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Review

The week in theatre: *Alter*; *Word-Play*; *Ride* - review



◻ You emerge with an extra set of eyes: Kamchätka's *Alter* at Milton Keynes international festival. Photograph: Per Rasmussen

You are asked to wear stout shoes and bring an uncooked potato. It is 10.30 at night. You don't know when you get into the van (phones off) where you are going; you are asked not to speak to your fellow walkers. It's a long time since I have been to a site-specific performance that was so truly absorbed in its geography - and so freewheeling in what it offers. So much about *Alter* prompted memories. Even Milton Keynes carries echoes of a long-ago culture; who, these days, would name a new town after a poet and a leftwing economist?

The Catalan company *Kamchätka* have made a show that, unearthing suggestive histories, evokes political displacement and wild individual dreams, a blend of the personal and the far-reaching. At the end of a muddy, blackberry-hedged lane, spectators meet a young woman, her face unvarnished with anything but candour, carrying a suitcase like a second world war refugee. Handing out lanterns in glass jars, she leads us through a forest, towards an extraordinary eruption: a man, buried up to his waist in earth, is watching what looks like an old home movie. Our guide tries to dig him out of the ground; slowly, audience members begin to help. Yanked free, he joins the procession; we move on. We are led to an underground hoard of baked potatoes, and swap our uncooked items for delicious, salt-cooked ones. Jerky videos flicker on the lids of suitcases, on pieces of cloth, on bales of hay: snatches of forgotten lives; a couple dancing merrily; a house smashed into ruin by the catastrophe of earthquake or bombs.

In one glade, other lights gradually appear from all directions, as if the dazzle of stars had fallen into people's hands. In another clearing, music breaks out. A lamenting drone becomes frisky, then wild. The audience is enticed, without hectoring, without words, to dance. As throughout *Alter*, there is no evident plot or purpose. Yet you are slowly immersed in another place, and emerge with an extra set of eyes.

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2023/jul/30/the-week-in-theatre-alter-milton-keynes-international-festival-kamchatka-word-play-rabiah-hussain-royal-court-ride-southwark-playhouse-elephant-review>