

# WORKER'S CHOICE

## INFO PACK



PHOTO: GERHARD LUDWIG

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Trailer: <http://www.tanzforumberlin.de/en/production/workers-choice/>

Full length recording: <https://vimeo.com/199466197/07a782070e>

Photo documentation: <http://mmk.wf/workerschoice.html>

## CREDITS:

Concept, costumes, set design: Miriam Kongstad

Performance: Suvi Kemppainen, Miriam Kongstad

Dramaturgy: Thomas Schaupp

Sound design: Jonas Frederiksen, Miriam Kongstad

Light design: Fabian Stemmer, Miriam Kongstad

Premiere: 11.01.2017, Tanztage Berlin 2017, Sophiensaele, Berlin, DE

Co-production: Sophiensaele Berlin

Thanks to: HZT Berlin, Performing Arts Platform Berlin, Eva Hartmann, Eva Meyer-Keller, Ida Katinka Fridan Pedersen, Mio Nordentoft.

Next showing: *alt\_cph* 2018, 25-27.05.2018

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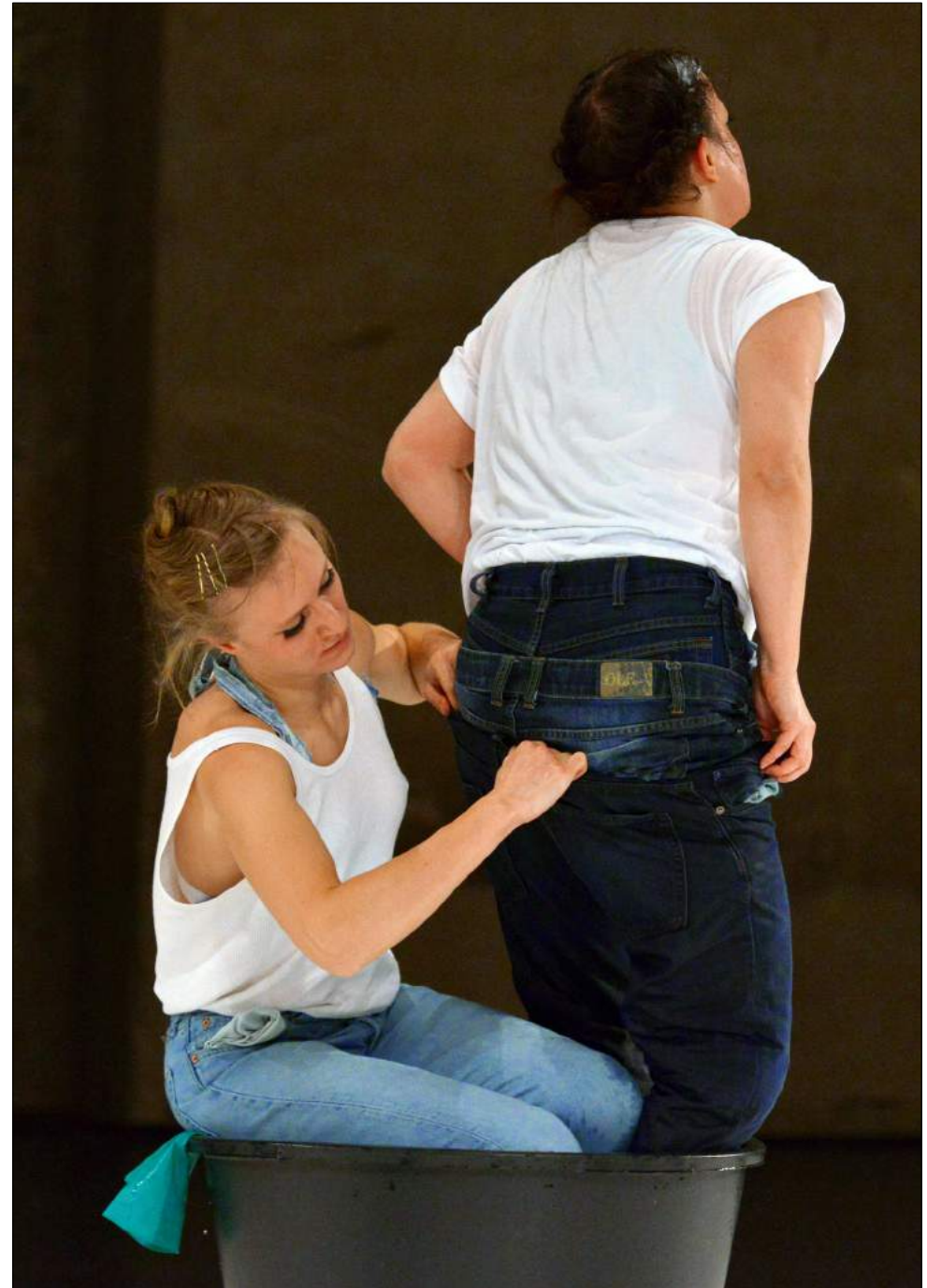


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# ABOUT THE ARTIST

MIRIAM KONGSTAD (DK, 1991) is an artist and performer based in Berlin (DE) and Copenhagen (DK). Her work is fuelled by a strong interest in the human body and the social and political regimes surrounding it. Her artistic output often blurs the line between performance and visual art and is a synthesis of different modalities and media, from assemblage, installation, and sculpture, to sound, poetry and performance. Next to her solo practice, she is also one part of the artist duo Bonnie & Clyde.

In her work, Kongstad utilizes socio-anthropological theories to investigate the human body and the anthropometric, with specific attention to habitual and naturalized movements and their associations in popular culture. Kongstad treats bodies as performative material; as players in systems, societies and cultures; as compasses and thermometers and as devices which direct and encode structures of everyday life.

Kongstad works with material extensions of the human body which are related to corporeal, social, biographical and representational upkeep: foods, beauty products, fashion, technology, pornography, toys, fitness equipment. Kongstad activates these materials as a way of laying bare the systems through which power is reproduced, felt and fought against on a bodily level. Recurring themes in her work include female identity, speed, technology, accumulation, sexuality, desire, vernacular and popular culture, norms and expectations.

MIRIAM KONGSTAD completed her Bachelor of Art from Universität der Künste Berlin (DE) in 2016 and holds a diploma in movement studies from Akademiet for Musik, Dans og Teater (DK). Most recently her work has been shown at Sophiensaele (Berlin, DE), Dansekapellet, (Copenhagen, DK), Hamburger Bahnhof (Berlin, DE), PPL (New York, USA), Fundación Botín (Santander, ES), Scandinavian Institute (New York, USA), Collegium Hungaricum (Berlin, DE.), Uferstudios (Berlin, DE) as well as site-specific locations ranging from apartments and deserts to forests.

# ABOUT THE WORK

As individuals, as women, as Westerners we put on jeans - the contemporary corset. Representing the free, original, authentic West. For several decades the female body has been portrayed as emancipated in favor of advertising jeans. But has she been equally constrained by this material fashion? Miriam Kongstad's performance *Worker's Choice* explores how the feminine body has been choreographed and shaped by jeans over time, and how female appearance is portrayed through historical and contemporary advertising campaigns connected to denim and the fashion industries.

In *Worker's Choice* we encounter two female performers clad in blue denim outfits and cowboy boots. Their hair tightly braided, eyelashes heavy with black extensions. The performers inhabit a minimal scenography and installation of objects: a small wooden board on wheels, a swirling lasso, and a large washing bucket filled with water and jeans. A soundscape compliments the scenography, periodically chiming in with sonic fragments seeming to anticipate drama.

A showdown ensues. A duel follows, outside the revolving saloon doors on Main Street. The environment depicted is the original habitat of denim and jeans, overlaid with a cold, blueish tint.

A choreography is taking place not only between the two performers, but between them and the soundscape as well. The sound hereby becomes a "third actor" of the performance; an interplay between live actions on stage and a catalog of sonic scenarios and atmospheres, adding, contradicting and commenting on the choreographic narrative unfolding in real time.



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An old car starts up, the gears springing into action one by one as if a row of mechanical mannequins in a storefront window. The soundscape appears to be in conversation with the performers - sometimes reacted to, sometimes not.

Together, the costume, choreography, scenography and soundscape establish a scene of our collective fantasy of the American West. The cowboy, the milkmaid, the wrangling and the ranch. Sweat, dust and cigarette butts stomped out by a cowboy boot with spurs. This representation of the Western Female is sexualized from the get-go. The skin is sweaty and glistening. The work has always already concluded. We enter the scene at the moment of leisure newly achieved. A pause between the professional and domestic sphere, an exhaling body, still warm from work. Leaning against a wall, back turned away from us, her ass jutting out like a second face, muted and ready to be used.

For more than a year preceding the premiere of *Worker's Choice*, Kongstad collected clippings and text on the advertisement of jeans, from the early 1880s until today. Through this archive of representation, Kongstad studied the evolution and naturalization of gendered body postures, including early workwear advertisements for male mine workers, a "calvinized", hyper-sexualized 15-year-old Brooke Shields as the face of 1980 Calvin Klein Jeans commercials, and today's marketing strategies advocating "gender neutrality" and "female empowerment" by Levi's and Diesel.

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The equating of the female subject with animal desire in the advertisements studied by Kongstad influences the performers' behavior. At times they snap out of their stylized postures, collapsing both physically and abstractly while uttering banal, exclamations of protolanguage, crawling and dragging themselves across the floor. They call to mind an early, sometimes amoebic state of life where body movement and language is still in its most basic or nonexistent form. The tension between different notions of the female body in *Worker's Choice* can be described as oscillating between highly stylized postures and movement patterns pertaining to representations of the feminine, and a pre-discursive form of inhabiting the body, neither female nor male.

During the performance, a gradual shift in the mobility and agency of the performers occurs: at first the denim manipulates and curbs the bodies, slowly transitioning to the bodies controlling and directing their denim exterior. A transition from the material performing the body to beholding the body performing the material. After this struggle the bodies move freely with newfound ease. The scope of their movement suggests a panorama far beyond the parameters of the performance space, like witnessing an amalgamation of the Grand Canyon and the catwalk of a Victoria's Secret fashion show.

This utopian panorama quickly reveals itself as a fata morgana, as the grandeur and glamour of a moment of exhalation and power, collapses into spasms and compulsive, competitive behavior.

Ultimately the performers are caught as if in a panoptic structure: a labyrinthine industrial complex where bodies are reduced to players in a Pacman game. We leave the two female heroines trapped within this grid prison, predetermined to always re-inscribe into the game of consumption.



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They are momentarily able to eat away at their denim ghosts, but only to shortly after being on the run again - crying out, simultaneously diminished, wanton and relentless.

*Worker's Choice* is a study and celebration of struggles within historical and contemporary representation of the capitalized female form, in a territory of limited expression. A damp denim skin is shed, only to reveal an even colder armor underneath – and so the work continues.

(WRITTEN BY MIO NORDENTOFT)

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# TECH RIDER

## TECH REQUIRED:

- basic light setting / floodlights
- 2 profiles (with cold filters) placed on the floor directed towards backwall of the performance space (ideally)
- sound system (2-4 speakers)
- basic sound mixing desk
- 1 microphone (in tech area for sound operator)
- 1 laptop for sound operator (if possible provided by venue)
- floor or dance carpet tolerant to water

## STAFF REQUIRED:

- 1 light technician/operator (required from venue)
- 1 sound operator (provided by artist)
- 2 performers (provided by artist)

## PROPS:

Large plastic bucket, 15 pairs of jeans, wheeled board, rope, almonds, fake eyelashes, almonds, latex gloves, water, costumes (provided by artist)

## DIMENSIONS:

The performance is suitable for various kinds of spaces such as theatre venues, galleries, industrial spaces and site specific locations. The performance is adjustable in relation to the size of the space. The ideal size is 18m x 21m. The minimum size of the performance area is approximately 12m x 16m.

## AUDIENCE SEATING:

The performance requires a frontal audience seating. The Audience can be seated up to 2m on the sides of the performance area. The amount of audience is to be determined by the venue.

SCHEDULE: (assuming venue has rig in place)

DAY 1 get-in, dress rehearsal or “warm up” in any available space (ideally)

DAY 2 first performance

GET OUT: approximately 30 minutes

DURATION OF PERFORMANCE: 45 minutes



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