



Feb 16, 2022

Commentary on *The Skin of an Octopus* in Fluid Fest 2021

The Skin of an Octopus is a dance piece created by Nicole Charlton Goodbrand in collaboration with Ryan John Arnold and Derek Demassi, and performed by Charlton Goodbrand herself. The piece is an intense, wild ride punctuated with strangeness and humour. The work motors on rails of physical virtuosity, equal parts dynamism and specificity.

Unlike some cross-disciplinary collaborations, where the inherent friction between artists of different media is less than productive, *The Skin of an Octopus* is a meeting of minds. The synergy between recorded text, music, choreography, and projections points beyond a Diaghilevian *total theatre* and a postmodern fragmentation of the stage. Instead, the relationship between the various pieces is a mutual freeing, a result of artists labouring passionately within their respective media while constantly returning to a common meeting ground. The collaboration is a pulsing convergence-divergence.

Despite the broad multidisciplinary from which the work is hewn, *The Skin of an Octopus* is self-contained. Visually, this is due in part to the projections clearly delimiting a space in which Charlton Goodbrand performs. The space is further delimited by way of her performative magnetism. Charlton Goodbrand sinks deeply into carefully curated states of feeling—and takes her audience with her. For example, in one section, she lures her viewers in through unabashed sensuality. With her vivaciousness on overdrive, bordering parody, her face erupts into absurd contortions. Through the rather abrupt change, her commitment to embodying these states thoroughly anchors the transition, lending it a sense of contiguousness and coherence with the piece overall.

In sum, *The Skin of an Octopus* is fun, sexy, and a little weird. It harnesses the expressive power of many artistic media, while grounding the expansive range of ideas in an electric, yet deliberate performance.

This review is based on the live and digital performance of The Skin of an Octopus presented by Springboard Performance as part of the Fluid Fest, Oct 28 - Nov 7, 2021 in the GRAND Theatre. The work was created with the support of the Decidedly Jazz Danceworks Artist in Residency Program, the GRAND Theatre Creative Residency, North Calgary Dance Centre and Travis Goodbrand.

The theatre and reviewer are located in Mohkínstsis/Calgary, the traditional territories of the people of Treaty 7, namely the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations). Mohkínstsis is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3.

For more information about *The Skin of an Octopus*, please see <https://www.ncqbrand.com/works>

Rufi Oswald [he/they]

Artistic Director

Dancers' Studio West

(587) 372-3182 | dancersstudiowest.ca