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Fresh Works: Mark Conway Thompson residency showing tackles predation, victimization

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Artist **Mark Conway Thompson** explores social justice through the experience of victims, the evil of predation, and the culpability of predators in his work-in-progress showing of *Kimono* at 8 p.m. on Friday, September 19 at The Alloy Studios.

Thompson’s showing is part of the **Fresh Works** residency program. Now in its second year, Fresh Works is KST’s creative learning program for local artists. The program provides artists with production support and 80 hours at The Alloy Studios to research, explore, play, and share a work-in-progress performance. Since its debut in 2013 the residency incubator has benefited seven lead artists. This fall, KST presents two Fresh Works artists — Mark Conway Thompson (September) and Anthony Williams (October).

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Mark Conway Thompson has performed internationally and throughout the U.S., including several productions with Quantum Theatre in Pittsburgh. In addition to dance, Mark has performed as a mime in Paris, acted on Broadway, and appeared in numerous television shows and film. During his residency, Mark works and performs with artists Anna Thompson and Taylor Knight, with musician/artist David Bernabo providing music for the project.

The influence for *Kimono* dates back to 2007 when Thompson was a guest instructor at Colorado College. He worked with French and English-speaking students on a movement theatre project that focused on predation. The project was based on Jean Ziegler’s *Les nouveaux maîtres du monde et ceux qui leur résistent* (The new rulers of the world and those who resist them). “The worst things that happen in the world all go on under one kind of arch that can be named, and that is predation. Predation is the source of the worst things — environmental, societal — that go on in the world today,” Thompson explains.

Internationally acclaimed artist Itchiku Kubota’s stunning use of kimonos as canvases inspired Thompson to use the silk robes as the project’s primary metaphor. “I went to an art exhibit in Canton, Ohio where I saw these kimonos,” says Thompson. “I learned about the artist a little bit and I learned that he had been for six years a prisoner of war in Siberia during World War II. The story of his imprisonment was a story of torture and victimization. So I said, ‘My god, this man’s life suggests a story to me.’”

Over the course of his project, Thompson engaged in conversations with people who were once victims of what he calls predation. He was on tour in South America with a Broadway show when he met a young journalist who had been released from prison where he was held as a political dissident. “On the night we had to say our goodbyes the guy wept as he said, ‘Those of you who live in countries

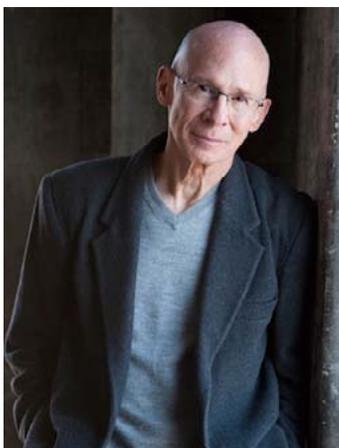


Photo by Becky Turner



where you're free to practice your art must do so to the extent that the freedom allows in the name of those of us who cannot.' And that gives impetus to doing this piece."

"Mark's project resonates well with the centennial and our fall season's theme — the transformational power of art to overcome," says Janera Solomon, executive director of KST. "We're happy to bring back Fresh Works for another year and welcome Mark Conway Thompson to KST."

Thompson says he and his cast are enjoying their time at KST's Alloy Studios for Fresh Works. He hopes the subject matter, along with the beauty of the set and the cast will push the audience. "The goal of this is to push back against the growing momentum of the predators. This project is the hardest, most sophisticated, and biggest artistic challenge I've ever given myself. We're excited to present this work-in-progress."

THIS PERFORMANCE CONTAINS NUDITY

Tickets

Gen. Admission \$15

Student/Artist \$10

Available online at kelly-strayhorn.org or at the door

About the Kelly Strayhorn Theater

As the last of nine theaters from the 1950s heyday of East Liberty, the Kelly Strayhorn Theater uses the arts as a catalyst for continuing community revitalization. The theater continues to play a key role in the transformation of Pittsburgh's East Liberty neighborhood. An intimate, professionally equipped, 350-seat multiple-use performance venue, the theater demonstrates its commitment to Pittsburgh artists and audiences. The KST is a favorite venue of emerging local artists, regional artists and arts organizations who take risks and present new work. Noted Pittsburghers Gene Kelly and Billy Strayhorn, the namesakes, are among the 80 area artists honored on the theater's Gallery of Stars. The building, opened in 1914, is the former Regent Theatre, which served the East End as a movie house for eight decades.

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