

# AUTRE

SUBVERSIVE NARRATIVES: AN INTERVIEW WITH RYAN HEFFINGTON

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Ryan Heffington has carved an extremely unique place in the world of dance and contemporary art. If you've seen the music video for Sia's triple-platinum song Chandelier, you know Heffington's work. If you've seen the Sigur Rós music video where Shia LaBeouf goes full frontal, you know Heffington's work. But Heffington's real magic exists in his spectacular live performances – where he uses the medium of modern dance and movement to paint a portrait of identity and culture in a fragmentary digital age. Next week, as part of Art Basel Miami, MAMA gallery will present Heffington's premier of Wading Games – a performance that he describes as a “punk rock water ballet” – at the Ritz Carlton hotel. In the following interview, Heffington explains his upcoming performance in Miami and how dance can change the world.

AUTRE: Can you talk a little about your upcoming performance in Miami – you once described it as a “punk rock water ballet.” Is that an accurate description?

RYAN HEFFINGTON: Yes, the piece will live between a glorious ballet in terms of scale, and at moments aesthetically beautiful, but sharply contrasted by a subversive narrative where the dancers will have to fight from drowning over collectively taking part in a synchronized swim routine.

AUTRE: You have been thinking about this project for a long time – why is this particular project so meaningful to you?

HEFFINGTON: The fact that certain performative spectacles cling to my brain collecting momentum over the years creates a feeling of deep respect and attachment to the piece. I'm not sure exactly when this ballet pushed itself inside, but the element of potential danger, the symbology of over-flooding tears, and a certain societal class - all of this is so dramatic. It has spoken to me in my dreams and waking state as well - at this point it's a part of me and I cannot keep it a secret any longer.

AUTRE: Why is dance important in today's contemporary artistic landscape?

HEFFINGTON: In this age of digital media, over-saturation of well most everything, dance claims it stake in that it is most simple in its form. Its the body expressing the mind. No need for tools, keyboards, audio accompaniment - just the human form. There is something inherently grounding about this. It's access is given once the being accepts their own invitation to do so - again no money, tools or experience is necessary. It's also powerful in terms of invigorating the soul and once you come to peace with that you dance like no one else on earth - think fingerprint - an endless amount of joy is yours. Really - imagine if every human danced for 1 hour a day, how that would change your life, your work space, your community, your nation, our world.

AUTRE:What do you hope to convey – or what kind of feelings do you want to emote – through your dancers and your choreography?

HEFFINGTON:In rehearsals, sometimes I squint when watching the piece in front of me. I know when I feel something from the bodies before me - I'll get a tingle or goosebumps or rays of energy - I know I've created something visceral and this is what I hope my audiences experience. I can make aesthetically arresting imagery - yet without playing to the heart I'm afraid people leave empty handed. We're over stimulated visually as a society - but to connect emotionally to people or art is how I want to live and have my work experienced.

Text and interview by Oliver Maxwell Kupper. MAMA gallery will present Ryan Heffington's Wading Games – with music by Banks and film installations by Osk – at the Ritz Carlton (pool) in Miami Beach as part of Art Basel Miami 2014 on Thursday, December 4 (rsvp@mama.gallery).

