

Puddles, Texte Zur Kunst Review Released February 16th 2022 Written by Maximilian Haas English Translation by DeepL

## APOCALYPTIC DRAG MUSICAL ON ACID MAXIMILIAN HAAS ON JEREMY WADE AT THE WILDEN RENATE, BERLIN

Jeremy Wade is a dancer, choreographer, curator and lecturer. In his pieces and performances, he questions hegemonic role prescriptions that define and oppress bodies. Until fall 2022, Wade and his band have a year-long residency at Wilde Renate in Berlin-Friedrichshain, where they are developing three different programs. Currently, the second is underway. Theater scholar and dramaturg Maximilian Haas has seen the piece and explains how the fictional narrative of a pelican condenses Wade's body- and performance-based practice into a dark cabaret about violence and destruction in the ruins of capitalism.

In June 2019, in response to a deliberately open-ended interview question, "How to relate in Contemporary Dance?", Jeremy Wade gave me the following response, "I really relate to being a host, who holds a very particular threshold and invites you to cross over that threshold all the way. I'm very familiar with that role in my work. I do it all the time." [1] Anyone who has seen a dance performance by the American dancer and choreographer, who has been living in Berlin since 2006, knows that his host function is not limited to social spaces. Rather, he also calls up affects and conflicts, memories and fictions, involuntary behavior and collective traumas and articulates them in the medium of dance. In doing so, Wade repeatedly falls back on established forms of U.S. entertainment culture, whose abysses and offsites he brings to the fore.

In this sense, Puddles Rising, his latest piece, is also a queer and at the same time dark cabaret or, speaking with the announcement, an "Apocalyptic Piano Bar Drag Musical on Acid" [2]. At its center is Puddles The Pelican, a derelict bird in the distant future of anthropogenic environmental destruction. Puddles, we learn from the lyrics and songs, grows up in a fairground, loses her sister in the oil of the Deepwater Horizon blowout, is rescued by a cruise ship where she has performed every night since as a singer and entertainer. The ship is on its way through the underworld, where there is no land and no horizon. Against this apocalyptic situation, Puddles raises the spirits every night.

Wade is the evening's maker, performer and singer, but above all: its host. He is accompanied by a five-piece band, Creatures From the Deep. The venue for the performance is a cramped club space at Wilde Renate in Berlin-Friedrichshain, where Wade and band perform regularly during a year-long residency and continually develop the piece. At the narrow front of the black, unadorned room, which could actually be in the belly of a ship, stands the small stage, crowding the band tightly around the performer. In his opulent costume of plastic garbage

(designed by Claudia Hill), Wade defies this spatial confinement and creates Puddles as a sculptural figure through text and music, movement and voice.

Puddles made her first appearance in Wade's dance performance *The Clearing* at HAU Hebbel am Ufer in 2019. Since then, the dancer and choreographer has added ever new facets to her persona, vita, and milieu in various productions. The focus on theatrical character and world building is new in Wade's hitherto more body- and performance-oriented practice. While the choreographic devices are used here as well, they are always embedded in the fictional framing, as aspects and attributes of a character and her situation. With their help, Wade condenses contemporary forms of violence and destruction into a bleak vision of survival in the ruins of capitalism. Everything has sunk - except for cruise ships, neoliberal mantras, and culture-industrial entertainment.

This cabaret is obviously trying to fulfill the genre rules. At the same time, these are stretched to make room for a character and her world that break genre boundaries. Wade does not do this once and for all, however, but rather in a continual evolution of the performance while simultaneously varying its parts. What holds these parts together are Puddles' original gesture and habitus, and her idiosyncratic idiom, which ranges between that of a cabaret singer and the sounds of a pelican. Wade opens up this non-human figure on the one hand representationally through mimetic experimentation with animal sounds and gestures, which often break into the performance abruptly, as it were from the outside; on the other hand, methodically, by adopting the bird's perspective in the development of figure and world and expressing its impressions and structures of desire. The epistemological problems posed by such an approach-how is another species' experience of the world knowable? -, Wade addresses through the means of drag.

This tension between appropriation and strangeness or alienation forms a rich matrix for Wade's performance, which moves between a queer art of failure and artisanal perfection. [3] In doing so, Wade now transfers the principles that otherwise characterize his physical performances to the voice: he quickly switches between energetic, physical registers and a fragile, falsetto-like head voice, between a broken, stuttering speech rhythm and elegiac singing. He is carried along by a superb band that plays through the classic genres of American bar shows: Jazz, blues, soul, bossa, broken up by electronics and indie rock. With a few exceptions, they play songs written with Wade for the show. Great, permeable songs that often end somewhere other than where they began, advancing the plot of the piece rather than interrupting it.

Wade and his band will develop three different programs at the Renate through fall 2022. Currently, the second is underway. However, the programs will be varied within themselves, for example, new songs and lyrics will be integrated, so that in principle you can see a different piece every evening. In keeping with the logic of the cabaret format, the team wants to attract an audience that comes back every evening for the

entertainment of the idea and accompanies the development of the production. In various pieces, Wade has applied the motifs and principles of late-night entertainment to dance performances. Puddles Rising takes the opposite approach, transferring his dance and performance aesthetic into an established show format that is celebrated as a ritual and performed through to audience engagement. Maximilian Haas is a dance and theater scholar and dramaturg. Most recently published *Animals on Stage. An Aesthetic Ecology of Performance* (2018) and *How to Relate. Knowledge Arts Practices* (2021), as well as the ongoing podcast series *Burning Futures: On Ecologies of Existence* (HAU Hebbel am Ufer). He developed the dance performance *DrawnOnward* (also at HAU) with Jeremy Wade in 2015.

Image credit: Courtesy of Jeremy Wade, photos: Florian Hetz (1+3), make-up: Rà Nikolaidis, wig: Benjamin Kiss and Antina Christ, costume: Claudia Hill

## NOTES

[1] Maximilian Haas, "How to Relate in Contemporary Dance. Conversations with Schubot/Grading, Alice Chauchat, Jeremy Wade," in *How to Relate. Knowledge, Arts, Practices*, ed. by Annika Haas/Maximilian Haas/Hanna Magauer/Dennis Pohl, Bielefeld 2021.

[2] <https://puddlesthepelican.show/story/>.

[3] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Durham, NC 2011.  
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