

REQUEST PROGRAMME

BY
FRANZ XAVER KROETZ

TRANSLATED BY
KATHARINA HEHN

DIRECTED BY
OLIVER CHONG
(THE FINGER PLAYERS)

DRAMATURGY BY
ALFIAN SA'AT

PERFORMED BY
KAREN TAN

THU - SAT
17 - 19 JUL 2025
8 - 8.50PM

Advisory 16: Some Mature Content

Photo: Crispian Chan



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



OLIVER CHONG
(THE FINGER PLAYERS)

In recent months, images of war have filled our feeds again. Explosions in distant cities, numbers scrolling across screens—casualty counts, refugee statistics, the time difference between here and elsewhere. And in the midst of it all, I find myself watching someone peel a vegetable, fold a blanket, run a comb through her hair.

There is something quietly radical about the ordinary. A body at rest, a breath taken without urgency, the quiet dignity of daily repetition—these are gestures we often overlook, yet they are precisely what conflict seeks to rupture. When chaos takes over, the first thing to go is routine.

This performance is not a story in the conventional sense. It is a meditation. A kind of held breath. In the silence between action and inaction, we glimpse the weight of being visible—and of being watched. What happens when the mundane becomes monumental simply because it is observed?

I've found myself returning to questions I asked in two earlier durational performances—*Time Between Us* and *The One At Home*. What is the nature of endurance? What accumulates when time is not narrated but inhabited? Here too, the question lingers. Is surviving the day a kind of protest? Is care—of the self, the domestic, the body—a form of defiance?

In a world increasingly shaped by noise and spectacle, there is something subversive in stillness. The slow violence of modern life rarely explodes; it seeps. Into gestures, into routine, into the quiet fatigue we carry home. But even in that fatigue, there is memory, presence, resistance.

Perhaps the most urgent thing we can do now is to watch—not with indifference, but with care. Not for entertainment, but for understanding. To witness is to say: I see you. You are not alone. And in this shared gaze, we might begin to stitch meaning back into the fabric of the everyday.

DRAMATURG'S MESSAGE



ALFIAN SA'AT

As a playwright, my tools are words. Which is why I am fascinated by plays which dispense with them altogether, relying on the expressive possibilities of other elements — sound, lighting, set, and most crucially, the body in time and space.

Franz Xaver Kroetz's *Request Programme*, which premiered in 1973, is a work which exemplifies a radicalisation of performance. It is performed entirely in silence, consisting of actions that gradually express the interiority of character—even as certain facets remain hidden. It not only pushes to the limits the actor's craft (without its usual reliance on a literary text to generate emotion, or corporeal virtuosity to generate attention), but also the limits of spectatorship (what makes something "watchable" or "unwatchable"?)

When SAM approached me for a proposal for a work in conjunction with their *Everyday Practices* exhibition, *Request Programme* immediately came to my mind. The exhibition's curatorial statement, on "quotidian routines and lived experiences", perfectly described what appealed to me about the play. In adapting it to a Singaporean context, I was careful to preserve the original's dramaturgical structure, while tweaking some details pertaining to cultural and environmental contexts (no overcoats and radiators in tropical Singapore!).

I feel deeply inspired by the casting of Karen Tan, one of Singapore's finest actors, in the role of Miss Lau. I am certain that the fearful austerity of the play will propel her to discover a fearsome purity in her performance. Together with director Oliver Chong (no stranger to creating profound works that reflect on isolation) as well as set designer Mohd Fared Jainal (who has created a hyper-realistic place—and not just a space), they invite you, the audience, to spend a fragment of your life immersed in Miss Lau's life.

SYNOPSIS



Photo: Crispian Chan

A woman comes home from work. She turns on the radio and performs all her everyday routines: preparing dinner, resuming her crochet project, completing her skincare routine, and readying herself for bed.

Franz Xaver Kroetz's modern classic explores a woman's isolation and fatigue in a city that seems oblivious to her existence. The seeming banality of what occurs in the performance raises intriguing questions. Is anything ever banal when an audience is present? How can the ordinary, transplanted into a gallery setting, transform under a critical and collective gaze? And does a live diorama — evoking a “human zoo” — retain its exoticism when it appears disturbingly familiar?

Performed by veteran theatre actress Karen Tan and directed by Oliver Chong, with a new adaptation by Alfian Sa'at, this delicate and haunting work invites the audience to contemplate the actions we execute in our daily lives — from the mechanical and mundane, to the meaningful and momentous. Blurring the lines between theatre, performance art and a happening, it challenges the audience to reflect on their own complicity as witnesses to the slow violence that courses through contemporary urban life.

This programme is presented in conjunction with the exhibition, *Everyday Practices*. Learn more about the exhibition at bit.ly/SAM-EverydayPractices.

BIOGRAPHIES



OLIVER CHONG

(THE FINGER PLAYERS)
DIRECTOR

Photo: Crispian Chan

Oliver Chong is a multi-award-winning and published playwright, director, actor, puppeteer; and set and puppet designer. Some of his memorable works include *Every Brilliant Thing*, *A Fiend's Diary*, *Roots*, *I'm Just A Piano Teacher*, *Cat*, *Lost & Found*, *The Book of Living and Dying*, *Citizen Pig* and *Citizen Dog*. His numerous wins and nominations at The Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards include Production of the Year, Best Director, Best Script, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor, Best Ensemble and Best Set Design.

To date, Chong's works have been presented at international arts festivals in Paris, Myanmar, Barcelona, Budapest, Ankara, Bangkok, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and Malaysia. He has conducted playwriting, directing and acting Masterclasses in Hong Kong and Singapore, and has been committed to helping practitioners fine-tune their crafts since 2014.

Chong was the Resident Director of THE FINGER PLAYERS (2004—2018) and is currently the Artistic Director of the company. He is also the founding member of A GROUP OF PEOPLE (2008—2012) and the founder of ODDCROP Productions (2019—present). His published works include *Roots*, *The Book of Living and Dying*, *I'm Just A Piano Teacher* and *Cat*, *Lost & Found*. *Roots* was also read and staged in New Zealand by Proudly Asian Theatre in 2018.

BIOGRAPHIES



ALFIAN SA'AT
DRAMATURG

Photo: Rachel Ng

Alfian Sa'at is Resident Playwright with Wild Rice. His published works include three collections of poetry, *One Fierce Hour*, *A History of Amnesia* and *The Invisible Manuscript*, a collection of short stories, *Corridor*, a collection of flash fiction, *Malay Sketches*, three collections of plays as well as the published play *Cooling Off Day*.

Alfian has won Best Original Script at The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards four times: in 2004 for *Landmarks*, in 2010 for *Nadirah*, in 2013 for *Kakak Kau Punya Laki (Your Sister's Husband)* and in 2016 for *Hotel* (with Marcia Vanderstraaten).

In 2001, Alfian won the Golden Point Award for Poetry as well as the National Arts Council Young Artist Award for Literature. He has also been nominated for the Singapore Literature Prize three times, for *Corridor* (1999, Commendation Prize), *A History of Amnesia* (2004) and his translation of the novel *The Widower* (2016).

BIOGRAPHIES



Karen Tan is a Singapore theatre actor.

KAREN TAN
PERFORMER

Photo: Crispian Chan/T:>Works



MOHD FARED JAINAL
SET DESIGNER

Photo: Akbar Syadiq

Fared engages in cross disciplinary work that delves into the realms of both visual and performing arts. He graduated with a Master In Arts (Design) from Open University/LASALLE College of the Arts and a recipient of the Goh Chok Tong Youth Promise Award.

Fared has collaborated extensively with various theatre and art groups in Singapore as a director, performer, visual artist and set designer. He has won several awards as a director, designer, and actor for Straits Times Life Theatre Awards and BOH Cameronian Arts Awards.

Fared is the founding member of Neon Tights, a visual art collective dealing with theatre design. He served as the Artistic Director (2013-2023) of Teater Ekamatra and does consultancy and project works with the National Heritage Board (NHB). Fared teaches at School of the Arts (SOTA).

PRODUCTION CREDITS

PLAYWRIGHT

FRANZ XAVER KROETZ

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

KATHARINA HEHN

DIRECTOR

OLIVER CHONG

(THE FINGER PLAYERS)

DRAMATURG

ALFIAN SA'AT

PERFORMER

KAREN TAN

SET DESIGNER

MOHD FARED JAINAL

ASSISTANT SET
DESIGNER

ELI ISMAIL

PRODUCTION MANAGER

EVELYN CHIA

(THE BACKSTAGE AFFAIR)

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

CHANG SHEAU LING

PHOTOGRAPHER

CRISPIAN CHAN

PRODUCER /

STAGE MANAGER

NEO KIM SENG

SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM TEAM

PROGRAMMES TEAM

ERICA LAI

MARILYN GIAM

MARKETING & PUBLICITY

MAYBELLINE TAN

JOLENE TAN

STEPHANIE WONG

SPECIAL THANKS:

ONG PUAY KHIM

TENG YEN HUI

SAM ESTATES

NATIONAL GALLERY AVL

MISH'AAL SYED NASAR

TAMARES GOH

SELENA TAN

ABOUT *EVERYDAY PRACTICES*

Discover how everyday actions transform into meaningful gestures amidst adversity.



“My art is doing time, so it’s not different from doing life or doing art or doing time. No matter whether I stay in ‘art-time’ or ‘life-time,’ I am passing time.” — the artist Tehching Hsieh thus describes his durational performances, which turn the banality of life and the passage of time into medium and subject for his art.

Building on Hsieh’s philosophy, the exhibition *Everyday Practices* examines the inventive ways artists have appropriated quotidian routines and lived experiences to express powerful statements of resilience and endurance. Through their works, we witness ongoing conflicts, humanitarian crises and asymmetrical power relationships. In this context, the gestures that the artists have employed, by dint of repetition, reveal themselves as small acts of resistance that return agency to the individual. Art, as we see here, offers a means of sense-making and coping in the face of adversity.

Drawing from the collection of Singapore Art Museum, *Everyday Practices* brings together artworks by diverse artists across different generations and geographies in Asia. They affirm that the collective strength found in individual actions cuts across cultural practices and conditions. The question that is universal to us all is: “In the face of life’s challenges, how do we go on going on?”.

Learn more about *Everyday Practices* at bit.ly/SAM-EverydayPractices.

Image credits: Dusadee Huntrakul, *Surfing the monsoon waves with the fish*, 2015

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