

Zheng Bo: 舞草舞木 / Dance Grass Dance Tree

Artwork Labels

Zheng Bo
舞草舞木
Dance Grass
Dance Tree

If we really want to move into a future where humans are not the centre of the world, we need to treat other forms of life and materiality with full respect, biologically, culturally, intellectually and politically.

–Zheng Bo

舞草舞木 / *Dance Grass Dance Tree* is a performance by Zheng Bo that cultivates intimate human-plant relationships and kinship. In doing so, Zheng seeks to provide a positive counter to global crises of the economy, security, health and migration that have triggered cascading systemic shocks and generated a state of profound instability. As these challenges persist, the climate emergency continues to escalate unabated, compounding the vulnerabilities of societies already grappling with concurrent crises and rising political tensions.

Commissioned by AGWA as part of the Simon Lee Foundation Institute of Contemporary Asian Art, this performance is choreographed by Zheng and Tyrone Earl Lraé Robinson who collaborated with two dancers and five Western Australian plants. Set atop a sparsely populated garden located inside a modern gallery space, the dance unfolds within a setting that isolates and elevates the presence of each plant. This garden-come-stage

...continued on next page

emphasises the preciousness of each plant and the precarity of their, and our shared existence.

Their work 舞草舞木 / *Dance Grass Dance Tree* draws on the notion of ‘making kin’ to consider how all of the Earth’s life forms are bound to fragile ecologies. To be kin with the surrounding plants is to have an enduring relatedness that is mutual, obligatory, pleasurable and accountable. The performance thereby poses a critical question: to whom is one truly responsible?

As the piece unfolds the beauty of sensual interactions between humans and plants is brought into focus, with lines and shapes that gesture across difference and energetically play with multispecies flourishing. In this way, Zheng creates a speculative alternative – a possibility of living in a subjective, symbiotic way with other life forms. Further to this, by excavating the roots of deeply entangled global structures this work considers how we might resist the extractive frameworks of our present moment, and come to view the ecological crisis as extending beyond human survival alone.

To interact intimately with the grass and the trees requires a reconfiguration of how we get to know life forms different from ours. For pleasure is both a noun and a verb that holds a moral and an ethical dimension. Pleasure is slowly cultivated over time, it is reciprocal and requires sensitivity to the needs of the other. Pleasure is what enables us all to form meaningful, lasting attachments to others. Connecting with plants in this way moves beyond language as a mode of recognising and understanding what we see. Rather than observing the plants Zheng invites you to sense and

...continued on next page

contemplate the way they live. Studying the outside world is also an opportunity to examine your own interior world.

By thinking with our entire bodies about the relations between humans and plants – contemplating how these bonds can be lasting, to a certain extent equal and ideally pleasurable – 舞草舞木 / *Dance Grass Dance Tree* suggests a reconfiguration of how we perceive and communicate with all of the Earth's life forms. As the performance suggests, building multiple alliances between people and plants might recompose what it means to be human. Let's find ways of becoming world together.

We acknowledge the Whadjuk Noongar people as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land on which AGWA stands. We offer our heartfelt gratitude to the Whadjuk community and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who continue to care for Country and share their knowledge. Their generosity and wisdom helps us to understand and navigate Country with respect and care.

Special thanks to Rickeeta Walley for sharing with Zheng Bo her ancestral ecological knowledge of Noongar boodja, the importance of plants for Noongar people, and the concept of kinship that is embedded across Indigenous cultures and knowledge systems.

We also extend our gratitude to Ian Kiely, Sue McDougall and Kings Park and Botanic Garden for their botanical advice; Tyrone Earl Lraé Robinson and Shuling Wong from OFF-base Dance for their collaborative spirit; Talitha Maslin and Niamh O'Sullivan for their performances; and Lara Rose Bos for her botanical expertise and ongoing care of this work.

舞草舞木 / *Dance Grass Dance Tree* will be performed every Friday at 5pm from 15 November to 13 December 2024, and from 17 January through to 14 February 2025.

Please note this performance contains nudity and sexualised themes. Age recommendation of 18+.

No photography or video is allowed during the performance.

...continued on next page

Zheng Bo: 舞草舞木 / *Dance Grass Dance Tree* is presented by AGWA's Simon Lee Foundation Institute of Contemporary Asian Art, a curatorial initiative supported by the Simon Lee Foundation.

AGWA PRINCIPAL PARTNER



PRESENTING PARTNER



EXHIBITION PARTNER



Zheng Bo

born 1974 Beijing

works Hong Kong

舞草舞木 / Dance Grass Dance Tree

2024

performance with two human dancers and five Western Australian plants, mulch, galvanised steel, sound; 30 min

Commissioned by The Art Gallery of Western Australia as part of the Simon Lee Foundation Institute of Contemporary Asian Art

Presented in collaboration with OFF-base Dance
Courtesy of the artist and Kiang Malingue, Hong Kong

Plant dancers: Boyur/Woolly Bush/*Adenanthos sericeus*, Mungart/Jam Wattle/*Acacia acuminata*, Balga/Grass Tree/*Xanthorrhoea preissii*, Berrung/*Grevillea* 'City of Lights', Birdak/Bottlebrush/*Callistemon salignus* 'Perth Pink'

Human dancers: Talitha Maslin, Niamh O'Sullivan

Choreography: Tyrone Earl Lraé Robinson, in collaboration with Talitha Maslin and Niamh O'Sullivan;
Ecosensibility: Zheng Bo; Music: Infraction Audio