action of dancing and then there is the image of this action. This culture of specialisation where some people engage with the action and others exclusively with the image baffles me. This is perhaps more obvious in cultures where traditions of dance have not seen historic continuity, as in Singapore. As such, my 'choreographic' work has been to widen the bridge between the action of dancing and the image of this action. This has necessarily made me operate as an interdisciplinary artist, engaging at once with dance-making as well as image-making. In past projects, the image-making aspect has been realised through digital moving images as well as spatial installations. For the present project, I am working with text to realise the image-making processes around dance.

'Expanded writing' is a practice wherein the artist-as-anthropologist makes auto-ethnographic notes (writings, drawings, audio and video recordings) on his dance-making practice. For this project, with Kaylene Tan and Paul Rae of spell#7 giving me access to their audio archives, I have had the opportunity to take their walks once again, this time in my own backyard. Both literally, since I now live in Little India, and figuratively, with a view on what implication this has for dance. My engagement with their work has been one of affection, rather than analysis.

For The Vault presentation, notes from this practice will be configured into three different forms. 'There is no dance', a multi-channel audio-installation, is perhaps a closest reference to spell#7's audio-guided walk in that it is an audio-guide to the lack of a dance performance. 'Dear Dead Dancer', is an essay-performance that stitches the notes into a letter addressed to a late dancer. 'Expanded Writing: Library' is an exhibition of processual and reference materials that have informed the project.

Together these three configurations may be seen as a curatorial experiment in presenting images of dance outside the frame of performance.

ABOUT CENTRE 42

- www.centre42.sg -

Centre 42 is a non-profit organisation with charity status that is committed to the creation, documentation and promotion of text-based works for the Singapore stage. The Centre incubates original writing for production development; provides space for artists and new work creation; and is developing a functional archive documenting the histories and processes of Singapore theatre.

THE VAULT revisits and remembers Singapore works dating back to our early theatre years, refreshes them through the responses of artists and collaborators, and retells them in a contemporary manner.

ABOUT DANCE NUCLEUS

- www.dancenucleus.com -

Dance Nucleus is an independent dance house, directed and managed by industry practitioners for artists, a home for artists to develop their artistic practice and craft. Dance Nucleus aims to INSPIRE artists, allowing them to INITIATE ideas, projects and conversations, by providing them with the space and time to INCUBATE these ideas and projects in fruition. The organisation serves to enable artists to gather at a common space to share knowledge and methodologies, allowing them to experience and learn as a community. At Dance Nucleus, we provide independent dance artists with opportunities for training, creating, sharing and networking. The Dance Nucleus is an initiative under the National Arts Council.

ELEMENT is Dance Nucleus' artist-in-residence programme focusing on movement and choreographic research practice. It supports rigorous discourse, research and wide-ranging experimentation in all movement-based forms, so as to nurture new movement and choreographic expression.



Inspire • Initiate • Incubate

DANCE NUCLEUS

An Independent Dance House



Image Credit: Dance Nucleus