

Yogurt Pot Sci-Fi – Chatum Tanning and Andy Edwards – August 2020

Company / Individual name:

Chatum Tanning and Andy Edwards

Contact number:

07809421749

Email:

p.hughespaul@gmail.com

Please tell us briefly about the performance you would like to propose for this commission.

‘Yogurt Pot Sci Fi’ (working title) is an evocative video work and original story set in a future in which water has become a universally scarce material: one which is furtively mined, smuggled, cherished and dreamed about. Exploring themes of loneliness, water, memory, transportation and transformation, the work uses the romance of space travel to reflect on contemporary questions of climate change, histories of imperialism, our relationship to materials. A collaboration between playwright Andy Edwards and visual artists Chatum Tanning (Rohanne Udall and Paul Hughes), this work summons the epic scale of sci-fi through a delicate and miniature visual world entirely constructed and recorded within their own homes.

Drawing from Edwards’ recent narrative work for radio, stage and screen, YPSF presents an 8-15 minute narrative performed by a solo voice actor. The otherworldly-ness of this story will be evoked through microscopic landscapes formed from everyday materials found in homes (cardboard, glass, mirrors, glue, wire, lamps): a kind of visual ‘ASMR’ or ‘foley’. Careful lighting, close camera work, and captivating shifts (things oozing, tinting, dwindling, dangling, collapsing, blowing, tightening, drying, melting) offer a surprising, sensuous, and soothing backdrop to this interplanetary and intimate tale.

YPSF will be devised through a back-and-forth of writing and visual materials between Edwards, Udall and Hughes. It will draw from the unique material, textual and collaborative possibilities of our working situations to develop new forms of playwriting and theatre. As such, YPSF reveals and celebrates the creativity and cultural production that can happen within our own homes. Resisting the big-budget and institutionalised hold of science-fiction, this work will invite the audience into the democratic and riotous pleasures of how we tell stories to one another; and how we wield materials around us in this act of playing, summoning, testing, telling, adapting and remaking.

Who will be involved in making the piece?

This project sits within a burgeoning collaboration of Andy Edwards and Chatum Tanning. Together, we are working to develop new modes of narrative playwriting that exceed the main-stage form: for example, our ongoing process for ‘Two Hander’, a evening-length original play that has received early development at Nottingham Playhouse and Playwrights Studio Scotland, and with further development at Dance4 in April 2021. We are interested in the cultural, linguistic, embodied memory

of empire, encounters with land and the 'other', voice, the crisis of representation and 'speaking for', how 'good stories' work, and what 'theatre' might look like within a rapidly-shifting world.

Andy Edwards is a Glasgow-based playwright and dramaturg. His work includes:

- [Happy Ark Day :\)](#), a short film commissioned by National Theatre of Scotland and BBC Scotland for Scenes for Survival, broadcast August 2020.

- Let The Music Go On And On And On And On... Dramaturgy for Carrie Skinner's work about ghosts and disco, presented at Glasgow CCA (July 2019).

- Tomorrow, Under Snow, a play about contemporary anti-semitism and holocaust remembrance. Developed through FIRE EXIT's PYROMANIA Bursary for experimental playwriting and presented as a reading at Take Me Somewhere (May 2019).

- Arketype, a retelling of Noah's Ark about patriarchy and climate change, written as Tron Theatre's Mayfesto Writer-in-Residence (May 2019).

- In Burrows, an improvised duet with Amy Cheskin about language, description and access, performed in English and BSL. (Assembly Roxy, Edinburgh, March 2019).

More info on his work is available at: <https://www.andynedwards.com/>

Chatum Tanning is the collaboration of Rohanne Udall (London) and Paul Hughes (Nottingham). Trained in fine art, philosophy and dance, they work across visual arts, choreography and performance. While conceptually oriented, their practice centers playful logics that manipulate body and objects – which has continually attracted serious and delighted engagement by young audiences. Recent projects include:

- This, a choreography of slapstick and thought for exhibition spaces, premiered at Rich Mix (May 2018) and more recently performed at Nottdance festival (October 2019).

- Radio Play (2018 - 2019), an independent radio station which curated and broadcast a broad range of original sound works from artist-peers working across music, playwriting, sound, dance and poetry.

- Solo exhibition As If Nobody's Watching (October 2019) at 4/4, Nottingham, presenting a collection of sculpture, print and collage work that playfully troubled its own visibility and display.

- Ghosting, a research project commissioned by LADA at Artsadmin, in which participants transformed themselves into ghosts to haunt institutional spaces (studios, offices, public areas and store-rooms).

More info on their work is available at: <https://www.chatumtanning.info/>

How long roughly would you expect the final product to be?

We expect the final work to run between 8 to 15 minutes.

When would the final product be ready to share? (We're looking for one piece to be ready by November 2020 and one to be ready by March 2021)

Broadly reflecting the commissioning fee, with three artists working one day a week at £140pppd, we anticipate this piece taking 6 weeks to make. Adding two weeks for contingency, we would be able to finish this work by early/mid November if selected in early September.

Why do you feel it's an engaging or important piece of work?

We originally conceived of Yogurt Pot Sci-Fi in late 2016, but have since returned to the idea during lockdown. We feel the themes it addresses – through its subject matter and means of production – are urgent, and respond to both collective experiences of the pandemic / lockdown, and political crises of today:

- The project centers the contradictions of loneliness uniquely addressed by science-fiction: that of physical isolation and alienation from others – experienced by most during the height of Covid lockdown – yet within the curious expansiveness of space. We are confined; we imagine distance, breadth, movement, landscapes; we dream these otherworldly distances with the textures and details of our own homes; yet these fantasies cannot fully address the lingering desire for collectivity and encounter with the other. The infinite space of sci-fi offers a new lens through which to reflect on loneliness and isolation.
- Filmed entirely within our homes, this project revives a rich tradition of science fiction filming in miniature: where evocative landscapes, worlds and galaxies are formed through resourcefulness and meticulous detail. In the face of the rise of computer generated special effects, our work celebrates this ongoing tradition as a joyful form of creativity that is accessible to all. This is a form of storytelling accessible to children and adults, that responds to and transforms the world around it in playful, energetic, imaginative ways. What forms of creativity have we turned to within the lockdown? How can we respond to, and make with, our material surroundings?
- Space, space-travel, and science fiction has always been an important forum to think through questions of colonialism and cultural encounters with 'the other'. We can see this imperialism – a colonial desire for heroic exploration of new frontiers – is alive and strong in the world within major business and research such as Space-X's 'Colonize Mars' plan. Within the backdrop of Black Lives Matter, and the unresolved nature of Britain's own imperial past, we believe this work can be a useful and sensitive way to invite reflection on exploration, encounter and cultural legacy, in a way that is appropriate for families, young audiences. Rather than shy away from these difficult topics, we want to keep finding ways to invite in those who might feel excluded from, frustrated, or even frightened by these conversations.

What age range do you think this would be most appropriate for, and why is this piece appropriate for a family audience?

“In the not too distant future, a climate-stricken Earth has been abandoned. Water is all that’s left, a precious and tightly regulated commodity which is outsourced to planets across the space colony. Rek is off grid, flying solo, under the radar in a cover mission to transport water from the Earth’s surface back to their lowly and forgotten home. Rek has never seen water, no one on their planet has. Rek wants that to change - but they aren’t prepared for what they find, when they stare into its depths.”

Yoghurt Pot Sci-Fi is a space adventure about humans caught in their desires to dominate, control and regulate. Our past work has been interested in how complex or fraught topics can be expressed through new and deceptively simple forms, that invite viewers to playfully respond, imagine, and think with. We have found that children are frequently the most perceptive and curious audiences. This project addresses contemporary, and often difficult-to-approach, topics (imperialism, climate change and our relationship to material resources) within a new-yet-familiar context: the space adventure. Through building rich worlds, compelling characters, and playful re-invention, Yoghurt Pot Sci-Fi will encourage families to engage with these global and urgent issues with their own voices, and within and beyond their homes.

YPSF invites its audience – of all ages, we think, but most specifically 6+ – to look at the objects that surround them in new light. To consider their strangeness, possibility and creative potential. What kinds of life might inhabit them, and transform them? If we are isolated or confined, then how can we be playful, and transform our surroundings? How can we make our homes strange? YPSF sees the answers to all these questions in the serious, busy, creative interventions we see most often in children. YPSF is a family piece: it centers the resourceful, insistent creativity of children as a space for conversation, learning, collectivity and pleasure.

Tell us and how you would plan to ensure the piece can be made under social distancing restrictions. This can be brief and based on current guidelines, we’re mostly interested in your creative thinking around responding to the challenge of social distancing.

The work will be entirely written, filmed, recorded and edited from our individual homes. Rather than staging or filming a pre-written story, our process will circulate video, text and audio materials between each other to feel out the unique narrative possibilities of this form. We are confident from early testing as to the rich possibilities of the form, particularly:

- a solo voice recorded from home, evoking the reflective and anxious textures of a solo pilot within a long-haul spaceflight.
- the simultaneous otherworldliness, and uncanny familiarity, of filming everyday materials in close up. We are excited by treading this line between the familiar and strange – and how it invites a viewer into the possibility of studying the materials that surround them, and forming imaginative worlds through it.

Please tell us an idea for a short interactive workshop that could be run linked to the story for families with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. (This may be led by a different artist, however if you are employed to deliver this fee would be separate from your commissioning fee.)

It's hard to generalise what an accessible workshop might be, without knowing the age range and particular access needs of these children, and whether this workshop would be undertaken remotely / digitally or in person. However, we think constructing alien landscapes through materials found at home (cardboard, tape, glue, toothpicks, plastics, stationary etc.) would be a good basis for a workshop, and adaptable to different access needs. We would invite and guide families in making these worlds, and then together tell a story about it while filming it with a smartphone or any other kind of camera they might have.

Please tell us about your access requirements, if any

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