

# REVIEWS FOR *TERRAIN*

by Rifleman Productions

Produced by SHOW PONY

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*PROVOCATIVE ART AND VERY FABULOUS PERFORMERS*

Reviewed by Felicity Molloy, 28 Feb 2013

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Malia Johnston belongs to a celebrated company called Rifleman Productions that hails from Wellington. Much of her work resonates with the influences of the diverse contemporaneity of Impulstanz, an annual international dance festival in Vienna. Rifleman Productions' distinctive choreographic hallmarks feature artistic collaborations with musical powerhouse, Eden Mulholland, theatre director, Emma Wilson and the finely calibrated designs of John Verryt and Rowan Pierce.

For the Auckland Fringe 2013, Rifleman presents two boutique dance works on separate bills. In order of the evening: Terrain, which is most definitely a festival favourite in that it combines charm and quirkiness with downright brilliance, and a premiere of dance theatre Amanimal. A new generation of contemporary dancers takes on the now decade-old Terrain, Anita Hunziker and Luke Hanna; whilst the mature virtuoso more seasoned performers, Ross McCormack, Paul Young and Eden Mulholland perform Amanimal. Taken together, as a double bill, the two works share viscerally organised movement and intense, fearless aerial bouts of partnering, plus jagged, plangent music renderings, visual disjunctions and pastel colours, making a compelling evening of engaging and immersive dance theatre.

I last reviewed Terrain when it was performed by the choreographers' Guy Ryan and Malia Johnstone at Galatos, Auckland in 2007, and I quote from that review which is just as relevant today: "A celebration of landscape, scale and place, Terrain is a performance in which the miniature and the giant collide in a very human exploration of precariousness, transience and transformation". I last remarked that I was "one of the fortunate few who will see this beautiful work up close and personal".

This time the space was the Q Loft, with seating configured to be still personal but fortunately fitting a larger audience. We were all still squeezed close to the movement, breath and sweat of the dancers, in fact I think I sat even closer this time and hardly dared to breathe in at the sheer balancing strength of this time round dancers, Anita Hunziker and Luke Hanna, nor to breathe out in case of disturbing their extraordinary focus.

Once again, presented as an innovative installation consisting of the same kit-set plywood stage, yoga blocks, layers of artificial grass, clumsily spaced lighting stands, a retro hi-fi system, records and an array of miniature props, Terrain still manages to subvert even the most recent ideas about what contemporary dance can be. This time round I noticed more about the wooden art body and the finger puppets and the way their journey through the work becomes part of a weave of subtle stories that are cleverly emphasised by the words of the many songs played throughout. Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Brian Eno and the country sounds of T Tex Tyler and Col Wilson provide texture in musical rhythms as well as text. The combination of physical theatre and visual imagery has over the years nestled into a timeless work about love. Simply by transposing the work on a new couple, recognisable intimacies and emotional play between characters reminds me of the obvious, the commonplace, and inevitable caprices inside any love affair.

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***FRINGE DANCE OFFERINGS DELICATE, FIERCE AND FUNNY***

Reviewed by Raewyn Whyte, 1 Mar 2013

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Wellington-based Rifleman Productions have brought two separate works to Q Loft in their double bill, which comes to a close tonight. At 7pm is the now decade-old award-winning *Terrain*, a boutique-scaled work featuring segments of densely crafted, intricate and awesome choreographic manoeuvres in tiny spaces.

Developed by Malia Johnston and Guy Ryan and toured extensively by them in New Zealand and Australia, it has now been passed on to Anita Hunziker and Luke Hanna.

*Terrain* gently and deftly explores the relationships between a man and a woman and their interactions with a continuously transforming environment, reflecting some themes from *Gulliver's Travels* in its use of miniature objects that contrast with the apparently huge humans.

Beautifully presented by Hanna and Hunziker, the dancing is set against an eclectic collection of tracks played on vinyl records, many of them ballads.

*Amanimal* at 9pm is a feral, fierce and surprisingly funny investigation of some of the deeper aspects of human nature, structured as a series of interactions that eventually turn full circle. Dancers Paul Young and Ross McCormack are riveting to watch (and listen to), performing an astonishing array and sequencing of movements and vocal effects against live music (bass and lead guitar, loops, effects and vocals) created by Eden Mulholland. Their various guises bury them in fake fur coats and wreathe them in sheets and they're also responsible for a live sound score and cleverly timed effects with projected film by Rowan Pierce.

With overall design by John Verryt, *Amanimal* is the first version of what will become a larger work in the Rifleman repertoire in due course.

The dance programme continues with six more premieres yet to come.

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## *ELEMENTAL LEXIS OF HUMAN FEELINGS AND CONNECTIONS*

Reviewed by Felicity Molloy, 16 Mar 2007

Don't tell me this is Fringe!

I rushed to get there, teeming traffic into a tiny world of toy cars. Malia, a tiny dynamic woman, a dance force to be reckoned with, lying, a most peaceful body suspended above yoga blocks. Oldish music, Baez and Dylan with Eno ambience played on old records.

It is so good to walk into a contemporary dance event. I have seen thousands and for each one I know there will be a satisfying release into my imagination, the place I stayed as long as possible as a child. Guy Ryan and Malia Johnston's eclectic choreography and intelligent dancing expose such contexts and connections to an audience who were just as beautifully lit by the four stage lights. Detailed placements of tiny props, counter pose a personal and intuitive state of mind that directs their movements, their patterns and their moments together to reveal a paradoxical intertwining of two lives which remains less moveable than the platform they move on.

And somehow this work is sorrowful. Malia sings and dances, dislocated. I think that dancers sometimes tell parts of their life stories, or a version at least. This time the distance from the performance space is minimal and her trembling body and Ryan's sweat remove the usual constraints of pretence.

*Terrain* is a strong dance work, the limitations provide space for the imagination, the songs tell stories maybe we weren't meant to heed. There's a deeper resistance here to the idea that the human form can be utterly abstracted. It is fantastic to see an artist produce two shows in one Festival (Malia also choreographed [Dark Tourists](#)). It makes meaning of "a body of work" and presents the possibility of real innovation. In order for these performance artists to truly emerge as voices for a more developed artistic future, perhaps it would be useful to embed in their opportunities repeated occasions which allow them time to disclose this elemental lexis of human feelings and connections.

But in response to those who say this and [Dark Tourists](#) should be Fringe shows: I don't think so.