

Joseph June Bond



Get It Out The Mud!

ICA Theatre, Saturday 26 March
Installation open 12–6pm, performance 7pm

The foreshore of the Thames is an organic, constantly shifting mass – digesting and regurgitating, listening and echoing back. *Get It Out The Mud!* is an experimental moving image work that acts as a messenger to these slippages through projections, sound and performance. At night, the immersive environment becomes a site for encounters with drag and dance artist OK Norris, and a sonic gathering with DJ and artist Ashley Holmes.

Q&A

So, first question, can you talk a little bit about where the idea for the work came from?

This body of work began last summer, during a research and development residency, as part of Siobhan Davies Studios' Percolate Programme. The opportunity presented itself to facilitate a week-long communing of artists, athletes, movement therapists, collaborators and mentors.

Movement artist and my long-term collaborator OK Norris, national boxing champion Oriance Lungu, players from the basketball community I coach, and many others brought their distinctive, embodied knowledge into the inquisitive, shared space. Collectively, we began exploring forms of physical resistance and warping on the body, whilst discussing this idea of the thinking body. Rather than performing choreography, or something that it knows, this body is figuring it out, finding its way and failing often.

During lockdown, I spent nearly every low tide mudlarking (scavenging the exposed riverbed for lost or discarded things) down on the Thames foreshore. Mud is this material of strange, glorious consistencies that place resistance, weight and drag on the body. It's also a messenger, a digestive system and an ear that hears and archives the chorus of languages, ever-changing dialects and hundreds of years of slang that have been audible along the Thames. It's a body that swallows these slivers of history, waste, ritualistic offerings and then, twice a day, spits them back up at high tide in gorgeous gatherings.

How does this new piece relate to your wider body of work?

Over the last two or three years, I've been slowly feeling through bodies of fluid, fluid bodies and bodily fluids as repositories for movement, sound and knowledge. Abundant spirits stir within these temporal, tidal spaces along the Thames, where the sea transforms into the city. They've always been portals through which a perceived otherness, unknowns and futures have emerged into the heart of London. Last year I produced *Thames Whale*, a sound work supported by the ICA and NTS, which was broadcast on the BBC. For as long as I can remember I've felt this deep kinship with whales. They are unfathomably ancient, alien and yet so intimately intertwined with humanity. The project explored extraordinary accounts, dating back to the 17th century, of whales making their way up the Thames.

How does choreography and performance come into your work and practice?

I danced until I was about 14 or 15 and only really stopped because I was being bullied for it. It was around that age where all you want is to fit in and not be noticed, you know? As always, these things never leave our bodies, so movement warped itself and emerged as these different practices that were less explicitly recognised as dance. It took more than a decade for me to recognise that my sound work, exhibition design, basketball coaching, workshop facilitation, mudlarking, all of it is rooted in the movement of bodies. I guess I got to a point where I had to stop pretending that I hadn't always been dancing, in one way or another. I think this is the first body of work that honours how movement found ways to weave itself through my practice before I came to that acknowledgment.

Is it easy for you to describe succinctly the new work for Image Behaviour?

You know really, the mud guides this work. It's a tangling together, or constellation, of historical, cultural and spiritual sediment. An integral part of making the work has been resisting this very seductive urge to untangle the aura, piece together all these residual fragments, and make sense. Instead I learned to cherish the intangibility, trusting that the meanings linger in the slippages in-between and will always translate imperfectly.

In *The Skin of the Film*, Laura U. Marks talks about how words, sounds and images trap as much as they free. That was an idea that we returned to throughout this process, often asking ourselves whether we were trapping the feeling, or freeing it. This reverberating question really nourished a letting go, a letting loose, where we stopped trying to wrangle and wrestle the work into being. In the same way that the mud, the clay, the water truly know, the work began to communicate what it wanted to be and let us wholeheartedly trust and follow its guidance, as you would an old friend, or a loved one.

The film is of, about and for bodies: fluid bodies, precarious bodies, thinking bodies, queer bodies. I think of the film as a body itself too. The wriggling reels of 16mm and 8mm film are its intestines. Their textural markings are a delicious tonic of body fluids, scavenged natural pigments, rubbings of the foreshore, and pollutants in the Thames.

Can you talk a little bit from a practical perspective about how you approach making the work and how the physical performance elements relate to the moving image and how you negotiate the two?

This project began in asking the mud what it's heard and

shadowing those echoes. During the residency at Siobhan Davies Studios, Far From The Norm dancer Naïma Souhaïr helped develop an idea I'd had to generate movement through imitating a whale's echolocation. In practice, this meant one of us would be in the middle of the space with our eyes closed whilst others moved around making sounds with their bodies, their mouths, their teeth, their feet, and you sought the source of these sounds through the space.

Throughout the project, the body has been in this perpetual state of reacting and responding to stimuli. We've moved on uneven, precarious surfaces, held on to each other's limbs, struggled and moved seductively on wobbly exercise bubbles, and kept taught distances between two or three bodies within resistance bands.

The installation at the ICA is a site for the filming and a site for the film. As the lone source of light, a moon perhaps, the projection is leaky, porous and flows out into the darkness of the space onto the bodies of the performers and through the audience cruising the space. The moving image is never wholly captured or held by the permeable, translucent gauze, so there's a suppleness and fluidity. It dances in the space like silt, releasing these moments of thick, sensuous darkness and womb-like warmth through which sound, scent and touch can spill. Juniper is burned here to arouse the senses and ward off evil spirits, as it has been throughout British folklore. It takes root along ancient pilgrimage routes, roadsides and edge land spaces that are so often sites for queer cruising.

Joseph June Bond is an artist, community organiser and basketball coach. Their interdisciplinary practice centres intergenerational knowledge sharing and collaboration through practical workshops, sports methodologies and open source resources. Bond's recent research and projects explore bodies of fluid, fluid bodies and body fluids as porous repositories of ritual, movement and sound. They work predominantly within site-specific contexts and peer-to-peer platforms including artist run spaces, online radio and DIY communities. Bond facilitates a weekly, inclusive space for women, non-binary and trans people to play basketball in London.

OK Norris (WET MESS) is a drag and dance artist who works across cabaret, film, performance and theatre. Their live work explores how the structure of society impacts and shapes our identity across bodies, behaviour and adornment. They perform to laughable, grotesque and disturbing ends, through dance, lip syncing, DIY spectacle and dark humour.

Ashley Holmes (b. Luton, 1990) is an artist and DJ based in Sheffield. His interdisciplinary practice combines sound, moving image, performance, installation, radio broadcasts and ongoing collaborative projects. Holmes' recent work is informed by an interest in the value and potential of music as a research methodology that allows us to think relationally within broader social, cultural, and political discourses and reimagine notions of listening, storytelling, collaboration, ownership, place-making and belonging. Ashley currently hosts Tough Matter, a monthly broadcast on NTS Radio, and also facilitates Open Deck – a series of gatherings giving space to collectively listen and hold discursive space around relationships to music, sound and oral histories.