

CITATION: JAY PATHER'S QAPHELA CAESAR

Jay Pather's *Qaphela Caesar* is an interdisciplinary adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The work brings together classical and contemporary dance, film, documentary footage, large-scale video projections, text and ritual to subvert Shakespeare's play, both drawing from as well as challenging its relevance to contemporary South Africa. The original story is riddled with political intrigue, personal betrayals, staggering deception, superstitions, prophecies and high drama. At the centre of it all is the tension between the good fight of the past and the political expediency of the present as well as the lust for power, the roots of this power, contemporary betrayals and the collapse of conscience.

Set in South Africa, this dance theatre production, performed to the highly charged *Death and the Maiden* by Schubert and other works by contemporary composers, evoked a fast-paced kinetic re-imagining of Shakespeare's work while providing commentary on the politics of our time, incomplete memory, interrupted history, of inertia and suspended futures. With an inaugural performance at the Hiddingh Hall, the work was commissioned for several spaces thereafter and became heavily influenced by these spaces of political and economic power. These included an especially designed performance in all 14 rooms at the Cape Town City Hall, a Dance Umbrella Commission for the Johannesburg Stock Exchange on Diagonal Street and the State Theatre in Pretoria. The *Sunday Independent* named the work one of the Best Performance Art Works for 2012. Writing for the same paper Mary Corrigan wrote that it 'evokes this very particular kind of African urban palimpsest, where a multitude of cultures, traditions and histories all converge.'

The work has gone on to spawn several articles as well as another work *Caesar Interrupted*, which arose out of the actual circumstance of cancellation of a new production envisaged for the Ethekweni City Hall due to a lack of funding and infrastructure. In a deconstructed, threadbare version using text, contemporary movement, projection and interrupted fragments of the original work, *Caesar Interrupted* brought together ideas of power, privilege and the fragile place of the artist as commentator.

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