

## **The Casement Project**

The Casement Project is a new work by Fearghus Ó Conchúir. In the context of the centenary commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising and of the First World War against which the Rising took place, this choreography reflects on the relationship between nationalism and the body: Who gets to be in the national body? Whose body represents the nation? How does the national body move? How permeable are its borders?

Continuing Fearghus's thoughtful and provocative championing of the value of dance as a form of knowledge to help us understand better our place in the world, this new choreography uses as material the problematic body of Roger Casement to address contemporary questions of belonging and becoming. These questions have an impact on the lives of all citizens, on those who enjoy privilege and in particular on the lives of the disabled, of asylum seekers, of women and of sexual minorities.

The Casement Project engages imaginatively with the scandalous permeability to otherness of Casement's body. He held in tension conflicting identities: British peer, Irish nationalist, a Protestant and a Catholic, a hero and a traitor, a sex tourist and a sexual pioneer. His diary details a sexual life in which he welcomed the breaching of those bodily borders that dominant males are supposed to defend. His corpse was medically probed to prove his sexuality. His body was limed. Even after his death his bones remained politically sensitive.

The Casement Project uses the mobility and flexibility of the articulate dancing body to illuminate the still-relevant complexities that Casement represents. In the context of an Irish culture given to verbal literacy, The Casement Project insists on the value of body as a source of knowledge and insight for understanding the past and imagining new potential.

### **Creation Process**

The Casement Project is a work for six performers that brings together a creative team of familiar collaborators. Fearghus has a track record of innovative and fruitful collaboration with dance artists and across art-forms and he builds on that experience in this innovative work.

In 1972 David Rudkin was commissioned by the BBC to write a radio play about Casement. Broadcast of the resulting play, *Cries from Casement as his Bones are Brought to Dublin*, was delayed by the BBC until 1973, due to sensitivities about the political situation in Northern Ireland. A version of the play was staged at Project Arts Centre in 1976.

The Casement Project will use as a sound score and skeleton, the author's tape of the original broadcast. The play and the tape, connect to the Casement history but also remind us that the national narrative is mediated, passed down in various forms that bear the marks of their own political context. The degraded quality of the tape, degrading more each time it's played, helps to create some of the space necessary to use this narrative in a way that is flexible and generous to a parallel and interweaving choreography. The radio play will be edited and supplemented by a sound score from award-winning composer, Alma Kelliher.

A second source for the creation of the work is the photographs Casement took in the Congo, South America and in Ireland. Some document the bodies of abused slaves, some capture tribal life in the Amazon, some are of young men posing for the desiring eye behind the camera, and some are of the west of Ireland where Casement diagnosed colonial oppression akin to the exploitation he had seen in the Amazon and in Africa. The framing and presentation of bodies in these photographs provides material for physical exploration. The photographs are an archive of frozen images, a history that dance can set in motion again, freeing fixed viewpoints and offering more fluid perspectives instead.

A final element to be integrated into this work is material drawn from engagement with LGBTI asylum seekers in Ireland and the UK. This material connects contemporary experience to the historical and canonical instance of Casement, linking together a legacy of colonialism, abuse of sexual minorities, and the transgression of bodily and geographical borders.

This extension of the choreography beyond the studio is typical of Fearghus' work. It is an artistic and ethical strategy that enriches his creation process by opening it up to new influences and it enriches others by sharing the value of dance. It also builds communities around the work that sustain an engagement that is more than a transaction between audience and artist.

The aim of The Casement Project is to use dance to set in motion fixed articulations of the body, showing bodies that transform, that can carry multiple histories and can process those legacies in creative ways that open potential for new bodies of nationality and transnationality. In the context of historical com