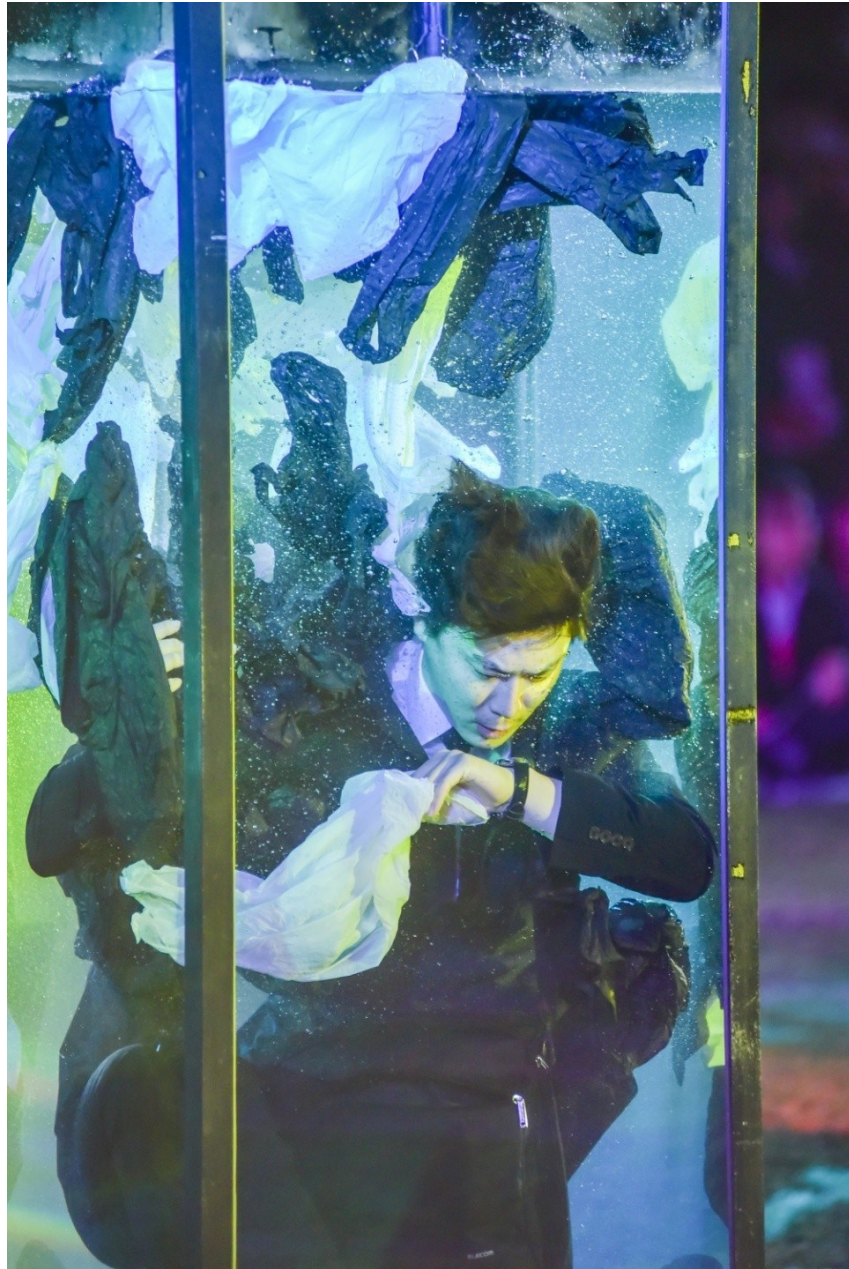


MULJIL



Elephants Laugh

Elephants Laugh

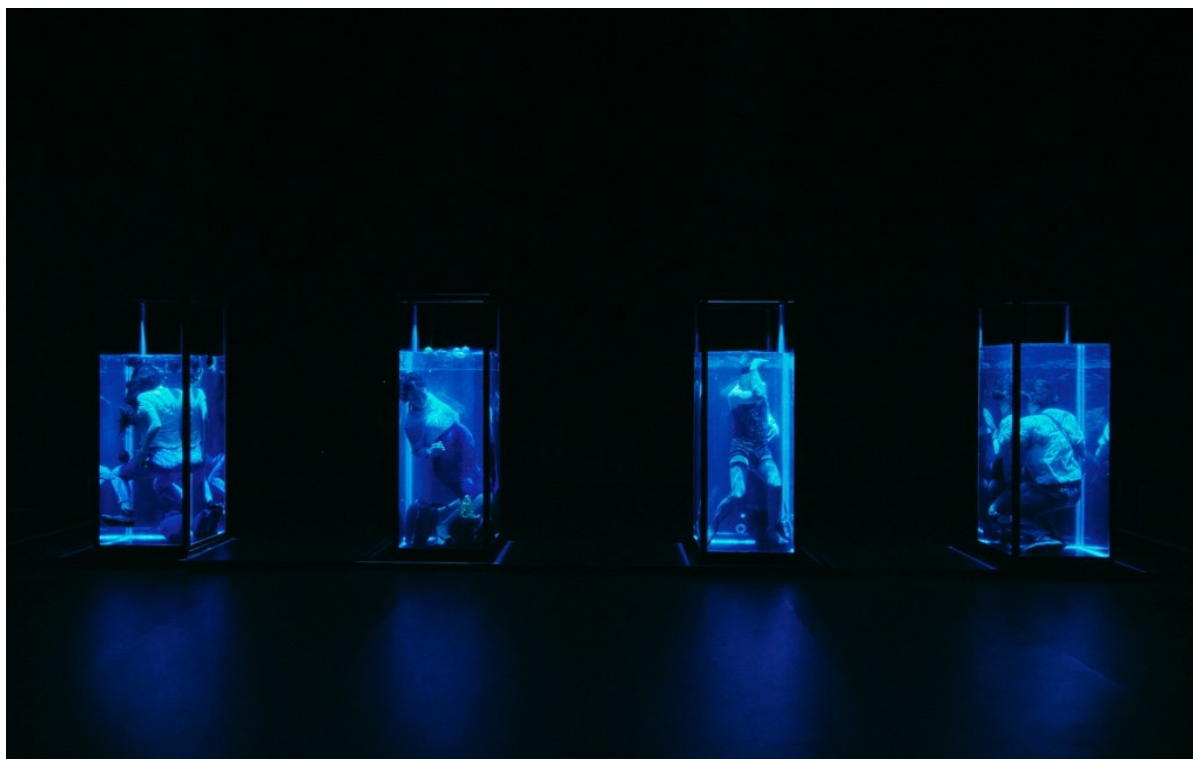
Founded in 2009, "Elephants Laugh" is an artist collective passionate about creating and showcasing interactive performances. Every piece they present uniquely intertwines three core elements: a specific site, an engaged local community, and participatory features. Their mission is to weave performing arts seamlessly into the fabric of daily life, bridging the gap between art and lived experience.

Furthermore, "Elephants Laugh" delves deep into social issues and highlights marginalized communities. Their performances are designed to stimulate audiences, urging them to reflect on the nuances of their everyday existence. At its core, the collective challenges individuals to reevaluate their self-perceptions and the societal boundaries they navigate.

MULJIL

On Jeju Island, Korea, the "Haenyeo" (translated as "sea women") free dive deep into the sea to harvest a variety of shellfish. This is their livelihood. Their diving endeavors are encapsulated by the Korean term 'muljil'. Each descent presents a palpable confrontation with mortality: a profound moment of breathlessness experienced at least twice by every haenyeo. It is a testament to their resolve that only those willing to dance with danger can transcend these fleeting moments of peril. Haenyeo often express that each dive is a daily reckoning with death, only to resurface with renewed life.

This juxtaposition of life and death, so vividly experienced by the haenyeo, mirrors moments in our everyday existence. Each of us, due to various circumstances, has instances where we brush against the specter of death. My endeavor is to explore these moments, to understand how the people of today grapple with mortality and, time and again, emerge from its shadow.





Although separated like islands, we are all immersed in the same sea.

Nobody can choose the conditions of life themselves.

We owe much to those who endure the agony and hatred present in the world.

INTRODUCTION

There are people who sink into deep water every night. Their bodies feel heavy when they have to get up, and some of them never wake up. Even as I assure myself that it's not my turn yet, I cannot help but walk on tiptoe. When the water comes up to my chin, I start breathing slowly. Thus I survive the day only to repeat it all over again. At night, I curl up and ask myself if I've really survived. In the morning, I open my eyes as if in answer.

People separated from one another like islands are floundering in their own waves. These waves I see before me—where do they come from? With each step, they spread further. Where do they go?

The waves are utterly relentless. Some people keep asking one question after another in an effort to understand the waves. Have we really survived? The waves sway as if in answer. Although separated like islands, we are all immersed in the same sea.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Before my encounters with the refugees and asylum seekers at the Ansan Global Youth Support Center in Korea, I was oblivious to the fact that they were, in essence, our neighbors. In Korean society, refugees often remain unseen, hidden in the shadows. When they do surface into the public consciousness, they're either perceived as vulnerable souls reliant on aid or, contrarily, as threats who might seize our job opportunities and undermine safety. Both views unjustly cast refugees in the light of disdain and prejudice.

Such prejudice often stems from ignorance and an unwillingness to engage in meaningful discourse. When we coexist with others, disagreements are inevitable. Yet, dialogue and compromise are crucial. Avoidance and turning a blind eye to vital issues only give rise to misjudgments. My time spent with the refugees in Ansan illuminated the truth that they are an integral part of our societal fabric.

It's imperative that we don't objectify refugees or expose their lives as spectacles. No one holds the authority to critique another's life journey. Similarly, those facing adversities shouldn't be scapegoated for their challenges. Often, societal structures perpetuate the vulnerabilities of the marginalized.

It's crucial to acknowledge the randomness of our life circumstances. Being born a heterosexual male or without disabilities is purely coincidental. As such, harboring resentment or ostracizing others without just cause is untenable. We must refrain from assigning blame to individuals for circumstances beyond their control.

Performance history

2018 Ansan International Street Arts Festival / Ansan, Korea
2018 Seoul Street Arts Festival / Seoul, Korea
2019 PAMS Choice, Seoul Arts Market / Seoul, Korea
2019 Stockton International Riverside Festival / Stockton-on-tees, UK
2019 Sziget Festival / Budapest, Hungary
2019 Opera Estate Festival / Bassano del Grappa, Italy
2019 Waves Festival / Vordingborg, Denmark
2020 The Performance Arcade / Wellington, New Zealand
2022 Veranos de la Villa / Madrid, Spain
2024 WOMADelaide / Adelaide, Australia
2024 Festival d'Aurillac / Aurillac, France

REVIEW

“Muljil” by Elephants Laugh | Until the last breath ENG/ITA

Here are our review and our photo gallery of “MULJIL” by the Korean company Elephants Laugh.

A bout du souffle. Until the last breath. The performer's bodies float motionless inside the glass cases. For a long time they remain quite still, like inert animal corpses in formaldehyde. But they are light years away from any Damien Hirst installation because they are alive, very alive. They breathe. Each inside their own container, vertical and transparent, filled almost to the brim with water. We watch them. We are sitting upon the damp night-time grass of the Museum's cloister. We waited for them, we saw them come and enter their aqueous tanks by way of long metal stairs. We watched them submerge and become mute, distant creatures, interred by an intangible transparency.

The clothes they wear reveal a lot about who they are: a pin-up model in tight jeans and a close-fitting shirt; a pregnant woman in a purple dress, high-heels and with a black leather handbag hanging on her arm; a man en travesti with petticoat and suspenders; a businessman dressed in shirt and long trousers, carrying a laptop case over his shoulder. Four lives dissected in front of our eyes, criss- crossed by our gaze, enveloped in a geometric volume of water. Four portraits of our contemporary world and its obsessions: beauty, procreation, sexuality, work.

Then these bodies, immersed in water up to the mouth, begin to move, to animate themselves, to explore the marine world of interiority, a contained yet formidable abyss. And it is in that agitation, in that twisting and turning, in that quivering and holding of breath, in that remote and ancient apnea that embodies something original in itself, that we witness the transformation. No longer bodies but actual people; no more icy mannequins but human beings, stirred by perturbations, passions, emotions. Hair begins to swirl around the water, like algae swept by a current; faces appear distorted; body movements seem slower; clothes billow and drift down like falling petals.

In those open glassy eyes that stare at us from the water we see an exotic reflection of ourselves,

both the mirrored narcissist and vanity's withering, an echo of love as well as its severance, an evocation of security and its subsequent attenuation. Inside those glass cases we see both the micro and the macrocosm. Finally something floats up from our memory, through the pregnant woman pirouetting upside down to retrieve some apples that have escaped from her bag. An allusion to the Haenyeo: those last female divers able to hold their breath and dive at depth in order to comb the Korean seabed for molluscs and shells. The glass that encases them ensures that the audience observes them holding their breath. We witness that delicate and very fragile moment that divides a life-giving breath from its suspension, from its interruption. Its tangibility brings us closer to that secret inter-world, that mysterious veil that separates the surface of life from death's vast sealed-off inaccessibility.

The disturbing and formally perfect show of these four underwater dancers occasionally evokes the equally disturbing and impeccable moods created by the Korean director Kim Kiduk. Rippling against these fully-formed realistic artworks are the other performers who enter the scene and interact from the outside with those enclosed inside their watery pods. It is a search for contact that culminates with their voluntary immersion in the tanks too, together with the four dancers. It's carried out in steps, they seek to touch and connect with backs, heads and shoulders.

The surprise for the audience comes at the end, when some of the company's dancers emerge out of their tanks, soaked and dripping wet, smiling, invite us all to repeat some simple movements. Thus, we all find ourselves in the same boat so-to-speak, dancing and holding hands, pivoting around on our feet. Like sea waves, we tumble to the ground, lying down, holding each others' hands and, despite ourselves, we find ourselves gazing up at the dark, adrift amongst the stars. "Even if we are separated like islands, we are all in the same sea" someone says offstage.

Then, the stage lights come back on so we recompose ourselves, and the other performers who had remained immersed in the tanks up to that point re-emerge and exit by way of the long stairs. It is at this juncture that a connection is made with the migrant landings: in those thoughtful towels offered by stage assistants to performers, in those spontaneous applause with which every re-emerging body is welcomed and embraced, we feel and see all the dramatic power of life which has survived death, the alighting ashore that defeats being adrift out at sea, a humanity that has finally found itself.

Anna Trevisan

(English translation by Jim Sunderland)

If you want to find original review, please go to the following link.

<http://www.abcdance.eu/muljil-by-elephants-laugh-until-the-last-breath-engita>

Credit of MULJIL

Director || LEE Jinyeob

Text || SHIN Jaeuk

Actors || SEO Hyun Sung, MA Kwanghyun, LEE Jaeho, KIM Joonbong, LEE Aeri

Sound Design || SERT Jimmy

Lighting Design || JEONG Hayoung

Costume Design || KIM Gyonginn

Stage Manager || CHOI Wonsuk

Producer || CHOI Bongmin

Fund Commissioned by Ansan Street Arts Festival, Seoul Street Arts Creation Center

Associated with Producer Group DOT

[Photo & Video of MULJIL]

PHOTO <https://url.kr/4w1sua>

VIDEO

- Outdoor Trailer <https://url.kr/y5u8nf>
- Full Version <https://url.kr/dsd76i>
- Indoor Trailer <https://url.kr/7go9yz>
- Full Version <https://url.kr/cq7f8m>
- Community Workshop (2019 Italy) <https://url.kr/bxipko>

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If you need any more information, please feel free to contact Sonia at
Unicycleproductions@gmail.com for the US/North American market

or CHOI Bongmin bmchoipd@gmail.com / 82(0)10 8901 6079
