



DANCE PLANT COLLECTIVE - PHOTOSHOOT FOR MEAT, 2018

# COLLABORATING AS A COLLECTIVE

BY BELLA WILSON AND DANCE PLANT COLLECTIVE

Dance Plant Collective is a contemporary dance theatre collective based in Auckland. Here Co-founders Tui Hofmann, Brittany Kohler, Natasha Kohler, Rosie Tapsell, Jaz Yahel and Bella Wilson discuss their approach to collaboration.

Initially, we formed our collective simply to continue to work together after graduating from Unitec's Contemporary Dance course in 2016. Since then, we have created three full-length dance shows – *Desire Line(s)* (2017), *The Cost of Arms and Legs* (2018), and *MEAT* (2018). We have collaborated on a diverse range of projects including dance films, performances in art galleries, music gigs and festivals, and taught a series of movement classes and workshops for both professional dancers and the wider community.

Our vision is to create politically challenging and transformative performance work grounded in an ecological framework. Every project we embark on comes from a place of genuine curiosity and is often a response to the world we live in, and our place in it. Our collaborative practice is inspired by the genius of rhizome ecosystems; think mushrooms, ginger, and underground tree-root networks. We embrace both absurdity and authenticity,

trusting the spontaneous cross-fertilisation of viewpoints to produce startling new material staged in equally surprising spaces. We aim to make work of our time; work that is political, or simply explorative which comments on situations we find ourselves in. However, every work we do is different, which is the blessing of working with six people, and is not bound by a certain style. We make work we are currently interested in, and this constantly shifts over time.

Every creative process we step into as a collective shares one important commonality: a trust in the strength of collaboration. We believe in rhizomatic thinking – that great ideas happen collectively, by bouncing ideas off each other, stress-testing things, not holding onto ideas that aren't working, and allowing whatever emerges to be given value and space. Everyone's creative input is valued; however compromise is also important, as we are constantly negotiating our divergent interests, experiences



PHOTO: SARA COWDELL



PHOTO: BELLA WILSON

L TO R: ROSIE TAPSELL, BELLA WILSON, NATASHA KOHLER AND BRITTANY KOHLER - *DESIRE LINES*, 2017

L TO R: ROSIE TAPSELL, TUI HOFMANN, NATASHA KOHLER, BRITTANY KOHLER AND JAZ YAHIEL - *IN REHEARSAL FOR MEAT*, 2018

and desires. We feel that the eventual result of working collaboratively leads to highly nuanced performances which are more accessible to a wider audience, and reflective of the world we live in.

One of the special things about working as a collective is that we are constantly refining how we work together.

**WORKING WITH YOUR BEST FRIENDS ALLOWS FOR A NURTURING ENVIRONMENT WHERE WE CAN HELP EACH OTHER GROW AS PEOPLE AND AS ARTISTS. THIS GIVES US A HUGE LEVEL OF TRUST AND COMFORT WITH EACH OTHER, ALLOWING A SAFE SPACE IN WHICH WE CAN BE VULNERABLE AND TAKE RISKS.**

However, it can sometimes be challenging to separate ‘work time’ from ‘friend time’, and we find it super important to set aside time to catch up and debrief outside of rehearsals.

Our roles within the collective are fluid, and shift between projects. In our first development of *Desire Line(s)*, no-one was in charge and it was difficult at times to make decisions. Since then, we’ve chosen to have more clearly defined roles within each project, so we can work more efficiently together and best utilise our individual skills. We still don’t have a person in charge when it comes to application writing, admin and social media tasks – we share the load and all chip in when we can. However, this year we have been hugely fortunate to have Zoë Nicholson come onboard as our producer for *MEAT*, which has made the world of difference! We’ve been able to stay in the ‘creative zone’ without having to constantly switch to logistics mode – which can be jarring and restrictive as a creative. Having someone so reliable, organised and creative with their producing has made our show promotion much more consistent and successful.



## MEAT – DANCE PLANT COLLECTIVE

14 AUGUST 2018  
BASEMENT THEATRE, AUCKLAND  
BY LAUREN SANDERSON

*MEAT* is a contemporary dance theatre work that looks in depth at factory farming, delving into the darkest corners of New Zealand’s animal industries. It’s a powerful piece about the psychology of consumption and leaves you questioning what are you consuming and more importantly what consumes you?

Choreographed by Tui Hofmann, in collaboration with Dance Plant Collective, a performance group that creates politically challenging and transformative work. Hofmann’s choreography is brought to life by the

talented dancers (Brittany Kohler, Natasha Kohler, Rosie Tapsell, Bella Wilson and Jaz Yahel) who explore the process of meat consumption and the journey it takes from farm to fridge. The dancers take the form of the animals, butchers and farmers, and we as the audience represent society as the spectators to the animal cruelty that has been embedded into our culture.

*MEAT* confronts topics that others necessarily wouldn’t and that’s what makes it so engaging. It challenges the norm which is exactly what needs to be done in dance. It will make you feel something, whether that be anger, sadness, laughter or just darn right confusion. It’s not a judgmental piece, more of a conversation that needs to be had.

**The full review of MEAT can be found on the DANZ website.**



PHOTO: PETER JENNINGS

L TO R: BRITTANY KOHLER, NATASHA KOHLER, BELLA WILSON AND JAZ YAHEL - THE COST OF ARMS AND LEGS, 2018

Some of our biggest challenges are things that many emerging artists struggle with: finding time to rehearse our mostly unfunded or unpaid dance projects while simultaneously juggling our ever-changing work schedules, and finding affordable and dance-appropriate rehearsal spaces. We all work multiple jobs, and have squeezed rehearsals into any spare gaps of time we have in order to keep things going. We were highly fortunate to have been granted a residency at Studio One Toi Tū last year, which offered us free use of their beautiful spaces for 10 months. These kinds of opportunities are quite rare; so outside of this, we've rehearsed in dance and fitness studios we've worked at, empty offices, and our living rooms! Quite miraculously, we just make it work. It helps that we are all very committed to our collective and passionate about the work we make.

While we are faced with many challenges as emerging artists, working in a collective can provide a space to create, grow and develop your craft as artists together in a supportive environment. It has given us ongoing momentum and motivation to work on a huge range of projects, and has also enabled us to give back to the community through our performances and classes. We love working in this way and hope to continue to expand on what we do to provide more opportunities for other artists to connect with us. ■



PHOTO: LUCESMERIGLIO

L TO R: TUI HOFMANN, JAZ YAHEL, NATASHA KOHLER, BRITTANY KOHLER AND BELLA WILSON - DANCE PLANT COLLECTIVE PHOTOSHOOT, 2018