ALMINE RECH

Oliver Beer
Compositions for Mouths, Face and Hands

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Our emotional responses and behaviours are controlled by the limbic system, a structural part of our brain composed of the hippocampus, the center of memory and learning, and the amygdala, the seat of emotion. Love, hate, fear, enjoyment, rage, and other intense feelings are all mediated by the amygdala. The amygdala is also extremely sensitive to sound, linking our emotions directly to our auditory memory. This season we present the work of Oliver Beer, Babak Golkar, and Caroline Monnet, artists whose work fine-tune the emotional complexity of sound.

'Compositions for Mouths, Face and Hands' presents two video works by Oliver Beer—*Composition for Mouths (Songs My Mother Taught Me) I & II* and *Composition for Face and Hands (ASMR)*. Visceral, tender, and shocking, these works use the body as an instrument: collaborators hum early childhood songs and explore each other's faces for resonant surfaces.

In Composition for Mouths (Songs My Mother Taught Me) I & II, created during Beer's residency at the Sydney Opera House, the artist invited professional singers to recall the earliest songs they learned in childhood. These songs—cultural fragments inherited from family, tradition, or spiritual life—become the foundation for a series of hauntingly intimate duets. The performers join their lips to form a single shared mouth cavity, blending their voices in a resonant chamber of flesh and breath. Through this configuration, at once corporeal and symbolically unifying, the singers explore the resonant frequencies of each other's faces as acoustic vessels. The resulting compositions are woven from adapted memories, vocal improvisation, visceral alliance, and microtonal "beats"—rhythmic harmonic interactions vibrating against one another.

These moments of harmony and dissonance reflect the complexities of cultural memory itself: overlapping, evolving, and occasionally producing a kind of friction. In *Composition for Mouths I,* a tenor performs an Indigenous song passed down by his aunts, while his counterpart performs the children's hymn, *Two Little Eyes To Look To God*. *In Composition for Mouths II,* two sopranos merge an Indian classical raga with a melody by medieval Benedictine abbess and composer Hildegard of Bingen. These compositions become the site of an active negotiation between the registers of bodily resonance and personal and cultural memory.

This exploration of the body as a site of sound and exchange continues in *Composition for Face and Hands (ASMR)*, a diptych in which two pairs of percussionists use one another's faces as a percussion instrument. Building from the lightest touch to more forceful gestures, the performers coax rhythms and musicality from skin, bone, and hair. At once tender and unsettling, the performances move between gentleness and aggression, between control and intense rhythmic surrender.

Beer's works reveal the body not only as a source of sound but as a medium of exchange—intimate, cultural, and corporal. Whether by joining mouths or striking faces, the performers in these works become both instrument and archive: conduits for traditions passed through generations, vibrations that travel through flesh, and memories that echo through shared, vulnerable experience.