

Dancing in tune with the world

Current, directed and produced by BERG DUO (Ami Skånberg & Anna Viola Hallberg)

Produced: 2024

On location: May 2023, Ciganitri, West Java, Indonesia

Music: "Tried and Tired" Mats Skånberg (SE)

Dance/Choreography: Ami Skånberg (SE)

Guest dancer: Alfiyanto Wajiwa (ID)

Camera/Editing: Anna Viola Hallberg

Current - a word with multiple meanings from which we will retain the idea of flow, of driving force, of fluidity that is conducive to mixing, of permanence of movement, and of displacement. *Current* is also the title of a dance film that draws on all the aesthetic reflection of each of the film's partners, and on all the political commitment that their art forms usually embody, consciously and deliberately. And therein lies the flow, the driving force.

Given the confluence of the trajectories of Anna Viola, Ami and Alfiyanto, could the film *Current* not have existed? It is a work to which, in accordance with its title, what Anna Viola calls "a beautiful story" has contributed, as much as the aesthetic and artistic background of each, the qualities of choreographic improvisation of the two dancers, the filmmaker's eye, the composition of a musician brother, and the places and spaces in which the three protagonists evolved.

Alfiyanto Wajiwa is a dancer, a choreographer and an artistic director of *WaliWa Bandung Dance Theater, Rumah Kreatif Wajiwa* (ID). He performed in *Gumarang Sakti Dance Company* directed by female choreographer Gusmiati Suid. Gusmiati Suid received a Bessie - the New York Dance and Performance Award for "outstanding creative achievement in 1991.

Ami Skånberg, a dancer and choreographer, received rigorous training in Japanese theater and dance, particularly in Suriashi. She has been practicing and sharing it since 2014 as a sensitive and political exploration of urban spaces and rhythms and their gendered uses.

Anna Viola Hallberg is an artist and curator. She sees her video work and curatorial activity as a continuum through which she explores the notion of the in-between as a personal experience and a geopolitical position. Since 2020, she has been curator of the *Björkö Konstnod* (SE) creative residency.

BERG DUO is the name of the artists' collective founded in 2022 by Ami Skånberg and Anna Viola Hallberg. They are based in Stockholm/Gothenburg/Björkö, Sweden. They move between studio based practice and the outdoor. The work intersects lens and embodied practices, towards reconfigurations of subjectivity by visualizing possible futures. Concepts of in-between and the state of becoming are central in their artistic research (embodied, spoken, text, visuals, audio). Walking as practice is an integral part of their work.

Through their approaches, the three artists are asserting the importance of auto-fiction and also of collective narrative. They are also asserting the pooling together of the resources of the participants, that results in both a collaborative work, which allows us to move away from the myth of the great, brilliant and solitary artist, and a renewal and enrichment of the theme worked on.

Better yet, the use of collaborative work immediately opens the way to a shift in the angle of entry to the theme being worked on, through a reversal of procedures, the first principle of which is to move away from the "look at an object of study", which is often distant or even overhanging, to pass through an embodied and subjective experience and to pass through an experiential and situated knowledge. Such knowledge, assumed as relative and plural, is then able to redefine an object of study or a working theme and its contours, and to reveal all its porosity with contemporary socio-political issues.

It's hardly surprising then, that for decades of choreographic research into the political nature of bodies and spaces, and the embodied nature of knowledge, Alfiyanto Wajiwa and Ami Skånberg have both formalized their thinking through a PhD, respectively at the Institut Seni Indonesia – ISI in Surakarta, and at the University of Roehampton (UK).

Such a convergence of ethical commitment in the aesthetic approach led to a project to bring the three artists together. Berg Duo came to Indonesia for other engagements but decided to visit Alfiyanto Wajiwa, who, as the director of the *Bandung Dance film Festival*, had screened Ami Skånbergs films twice - in 2012 and 2014. Skånberg had begun to follow Alfiyantos work as shared on digital channels and media. She appreciated his work with screendance and community-based dance improvisation in rural spaces. Alfiyanto and Ami thus already shared a common starting point. In addition, they both have practiced martial arts. Anna Viola's engagement in Indonesia was to map the Indonesian socially-engaged art scene.

Nothing in the film *Current* was planned. Anna Viola Hallberg and Ami Skånberg started walking around Ciganitri and immediately thought they had to make this discovery in the company of Alfiyanto Wajiwa. Anna Viola Hallberg, relating this story, says they thought "we're taking him with us." In French "take with" [prendre avec] is the literal Latin translation of the verb "understand" [comprendre, cum prehendere]. Thus the visit to the village by the three artists goes far beyond the mere discovery of places, buildings and landscapes. It goes far beyond a guided tour. It is the premise of the collaborative work that is this movie. This very first shared walk is a time of listening to one another. It is a desire to understand – a desire to understand each other.

The desire to understand each other, this desire to take on the other's part, in the absence of a common verbal language, was expressed thanks to the creative resources of the three artists. The dancers danced. The filmmaker grabbed her camera and filmed. The dancers' improvisations drew on their ability to listen to each other, to play with the architectural elements and objects that structured their immediate environment, and to respond to the partner's breathing with a gestural score adjusted with delicacy and attention. The filmmaker's improvisation involved her body more than her eye. She brought the camera to her sides, thus shifting the usual approach of visual artists, which is the distant gaze of the "gaze on". Far from the classic cutting out of a part of visible reality,

specific to the tradition of the Western gaze built since the Renaissance and multiplied in the photographic and cinematographic gaze, Anna Viola Hallberg carried out a visual capture anchored in her own presence in the choreographic dialogue of the dancers. Part of an ecology of attention, the camera work is in tune with the movements of bodies and the world.

The attentive improvisation of the three artists offered, in its slowness and gentleness, the possibility for each of them to open the space differently, to inhabit it, to be followed there by their partners, to abandon it, to join the space opened and offered by them, and then to return to it, in the acceptance of the return on the gestures already made, in the acceptance of the repetition, of the very little and the tenuous.

The four constituent stages of the film were the warm-up, immediately filmed in improvisation by Anna Viola: the mud pool, the fish pond, the cultural center and the wall of a vacant lot.

The dancers danced with no sound other than the sounds of their environment. Nor did they know that Berg Duo would later choose the music *Tried and Tired* for the film. The music *Tried and Tired* had been composed prior to this encounter by the composer and bassist Mats Skånberg, and its sound interlacing between pulsations, the tension of the melodic thread and the cycles of rhymes, fit the beat of the images as if made for them.

The film *Current* does not depict a dance scene nor the scene of an encounter, it embodies the encounter in all its subtlety. It also has a second strength, which is that, by putting the finishing touches to all of the aesthetic, ethical and political positions of its authors, and abandoning the endless conquest of avant-garde innovation and performance, the film *Current* performs by its very presence, a displacement of the usual stakes of on-screen dance and its different contexts of presentation.

For here, both choreographic and audiovisual creation has abandoned the demonstration of bodily performances, the erasure of effort, fatigue and breathlessness, gender assignment and the omniscient point of view. Here, choreographic and audiovisual creation involves slowness, immersion in places and in their materials, and attention to others. Covered in mud and in the full grace and life of their bodies, the dancers breathe. The environment is not a stage but a partner, and their simple responses are a perfect fit. The mutual interactions are in sensitive accord, whose complexity and subtlety touch the camera frame, as exact as it is varied. The editing, meticulous, turns this encounter into a poignant story.

Dr Anne-Laure Vernet, Université de Lorraine, April 2024