

Arts House, Beaubois, McClure & Stein and Insite Arts  
in association with Melbourne Festival present

Denis Beaubois, William McClure  
& Jeff Stein

# Impasse

## ARTS HOUSE

ARTS HOUSE,  
NORTH MELBOURNE TOWN HALL  
FRI 19 – SUN 28 OCT 2012

### CREATIVE

Created by: **Denis Beaubois, William McClure & Jeff Stein**

Sound Design: **Nick Wishart**

Lighting: **Oscar C Bergs**

Production: **Hedge**

Produced by: **Insite Arts**

**Free Artist Talk** with Jeff Stein and William McClure (**Impasse**) and David Cross (**Hold**) – Arts House, The Warehouse, Thu 25 Oct, 6–7pm, followed by drinks till 8pm. RSVP to [artshousersvp@melbourne.vic.gov.au](mailto:artshousersvp@melbourne.vic.gov.au). Hosted by Melbourne-based artist, writer and curator Phip Murray.

**Impasse** has been kindly supported by Dunlop Foams, the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, the City of Melbourne through Arts House, and the City of Melbourne's Late Night Programming Initiative.

Image: **Denis Beaubois**

### ABOUT IMPASSE

Push your way into the experiential extreme of an 'impossible space' – where physical pressure, light and sound combine to create a surreal accumulation of sensations.

**Impasse** creates a unique experience of 'space' as you struggle to carve out a path with your body. Its unique fusion of physical impression and surprising sounds makes for an extraordinary, densely-packed journey that will change the way you see, feel and hear the world!

### ABOUT THE CREATORS

Denis Beaubois has had works exhibited worldwide including at the Tate Modern (UK), the Santiago Biennale (Chile) and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; William McClure has featured at the Biennale Nationale de danse du Val-de-Marne (Paris, France); and Jeff Stein is a multi-platform artist, producer and director who has worked with Societas Raffaello Sanzio (Cesena, Italy) and was recently creative producer for *The Exchange* (Arts House/Next Wave), facilitating the collaboration between Dewey Dell and Justin Shoulder.

## NEGOTIATING IMPOSSIBLE SPACE: IMPASSE

The name **Impasse** refers to an “impossible space”, say its creators Denis Beaubois, William McClure and Jeff Stein: an “end of the road” where old paradigms break down and expected ways of working are no longer any use. All three artists share an aesthetic that’s at odds with the usual expectations of high-energy or high-mobility works. “We are drawn to situations and bodies where possibilities seem to be closed down,” they say, replying to questions for the most part collectively. “Not minimal art, but rather the art of a deadlock; art arising from something that does not appear to offer anything.”

The art that arises, they say, seems to come from ‘beyond’: “Beyond one’s own strength and ability, and arising out of a lack of power, an impotence, a post-human ‘something’ on the edge of nothing. The **Impasse** project is one of our more extreme explorations of this situation.”

Baubois, McClure and Stein are all alumni of architectural performance group, Gravity Feed, whose work, they suggest, shifted in emphasis over time, from the body of the performer to the ‘encasement’ of the body by the ‘set’, and ultimately to works that rendered the performer’s body almost redundant.

“[There was] a tendency toward greater and greater modes of density and formless volume, concluding in what came to be known...as an ‘impossible’ space. A space that is so full, so crammed with matter that it is impossible for performers to move and spectators to see. Or, at least in the case of spectators, seeing is no longer their primary point of contact with the space, but rather the body and the pressure it is feeling.”

The process of creating **Impasse**, say the artists, was necessarily very open; flowing from the decision “to put in place something that undermines pretty much everything that is familiar about working in a particular art form”. They describe this confrontation with limits – limits that must be surpassed in order to create a work – as being “like a mode of shock that disarms our centrality”.

“This explodes the idea of the material as inert matter on which we artists seek to mould and impose a will. Rather the material is made to stand out in a shocking sense, and perhaps the only sense in which it is available to us as an active force that communicates directly.”

Extreme spatial experience and physical imposition are at the core of **Impasse’s** effect on the visitor; but more subtle aims inform the work as well, articulated by each of the artists’ particular interests:

For McClure, a further question became that of a space that was “paradoxical” – “at once approaching absolute density, yet experienced as a void”; followed by the idea of a transformative immersion “in a cracked materiality...the idea that it is only when things start to break down and crack that something new can happen”.

Stein speaks of the relation of individuals to the whole: “You enter alone, not in a mass – this is in opposition to the idea of the spectacle. There is no space, little sound and light and no performer, only the lone spectator’s own struggle. Beyond that, there is our fundamental desire to exist...to see ourselves through others....”.

The absence of ‘the other’ is taken in a different direction by Beaubois:

“Having removed ourselves from the equation as performers, I also wanted to remove the audience’s bodies from the location. Once the material and space was given prime consideration, the visitors’ bodies would be considered against the material. The paradox of considering an impossible space and then allowing people to navigate the space was also intriguing: this suggested that the ‘impasse’ was not necessarily a physical obstacle, but perhaps more of a psychological state of mind that is self-imposed and encouraged by the architecture – an architecture of doubt.”

At the most basic level, Beaubois, McClure and Stein see **Impasse** as “an experience of space”. Obvious, perhaps – “but our hunch is that space is not normally experienced; it’s really experienced just as a backdrop to busy lives.”

“We move through [space], but very rarely experience it, let alone experience its potentiality or its socially constructed nature. So we go to the Kafka revelation – that it is really the mole, the one who is deprived of space, that experiences space... We want to avoid the paranoid dimensions of the creature in Kafka’s burrow – but we also see that as a particular psycho-political production of space, that perhaps defines how space is experienced today.”

*Urszula Dawkins*

## ARTS HOUSE

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Arts House presents contemporary arts in programs encompassing performance, exhibitions, live art, residencies and other activities that nurture, support and stimulate cultural engagement. We value work in which artists at different stages of their careers, as well as our diverse audiences and communities, are actively involved in creating an imaginative, just and environmentally sustainable global society.

Arts House’s programs include two curated public seasons of multidisciplinary work each year. From 2013, approximately half of this work will be selected through a new Expression of Interest process. We seek artists who are responding to the urgent issues of our time in imaginative and surprising ways, taking artistic risks and offering multiple ways for audiences to engage with or co-author their work. For more information, please contact us on (03) 9322 3720 or visit [artshouse.com.au](http://artshouse.com.au).

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Arts House is a City of Melbourne contemporary arts initiative