

STORY: AMITHA AMRANAND

Director Jitti Chompee about what performance art to look out for at this year's festival

# GENDER IDENTITY, ANIMALS AND KAFKA



Red Peter.



Jitti Chompee.



Holistic Strata by S20 Hiroaki Umeda.

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Every two years, Jitti Chompee puts on his festival director's hat. The dancer-choreographer and founder of 18 Monkeys Dance Theatre founded Unfolding Kafka Festival in 2015. In its first year, the festival featured four performances, one installation and a workshop. This year, the performing arts portion of the festival has doubled in number.

Jitti tells us how he chose this year's productions and gives recommendations to contemporary performance novices.

#### How is this year's performance programme different from last year?

The first year was about the folding and unfolding of the body and objects. I got the idea for the theme when I saw Isabelle Schaad and Laurent Goldring's piece *Der Bau* and Yoko Seyama's origami installation *The Silence Of Insects*. This year, we included the themes of gender identity and animals to our original theme. I wasn't looking for productions that directly translate Franz Kafka's works onto the stage. I also chose small productions. They are more suitable for Thailand at the moment because there's a lack of venues and subsidies for Thai artists. I chose these works so they can inspire people here.

#### Could you recommend a few shows in the festival for those who are not

#### familiar with contemporary dance or performance?

I recommend *Holistic Strata* by Hiroaki Umeda. He's a digital media and sound designer, but his work is very much like dance, except he's not a dancer. Children will enjoy it. It's beautiful, but I like it for its minimalism and musicality. It's also charming because he's not a dancer, but the way he moves is very natural.

Another one I recommend is *NO-Body* by Roni Chadash, which will be performed at The Rose Hotel. It's super creative. You don't see the performer's head at all, and she performs in a tiny space. The way she designs the body in relation to the space is very beautiful.

I also want to recommend Satoshi Kudo's *Bio-Erosion* for those who do physical theatre. This is their world premier. Kudo's background is in gymnastics and martial arts. He sees beauty in the way people move when they're struggling, like when someone's trying to help a person who's falling. He uses those moments to create his work, and it's really beautiful. It's also very simple and minimal — just an empty space and the twin sisters Anna and Berit Einemo Froyland who are dancers.

#### In which direction do you want the festival to take in the future?

I want to eventually be able to invite producers to meet the artists in our festival and maybe take their work somewhere else. Do I

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want the festival to be bigger? I think its current size is perfect. It's already a lot of work because our team is still small. I want the festival to eventually start collecting information about the artworks that are inspired by Kafka. I got all these applications from countries I had never heard of. I want to know how artists in different countries are interpreting Kafka's works.

"Unfolding Kafka Festival" runs from Friday to Nov 22 in Bangkok and from Nov 24-25 in Chiang Mai at MAIAM Contemporary Art Museum. Visit [unfoldingkafkafestival.com](http://unfoldingkafkafestival.com).

## The dark world of Franz

STORY: BENJAMIN TARDIF

Franz Kafka's world was one that was crushed by a meaningless bureaucratic society and lost without a sense of identity, and this malaise in modern society remains nightmarishly relevant. As part of the "Unfolding Kafka Festival", the exhibition "K: Kafka In Komiks" is taking place Goethe Institute running from Nov 7 until Dec 17.

Bangkok is the latest stop on the exhibition's travels having visited Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Poland and the UK, proving that the Czech author's work is borderless and still relevant even after almost a century.

The exhibition has been curated by David Zane Mairowitz and Malgorzata Zerwe, and centres on the work of three graphic artists who interpreted the dark imagination of Kafka. Over the past several decades, Kafka's work has inspired numerous artistic creations, but it has always been a challenge to succeed by remaining faithful to the original work while being able to translate into a new creation the essence of a Kafkaesque world, which is as imaginative as much as it is grotesque.

The exhibition unites three graphic novels, the result of different artistic collaborations between Mairowitz and three illustrators: *Das Schloss* illustrated by the French illustrator Chantal Montellier, *Der Prozess* illustrated by the Czech Jaromir 99, and excerpts from *Introducing Kafka* by the American comic pioneer Robert Crumb. The three artists' visions come together with enlarged images, reminding us of the graffiti aesthetic, which treat recurring Kafka's themes like animalism and crossbreeding, sex and women, death and tragedy.

Mairowitz, one of the curators, talks to us about the exhibition.

#### How is Kafka's work still relevant today, and while doing the exhibition, what did you learn about the man or his work?

Kafka is still relevant today because he is essentially writing about bureaucracy. Many of the world's problems come from that. What I continue to learn about Kafka, even before the exhibition, is his humour. This is something most people don't understand, in part because the translations are so bad. Humour, of a self-denigrating kind, is the mark of Kafka.

#### What is the aim of the exhibition?

The exhibition aims to unite the three illustrators with whom I created these three books: Robert Crumb, Chantal Montellier and Jaromir 99. And to show that Kafka can be appreciated on this simple level, and not only in the universities.

#### There seems to be three main themes from the artwork at the exhibition: animals and crossbreeding, sex and women, death and tragedy. What exactly interested you in the graphic novel to represent Kafka's work?

All of the themes you mention are Kafka's. He fits perfectly into the comic form because of his fantasy world, which in large part, has to do with animals. Just consider: a man wakes up from disturbing dreams to find he has been transformed into an insect. This is already comic book material.

#### The chosen graphic novels are all in black and white. Is there any purpose or reason?

Money. Colour is just too expensive. But Kafka's world is anyway more or less black and white.

#### From the three artists that you selected for the exhibition, who best captures the essence of Kafka's work?

They all have some relation to Kafka, but Robert Crumb is in many ways Kafka. He feels very close personally to the author.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNFOLDING KAFKA FESTIVAL