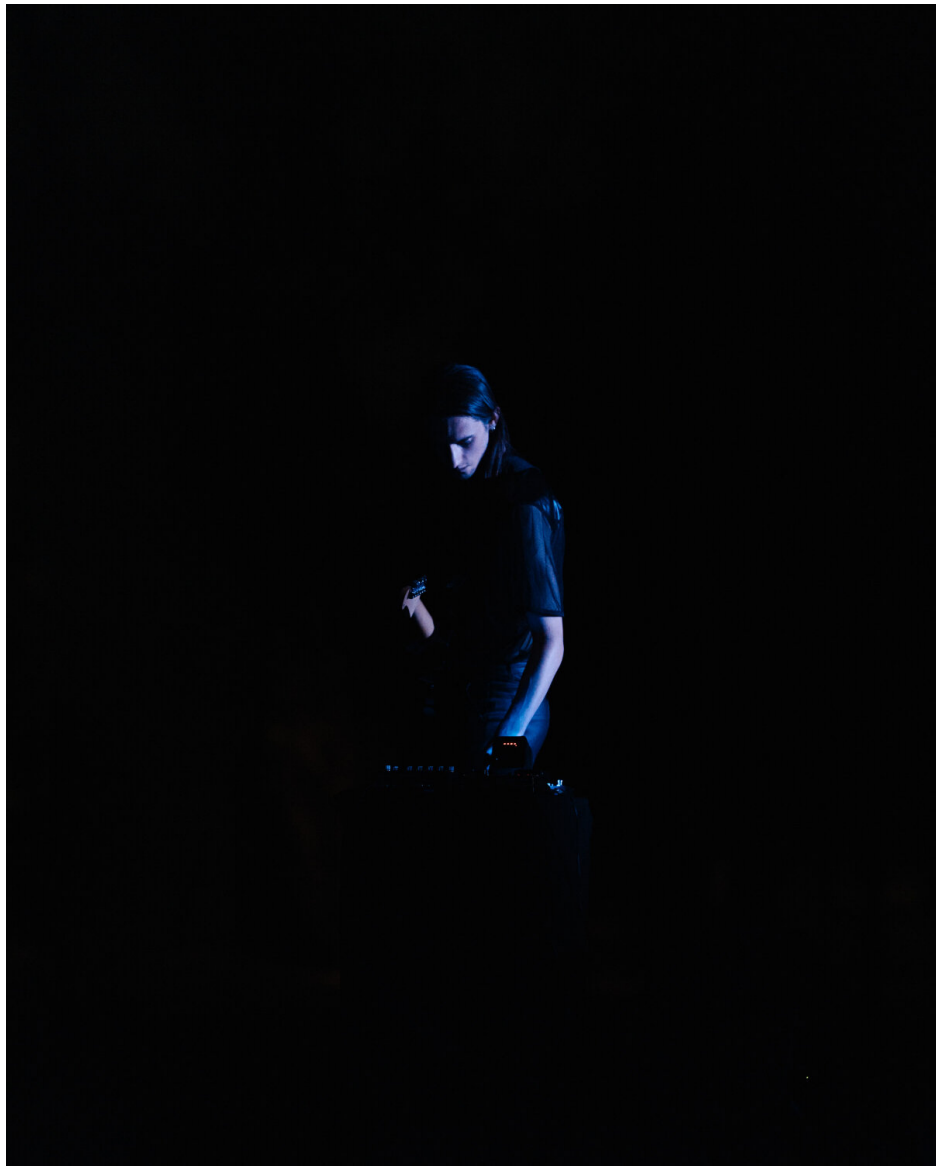




VOID

JOSHUA SERAFIN

VOID, in a word, is truly of its day



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Halles de Schaerbeek

Multi-disciplinary artist Joshua Serafin, with the help of two musicians and lots of black, viscous liquid, startlingly rebirths themselves as a futuristic, re-imagined, ancestral Philippine god going by the name of 'VOID'.

29 SEPTEMBER 2025

It was a scramble to get a ticket for the one-off, sold-out performance in Brussels' *Les Halles de Schaerbeek*. Being allowed to bring our plastic drinks goblets into the massive *Grande Halle*, already signalled we were more in for an 'event' than a conventional performance. Gathered in an arena-like semicircle facing a large black crater framed by four slim, neon staffs and a large screen at the back, those sitting close were instructed to don splash-proof plastic ponchos. Strains of a melancholic trumpet contrasted with our excited chatter.

There's already quite a buzz around Serafin. A one-time student at PARTS the queer, Filipino born artist made a video in 2023 that garnered acclaim at last year's Venice Biennale. It provided the base from which the live performance we were about to see was developed. Serafin has also been creating different 'constellations', under the tantalising umbrella title, 'Cosmological Gangbang' using different medium but all centred around his ongoing research into pre-

colonial Philippine mythology.

With all this as a backdrop, expectations are high. So intensely focused watching for action at the centre of the circle, we barely notice a light is now shining on the balcony, illuminating the live trumpeter, Alex Zhang Huntai, who also designed the sound together with Luis Miguel Muñoz, and guitarist Calvin Carrier. Then, high up on the other side, a naked figure, under a spotlight, begins to thrash and stamp: a modern-day Mowgli in a fury.

Smoke billows into the central space and we see Serafin appear for the first time at our level. Still naked, strong and strutting, their energy — part wrestler, part ballerina — means their entrance thrills, like the start of a pop idol's concert we've all been impatiently anticipating. And even though we knew it would happen, it's still mesmerising to witness them plunging into the black crater, sending lava-like liquid over their head in what looks like a 3D black wave from a paint ad. Splashing and sweeping the stuff in grand swirls and arches that form iridescent black rainbows like those found in puddles of petrol, Serafin does seem godlike, but far from angelic. They are, in fact, livid, spitting out a series of staccato Tourette-like eructations that can't quite be understood but are unmistakably obscenities.

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Leaving the dark pond, still naked but coated with the glimmering black-gold, they prowl, scamper, pounce, growl and prowl some more: muscularly feline with a whiff of camp. We notice the screen at the back flickers into action. The first images show Serafin and two other performers, Bunny Cadag and Lukresia Quismundo, similarly daubing themselves with the viscous liquid. Highly sensual, all three physiques defy any binary definition, reflecting, according to Serafin's research, the true nature of deities in pre-colonial Philippine mythology, before the western coloniser inflicted gender 'norms'. The screen also shows underwater shots: a *merperson* speeding through the deep, legs undulating like a tail, or Serafin themselves, floating, suspended, in a moment of serenity.

The smoke returns and now Serafin upends one of the neon staffs, balancing it horizontally like a fence or barrier and repeatedly utters, audibly this time: 'If one body is not free, none of us are free'. They are now calmly in command.

Being somewhat a sucker for showtime spectacular I am bowled over by Serafin's power and slick command of stagecraft; other audience members with whom I chatted after the show resented what they viewed as its relentless superficiality. Indeed, after reading the arts-speak blurb surrounding Serafin's work: "Joshua's globally acclaimed performance is committed to dwelling within interstitial spaces, a refusal to participate in dimorphic structures so they can craft an idiom where they can speak from the said in-betweenness." one could be forgiven for suspecting Serafin's research and heritage has been packaged up especially for the *m'as-tu-vu* Arts consumer. But hey, this is 2025, 'VOID', in a word, is truly of its day.