





As per the hallmarks of the work of The Finger Players, there is also a playing with scale. Puppet designer Loo An Ni's birds are both larger than life and miniature-sized, made of different materials and maneuvered in multiple ways by the puppeteer-performers. The show is simultaneously visceral – Kwek in particular is resplendent in her portrayal of a kind of warrior mama bird, but Al-Matin and Toh also throw their literal weight into the intensely physical show – as well as metaphorical.

The effect of this juxtaposition is a surreal one. It instantly makes me think of René Magritte's iconic *Son of Man* – densely poetic imagery that nonetheless seems to hide a larger truth. But aesthetically, *Peepbird* is loyal to its source subject – dark, feathery, complex. If it is a René Magritte painting, then it is one bathed in the hues of Rothko rendered in Chinese calligraphic ink.

*Peepbird* was an elegy.

There is a moment in the show when a piece of a prop/costume gets dislodged and thrown to the floor. For the rest of the show, it lies there, lifeless. Only moments ago it had been animate, full of life, activated by movement and the magic of theatre. It made my heart drop – this perfect metaphor for everything we had been missing for the past few months.

If I'm being perfectly honest, I think I wanted celebration. I wanted colour. I wanted everyone to say that everything was ok. I wanted to hug everyone and say *we're back, we're back, we're back*. But were we? We can smile and be really brave, but while we're still living in pandemic conditions, we know that something isn't quite right. Right?

*Peepbird* was a journey.

In the span of 60 minutes, I feel an internal battle between a desire for meaning and an appreciation for the meaninglessness that seemed to mirror our current lives. I think part of this was the effect of having watched too many shows via a screen, a cumulative alienation which had me craving for a journey of enveloping narrative, dialogue, and character that *Peepbird* did not necessarily offer. That would have been too easy. So

instead, I let myself melt into the simulacra of the show, becoming human-avian, outcasted, frustrated, forgotten. I abandoned my critic's notebook, no longer watching from the outside. Even if I was lost in the story, I found myself, finally, in the frame.

Empathy is a speculative journey. Empathy gives us wings, helps us see through the eyes of another. In making the show, Loke had referenced the culling of crows in Orchard Road due to overpopulation. I find myself returning to that memory of violence while watching, wondering about the stories of the voiceless. The ones society deems as pests.

Aesthetically, the show might have been predominantly black, but in its abstraction, it turned solid and multicoloured, reflecting this world in the same way you know that a black and white image is not just a black and white image. The result is a meaningful one. *Peepbird* was loss, but it was also resilience – perhaps best exemplified in Kwek's final, triumphant stretch of her majestic wings. A wingspan as if to say, I am still here. We are still here. Watch us soar.