



YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2021

NORHAIZAD ADAM

NORHAIZAD ADAM (b. 1987) is a dance artist. He performs and choreographs for unconventional community spaces, galleries and theatres. Central to his practice is considering the performativity of the everyday rituals and the ways that accessing tradition can be a form of wisdom for living in the dynamics of global modernity. His works talk about morality and behaviourism in Malay culture.

Norhaizad has spent his growing up years in Singapore as a dancer under the tutelage of Mr Azmi Juhari at Azpirasi. Through Malay dance, he began examining how individuals navigate complex issues of identity. As a self-taught artist, he believes in supporting the research and creation process, connecting dance and arts communities. This is evident in his rigorous participation in local, regional and international residencies, such as Dance Nucleus in Singapore (2018) and Asia Discovers Asia Meeting in Taipei (2018, 2019). He believes in advancing his professional career by harnessing dialogue and unlearning choreography. He has presented his work in Venice, Melbourne, Taipei, Paris, Vienna, Solo, Cyprus and notable events in Singapore such as da:ns festival, Singapore International Festival of the Arts (SIFA) and Singapore Writers Festival.

‘Belon’ is one of his accomplished works that was seeded as part of the ATLAS residency programme at ImPulsTanz – Vienna International Dance Festival 2015. It has since been performed at The Substation in Singapore, 2016, NuArt Sculpture Park in Bandung, 2018, presented as a programme of Floating Utopias at ArtScience Late in Singapore, 2019, and Mapping Melbourne in 2019.

Norhaizad’s key contribution is as Artistic Director of P7:1SMA, a dance performance company that radically shifts the perspective of Malay dance through intimate and innovative performance experiences. As a proactive mentor, he sees value in mentorship of emerging choreographers and contributes to programmes organised by *SCAPE and School of the Arts (SOTA).

Moving forward, Norhaizad desires to reimagine Malay dance and encourage critical discourse so as to make dance relevant to future generations.



Rehearsing ‘Belon’ at Mapping Melbourne, Testing Ground by Multicultural Arts Victoria, 2019
Photo courtesy of Sarah Goh



A CONVERSATION WITH NORHAIZAD ADAM

Tell us about your earliest memories encountering the arts. Who or what were your key influences in dance?

In early 2004, I joined Azpirasi, a Malay dance group at Yew Tee Community Centre. My first guru, Mr Azmi Juhari, was a generous teacher who often shared about the ups and downs of being a Malay dance practitioner. Initially, I never thought of becoming an artist as a career. After spending a lot of time performing and thinking about dance, I realised I really enjoy the process of moving and creating dance. That was when I began to clarify my purpose in art-making and decided to make a meaningful living as an artist.



'Delay' at Palazzo Mora by Venice International Performance Art Week, 2020
Photo courtesy of Fenia Kotsopoulou

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in your artistic journey, and how did you overcome them?

It is normal for people to have differing opinions on controversial issues in Singapore. Sometimes my artistic work may reveal these issues, and challenge social norms or community values. I am learning to trust my instincts and be clear about my intentions in every artistic work. Having open conversations helps me value different perspectives and share my motivations for artistic creations.

What is the most rewarding aspect of what you do?

I enjoy creating dance at a slow and meaningful pace. Taking things slow is a personal choice so that I can observe my mind and feel more through my body. When I reconnect with myself, I can come up with better ideas or performance strategies. I am grateful for committed collaborators and friends for their openness and trust in the slow process. Working with dancers and non-practitioners can be very rewarding for me. I get to know different life experiences. I love watching them in their state of curiosity and feeling their creative energy fill up the space.

What do you want the audience to experience through your works?

I want the audience to notice their thoughts, feelings and memories. I hope they experience courage and the value of imperfections. It is important for me to reflect on my life experiences, before I invite others to reflect too. And to remember that imperfections make us human.

Please share what a typical day in your life as dancer/choreographer is like.

With a warm cup of coffee, I try my best to start the day with a relaxed mind. I look through my project notes and check on that day's schedule. I continue my thought-processing and research. Being a new parent, I multi-task and do this thinking while caring for my son and doing house chores. Then I go to the studio for dance rehearsals or meetings with collaborators. Rehearsals can end till late at night so I try my best to take care of my mental and physical self through meditation.

What are your vision and hopes for Singapore's dance scene?

I hope that more people will learn and practise traditional Malay dance for many years to come. It will be good to bring our attention back to deep local activities that make us curious about our heritage and land, and also to find ways to rediscover Malay dance as a way of caring for our body, and building quality relationships. I also hope that more artists have the courage to create. In time, artists will be recognised as an essential contributor to our nation's cultural values.



‘Selamat Pengantin Baru’ at Esplanade Theatre by Esplanade da:ns festival, 2021

Photo courtesy of Ms Bern

What advice would you give to students who want to pursue a career in your field?

Always be open to exploring unconventional ideas and keep evaluating the purpose of your art-making. To have a sustainable artistic career, make good friends with fellow arts managers and collaborators to support your artistic vision. Try to have a deeper relationship with dance not only in an artistic sense, but also in the administrative and networking aspects and especially in your everyday life.

How does receiving the Young Artist Award from the National Arts Council change things for you? Tell us more about how you intend to further grow and contribute to the arts scene.

It is a milestone as it validates where I am now as an artist. I intend to explore my practice in tandem with technological developments as a way to rediscover performance during the pandemic. I also hope to use my forte as a dancer as a starting point to collaborate with other genres and trends.



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

I am grateful for the love and support from family and friends as they motivate me to keep doing what I love.

Thank you to my beloved parents, Adam Bin Mohamed and Saemah Binte Rudi for believing in my pursuit of dance, through a rollercoaster of good, bad and uncertain days.

My wife, Hasyimah Harith, for being the greatest inspiration and contributor in my artistic journey and P7:1SMA.

As a self-taught artist, I am thankful to Cikgu Azmi Juhari for being my first Malay dance teacher in Azpirasi. He is always generous in sharing his philosophy about community which sparks my questioning.

I am blessed to be surrounded by passionate and groundbreaking activists who believe in the core of arts for humanity: Thank you Ms Fezhah Maznan, Mr Daniel Kok, Dr Amin Farid, Mr Osman Hamid, Mr Zaini Tahir and Mr Ameerali Abdeali.

I appreciate the continuous support and affirmation from the National Arts Council in my artistic development through residencies and body of works in P7:1SMA.

All the conversations and building of relationships with each and every person, including everyday people, artistic collaborators and administrative managers, have taught me to be humble and enjoy the pleasures of the little things in art-making.