



# FiveLines

A Contemporary Dance Initiative

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## MILIEU 2019 review: Skinny Dipping / Nowhere But 2.5 Meters

*written by Teo Dawn* | November 19, 2019



Photo by Bernie Ng

MILIEU 2019, Frontier Danceland ends off 2019 with their annual double bill. Previous years have seen choreographies from their Artistic Director **Low Mei Yoke**, Dance-Artist **Christina Chan**, guest choreographers **Deborah Nightingale and Sascia Pellegrini**. This time, the stage is graced by the choreographies of Marioenrico D'Angelo from Italy and the return of Sita Ostheimer from Germany.

Both works touch upon the human condition today and the changing patterns of how we relate to one another. D'Angelo's debut with Frontier Danceland, titled *Skinny Dipping*, is a questioning of hesitance and the fear of letting go. Ostheimer's *Nowhere but 2.5 Meters* is an exploration on distance, connection and communication through space.

Experiencing both pieces as a full work, they bring fulfilment and a sense of completion. When looking at both as individual works, *Skinny Dipping* leaves me out of breath while *Nowhere but 2.5 Meters* is a breath of fresh air. Complementing one another beautifully, I exit School of The Art's Studio Theatre feeling refreshed and energised.

In *Skinny Dipping*, sounds of water flowing and distorting underscores this entire dance piece, its watery symphony haunting the back of my mind while I watch the dancers.

**Sammantha Yue** rises from her crumpled figure on the ground to approach the rectangular space that is lit up. She cautiously dips her toes into the light before withdrawing quickly, going back to the dark corridors by the side. This process repeats a couple of times before she takes the plunge, letting the light swallow her whole and revealing her movements for all the audience to see.

The rest of the dancers follow suit, entering the light one by one, each with their own quality of movement. Grace Lim Jin has an air of elegance, her movements flow from one to another with a sense of lightness. On the other hand, Mark Robles is steady, grounded and his movements carry a sense of weight. The dynamics remain pretty consistent throughout the first part of the work, which is the hesitation and confining the body to tension. With white lights being used, the muscular definitions of each body are highlighted—flexed arms, pointed toes and slightly melancholic facial expressions.

This consistency feels like steady waves of the sea, the push and pull rhythmic and constant. Together with the tension of the atmosphere, it becomes difficult to focus or breathe. I want to pull away and come up for air, but feel constantly just under the water's surface.

When the breakthrough happens, joy shown on the faces of dancers and the choreography starts taking a more united form, I am already somewhere else waiting for the swim to end.

In *Nowhere but 2.5 Meters* a voiceover speaks to us in a mellow and calm tone, telling us that this dance is about all of us and when the word "black" is mentioned, to have our eyes closed and "light" is when we have the permission to see again. To become an active audience, to participate and have the power to alter your own viewing pleasure is an interesting choice to make.

After all, a voiceover cannot physically stop you if you choose to have your eyes open throughout the performance. However, I take on this option given to me, shutting my eyes while the dancers go through a floor pattern change and opening them upon command. The experience feels like flipping through a picture book, from one scene to the next and allowing your own imagination and anticipation to fill in the gaps.

But what makes this dance fascinating is not solely based upon this novel experience, but rather the dance taking on a life of its own. The movements breathe, pace fluctuating yet achieved through precision and grace. Their costumes capture the flow of the dancers, becoming a second skin, an extension of the flesh. The earthy colours fluid in my eyes, fleeting across the stage.

There are many poignant moments in this work, with the artistic vision really coming through in the relationships formed between dancers and the use of gaze. Xin Yen and Konrad Plak share wonderful synergy, as if they share one body, moving seamlessly through their duet. Their movements extend and contract, pulsate and witnessing this invigorates me. Then my heart chips away as Ma Yueru jumps into the open arms of Keigo Nozaki again and again. Yet his arms never close into an embrace, he remains stoic with emotional undercurrents I cannot decipher and her desperation for connection unreturned.

If *Skinny Dipping* is a showcase of individual dancers and techniques, then I will say *Nowhere but 2.5 Meters* is a slice of life that breathes the air back into my lungs. Finally, I can breathe again, close to tears and on the brink of an epiphany of sorts.

## MILIEU 2019 by Frontier Danceland 17 November at SOTA (School of the Arts)

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