

OPENING ADDRESS

A monologue by Laremy Lee

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Performances

This play was first staged by Checkpoint Theatre from 11 to 13 March 2011 at the NUS Museum, Singapore, as part of The Power of Notions/Notions of Power. It was directed by Claire Wong and performed by Rodney Oliveiro.

All of you are morons for coming to watch this show. And I don't care if you're offended by what I've just said.

By choosing to watch this production, you've given up your freedom to be offended by what I'm saying.

You don't believe me? Well, then leave right now. You can reclaim your rights to feel affronted at the door, once you're outside this space.

Go on. I'm serious. I'm telling you that if you spend the next ten minutes in here, you're gonna be wasting ten minutes of your life, especially when you could've spent that time a bit more fruitfully. Like taking your equally bovine-looking companion to masquerade at appreciating those stupid pieces of pottery just around the corner, in the same way you see cows savouring grass in a gourmand-like fashion.

You'd like that, wouldn't you? So go. Walk out of this gallery while you still can.

Anyone? No one? Good. So shut the fuck up and listen as I verbally abuse you.

I was saying, ladies and gentlemen, that all of you are morons. And I've come to this conclusion because of the way you've chosen to spend your time – costly, precious, irretrievable time – to make your way to this stupid art gallery in the middle of fuck-knows-where to watch things that you might not even comprehend, because in some tiny corner of your monkey brain, you believe that a group of people whom you hardly know have written something of artistic value.

Why have you put yourself through this inconvenience?

Wait, wait – let me guess: maybe one or some of these 'artists' are your friends, and you want to 'support' them. Or maybe, they're friends of friends, and your friends told you about them, and asked you along, in the hope that it might help enrich the Sahara desert that is your cultural experience. Or maybe, they're friends of friends of friends – which makes *you* a loser who has no 'artist' friends.

Regardless, all of you in the audience tonight share one thing in common. Can you guess what it is? Yes, that's right. Your stupidity.

Because, ladies and gentlemen, these people are frauds who've been pretending to be artists. In fact, since we're being honest here, let's call a spade for what it is: all artists are frauds.

Think about it: these people who profess to be artists have written, or sculpted, or composed or created something based on some grand notion of theirs, like *transgression*. Or *multiplicity*. But no one really cares about this shit in real life. What we really care about is where our next meal is coming from. Or how we can afford the roof above our heads, right?

But these artists, they're as persistent as insurance agents. They put their works up at a gallery or a museum or a theatre, they print some flyers, they send out Facebook invites and text messages the day before the show opens. Then suddenly, voila! Because this so-

called art has had some semblance of performance ascribed to it, you suddenly believe that this art is something of intangible and indelible value. Where is the logic in that?

Furthermore, your entire theatre-going or art-appreciating experience has been based on faith and belief alone. You go to plays or films without knowing whether the piece is really good, but you attend the event nevertheless based on hearsay or stupid reviews by equally stupid reviewers who've decided, on a whim, to leave halfway during the piece because they want to catch the last train home. Where is the logic in that?

Worst of all, there is a school of thought to which I know one of you fuckers belongs to, because I can see you from the corner of my eye, all tensed and raring to jump up and tell me in this feeling-feeling voice of yours as you gaze at me mournfully with puppy-dog eyes: *art has no logic*. Fuck you lah! Where is the logic in that?

Essentially, ladies and gentlemen, what we have here is an entire industry that has been both dedicated to and based on fraudulent practices, in order to cheat you out of the money that you make while being a cog in the well-oiled machinery called Singapore.

And that is the price you pay for being a fool.

Now, you might ask: who has given me the authority to pronounce this judgement on all of you? Or has this authority been bestowed upon me through the aggrandising ability of self-styled posturing? And if so, doesn't that make me as fraudulent as these so-called artists?

Realise, ladies and gentlemen, that in this world we live in, it is demand that creates supply. It is a demand for artifice from everyone the world over which has helped this industry to thrive.

And I know this because I was just like you.

I went to plays. I attended film screenings. I browsed through MoMAs and Guggenheims the world over. I rubbed shoulders with the hoi oligoi of the arts and the art world; I stood around in circle jerks talking to jerks who spoke in circles; I brown-nosed with the best of them and in turn, I allowed the best of them to figuratively fellate me for nobody's pleasure.

But deep down inside me, there was something that gnarled and gnawed at the bones of my soul.

What was it? I did not know.

I sought salvation in art, because I had always believed in the sanctity of art. Like you, I believed that art had the ability to connect, to teach, to unite and to heal in a gigantic group fuck of understanding and love.

So, I thought, what better way to meliorate myself than to immerse myself entirely in art?

So I wrote. I played. I performed. I placed my body and my brain on display to all and sundry. I always had something to say, even if I couldn't articulate it verbally or textually. I had so much to say that I became the annoying person who was always quoted in the ninety cents national broadsheet, giving my two cents on inconsequential issues about art and the arts in Singapore.

But still that something; that chewing and biting inside of me would not go away. Instead, it sank its fangs in deeper and deeper into my being until I could ignore it no longer.

This something had a name, but my acquaintance with it didn't take place at the bottom of a paint can or between the lines of a song.

I found it staring back at me when I looked into the mirror one morning, all haggard and pale after yet another fretful night of chasing after it in my dreams.

When I finally came face to face with the bastard, it merely smiled and batted its eyelids at me.

Who are you, I asked.

It laughed.

Why the hell are you troubling me, I asked.

Oh, it said, gasping through its giggles, it is not I who has imposed. It is you who has brought this trouble upon yourself.

Bullshit, I said. Tell me what you want or fuck off.

At that, the monster started. It frowned and champed and wheeled and glared, and whipped me in the eyes with a stone-steeled stare, and it blared: I am the Truth, and I am the Way, and I am the Lie you have lain with all along. You will never, ever be rid of me, even if ten thousand years come to pass.

With a snarl, I grabbed the mirror with both hands and dashed it to the floor, shattering it into a cacophony of self-loathing, for every shard that looked up at me reflected the awful realisation of who this beast really was.

Ladies and gentlemen. We are the beasts. We are the pigs who have partaken of the apple of Eden, but refuse to come to terms with the emptiness of our existence. We are the swine who refuse to acknowledge the performances, like fig leaves, which we have devised to hide our shame and knowledge. Like this very performance here, which you, the almighty connoisseur of theatre and purveyor of fine arts, in all your perceived intellectual glory, have thought to be a meta-theatrical discourse utilising a frame within a frame technique in order to alienate the audience from the performance for the purposes of making them question the reality they live in. No, asshole. I'm fucking faking it, too. Just like your wife.

But don't lose hope, little one – it is not just art that is fraudulent. All of life is a fraud. A scam. A sham. A Ponzi scheme that we've chosen, by way of our birth, to participate in, in the hope that we make it out as fast as possible, with as much gain as possible, before this pyramid collapses under the weight of its own lies.

And this is the truth that resides deep inside us all. It is a beast that has been buried six feet shallow, and is all the time threatening to claw its way out and devour us alive.

Right now, some of you are sitting there still denying all of this. Some of you – bless your precious souls – are even thinking of where to go after this performance. Maybe drinks at Holland V or clubbing at St. James, where you will stage a performance of your own, telling stupid jokes and tapping your cigarette ash affectedly and braying in laughter like a donkey's daughter, all done in exaggerated motions that you've been consciously rehearsing in your head.

This is the only life we know. It is how the human race carries on running. And don't sit there staring at me like a stunned mullet, fuckface: you knew that all along too.

It is religion. It is masturbation. It is sitting, standing, bursting into laughter at appropriate moments, then walking down the aisles to drink from the cup of amnesia and eat of the wafer of blitheness, like the wankers that you all are.

It is enjoyment. It is rape. It is a distraction from the other distractions that distract us from our friend called the Truth, a beast whom we've come to know and love, but whose name we still do not dare utter.

It is mechanical reproduction. It is mechanical reproduction. It is where we come to be royally fucked with and screwed over, again and again and again, until the curtains close.

Now, enjoy the rest of the show. Or at least pretend to like it.

The audience exits.