

# embrace: Guilt Frame

By [Paul Knox ArtsHub](#) | Thursday, December 03, 2009



Describing *embrace: GUILT FRAME* without over simplification is difficult. It is, in essence, human installation art. Two performers, Peter Snow and Tess de Quincey, through the borders of a hanging golden picture frame, silently display a range of emotions over 40 slow, mesmerising minutes.

The concept draws inspiration from *The Nāṭyaśāstra*, an ancient Indian text that serves as a sort of bible for the performance of theatre, dance and music, thought to have been written some 2,000 years ago. De Quincey and Snow focus on the eight principal emotions or *Rasas* – love, pity, anger, disgust, heroism, awe, terror and comedy – to create various tableaux of passionate communication.

The conceit is intriguing. In discussion after the piece (which should be considered an essential part of the performance) Snow comments that one could not 'perform' *The Nāṭyaśāstra*. Reminiscent of the rigorous training and focus on detail present in Japanese Noh traditions, *The Nāṭyaśāstra* details movement virtually down to the individual muscle. In this way it dictates the 'correct' method for imitation of emotion to best evoke the desired response from an audience. A complete rejection of the concept of a feeling actor in favour of a systematic approach to the attainment of the 'perfect' performance most present-day actors would find near impossible to accept.

Yet *embrace: GUILT FRAME* is not a procession of mechanical representations. Inspiration from *The Nāṭyaśāstra* is limited purely to the *Rasas* themselves. Snow and de Quincey improvise through the first 30 minutes of the performance, hitting certain pre-arranged signposts but never presenting a linear story or even character representation. Any attempt to impose one from the audience leaves one grasping at thin air as expressions and emotions shift like sand dunes in a storm. De Quincey says that she takes inspiration from the energy and feelings of the audience which drives her own experience; Snow alludes to the difference of his approach, responding to a question by suggesting actors play actions not emotions, but we are left wondering whether this performance might be an exception.

It should be said that not everyone will embrace this piece. After 10 or so minutes, a restlessness was evident in many parts of the audience. It's understandable; 40 minutes of slow motion movement to a stark metronomic soundscape is not everyone's idea of engaging theatre. If you're the sort of person who prefers Red Bull to red wine and finds Tai Chi frustratingly slow, *embrace: GUILT FRAME* is not for you.

The pace and ambiance has a meditative effect. Snow and de Quincey are supremely focused and entirely present throughout their performance. Time loses relevance as the deliberate rhythm of the piece takes shape.

*embrace: GUILT FRAME* has no story, no plot, and no characters and is thus difficult to access in a traditional sense. The discussion that follows provides a much needed opportunity to structure and give voice to the feelings it gently provokes. Enter at your own risk; but if you do, approach it as you would a session of meditation or gentle massage.

## ***embrace: GUILT FRAME***

**December 2 – 13, La Mama Court House, 349 Drummond Street, Carlton Wednesday and Sunday @ 6:30pm;**

**Thursday, Friday and Saturday @ 8:00pm**

**Full / Concession: \$25 / \$12**

**Bookings: 9347 6142**