

Arts Centre Melbourne and Australian Art Orchestra present

MEETING POINTS SERIES: IM/MODESTY

Featuring Shoeb Ahmad

with Australian Art Orchestra
presented as part of Mapping Melbourne 2018

An essay by Cher Tan

days of fun and failure, an endless barrage of doubt

There's something to be said about autodidacticism that brings out the most unexpected. Think about the oeuvre of artists and thinkers like Terry Pratchett, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Jimi Hendrix—amongst many more, both celebrated and invisible—and how they've captured our collective imaginations in wild and unconventional ways. Self-learning takes that unanticipated off-the-beaten path; a self-created algorithm of tastes that isn't reflective of institutions, but through curiosity and deep introspection. For some, it can be the byproduct of hardship and abject loneliness, but it's almost always informed by the unwavering interest in art for art's sake. An inquisitive mind that's constantly searching.

Influenced by punk and noise artists like The Slits and Merzbow, Shoeb Ahmad began recording herself in her bedroom in 2006. She would later discover the evolving tome of Do-It-Yourself artists, both in Australia and her (often self-funded) tours in Asia. For many DIY creators who came of age pre-2010, the absence of social media was a boon: less people were looking, more mistakes could be made, and you would rarely get to know what others were up to, unless you asked. This isn't to say that "then" was better, but rather that the era created the perfect storm for the type of slow-burning creative work that's difficult to reproduce now.

on the long chair under light, woven in garlands

In *im/modesty*, this reckless premeditation is palpable as the ensemble comes together to produce an improvisation piece composed and led by Ahmad. It's the second iteration of a work she had written while on a residency in Kerala, India in 2016, but revitalised as she uncovers new aspects of her self-hood 2 years later. The work has a sense of urgency attached, but it's also laid with Ahmad's trademark gentleness, a nod to both her dream pop and harsh noise influences.

Co-curated by Ahmad and AAO Artistic Director Peter Knight, the performers behind *im/modesty* are an assemblage of musicians who come from adjacent DIY leanings. Whether this is in Maria Moles' occasional appearances at Melbourne experimental night Make It Up Club; Knight's 2015 collaboration with Ahmad on her self-conceived record label *hellosquare*; Aviva Endean's previous involvement with gypsy-punk outfit The Barons of Tang; Sunny Kim's gravitation towards jazz as a means to create new language in a globalised world; or Tilman Robinson's genre-defying compositions, their past and present selves come together to evoke what no-holds-barred self-actualisation could mean. Through this, Ahmad's corporeality is strengthened.

i'm not about the thrill of secrecy

When queried about the nature of her practice in relation to the piece, Ahmad remarked that it found itself in "the amorphous space between drone and jazz". Like Cy Twombly's paintings, improv work like *im/modesty* brings out that odd knee-jerk reaction with certain onlookers: "even my child can do this"—however every step is a careful deliberation, much like how Twombly spends years developing a single work. Whether it means anything to an audience entirely rests on how much context they can derive from it, how much of themselves they're projecting. After all, the artlessness surrounding "technique" is at best a rough guide, if not a gauche one.

it's not the wrong way to go

Within a canon written by experts, the playbook is set with little room for experimentation. What can sometimes be described as "free-flowing" can still be riddled with limitations, as its players sometimes succumb to methods interpreted as "correct" or popular. As a result, autodidacts can get lost in the noise. But Ahmad wants to ask: Can we ever create playful yet conscious art?



The Australian Art Orchestra is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body and is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

aao.com.au
artscentremelbourne.com.au

FEATURED ARTISTS

Shoeb Ahmad
Guitar, harmonium,
voice & percussion

Sunny Kim
Voice, electronics & percussion

Peter Knight
Trumpet & electronics,
percussion & voice

Aviva Endean
Clarinets & percussion

Tilman Robinson
Tape machine & percussion

Maria Moles
Drum kit

ABOUT MEETING POINTS SERIES

A concert series for the curious curated by Peter Knight, Australian Art Orchestra Artistic Director.

This intimate performance series features cutting-edge artists from Australia and Asia. Experience a breathtaking lineup of never-before-seen works, electrifying improvisations and cross-cultural collaborations.

Exclusively for this series, hidden spaces throughout Arts Centre Melbourne have been transformed into intimate pop-up venues. *im/modesty* is performed in the historic Potter Foyer – which is credited for reviving the dying Melbourne Jazz scene in the mid-80s as the venue of *Jazz After Dark*. As one of the only jazz clubs in the city at the time, music luminaries from around the world came to perform at these wild nights.

MEETING POINTS SERIES: NEXT CONCERT



UMI NO UZU Featuring Aaron Choulai

Immerse yourself in waves of electronic music and Japanese hip-hop with Umi no uzu – the headlining performance of Meeting Points Series. Mythical, innovative and deeply groovy, this is the latest work by Tokyo-based composer/pianist/beatmaker, Aaron Choulai. Along with an outstanding line-up of musicians from Australian Art Orchestra, Choulai will be joined by hip-hop icon Kojoe. Their music will be set against a backdrop of Japanese anime projections by renowned artist/filmmaker, Popy Oil.

Sunday 3 Feb, 5pm | Fairfax Studio

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We extend heartfelt thanks to our Arts Angels, whose generosity, loyalty and commitment ensure as many Victorians as possible can experience the joy of the performing arts here in Melbourne.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we're gathered, the People of the Kulin Nations, and pay our respects to their elders, past, present and future.

Conditions of Entry

Arts Centre Melbourne welcomes everyone to enjoy our spaces. For our full Conditions of Entry visit artscentremelbourne.com.au

Our sincere thanks to our partners for their ongoing support and contribution to Arts Centre Melbourne.

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