

w.o.m.a.n

There is something inside of me, who will I be when it comes out?



An aerial piece created and performed by Laila Umeko

This piece is about letting go; of expectations, of judgements, of who we are supposed to be. It is a questioning of that which is hidden deep within. A reclaiming of body - of self - in facets and in fragments.

It is as simple and as complicated as stripping clothes down to bare flesh. And in the process perhaps also discarding, layer by layer, the restraints holding us in place.

Why not revel in all that we are. All that we may become. The ugly, the messy, the chaotic, the colourful, the beautiful.

A collection of suspended moments in which finally,
We break free.

There is something inside of me, who will I be when it comes out?



Form

Fragmentation. Bodies. Transformation

A series of fleeting moments, suspended instants, a collection of colours, sensations and images assembled together, each one flowing into the next. A narrative composed by three miniature forms, each with their own story. How can I capture the essence of each piece? Put the fragments into order. Unstitch. Reweave. Again, again, again...

I am a woman. I grew up a woman. I walk through this life a woman. It is from these experiences, and ones shared by many other women, that this project was born. w.o.m.an. moves beyond gender norms and societal expectations in an attempt to reappropriate this body in its entirety. The simple presence of a female body onstage can itself, be seen an act of resistance.

I am interested in discovering what lies beneath the facade of a flawless woman, perfect image of desire. What happens when she takes off her disguise? Clothing comes first. With every garment removed, the oppression, trauma and shame associated with female existence become a little lighter. The restraints which have for so long confined our bodies become a metaphor. Discarded layers – both visible and unseen – reveal a new self beneath. And in this way, we are transformed. We transform ourselves.

*I write for the still-fragmented parts in me,
trying to bring them together. Whoever can read
and use any of this, I write for them as well*

Adrienne Rich

Mise en Scene

Circus, movement and costume combined to create **three miniature forms**

One.

Lights fade in to reveal a woman standing centre stage. She confronts the audience clad in red, garments chosen to provoke pleasure and desire. She is the embodiment seduction, a femme fatale. Yet her exaggerated sexuality is ironic, a parody of expectations which demands us to question the norms of femininity. Her presence onstage is concluded with a striptease.



Two.

Phases of transformation; discarded garments scattered across the floor like layers of shed skin. In place of red, we are confronted by the colour of exposed flesh. What is it that you see in this woman standing before you? Where on her body does your gaze rest? Look carefully. Think carefully. Break free of your own expectations. I am so much more than a simple collection of parts.



Three.

From the silence a new woman is born, one who is no longer willing to remain within the narrow confines of prescribed femininity. Layer by layer she reshapes herself, transformed once again. It is time now, to move our bodies! Excessively, discomposedly, convulsively, uncontrolledly, to escape norms, to realise potential. A thousand women held within, all of them dancing. And that something inside of me? Who shall I be now that I have set it free?



History is full of women who venture beyond the cultural and social limits set by the community to which they belong and who shape, through their bodies in movement, forms of resistance to norms.

Valerie Piette

Physical Research

A language composed of lines and curves, varied physical vocabulary for pieces onetwothree. Specific movement qualities, each one chosen to express a different form of femininity. Written by a woman who spins into a blur, kaleidoscope of movement, confusion. Every gesture seeks meaning, body tangled, limbs intertwined to create new forms. I want you to see me in this skin, this flesh, these bones. Inspired by all that floats, that flies, that falls, that has let go, gone wild. Sensations spilling out in every direction.



A body that exists, resists,
revolts

A body that is reclaimed,
transformed, alive

A body that asks
questions

A body that is more than
an object

A body in motion

And so, the woman

I come from Aotearoa, New Zealand, but today I am based in Belgium. My work is a fusion of contemporary circus and performance which seeks to question norms and inspire conversations. I create with strong socio-cultural influence, notably in relation to gender, feminism and the environment. My research is rooted in the human body; using acrobatic movement, costume and aerial spaces to create new forms of visual poetry.

In November 2021 I graduated from the professional circus formation at ESAC (Ecole supérieure des arts du Cirque), where I specialised in dance trapeze. There I had the pleasure of working under the direction of artists such as Simon Thierrée, Elodie Doñaque and Micha Goldberg among others.

Post-graduation, my class of 18 at ESAC formed the company Soif Totale. We will be premiering our collective show DIVE IN, in October 2022. In 2021 I co-created the circus company La Lune Bleue with Elise Martin and Mia Mattenklotz. After a successful first creation, we are currently in the process of writing a new street show which will travel across Belgium and Switzerland in the summer of 2022. I will also be performing in the trapeze collective WITCHES directed by Elodie Doñaque and premiering in December 2022.

Contact

Laila : +32 465 8469 62

laila.u.smith@gmail.com

[@lailaumekeo](#)



it will not be simple, it will not be long
it will take little time, it will take all your thought
it will take all your heart, it will take all your breath
it will be short, it will not be simple
it will touch through your ribs, it will take all your heart
it will not be long, it will occupy your thought
as a city is occupied, as a bed is occupied
it will take all your flesh, it will not be simple
You are coming into us who cannot withstand you
you are coming into us who never wanted to withstand you
you are taking parts of us into places never planned
you are going far away with pieces of our lives
it will be short, it will take all your breath
it will not be simple, it will become your will

Adrienne Rich Final Notations



Technical Conditions

- o 2x aerial rigging points 350 daN WLL at minimum 6m high
- o 1x floor anchor point 350 daN WLL
- o A ladder (or other equipment) to attach pulley system + trapeze to aerial rigging points
- o Trapeze and all technical material (carabiners, ropes, straps...) will be supplied by the artist**

These conditions are open to arrangement so as to best suit each specific venue and performance environment. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with any questions.



LAILA UMEKO

Circus Artist

INFO

Rue de la Glaciere 40
1060 Saint Gilles, Brussels, Belgium
Tel : +32 465 846 962
laila.u.smith@gmail.com

PROFILE

Laila discovered circus in the distant lands of New Zealand, where she fell under the spell of dance trapeze. This passion took her to Belgium, to ESAC, where she has just graduated as a circus artist.

Her work examines how a circus body can be used to tell stories which challenge and inspire her audience.

EDUCATION

2018 - 2021, Belgium

ECOLE SUPÉRIEURE DES ARTS DU CIRQUE (ÉSAC)

Bachelor's Diploma in Performing Arts and Arts Promotion / Communication Techniques – Circus Concentration.

PERFORMING EXPERIENCE

- 2021 **EXIT | dance trapeze solo graduation piece**
ésac, Belgium
- 2021 **La Lune Bleue Circus Company | Ere de Rien summer tour with a street show**
Switzerland
- 2021 **ésac + Soif Totale Company | DIVE IN collective show directed by Micha Goldberg**
Les Halles de Schaerbeek, Belgium
- 2020 **Headless Productions | The Headless Cabaret online event**
- 2020 **ésac | The Line 8 collective show directed Simon Thierrée**
ésac, Belgium
- 2019 **Las Bobinas | Las Bobinas Circus Cabaret**
Las Bobinas, Belgium
- 2019 **ésac | Atelier Collectif Collective show directed by Vincent Kuentz**
ésac, Belgium
- 2018 **Faraway Places | Cabaret**
The Circus Hub, New Zealand
- 2017 **Colossal Productions | Highlight: Carnival of Light**
Highlight, New Zealand
- 2017 **The Circus Hub | Murder in Hubbington**
The Circus Hub, New Zealand
- 2016 **The Circus Hub + Orchestra Wellington | Under the Big Top**
Michael Fowler Center, New Zealand
- 2016 **Circus Aotearoa | Guest Artist**
New Zealand
- 2016 **Wellington City Council | CubaDupa Festival**
New Zealand

OTHER EXPERIENCE

- 2021 - present **Imagine | aerial arts teacher**
Belgium
- 2020 - 2021 **Académie Constantin Meunier | Life Model**
Belgium
- 2015 - 2020 **Colossal Entertainment Company | Aerial Artist**
New Zealand
- 2016 - 2020 **The Circus Hub | Circus Arts Teacher**
New Zealand
- 2012 - 2018 **Onslow Gymnastics Club | Gymnastics Coach**
New Zealand

