

ARTISTIC STATEMENT – LEILAH KIRSTEN

I am Leilah Kirsten, a South African movement and dance artist with a necessity to express my human experience through the moving body. I aim to inspire curiosity in audiences and transport them into their own creative sanctuaries.

Improvisation forms a large base from which I research and create. My performance works include elements of improvisation so as to speak to the spontaneity of the moment while past and future narratives are explored and presented through choreographed gesture and phrase-work.

The human existence comprises of many events such as personal evolution, emotional states, aspirations, struggle and our ultimate death. My work is developed from personal experiences and philosophies on these themes and intended to speak viscerally to an eclectic audience through a dynamic physical performance.

I aim to present both the whimsical and practical aspects of the human experience in my creations.

My work is created to inspire curiosity and potentially resolve in others and to satisfy my own need to express life through my moving body. I have been expressing myself through movement and performance since I was a young child and it has evolved into its present form through at least a decade of study, practice, performance and my own inquiry into what it is to be human.



I see myself as a travelling performer and facilitator, gaining experience and expanding my network globally with the intention to ultimately create spaces for other South African artists to have the same opportunities. I would like to set up an exchange programme or residence space that fosters international collaborations and relationships for continued development of artists and audiences.

I imagine audiences to engage with my work with curiosity. Hopefully they feel a sense of lightness of being or have managed to reflect on some aspect of themselves during their experience of the performance.

I draw inspiration from life! Places, spaces, conversations, relationships, experiences, fantasy, magic, nature and anything that catches my attention or interest.

I am influenced by the work of artists and companies such as Batsheva Dance Company, Iesu Escalante and Rootless Root (Linda Kapetanea and Jozef Frucek).

My philosophy on art making is; If there is a necessity to express something that is swirling inside the body and mind asking to be heard, create a space and allow it to move through the physical body regardless of whether it is for personal healing or collective engagement.

I am aiming to convey the complexity of the human condition by highlighting chosen themes through each work. I am influenced by the ever-changing experience of life and a seemingly constant search for answers. By working with improvisation as my base for research, I am able to explore various emotional and physical landscapes that allow me to discover physical expression of particular themes, which is then consolidated either into a particular narrative through choreographic and stylistic choices or proposed entirely as an improvised performance.

My most recent work is an example of completely improvised performance inspired by my current place of residence alongside the ocean in the Eastern Cape of South Africa (2020). I am exploring the vastness of the landscapes I have access to while processing the emotions I am grappling with during a global pandemic (Covid-19) that isolates us physically from other artists, collaborators, studio spaces and creative gatherings.

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