

# 9 things I loved in 2019



Let the Right One in



SYLPHIDES-humans-fishes-birds © Sebastian M Purfuerst



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To look life in the face. Always look life in the face. And to know it for what it is. At last to know it. To love it for what it is, and then, to put it away... Always the years between us. Always the years.

Always the love. Always the hours.' – Virginia Woolf

This year I went under the needle and had myself inked. At first I contemplated having the above quote (from Michael Cunningham's 1998 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Hours*), tattooed on my ribs, because it resonates powerfully with me. It articulates a curious kind of peacemaking with the passage of time and the transience of all things. But then I decided I preferred something that could evoke a *sense* of that feeling instead. So I decided on micro-tattoos of the initials of my daughters' first names on the inside of my wrists (things 1 and 2), and a micro-tattoo of the initial of my husband's first name over my heart (thing 3). All three are in a font called 'Please write me a song'. This is what I loved most about 2019 – indelibly inking myself with a discreet triptych, like a secret love song written on my skin and dedicated to the ones I love. This year I also loved:

The inaugural Arts Business Forum, hosted by the National Arts Council of Zambia, which took place in June,

under the theme of 'Unlocking the Investment Opportunities of the Creative Industries'. In Zambia, the arts remain a largely social endeavour, rather than any kind of driver of the economy. The purpose of the Forum was to catalyse engagements between businesses operating in Zambia and artists in the country, with the aim of unlocking the sector's investment opportunities, and to cement the Zambian government's position on the economic diversification agenda (as contained in the Seventh National Development Plan). I was hosted in Lusaka, as a guest of the British Council Zambia (in partnership with the British Council South Africa) and I loved being invited to deliver the keynote address at the Forum (thing 4).

*SYLPHIDES-humans-fishes-birds*, a dance creation by German-Chinese choreographer Hannah Ma and her company The People United, featured dancers from Germany, Syria, France, Spain and Luxembourg, and it premiered in the Guy Butler Theatre during this year's National Arts Festival (NAF). Inspired by the romantic ballet *Les Sylphides*, possibly one of the very first non-narrative ballets with no storyline as such, Hannah's interpretation was an exquisite hybrid of classical movements unapologetically choreographed onto

contemporary dance bodies with brutal honesty. I loved that the work was so different to what has been normally presented in the usual ballet slot at the Festival (thing 5). It was profoundly delicate, and joyous.

The all-new FNB Art Joburg was a refresh, rebrand and, to my mind, a quite phenomenal reboot of the former Joburg Art Fair, under the direction of owner-director Mandla Sibeko. His new model for the Fair saw participating galleries given equal space, thereby creating a more unified approach that included large-scale installations, as well as solo works being shown, and programme talks and gallery visits being offered. I loved being invited to moderate a panel discussion entitled 'The Future of the Joburg Arts Economy', which featured Mandla alongside hip-hop artist Ricky Rick, Founder of the Feminist Library Kgomotso Matsunyane, and Vuyisile Mshudulu from the City of Joburg (CoJ) (thing 6).

Adapted for stage by Jack Thorne, from the bestselling Swedish novel and the award-winning film by John Ajvide Lindqvist, *Let the Right One in* had its South African premiere at the UJ Arts Centre Theatre, albeit in a low-key, fairly short development run. Nevertheless, with the steady directorial hand of award-winning director Rob Murray clearly visible,

I was blown away by the production values and work of the awesome creative team, which included Daniel Buckland on choreography (which was superb) Benji Mills on lighting, and Nadine Minnaar, who constructed the fantastically clever set. I loved that the production was a distillation of process work by 300 students from the UJ Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture (FADA) (thing 7), and that the team at my old stomping ground is still churning out phenomenal productions (thing 8). It's a great play and I can't wait to see the full production in 2020.

Connections: Mimosa Celebration Festival rounds off this quasi-listicle (thing 9). Every day in schools across the country, teachers and children are in the act of imagining themselves into the future, and this pre-primary/foundation phase, Reggio Emilia-inspired school (located at the foot of the SABC tower in Auckland Park, Johannesburg) is doing it in the most mind-blowing way. Its curriculum draws on the school's immediate context and the children's interests, so the overarching enquiry across the whole school for 2019 has been how the school connects to its surrounding community via the city streets. This informed its involvement in Open Streets, and its day-to-day enquiry in each classroom. The Mimosa Celebration Festival was an evolution of the usual year-end concert, and took place as a morning-long, multi-disciplinary mini-festival, sharing highlights and selections of the work the students have done throughout the year. A festival by pre-schoolers! What's not to love?

So that's my wrap on 2019. From Business and Arts South Africa to all of our members, sponsors, partners and stakeholders, sincere gratitude for your support and engagement throughout the year. And from me to you, sunny summer wishes for a safe and splendid holiday season. Bring on 2020! CF



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