

RIDDEN

LEU WIJEE AND MIO ISHIDA

Survival rites



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In a large square, flanked on four sides by an eager audience, five immobile dancers are ready in position on the floor. It's from their repeated and singular movements that a choreography will emerge which, like a choppy sea, swells and flows — from abstract to figurative, from metaphorical to literal, from breathless silence to ritualistic rhythm. The departure point of Leu Wijee's and Mio Ishida's *performance* is the triple disaster that struck Central Sulawesi in Indonesia in 2018 — earthquake, liquefaction and tsunami.

22 MEI 2026

As we bustle into the theatre to find our seats, the performers are already waiting. Stock still, serene, in a semi-kneeling position — one leg bent and the other stretched out, hands pressing into the floor, supporting their torsos. Sharp on some internal cue, they suddenly swivel, shifting direction with the swish of their nylon track pants and squeak of their sneakers on the floor. We are startled, like when you catch a darting lizard or fleeing spider out of the corner of your eye.

Hypnotic and ominous

The dancers' semi-crouching position is 'RIDDEN''s leitmotif. With the impetus of a swing of an arm, the tilting body and its rotation bring to mind shifting sands, the rolling of sea waves, the flowing of liquid, the swirling of the wind. The performers' faces are so close to us, but they seem to be gazing at a distant horizon. Again, the rhythm of the switching and swivelling seems gauged by an internal but shared score. It's hypnotic, but slightly ominous too. There's an anticipation of the patterns breaking, the serenity shattering and the structures falling apart.

Indonesian choreographer Leu Wijee was not actually present when the triple disaster, which killed at least 1,650 people, struck, but he suffered from the consequent confusion and communications shutdown. At the time, it was

reported that the tsunami warning was issued soon after the earthquake, but it was then mistakenly revoked, meaning the disaster was even more deadly than if the alarm systems had worked properly.

Rather than evoking the disaster directly, ‘RIDDEN’ seems inspired by the innate paradoxes it revealed

Having spent time at sea before returning to the site of the catastrophe, Wijee experienced the motion of the waves as a call to contemplation. He visited the site six months later, where chaos and reconstruction were living side by side. But ‘*RIDDEN*’, rather than evoking the disaster directly, seems inspired by the innate paradoxes it revealed — when solid earth turns into liquid swamps, where devastation and resilience coexist.

Broomsticks
Wijee had been nurturing thoughts about the work since before COVID and, from 2020, together with Japanese dance artist Mio Ishida, began shaping ideas and collecting fragments of narrative material from Indonesian traditions and everyday life. One element particularly: the broomstick, used to sweep both inside and out, as well as being an emblem of resistance in public demonstrations, finds its way into the work as both banner and rhythm keeper.

A ritualised dance, symbolic of defiance and survival

Two of the dancers now sit up and begin drumming on one of several cardboard boxes dotted around the space. The three other dancers, having each stripped one foot of its sock, stand erect, rhythmically stamping in unison, clutching and pounding what could be the green stems of the long grasses used as broom bristles, into the palm of their gloved hands. They crescendo into a contrived and controlled frenzy. Human broomstick handles, with extreme vertical force, focus and attention to each other, they never miss a beat. They are stamping out a geometric pattern, a geographic territory, testing the solidity of the ground, or perhaps performing a ritualised dance, symbolic of defiance and survival.

The formation suddenly breaks and all five are up on their feet again, speeding around the square, kung fu-style leaps and high kicks exploding into the air, before plummeting back to the ground again as, mid-descent, the lights black out. We don’t see them crash to the floor, but when the lights are switched on again, the performers are once more horizontal, though not crushed. They rise to heartfelt applause. It’s a performance that leaves the rare and happy sensation that it all ended too soon.