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## OzAsia Festival Review: Sk!n

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BY BRIAN GODFREY ON OCTOBER 1, 2016

ARTS, ARTS FESTIVALS, ENTERTAINMENT, OZASIA FESTIVAL, OZASIA REVIEWS

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Presented by **Terryandthecuz**

Reviewed 30 Sept 2016

Wild weather meant that many of **Sk!n**'s performances had to be cancelled and that is undoubtedly Adelaide's loss. A truly inventive and skilfully executed production, **Sk!n** demanded the audience's attention from the moment it began and those fortunate enough to attend will remember it for years to come.

Based on the experiences of human trafficking victims, it thrusts the audience into this world before they are even aware that the performance has begun. Along with a waiver, we are handed a questionnaire that asks for some very personal information before being herded into a waiting chamber. Addressed by number rather than name, we form lines and our responses are openly queried in front of strangers.

Then our claims are processed and we are arbitrarily divided into separate groups. We won't see some of the other audience members again until the night is over, and each will have a fundamentally different experience. This knowledge is central to **Sk!n**'s impact, the context in which to view the dance component once it arrives.

While the processing creates an air of unease and provokes a few giggles, the dance evokes nothing less than horror. Bedraggled forms haul themselves across a tiled floor, seemingly moving by sheer force of will alone. Their faces are invisible, covered by wild tangles of hair and they seem to be the very embodiment of Emma Lazarus' "huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

From among these ranks rise three dancers who contort their bodies to convey the pain of their comrades. A breathtaking spectacle, it is at times hard to watch because it is so raw. This is the language of pain, and this trio constantly struggles to break free from the morass, to see the audience and be acknowledged. They try to drag the others to safety but are engulfed again and again, their humanity stripped as they are again reduced to faceless crawlers.



By the end of the segment these three remain onstage alone, wrenching their bodies into unnatural poses as they are subdued and abused by invisible persecutors. It's hard to watch, but impossible to avert the gaze as they point directly at us, addressing the audience and singling us out. For what, we don't know.

For our group, a congratulatory champagne awaited, but any sense of celebration was muted by the knowledge that others in the audience were not afforded this opportunity. **SkIn** speaks to the many ways in which we are complicit in acts that we do not condone. We can tell ourselves that we are free of responsibility but **SkIn** asks us directly if we are comfortable with that response. The fact that many of the audience stayed afterwards to speak to volunteers from local refugee organisations seems to provide an answer.

If that sounds heavy, it's because it is. **SkIn** is not light entertainment, but nor is it preachy - it asks questions rather than forcing opinions on us.

There are many ways to judge art's success, but a vital one is that it moves the audience. By this measure and many others, **SkIn** is a highlight not just of Ozasia but of the entire year.

Reviewed by **Alexis Buxton-Collins**



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ABOUT AUTHOR

BRIAN GODFREY



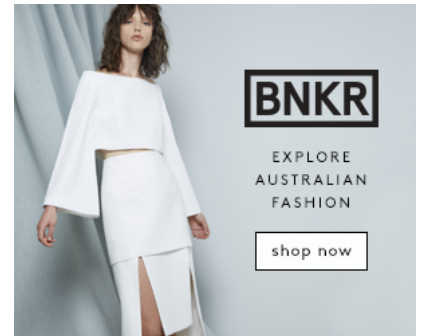
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