

Preview: MILIEU 2023 by Frontier Danceland



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COMMENTS 0



MILIEU, the annual flagship production by Frontier Danceland returns this year with a swansong edition that features artistic director, Low Mei Yoke (Singapore) and guest choreographers, Ong Yong Lock (Hong Kong / Malaysia), Loke Soh Kim (Malaysia) and Chiew Peishan (Singapore).



Photo
Credit:
Chew
Yi Hui

Co-founder of Frontier Danceland and 2018 Cultural Medallion Award recipient, Low takes centre stage in the full-length creation, *a . part*. Through the unique immediacy of live theatre, the work embarks on a retrospective performance journey to share introspection and mull over lived experience, longing and time. An invitation for audiences to witness the embodiment of over four decades of dance-making by a veteran dance artist and the performance-making traces of Frontier Danceland, MILIEU 2023 endeavours to hold space for both artists and audiences to share sensibilities and seed refreshed connections to dance and everyday living

The artistic impetus for MILIEU 2023 came about in late 2022 during the double bill production of MILIEU 2022 that featured Loke's work, *Listening...*, which was conceived as an inquiry into the ability of each being to sense with sincerity. Facilitating the act of listening that begins with the performers and their physicality, and extending from within each self to be in relation to other beings, Loke performed alongside 4 company artists. Low shares, "I was deeply drawn by Loke's performance; her movements exuded unrestrained exuberance yet there was freedom in control. It was as if I could hear her physical body speak through the interplay of dynamic and sustained moments, with each movement seemingly emanating a sound. I had a sudden urge to dance with Loke. I expressed my desire to explore her "listening" practice and perform together in MILIEU 2023 to potentially experience the euphoric sense of liberation that I witnessed."



Photo Credit: Chew Yi Hui

A long-time collaborator of Frontier Danceland since 1996, Loke was pleasantly surprised by the connection that Listening... invited. Sensing Low at a current juncture of change, not only did Loke take up the collaboration and performance offer, she also invited Ong to join the artistic team as concept director and Malaysian music composer, Kent Lee to undertake sound design with live sonic performance intervention. For Loke, MILIEU 2023 primarily evolves around "dancing with a friend." She says, "Low and I have grown from newly met artists to friends with rapport over the years. Personally, the significance of relationships lies in one's attitude towards life. I suggested for Low to live and do a creative residency together as an avenue to expand her perception, give care to the potential accumulated neglect of her body, as well as manage her imminent loss of Frontier Danceland as a full-time dance company."

A 10-day residency was hosted by Loke where Low travelled to Kuala Lumpur to experience the former's way of life and engage in explorations as part of the creative work development. Loke perceives no clear delineation between life and art, where "Life is art-making and art-making is part of life. I stay committed to my doing and allow others to perceive and define where lies the art that translates. What's important and valuable is the interactive exchange between the collaborators, one that encompasses the process of embracing the strengths and weaknesses of the other."



Photo Credit: Chew Yi Hui

Co-founder and creative director of Hong Kong's Unlock Dancing Plaza, Ong plays a pivotal role in shaping the artistic premise of *a . part*. He shares, "Through conversations, I grow understanding and sense Low's profound sentiments towards dance and her personal aspiration. Rather than take on her initial frame of mind towards MILIEU 2023 as a retirement production, I have greater interest to explore Low's web of connections with dance and her practice of dance as a medium to understand worldly happenings and oneself." Ong injects a more meaningful perspective to curate a performance archive of Low and Frontier Danceland. Navigating personal historical materials to organise, transform and place them in relevant context, he crafts a creative framework that begins with narration and unfolds through a distillation of Low's artistic and life experiences. Addressing Frontier Danceland's upcoming transition out of full-time operations, Ong perceives little need to delve into its causes. He steers clear of emotional indulgence to offer a ritualistic process to manage the closure of a relationship for Low, as well as potentially share with audiences a learning and observational attitude towards the acknowledgement and acceptance of loss, a common experience in life.

Beyond Low's relationship with Frontier Danceland, Ong values a more wholesome focus to include the artistic outlook of the dance company through its collaborators and repertoire. An invitation was extended to Chiew to reflect on the intricate relationship from her years of working with Frontier Danceland from 2007 to 2011 as a performer during its full-time transformation phase, and more recently from 2020 to 2023 as assistant artistic director through the COVID-19 pandemic. A six-week residency took place for the creation of a new work that will be integrated as part of the full-length work.



Photo Credit: @bykairay

For Chiew, her interest for MILIEU 2023 evades the glorification of Low and Frontier Danceland. Locating her relationship with Frontier Danceland between the dichotomy of hope and hurt, she muses, “I would like to honestly acknowledge both nourishing and toxic encounters in a relationship; life is oftentimes no bed of roses. I value importance for one’s “giving” to invite “receiving” with mutual respect and understanding, otherwise “giving more becomes less” and a relationship shifts into problematic realm.” Chiew extends an earlier exploration of the origami apple as the symbolic manifestation of the self from her work, *Re Apple Diary* (2021) which was presented as part of MILIEU 2021. Working in close collaboration with company artists, Sammantha Yue and Kirby Dunnzell, Chiew crafts a creative premise where audiences will witness the process of the origami apple gradually losing its original form, while a repurposed set consisting of differently-sized spheres from one of Frontier Danceland’s works is integrated to visually suggest the physical magnification and accumulation of hope and hurt over time.

2023 marks Yue’s 7th year as a full-time company artist with Frontier Danceland. Exploring with Chiew and Dunnzell through shared experiences and learning about each other’s perspectives, she connects her personal association of “perseverance” with “hope”, and “failure” with “hurt”. Yue shares, “This is expressed through working with 3 unpredictable inanimate objects [origami apple, small sphere and big sphere] that increase in size throughout the work, creating volatility in the navigation of space and relationship within the performance itself. Treading the in-between of subjective success and failure both within the work and in life is a surprise and challenge that I can never be fully prepared for.” Regarding Frontier Danceland’s transition out of full-time operations, Yue laments the decision made beyond her control while staying thankful to have crossed paths with many company artists and choreographers over the years. With positivity, she is “accepting that life goes on and staying excited for what’s to come as I journey forward.”



Photo Credit: @bykairay

From a collective of dance hobbyists in 1991 to a full-time dance company in 2023, Frontier Danceland has forged through various evolutions for the past 32 years to become one of the key dance organizations in Singapore. Shifting her perception to embrace the saying of “giving time its time, and allowing the past to pass”, Low hopes to connect with a more wholesome self to dance and make dance to her heart’s will, as well as grow greater comfort in her own skin. Low reflects, “Perhapsthe very pursuit of a dance company dream is already a form of happiness. What’s valuable may be where life is headed, rather than the height where one stands. I do not wish to have regrets. Hereon, I would like to take time to slow down and find my peace of mind and body. Keeping faith in my utmost passion for dance, I believe a new start awaits.” About the unknown future, Low ever tightly weaves the legacy of Frontier Danceland with her current personal aspiration “to do what I want.”

The creative platform of MILIEU was curated in 2012 and has since presented 21 works by 18 local and international dance artists including Stefanie Batten Bland (USA), Matej Kejzar (Belgium/Slovenia), Liu Yen-Cheng (Taiwan), Noa Zuk and Ohad Fishof (Israel), Aymeric Bichon (France), Christina Chan (Singapore), Thomas Lebrun (France), Victor Ma Choi-Wo (Hong Kong), Sascia Pellegrini (Italy/Hong Kong) and Deborah Nightingale née Galloway (United Kingdom). The diversity of cultures and influences supports the continued exploration of new frontiers in embodying a unique versatility that is the hallmark of Frontier Danceland.



Photo Credit: @bykairay

Ong shares, "MILIEU 2023 embodies much complexity and nuances, and I strive to extract and present them in simplified forms. Instead of an informative transmission of happenings, I hope for audiences to connect resonance and strike a chord with the dance veteran, Low through her sharing of lived experience and engagement of the body in performance."

Presenting this final production of MILIEU 2023 as a full-time contemporary dance company, Frontier Danceland invites all dance practitioners, movement enthusiasts and arts lovers to share communal presence and support of this meaningful milestone.

MILIEU 2023 runs from 3rd to 4th August 2023 at the Esplanade Annexe Studio. Tickets available [here](https://milieu2023.peatix.com/) (<https://milieu2023.peatix.com/>).

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