



PROTEUS



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Indestructible by Proteus Theatre Company

Written and directed by Mary Swan

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Previews - Basingstoke: 11 & 12 January 2024

Previews - Omnibus Theatre, Clapham, London: 16 & 17 January 2024

Shows - Omnibus Theatre, Clapham, London: 18 January - 3 February 2024

Catherine Shaw spent the 90's shocking the art world with her provocative performance art. She's always called herself a feminist, but looking back through the lens of #MeToo, she's questioning how much she enabled the culture that's now being called out.

An ambitious curator approaches her to put together an exhibition of female artists at a major new gallery, but when a scandal breaks, she is unwittingly caught at its centre and begins to question everything.

Why is it that when men behave in unacceptable ways, we always point to the women close to them and ask why they did nothing? Can we, and should we, separate the art from the artist? How far do the ripples of consequence spread? And why is it always women who must hold the moral space?

"I'm tired, I'm tired of trying to play the system, I'm tired of trying to fight the system and I'm tired of feeling tired about it."

Inspired by the life of photographer Lee Miller, *Indestructible* compares the parallel struggles of fictional contemporary artist Catherine Shaw with the real lives and work of uncompromising female artists from the Guerrilla Girls to Sinead O'Connor and Taylor Swift to ask why is it still so difficult for female artists to succeed? And why are women always the muse, never the artist?

About the show - context

Indestructible was originally inspired by the photographer Lee Miller, perhaps best known for her war photography, who began her career as a fashion model before switching to a new life working behind the lens. She navigated and documented some of the most momentous events of the 20th Century and mixed with the most remarkable people of the time, chronicling, observing and commenting on all of it; her artistic legacy is a visual memoir of immense beauty, horror and controversy.

"I was living in Hitler's private apartment when his death was announced, midnight of May Day... Well, alright, he was dead. He'd never really been alive to me until today. He'd been an evil-machine-monster all these years, until I visited the places he made famous, talked to people who knew him, dug into backstairs gossip and ate and slept in his house. He became less fabulous and therefore more terrible, along with a little evidence of his having some almost human habits; like an ape who embarrasses and humbles you with his gestures, mirroring yourself in caricature. "There, but for the Grace of God, walks I." *Lee Miller 1945*

Despite a huge body of work and a living a truly remarkable life, she is frequently overshadowed by the men she associated with including Man Ray, Jean Cocteau and Picasso and regarded only as muse, friend and lover.

The title refers to Man Ray's work *Object to Be Destroyed* which consists of a metronome with a photograph of Lee Miller's eye attached to its swinging arm. After the piece was destroyed in 1957, he later made multiple copies, renamed *Indestructible Object*. It also refers to her ability for survival and incredible transformations from model, artist's muse, war photographer and finally accomplished chef. Ultimately, despite the best efforts by some of the men in her life to destroy her legacy, her work has survived, thrived and now is indestructible.

However, Miller's battles for recognition echo the experiences of female artists from the Renaissance to the present day as women are still expected to be the moral guardians of the men in their lives.

***Indestructible* is available for touring in autumn 2024.**

Contact for tour booking: Sarah-Jane Watkinson sj@outercirclearts.co.uk

From Mary Swan, Writer and Director

The idea for this show began in 2005 when, quite by chance, I saw a retrospective of Lee Miller's work at the National Portrait Gallery. I fell instantly in love with her incredible photographs, the tenacity and sheer force of nature of the woman, and was incredulous that this was the first I knew of her. Over the years, the way I approached her, and her story, changed with every subsequent encounter; seeing an exhibition in Edinburgh focussing on her friendship with Picasso, I was struck by the contradictions of this feminist being close friends with a well-documented misogynist. After the #MeToo movement gave women a long overdue platform to confront predatory behaviour in the men around them, I began to be aware of how often the women in these men's circles were criticised or dragged into the subsequent controversy. The sheer disappointment many of us have felt when we have discovered the uncomfortable truth about a hero – or sadly - someone we know. From there, the ideas contained in this show began to take shape through a long period of R&D with many talented people I was lucky enough to bring together.

Indestructible became a dryly funny and caustic contemporary tale about the machinations of what it means to be a female Artist, whilst also asking serious and vital questions about cancel culture and accountability; it is a show we want the audience to discuss, and argue about, long after they have seen it.

Proteus has a long history of working with visual artists; we have a gallery space and host affordable studios for over a dozen visual artists in the centre of Basingstoke where we are based. This show is dedicated to all the visual artists who have worked with us, and to female artists rendered largely invisible compared to their male counterparts, artists such as Ana Mendiata, Carrie Mae Weems, Madame Yevonde and Bobby Baker. We have worked with multi-disciplinary artist Paula Varjack throughout the whole process of creating the show, in particular on the digital aspects that extend the world of Catherine Shaw (the central character in the play) into a virtual space that audiences can explore pre or post show.



Creative team

Mary Swan	Writer and Director
Sam Pine	Set and Costume Design
Christopher Harrison	Projection Design and Animation
Joe Hornsby	Lighting Design
Alice Amesbury	Production Manager
Izzy Smith	Assistant Stage Manager
Paula Varjack	Dramaturg and Digital Artist
Saul Jaffe	Dramaturg
Paul Wild	Original Music
Liam Hipple	Sound Design
Cassie Friend	Movement Consultant
Ben Gregory	Website Design
Rob Thrush	Videographer

Cast

Mary Rose, Paul Huntley-Thomas, Danny Charles,
Olivia Egbunike

About Proteus Theatre

Proteus Theatre Company is one of the south's foremost touring companies, established for over 30 years and best known for its brand new productions, innovative staging and in-depth character work. Since 2004 the company has been led by internationally acclaimed director, Mary Swan who has developed the company's distinctive style of fusing highly physical performance, circus, puppetry and music. Proteus is based at the Creation Space in Basingstoke, a community arts and performance space and which offers a varied programme of performance, residencies, workshops, training and participatory events, alongside a busy performance schedule touring nationally.

Their most recent show, *The Bloody Chamber* is based on Angela Carter's short story and toured extensively across the UK in 2022. More information [here](#).

"A performance driven by female empowerment and strength...spectacular"

★★★★★ **West End Best Friend**

"Profound and relevant"

Theatre South East

"A feast for the eyes"

Circus Diaries

Indestructible touring 2024

We are taking bookings for tour dates 16 September - 2 November.

Staging requirements and tech specs

We require a black box space minimum 5m x 5m, minimum height 4m.

We tour with projector, screen and all props and costumes and the design is being created with flexibility for touring in mind.

Lighting plans and full tech specs to follow.

Get in: From 10am on day of performance, pre rig if possible

Get out: 2 hours

Running time: 1 hour 45 mins

Age guidance: 14 +

Content warnings: References to sexual assault, rape, misogyny, physical violence and the Holocaust. Some strong language

Wraparound activity

Podcast

Proteus is creating a six part podcast series based around the themes of the show, including interviews with some of the creative team, artists and curators

Spotify playlist

A playlist of music from the soundtrack of Catherine Shaw's studio especially curated by the (fictional) artist, featuring artists like Yoko Ono, Bikini Kill, and Princess Nokia is available on [Spotify](#)

MOCA North virtual gallery

<https://www.mocanorth.com/>

Blurring the worlds of gallery and theatre and drawing on the visual language and art speak of gallery websites, Proteus have commissioned digital artist **Paula Varjack** and web developer **Ben Gregory** to create a website for the fictional MOCA North gallery featured in the show. It includes additional material that extends the narrative outside the physical show; a virtual gallery and online guide for the **Indestructible** exhibition and an interview with Catherine Shaw.

The gallery of 26 artworks mixes real work by emerging and established female artists alongside fictional digital works created by AI, raising questions about truth, authorship and the rising use of digital creative tools across art forms.

Proteus website:

<https://www.proteustheatre.com/productions/indestructible/>

Show trailer:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2FQXnl_UuU

Social media:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ProteusTheatreCompany/>

Twitter: @proteustheatre

Instagram: @proteustheatre

Press

“The subjects touched upon will stay with me for a very long time... the topics dealt with real and believable emotions. With clever use of AI-generated projections, **Indestructible** has a lot going on and a lot to consider.”

Theatre and Tonic ★★★★★

“Makes a timely point about the routine silencing of women’s voices.”

The Stage

“An amusing art world satire... Writer and director Mary Swan certainly knows her subject matter.”

The Guardian

“An excellent match of a compelling script and superb performances; it’s throughout undeniably absorbing. **Indestructible** makes for a hugely entertaining, important, and engaging piece of theatre. It’s a play that audiences will take with them long after the house lights come up.”

Reviews Hub ★★★★★

“An intensely visual production... a show that handles its arguments with great skill, and will inspire audiences to keep pushing for change.”

Theatre Weekly ★★★★★

“This engaging show shines an important light on the money-driven commodification of art. Plays like **Indestructible** are part of the change.”

British Theatre Guide

“A non-traditionally immersive theatrical experience. **Indestructible** is an unflinching examination of nauseatingly complex interplay between gender and power in the contemporary art world.”

North West End ★★★★★

“An educational and entertaining experience and a show that will leave you slowly processing long after.”

Adventures in Theatreland

Audience reactions

“We’ve been talking about it ever since - the technical stuff was amazing. I’m going to tell everyone to watch it.”

“I need time to process it, there was so much to think about. It made me think about if we really can divide the art from the artist.”

“I’m going to do some research because it left me thinking and want to know more.”

“It was a mirror on my life, I identified with it so much”

“It changed from serious to light hearted with different dynamics”

“It had topics that made you think, with audience participation with moral dilemmas that expand out into the show itself. Well worth watching”

Production shots - image credit The Other Richard









Rehearsal shots - photo credit Chuck Douglas Photography





Biographies

Mary Swan - Director

Mary Swan joined Proteus as Artistic Director in December 2004. Since then she has developed the company's distinctive style for fusing physical performance, circus, puppetry and music. National touring work has included; *The Secret Garden*, *Missing in Action*, *Dracula*, *Houdini*, *Frankenstein*, *Arabian Nights*, *Becoming Hattie*, *Macbeth*, *Merrick* *The Elephant Man* for the 'Brits off Broadway Festival' in New York and *The Bloody Chamber*.

In 2014 she directed *The Party*, a co-production with Associate Company Nearly There Yet, which was selected for Guy Garvey's *Meltdown Festival* at Royal Festival Hall, Southbank in 2016. In late 2018 she has returned to the stage to perform in the show she had written *I'm Super, Thanks*, a one-woman feminist satire which she hopes to tour further in the future. Her work in physical and kinaesthetic theatre has been the subject of an academic study in the American Journal of Drama

and Theater Criticism, and is used in teaching at the University of Tennessee in the USA. In 2017 she was invited to become a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Paula Varjack - Dramaturg and Digital Artist

Paula Varjack is an artist working in performance, video and participation. She makes work as a way of making sense of and communicating with the world. In every show she makes, she aims to find the balance between making audiences question themselves, and feeling like they have had a fun night out. She uses storytelling to take audiences on a journey, shining light on what some might find uncomfortable, or may not have contemplated before. She is a London Pleasance associate artist and a Barbican Open Lab artist. She has been commissioned to make work by The Barbican, Battersea Arts Centre, Camden People's Theatre, Fuel, The Marlborough, Attenborough Centre for the Arts, Upstart Theatre, Beam, and First Draft Cabaret.

She is the creator of the Anti-Slam a satirical take on Poetry Slams where the lowest score wins. In addition to creating, she facilitates writing and performance workshops with a wide range of age groups, and mentors emerging artists on developing their creative practice. Born in Washington D.C. to a Ghanaian mother and a British father, out of many places she has lived she considers east London to be "home".

Saul Jaffe - Dramaturg

To follow

Christopher Harrison - Animation and Projection Design

Christopher is a multi-disciplinary storyteller based in Bristol, UK. He works mainly in animation and projection design for theatre, but his practice also spans writing, comics and performance. Driven by playfulness, all his work has been unified by a desire to tell accessible narratives, in whatever form is most appropriate. His projects frequently touch on themes of myth, memory and radical reinterpretations of the past.

Christopher has created illustrations and animations across multiple platforms, with commissions from organisations such as Sony and Selfridges. Animation and projection design for theatre includes Bristol Old Vic show *Outlier*, his solo show *The North! The North!* and the Viking adventure *Vinland* by Jack Dean. Recent animation projects include the computer games *Great North Road* (Jack Dean & Company) and *Truth Sleuth: Thrills, Chills and Chemical Spills* (Modest Genius Theatre Company).

Sam Pine - Set and Costume Design

After studying Theatre Design at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, Sam has worked in theatre, film and television. She has designed over 20 shows for Proteus, including *Becoming Hattie*, *12.10.15*, *Little Red and the Wolves*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Frankenstein*, *The Little Mermaid*, *The Secret Garden*, *Merrick*, *The Elephant Man* and most recently, *The Bloody Chamber*. Sam has also designed for New Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich, The Watermill Theatre in Newbury, The Cheltenham Everyman, Show of Strength, ACTA, Tour De Force, Desperate Men and Common Players. She has also spent time art directing for period drama documentaries including *The Atlantic Cable* (WGBH) and *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (BBC) as well as working as a costume designer for Edgar Wright's first feature film.

Joe Hornsby - Lighting Design

Joe is a lighting designer of theatre, dance, immersive productions, music and events. His recent credits include Gecko Theatre, Theatre Rites, Deafinitely Theatre, James Cousins, Strictly Arts Theatre Company, Marc Brew Company and Pell Ensemble. He was associate designer on the 2018 West End transfer of hit musical *Caroline, Or Change*.

Joe trained in Theatre Arts at Goldsmiths where his passion for lighting design grew. He has worked extensively as a production manager and technical manager working both in venues and on large

national and international tours and brings this wealth of experience to his design work. He is passionate about creating unique and unexpected designs and enjoys collaborating with set designers to incorporate light into props and staging.

Paul Wild - Composer

Paul Wild has written and performed music for Proteus shows for 10 years, including *Frankenstein*, *Merrick The Elephant Man*, *Below Zero*, *Peter Pan*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Dracula*, *The Princess and the Pea*, *The Secret Garden*, *Poppy Wild's Magical Machine*, *Sophia and the Snail* and *Houdini*. He has previously worked with Mary Swan on the soundtrack for shows at Solent People's Theatre and The New Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich.