

# PRIMAVERA, I AM HUMAN.

*Retrospective Review of the 'Primavera, I am Human' Performance (3rd Feb. 2022) by the Future Past Coalition: Linda Cassels, Lyndon Watkinson, & Sue Hare*

**"Primavera, I am human generated a palpable and memorable response. Linda brought her experiences to life, providing a moving critique of racism and colonialism. The sound initially suggested promise, though the costumed women soon suggested all was not well as they were either received and rewarded with gifts or de-crowned or admonished. The music grew darker. Voices gave warning. Human paintings, in the spirit of Primavera, were created by Linda. Splendid in her pink dress she beat the huge heavy chain on the floor, narrowly missing her bare feet. The chain crashed time and time again recalling the ships and shackles of slavery and the whips of the owners. Chaz, a young black man knelt in a kind of supplication, seeming to beg for something better in this life. Finally, Linda led him quietly away and brought the audience to attention chanting "I am human, you are human, we are human over and over again..." to an attentive, appreciative, and perhaps rattled audience."**

## Where did the idea come from?

Linda had a conversation with Rachel Colley, a recipient of the Platform 21 award and a jewellery tutor at the university about how jewellery was promoted since it was a different commodity to fashion. Rachel thought that a catwalk would be the best route to take. This generated ideas about how the idea of a fashion show could be used



*(above) The Catwalk: deciding on how to put together a performance*

to explore emotions, language and the self. This was the start of Linda bringing to realisation an idea she had been playing with for some time.

Linda invited some of her friends to experiment with photography and

created a mock fashion show. Linda could see that the models could contribute to a narrative. She realised for it to work it will have to be a less structured walk and to give as little as possible info about the purpose so people's reactions would be authentic.

This was an important element as it was the uncensored emotions that make the audience question, unfiltered expression of emotions of the models was imperative for it to transfer over to the audience. The idea of a performance is much like a painting or sculpture it aims to attract a reaction from the audience.

## What we did

Future Past reformed on the basis that we worked well as a small collaborative team. We had a rapport which had built overtime.

The main bulk of our planning was done face to face, with Sue most often recording and progress chasing from meeting to meeting.

We were able to engage sufficient people from the student body and friends to make the performance a success. They each brought specific skills we either didn't have (Harry

Foster, a contributing second year Fine Art student, for example has much experience of organising music events/sound) or which we could not use because we were doing other things.

The MIRO planning tool was great for visualising how much time we had and allowed for each of us to consult a master planner. We used it mainly to record notes of meetings and to share images. As our planning progressed, we used Miro less and less as we became more and more aware of what we were doing and how much time we had. This seems normal in a creative process when the 'thing' becomes the focus not the administration.

Linda's idea of handwritten invitations to attract potential helpers/performers was well received, a great personal touch.

Spending time at the beginning to clarify what Linda's vision was, was essential. Actively stepping back and continuing to do so was appropriate especially in the context of the performance. Lyndon and Sue aimed to be supportive of her vision.

Time pressures to create the performance and the costumes

had potential to pull us away from individual works but also contributed to our individual artwork (in Sue's case to thinking about colonialisation, whiteness, and racism), for Linda retelling a story from their view using their lived experience as a vehicle, how we use appendages to cope with our daily lives. For Lyndon building experience in artistic expression in physical and performative mediums.

Our designated roles were successful allowing us to learn from each other. Lyndon's technical skills (IT and creative sound) were invaluable. Linda's creative personal vision set the scene for the work. Sue's completer finisher project management skills came to the fore.

Despite our recruitment of nineteen student and friend volunteers the three of us undertook most of the planning and arranging. Harry Foster was also involved with planning towards the end as he had a lot of experience and technical expertise with events.

The shape and style of the venue worked for the performance, but the inhouse technology was poor and therefore we had to bring in our own equipment for sound and film.



*(above) Still of an average weekly meeting*

Harry was helpful with sourcing this.

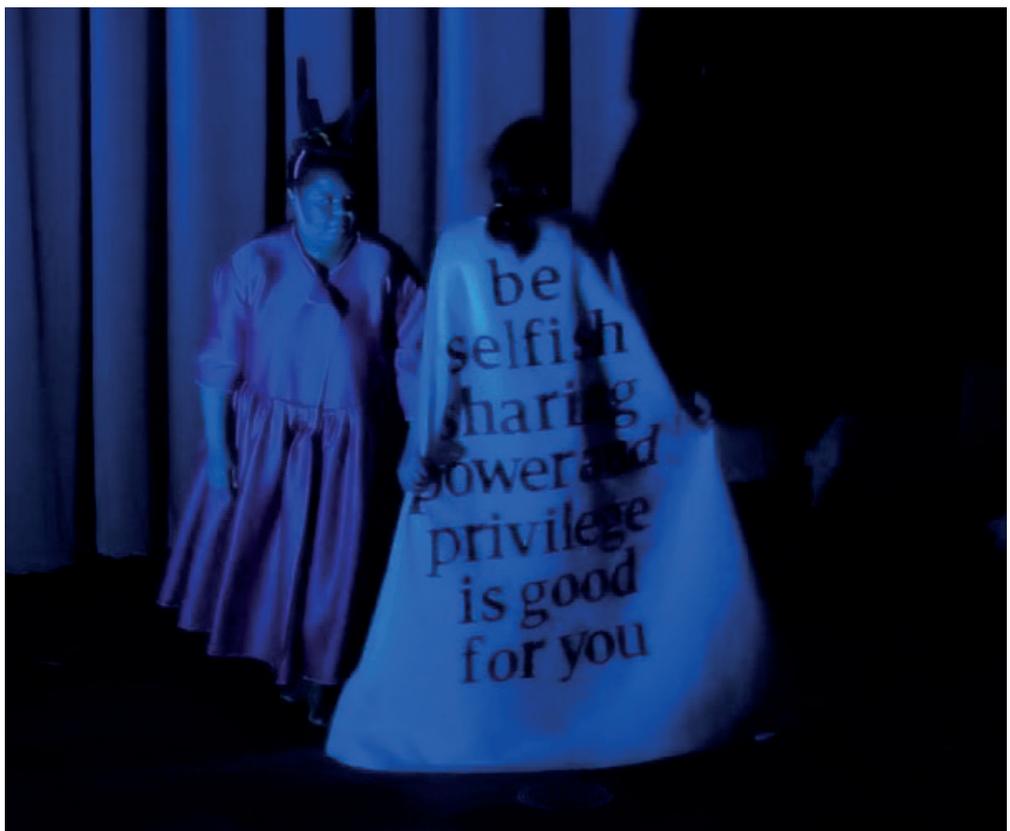
We realised that the lighting was not right, too bright and harsh, or too dark. Fortunately, we were able to locate a small stage lighting set.

University risk assessments and health and safety requirements were addressed. We had grand plans to have an invited audience, they would receive an invitation and be asked to dress according to our instructions. They would not be seated with people they know. They would be ushered and controlled like being in an airport security process. The seats would all be covered in cloth to create a different ambience. Art would be displayed

**“Be selfish**

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**sharing  
power and  
priviledge  
is good for  
you.”**



outside the venue. There were other good ideas to create a controlling atmosphere, but we had to limit our ambition to enable us to succeed.

## Costumes

Linda had been experimenting with clay. Her clay doodles led her to make body adornment. Initially she used imagery arising from how black people were portrayed in the past. She used some elements from conjured images to create some of the pieces. Her idea was to experiment but the more she made the more it made her think about how we use adornment now. At the same time, she was experimenting with colour and colour theory using acrylic paint.

She realised that for a live event there would have to be more elements to the work. It had to have substance. After careful consideration, she decided to think about ways to incorporate her paintings into a concept for a capsule

wardrobe. Her paintings explored how colour affects one's mood. Combining body adornment and fashion. She realised that she was developing a clear interest in how clothes and body adornment help people to communicate to themselves and society who they are. The fashion show would be a psychological exploration of adornment and costume. During the summer Linda spoke to Dr Ling, asking what she could do to develop this idea. His response was that she should add an artistic element to the making of garments. He suggested looking at Elsa Schiaparelli's work. Schiaparelli was a fashion designer who designed haute couture with surrealist's overtones.

Towards the end of summer, Linda had started to sketch

some designs for the clothes.

We decided to make three costumes each initially. Botticelli's Primavera, a fantasy painting, was an influence too. The idea of creating 'paintings' with the models grew.

Sue's costumes were directly linked to her personal artwork and concerns about white privilege, racism, the idea of tolerance, and the way in which structural racism is denied by the British Government. Lyndon was unsure about sewing but worked on more dramatic costumes himself with his partner. Linda meanwhile worked steadily on her collection.

New to sewing, Lyndon really liked the idea of making clothes for the performance. The outfits he made



(above) Photograph from our first rehearsal. Linda organises the models.

were a (continued) great way for him to work outside of his own practice. He designed them around impulsive ideas rather than have to think too deeply. His designs were inspired by his own relationship with clothing, visually describing ideas of excessive outwards exteriors or intentional misrepresentation

through garment selection. On reflection a further development might have been to think more collaboratively about the costumes, possibly to relate them more closely to Primavera's characters with a modern take. Primavera is very white. In a modern take, Mercury for example

could be dressed as a banker, or the three Graces could celebrate various skin tones rather than all white as they are so often portrayed.



(above) Yasmin Yoemans, Lyndon Watkinson, & Sue Hare  
(left) Yasmin Yoemans, Lyndon Wakinson, & Linda Cassels

## Collaboration

The project was going to be a major effort and needed to be carried out to a high standard. It could not be a one woman show.

Future Past 22 was a successful collaboration. We had worked together the previous year as part of our second-year exhibitions in a



(above) Harry occupying the booth during a rehearsal

much larger group. We had grown close throughout this experience. Working together enabled us to share learning and knowledge. We began with Linda explaining her idea for performance. Together we were

able to fine tune ideas and to decide as a group on issues important to us.

A small group of three meant for reasonably easy decision making though not all was straight forward. Negotiations were required. There was a healthy challenge. We were not always free at the same time and had to trust each other to make the right decisions.

Lyndon's personal practice had migrated from physical to digital mediums. He wanted to be involved in physical art. The collaboration enabled him to incorporate his digital skills into new non digital work.

The rest of the collaboration was straight forward. The three of us met roughly once a week. Linda led the conceptual basis for the performance with Lyndon and Sue contributing ideas. Sue had a more administrative role, often writing all the emails, and organising with staff. Lyndon took on a role of event planning and timings, this combined well with his leading role in the production of the film soundtrack.

While we each naturally gravitated towards certain responsibilities, we

each interpolated between each other's areas of expertise, which created an excellent environment for learning and idea generation.

We knew we had skill gaps and created a list of roles we required to make the performance happen. Volunteers primarily derived from Fine Art were recruited based on either their abilities, or simply which role they wanted to try.

We attempted to engage with FMC students as part of the bigger collab. Whilst we were not successful there might be opportunity for a planned collaboration in future years across SHU arts. Linda asked Lyndon to compile a sound piece based on South African music, which he worked on with Chaz Hani-Okoroafor, Yasmin Yoemans, and Harry Foster. Contributions were also made from Sue and Linda.

## Performance in Real Life

On the day there was great excitement and anxious anticipation about the performance. We feared that there would be no audience because of limited marketing of the event but were delighted with the turnout and response.

In future in such a setting more lighting is required to gently light the stage from the front. There were no major technical hitches.

More time might have been spent thinking about the relationship with Primavera. The accidental delay in the film showing above the stage and the action on stage was fabulous, with the audience being able to see everything twice.

An additional rehearsal would have helped us all to synchronise the performance with the sound. I don't know if the audience realised there was an issue of timing.

SHU securities were helpful in providing access and securing gear we had to leave overnight. The availability of the green room worked well.

Lyndon increased his skills in event planning and management. Not everyone showed up, but everything got done.

There were elements which would have benefited more from more rehearsal time and would have aided Lyndon in his role as timekeeper to keep in sync with the soundtrack. Overall, the performance was well received despite the setbacks. The audience did not know about the difficulties.

During rehearsal Linda went through numerous scenarios as to how the performance might occur. She made a conscious decision not to stick to one definite possibility,

in order to maintain the element of surprise. The point of exploration was empathy and participation of both audience and cohorts. The premise of the performance was human relations, and to a lesser extent, the communicative borders we install to protect our emotions.

On the day there were some hiccups. In the dressing room we needed

The introduction song felt too long. We had to scrap the idea of an usher accompanying the audience to their seats which meant the audience was seated long before the song finished.

What we envisaged was to build suspension from the entrance all the way through the performance. This delay meant that Linda lost her sense



*(above) Stills from the performance*

someone else to help the models get dressed but helping to get them ready also served as a distraction for Linda who needed space to prepare mentally for her role.

The venue was ill equipped for what we wanted to do.

of timing in relation to the action under stage and the soundtrack. To compensate Linda had to improvise.

Linda decided that she wanted two people to remain on the stage with her to swing the chain which Linda would periodically engage with. Extending

the chain sequence - of chain to skin - it might create greater empathy in both participants and audience. During the performance Linda asked a member of the audience to take pictures using an iPad. In relation to Martin Parr's work documenting how modern technology has become part of life. The disparity between our perception of life through our eyes and through a screen.

Linda asked a member from the audience to take pictures, the lady refused but her daughter was happy to do so.

**After the event**

The collaboration has cemented our friendship as a small artistic community.

least annually after we graduate.

We were invited by Dr Ling on behalf of YVAN to contribute to the launch of a publication celebrating artists of colour in the region. This gave the opportunity to perform as a group of three in the way we had not been able to previously. Drawing in other students was great for building relationships across the student body. The film has been edited to 20 minutes. It is on YouTube and was shown at the YVAN event.

Linda plans to explore performance art and to develop it as part of her art practice.

We intend to continue to work together and will take collaborative

exhibition. Though we were thinking of performing again for the final exhibition we will now show the edited film instead.

Lyndon took the opportunity to produce a short promotional video as an opportunity to get a grip with video editing.

The chain could have been used for a longer time as the extended duration is more impactful.

An additional light source on the stage would have been helpful. This became obvious when we reviewed the recording of the performance. Some of the film was very dark making it difficult to see what was happening. Linda feels that she needs to have more experience of speaking in front of people which would give her more confidence when in performance. However, the overall response to her performance was that it was very moving.

**Credits**

*Written and compiled by Sue Hare, Sarah Linda Cassels, & Lyndon Watkinson*

*Designed by Lyndon Watkinson, SU4IP ♻️*

*May 2022*

*With thanks to fellow students and friends for their contributions:*

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|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Jade Cassels,</i>        | <i>Thomas Clogg,</i>    |
| <i>Chaz Hani-Okoroafor,</i> | <i>Hope Schofield,</i>  |
| <i>Amy Hannah,</i>          | <i>Yaz Yoemans,</i>     |
| <i>Katie Farrow,</i>        | <i>Kate Allen,</i>      |
| <i>Alexa Brooks,</i>        | <i>Aswad Cassels,</i>   |
| <i>Vicki Stephenson,</i>    | <i>Rob Hemmingfield</i> |
| <i>Sarah Catterall,</i>     |                         |
| <i>Autumn Ryder,</i>        |                         |
| <i>Eleanor Hurt,</i>        |                         |
| <i>Harry Foster,</i>        |                         |
| <i>Russell Jones,</i>       |                         |
| <i>Ruqqayah</i>             |                         |
| <i>Mohungoo,</i>            |                         |
| <i>Rachel Deane,</i>        |                         |



*(above) Photograph of poetry performance at Beyond the Obvious Publication launch. Photo credits to Yuen Fong Ling. Source: Instagram. URL: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cbp5xrZsFjm/> Accessed: May. 2022.*

A thankyou card using a film still was made in InDesign and we bought chocolate for the participants and helpers.

We plan to work together at

performance wherever we please and to develop new work.

Sue plans to use a chalkboard as a vehicle for performance during the Equinox the BA Final