Ghosts of the Near Future

emma + pj
To David, for your unwavering belief.

To Katherine, among the ancestors now.

To our mums/moms, for everything.
A Note

We began developing this piece in isolation during the pandemic lockdowns, when all sense of time had vanished and death stalked every headline and human interaction. It emerged from a fog of loss and grief, both personal and planetary. We were trying to process the uncanny feeling of living through a disaster in both future and past tense. We felt like ghosts, then.

We had an early intuition that this piece would be about extinctions, but we also felt that it had something to do with magic. The slow collapse of Earth’s ecosystems, the erosion of democracy, the loss of homelands – perhaps these could be understood as disappearing acts, where we were both the unwitting audience and the grinning magician. Or maybe we simply craved the open expanse of the Nevada desert, and the glimmer of a carefree, bygone age.

This piece was an experiment for us and a chance to try something new. In some ways, it’s a storytelling show, told in the imagined space between landscape, memory, genre, and fantasy. In other ways it’s something more abstract and personal – an attempt to embody this moment in our lifetimes through instinct and association. However you choose to read/experience it, we hope you find something in these pages that you’ll take with you on the road ahead.

We owe so much of this journey to our generous and brilliant collaborators Patch and Georgie, who offered us trust and compassion at every step of the process. Making this piece together eased the claustrophobia and anxiety of the years lost to the pandemic, and helped us discover joy in this moment-between-moments and hope that the future is not yet lost.

Emma Clark & PJ Stanley
July 2022
Production Credits

Concept by Emma Clark and PJ Stanley
Devised by Emma Clark, PJ Stanley, Patch Middleton and Georgie Hook
Performed by Emma Clark and PJ Stanley
Scenography by Georgie Hook
Sound Design by Patch Middleton
Lighting Design by Alex Fernandes
Produced by emma + pj

With additional support from Jemima Yong, Marie Klimis, and Virginie Taylor

Ghosts of the Near Future premiered on 3rd August 2022 at Summerhall for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The production was developed and presented with the support of Arts Council England, New Diorama Theatre, Barbican Centre, Battersea Arts Centre, The Maria Björnson Memorial Fund, The Carol Tambor Foundation, and The Romilly Walton Masters Award.

The book was designed by Emma Clark and PJ Stanley, with support from editor Serena Grasso. It went to print prior to rehearsals for the production.
‘Time isn’t deep, it is always already all around us. The past ghosts us, lies all about us less as layers, more as drift. Here that seems right, I think. We ghost the past, we are its eerie.’

– Robert Macfarlane

‘By the time the apocalypse began, the world had already ended.’

– Franny Choi
THIS IS A GHOST STORY
On stage, there are only remnants:

A silver trolley stacked with old archival boxes.
Plastic bottles of ketchup or mustard, now discarded.
A pair of diner stools, their vinyl cracked and splitting
   Tiny cacti framing nothing

To one side, a tattered red curtain hangs motionless, a relic
of some showbiz spectacular. To the other, there waits a large
square screen, blank for now, like a Polaroid still developing

This is a world half-remembered. Or soon to be.

We watch and wait for something to happen.

There is an explosion of sound.
The world plunges into darkness.

We hear cicadas. They are a dial tone.
   No one at the end of the line.

At last, a spotlight flickers to life and there is a white rabbit
standing in the middle of the stage.

Or rather – a human dressed as a rabbit.

The human/rabbit removes its costume head and looks over the
   audience, saying: