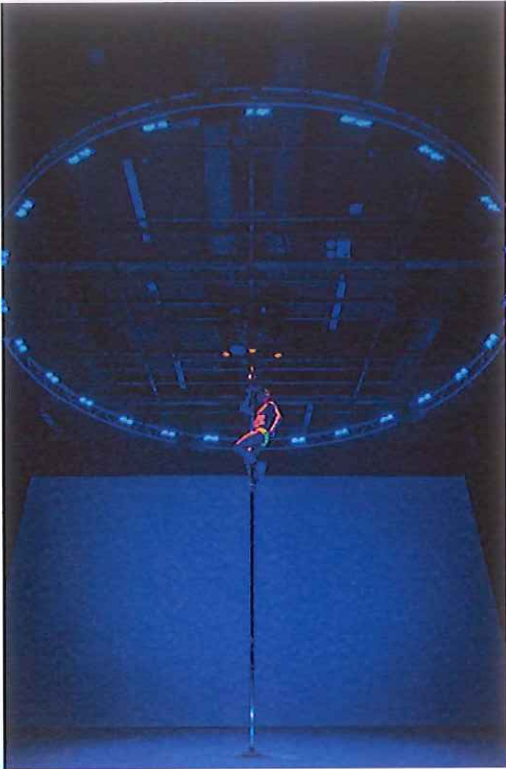


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An international collaboration explores new meanings of pole dancing

German-born and Belgium-based Arco Renz and his company, Kobalt Works, have collaborated with so many Southeast Asian dancers whose backgrounds vary from western classical ballet to Javanese court dance, that some people are wondering whether he has maybe moved to one of the [Asean](http://www.nationmultimedia.com/search/?keyword=+Asean+) (<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/search/?keyword=+Asean+>) member countries.

His most recent collaboration with Eisa Jocson and Daniel Kok, Filipino and Singaporean pole dance champions, is exciting in itself but add in Belgian sound design wizard Marc Appart and Japanese LED lighting master Takayuki "Kinsei" Fujimoto and you know that their production "Alpha" is guaranteed to please.

"I didn't really pick Daniel and Eisa; rather we picked one another," Renz tells XP. "'Alpha' is a collaborative project that the three of us co-author, albeit with different roles during the process."

Before Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay's artists in residency and dan:s festival 2014 commission, "Alpha" had its first weeks of rehearsals at Chulalongkorn University's Sodsai Pantomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts last July.

Renz reflects on how Bangkok has inspired Kok, Jocson and himself.

"In 'Alpha' we deal with two major 'identities' of pole dance - on the one hand, erotic entertainment as performed in night clubs; and on the other hand, the fitness discipline as practiced in gym clubs and for competitions. The work in Bangkok has been inspiring for us in both senses, but Bangkok's sparkling and diversified night life has been particularly important to our research on the mechanisms of seduction, politics of gender and power-dynamics of spectatorship."

"Being foreigners in Bangkok was also beneficial in exploring unexpected perspectives on pole dance. 'Alpha' formulates a 'foreign' language. It invites the viewer to rediscover pole dancing from a different perspective. It invites him or her to engage in a different intimacy with these two individuals on stage pole dancing."

Singaporean producer and dramaturg Tang Fu Kuen had this to say about "Alpha": "The pole stands on the stage, charged with absolutism. Shining, solid and still, it at once summons and unsettles our gaze. Pole champions, Daniel Kok and Eisa Jocson, each appears on stage, estranged from the pole. Within this ontological crisis, they confront their image and vitality as pole dancers. They expose gender corporeality, hyperbolise its libidinal charge, and dig effects that defy the cliché of the erotic dancer."

"As they resist the spectacle of the pole dance, they are also inscribed in a synaesthetic setting that promises the ultimate apotheosis of desire and sensation. With each layer of the construction of pole dance being stripped away, we are led finally to a bare studio where two bodies attempt a 'duet'. Here - drafting lines of flight, in manipulation with and against gravity - the body neither enfolds nor repeats to become the other."

After its world premiere at Esplanade's da:ns festival last October, "Alpha" was part of the "Tanz in Bern" festival in the Swiss capital.

Renz notes with satisfaction that the piece continues to evolve. "The performance is designed as a negotiation process. Every night, the performers freshly re-negotiate choreographic structures using breathing and other tools. The nature and amplitude of such negotiations differ from scene to scene. Certain scenes have also been developed and freshly added. So, it's truly our premiere in Thailand now."

Renz adds that audience reactions are very different. "That's a good sign. From my experience it's not so much different from city to city, but rather from one audience member to another. It's important for me that the performance doesn't dictate to the audience what to think or how to feel."

Renz sees three futures for pole dance, "The 'official' future would take place in fitness studios and sport clubs. I recently heard that pole dance could become an Olympic discipline at some point. Many former gymnasts already shift to pole dancing, bringing along incredible acrobatic skills. The 'unofficial' future of pole dance would be erotic entertainment in nightclubs or burlesque performances. This is perhaps where pole dance reconnects with its own past and origin, while developing new artistry and codes. Lastly, as an aesthetic and discursive experience, pole dance is so foreign and yet so familiar that it wordlessly incites notice."

Pole dance and LED lighting

Kobalt Works' "Alpha" is tomorrow and Saturday at 7.30pm, at Chulalongkorn University's Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts, on Henri Dunant Road, 10-minute walk from BTS Siam's Exit 6.

Tickets are Bt600 (Bt300 for students; Bt400 for artists and under-27), at www.ShowBooking.com (<http://www.ShowBooking.com>), or by calling (02) 218 4802 and (081) 559 7252.

Find out more at "Drama Arts Chula" and "Kobalt Works" [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/dramaartschula) (<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/search/?keyword=+Facebook+>)pages.

The Japan Foundation-supported LED lighting design workshops by Kinsei are on Monday and Tuesday, 10am to 1pm at the same venue. Free admission.

To sign up, email DramaArtsChula1971@gmail.com (<mailto:DramaArtsChula1971@gmail.com>).