

**The Saturday Paper**  
**November 4 - 10, 2023**  
**review by Cassie Tongue**  
**Liveworks, Performance**  
**Space Carriageworks, Sydney**

The soul of Liveworks this year might be *Antistatic Redux: The real time it takes...* Described as “Rosalind Crisp brings us her version of the retrospective”, it shouldn’t come as a surprise that, not quite halfway through the performance, Crisp herself makes a proclamation that “this is not a retrospective”. After all, this is not a festival known for linearity and conventionality and Crisp herself has no interest in presenting something so simple.

*The real time it takes...*, she says, is really something else. She offers us a tumble of words that might encompass the production: it’s a selection, she says, a snippet, some snippets, or some tidbits. Of what? “The bits that fell off while I was dancing,” she finishes, a disarming twinkle in her eyes. It’s an arresting, immediate image, and perhaps the perfect one to describe the production, which I might also call a riot of memory aimed squarely at the present.

As you walk into the space, you’re handed a card that encourages you to move around and take everything in. This is not a passive experience. Crisp – frequently billed as the “Mick Jagger of Australian dance” – is a Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and founder of the Omeo Dance Studio, named after her home town in regional Victoria. The space nods to her earlier years: there’s an achingly small Victorian Ballet sweatshirt on a hanger above a dresser; the drawers spill open, stuffed with ticket stubs and boarding passes; a small bouquet of native grasses rests atop it.

On screens – flickering up in front of us,

behind us, on the side walls – these recorded snippets of her work don’t stretch back quite as far. Later, when Crisp enters the space – shifting the mood immediately from museum viewing to kinesthetic experience; we move when she moves, following her movement and words – she tells us why. For the first 20 years of their career, she says, any dancer is just figuring out if they have something to say.

As she dances, she admits that she’s still figuring that out. Even when she is talking, she is dancing – an extension, an amplification, of her words. “Maybe,” she says to us, dancers move so much “to get away from their bodies”. Her dance is conversational, gestural and deeply embodied. Once you’ve trained to do it, how can you stop?

But Crisp wonders aloud to us, too – how can she continue? She has always found her practice of dance and her practice of being in her home town to be equally essential to her spirit. But when she returned home from living in France and was confronted by environmental disasters born of the climate crisis, she tells us that she wondered how she could dance while this was happening.

Performance art and experimental art – like Crisp, like PSpace, like Liveworks – responds to political, social and environmental concerns. Rather than stop, Crisp evolved. Her latest works are grounded in trees and earth. Her movement is elemental, closely connected to the environment. It’s dance as conduit to conversation, dance as pastoral elegy and alert.

Crisp’s retrospective looks back but urges us to look forward: to the environment and critical change needed; to how artists are nurtured, produced and developed; to how dance, like dancers, never stops moving. It is a conversation. She dances in and out of darkness, but there is no real stopping point – endings are false constructs, anyway. We could have lingered there forever: it’s only her simple, soft “okay” that jolts us into applause and out of the theatre, blinking into the light of the foyer. ●