

NICOLA GUNN / SANS HOTEL

IN SPIITE OF MYSELF





## SYNOPSIS

*In Spite of Myself* by award-winning art collective, SANS HOTEL, is an inter-disciplinary work with two parts: a fictional retrospective exhibition called *Exercises in Hopelessness: Nicola Gunn [1979 - Present]* and a mind-bending, subversive and heartfelt performance lecture about [fictional] preeminent performance artist Nicola Gunn's fictional life's work. Part-performance, part-lecture, part-workshop and part self-help forum, *In Spite of Myself* is a satirical whirl of video, sculpture, illustration, photography, text, audience debate and live performance.

Nicola Gunn performs perhaps her greatest work yet: she plays Susan Becker, the executive curator of *Exercises in Hopelessness: Nicola Gunn [1979 - Present]*, delivering the introductory lecture to this significant exhibition that celebrates the work of the world's most renowned performance artist Nicola Gunn.

Transforming the space into a liminal museum celebrating Nicola Gunn, including a wall-to-wall white gallery space in the foyer featuring a bounty of interactive and bizarre performance art works, *In Spite of Myself* explores the absurdities of performance art with wry humour and playfulness, while delving into the complexities of the arts market and critiquing the very organisations who commission Gunn's work.

Immersive and entertaining, *In Spite of Myself* is a slippery exploration of the nebulous line between who we are, who we say we are and who we seem to be.

SANS HOTEL are known for creating ground-breaking and innovative work about the human experience, including the Green Room Award-winning *At the Sans Hotel* and *Hello my name is*. Led by Nicola Gunn and with collaborators Gwen Holmberg-Gilchrist, Pier Carthew, and Michael Fikaris, the group uses a multi-disciplinary approach to live art and contemporary performance. Drawing mainly from autobiographical events, Nicola Gunn has developed a unique mode of self-expression that is brave, funny and sad – and occupies a territory somewhere between fact and fiction.



## ABOUT

**Nicola Gunn** is a Melbourne-based performance artist and theatremaker. She is known for her solo work that blends performance, art and anthropology to explore the fragility of the human condition with subversive humour. Drawing from autobiography, she makes urgent and relevant work that reflects on and responds to contemporary culture, people and places. Nicola has received critical acclaim for her own genre of bewilderingly surreal performance that address themes of identity and transformation in both the social and individual realms: *Hello my name is* [2012], *At the Sans Hotel* [2010 - 2011], *TWIN* [2010], *My Friend Schadenfreude* [2009], *An Unfortunate Woman* [2005], *Tyrannous Rex* [2003] and *The Elephant Club* [2002]. Tours include Canada, the US, New Zealand, Berlin, Australia and Edinburgh. In 2013 she was the recipient of an Australia Council Creative Australia Fellowship.

Awards and nominations include: Centaur Award for Best Play [2002, *The Elephant Club*], Green Room nomination for Best Performer [2006, *An Unfortunate Woman*], Green Room nominations for Best Production, Design and Performer [2010, *At the Sans Hotel*], UK Stage Award nomination for Best Solo Performance at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival [2011, *At the Sans Hotel*]; Green Room Award for Best Conceptual Realisation [2011, *At the Sans Hotel*]; Melbourne Fringe Best Experimental Performance Award [2012, *Hello my name is*]; The Blue Room Theatre Judge's Award for Most Original Theatrical Experience [2012, *Hello my name is*]; Green Room Award nomination for Best Production [2012, *Hello my name is*].

Led by Nicola Gunn and with collaborators Gwen Holmberg-Gilchrist, Pier Carthew and Michael Fikaris, SANS HOTEL are an award-winning performance and design collective committed to experimental and site-specific works. The work is made in response to a self-generated impulse to tell a story or explore a form. They are fascinated with the nature of the theatrical experience; the communication of an idea from performer to audience and back again. They may use theatre, anthropology, visual art, installation and video in their approach to performance; they use the web as a medium to document, research and exhibit ideas.



## INFORMATION

**Title:** In Spite of Myself  
**Genre:** Contemporary Performance / Inter-disciplinary Live Art  
**Concept, Text and Direction:** Nicola Gunn  
**Dramaturge:** David Woods  
**Production Design:** Nicola Gunn & Gwen Holmberg-Gilchrist  
**Lighting Design:** Gwen Holmberg-Gilchrist  
**Sound Design:** Duane Morrison  
**Choreography:** Jo Lloyd  
**Videography:** Pier Carthew  
**Artwork:** Michael Fikaris  
**Cast:** includes Nicola Gunn

### CONTACT DETAILS

Nicola Gunn  
 E [nicolagunn@gmail.com](mailto:nicolagunn@gmail.com)  
 M +61 424 706 821

[www.nicolagunn.com](http://www.nicolagunn.com)  
[www.sanshotel.com](http://www.sanshotel.com)

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Join Nicola Gunn, as she presents her fictional self as the subject of a fictional retrospective of her fictional work.

An unclassifiable excursion into the gap between woman and myth, Gunn's work is a dazzling whirl of video, sculpture, illustration, photography, text, audience debate and live performance. With wry humour and a playful sense of the absurd, Gunn transforms an art exhibition into an interdisciplinary free-for-all, where her identity both as a person and an artist is moulded and reshaped before your very eyes.

Immersive and entertaining, In Spite of Myself is a mind-bending exploration of the nebulous line between who we are, who we say we are and who we seem to be.

### PREVIOUS SEASONS

9 – 13 October 2013, Fairfax Theatre, Arts Centre Melbourne [Melbourne Festival]

### ONLINE TRAILER

[www.vimeo.com/nicolagunn](http://www.vimeo.com/nicolagunn)



## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

**Duration:** 75 mins

**Venue Specification:** The installation and performance can occur in two separate spaces – a large theatre foyer and theatre – or one larger installation space with temporary audience seating.

**Note on Adaptability:** The design is flexible and able to adapt to fit each venue accordingly.

**Space Dimensions:** Variable [please contact the show directly]

**Capacity:** 200 - 500

**Touring Personnel:** 5 [Director/Performer, Production Manager, Production & Lighting Designer/Technical Operator, Sound Designer/Operator, Stage Manager]

**Personnel to be provided by the venue:** 2 [Ushers / Gallery Docent]

**Bump-in:** 2 Days

# STAGING

---

## PROPS & CONSUMABLES

40kg of White Plasticine  
 Catalogue Publication [appropriate numbers for the anticipated audience]  
 4 x 8L White Buckets  
 Celery, Apple  
 Glass  
 A5 Notebook  
 Audience Hand-outs  
 Painter's Suit

---

## ARTWORKS

Dried Citrus Peel and Onion Skin  
 Cross-Stich  
 Large White Ceramic Bowl  
 Picture Frame  
 Vacuumed Packed Clothes  
 Various Artworks for the Installation Didactics  
 4 x Didactic Stands

---

## SET

3 x White Plinths  
 1m x 2m White Rostra,  
 1 x Standard Ikea Bed and White Bedding  
 White Walls - Installation Space  
 White Freestanding Wall - Performance Space  
 White Temporary Flooring panels - Performance Space]  
 5 x Standard Blonde Ikea Chairs  
 1 x Perspex Lectern

---

## AUDIO VISUAL

AV files on hard-drive/USB ready for transfer to Presenter supplied drive equipment  
 5 x Artbox Media Player  
 2 x Short-Throw Projector [min 3500 ansi-lumens]  
 1 x Standard Projector [min 3500 ansi-lumens, 1:2' throw ratio] and rigging bracket for hanging  
 1 x Fast-Fold Front-Projection Screen [freestanding]  
 1 x Fast-Fold Rear-Projection Screen and rigging brackets [hung] at 3000mm x 1700mm  
 3 x 30" LCD Screens [or similar] on Stands, at head-height

---

## AUDIO

All Audio files on USB ready for transfer to Presenter supplied drive equipment.  
 2 x Headphones [over-ear] with appropriate splitter - Installation Space.  
 PA System appropriate to the size and layout of the venue, with all cabling [min. 2 subwoofers].  
 Min 12-channel audio console with min 4 x stereo outputs.  
 1 x Lapel Radio MX Kit with transmitter and receiver.  
 1 x SM58 on boom stand.  
 1 x Show Control computer running QLab [preferably QLab 3] for AV and Audio.  
 1 x Audio Interface running Qlab feed to PA.  
 4 x non-obtrusive powered speakers [with stands].  
 All power and audio cabling as required by the size of the Installation Space to reach control.

---

## LIGHTING

30 x linkable T5 Mini Fluorescent tubes - Installation Space.  
 All lighting equipment, dimmers, control, cabling as listed in the Venue Technical Rider.  
 1 x Hazer and sufficient fluid for the season.  
 Cabling to power the Foyer Fluorescent tubes as detailed above.

For lighting design, please contact Gwen Holmberg-Gilchrist directly.  
 E miet23@gmail.com  
 M 0431 945 289

“Without using shortcuts to create a mere piss-take or parody it unwinds itself in an exquisitely sarcastic yet poignant exploration of art, how we consume it, and the cost to the artist of creating it, all the while refusing to take itself seriously. Clever, clever stuff.”

– **Liza Dezfouli, Australian Stage**





## REVIEW EXCERPTS

★★★★ THE GUARDIAN

★★★★ THE AGE

★★★★ HERALD SUN

★★★★ ARTSHUB

"This is a show, like Gunn's others, that exists on many and complex levels: you can enjoy it simply as a funny clown show, or as a sophisticated comic meta-critique examining the validity of art. And she is perhaps the first artist in history to provide live academic endnotes as a means of contextualising her buffoonery while she crawls into an onstage bed for a nap. It's hilarious."

– **Van Badham, The Guardian**

"In Spite of Myself is never less than fascinating; a meta-theatrical delight that subverts and entertains in equal measure..." – **Richard Watts, artsHub**

"Without using shortcuts to create a mere piss-take or parody it unwinds itself in an exquisitely sarcastic yet poignant exploration of art, how we consume it, and the cost to the artist of creating it, all the while refusing to take itself seriously. Clever, clever stuff."

– **Liza Dezfouli, Australian Stage**

"She is...a master of recursion. Gunn possesses, to a profound degree, the ability to suspend contradictory thoughts seamlessly in the same space. At the centre is her riveting performance, which enchants the audience from the moment she appears on stage. If ever an artist manages to have her cake and eat it too, it is Gunn, in spite of herself." – **Alison Croggon, ABC Arts Online**

"What follows is a comic tour de force, a deliciously offbeat blend of physical humour and po-faced ironic monologue that dissects all manner of hideous, navel-gazing theatrical experiments in Gunn's oeuvre... Given the knife-edge immediacy, lightning wit and sheer unbridled lunacy of the performance, you don't begrudge a moment."

– **Cameron Woodhead, The Age**

"That she can come up with something like this and avoid any charge of self-indulgence is extraordinary. In Spite of Myself is original, hilarious and moving. Serious silliness. There's nothing else quite like it. She's brilliant." – **Liza Dezfouli, Australian Stage**

"In Spite of Myself is originally fresh, visually gorgeous and so hilariously surprising that it's impossible to compare Gunn to anyone else, except maybe the fictional artist Nicola Gunn." – **Anne-Marie Peard, Issimo Magazine**

"In Spite Of Myself is anything but forgettable." – **Fleur Kilpatrick, Aussie Theatre**

"Her comic timing is impeccable, her writing is bizarre and unpredictable, her content often challenging and her parody of performance art ingenious."

– **Kate Herbert, Herald Sun**

**THE HERALD SUN:** "Gunn's sense of the absurd is bracing and we all leave wearing a broad smile and with an experience of communicating with strangers in a hearty and positive way." – **Kate Herbert**

**Aussie Theatre (Perth):** "It is an ingeniously crafted and brave piece of work that offers an enduring experience." – **Courtney Pascoe**

**BRISBANE TIMES:** ★★★★★ "This is one of the funniest shows I have seen in a long time." – **Saskia Moon**

**THE GUARDIAN:** ★★★★★ "Gunn's performance is astonishing." – **Ben Neutze**



## REVIEW EXCERPTS - HELLO MY NAME IS

MELBOURNE FRINGE FESTIVAL AWARD FOR BEST EXPERIMENTAL PERFORMANCE  
THE BLUE ROOM THEATRE JUDGE'S AWARD FOR MOST ORIGINAL THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE

**THE AGE:** "Gunn's quicksilver wit and the fearless eccentricity of her stage persona superimpose the tongue-in-cheek and the fearfully earnest in an utterly unique way... But it is Gunn's forceful charisma, her expressiveness, her control, mental sharpness and improvisational skill that have the audience at her command. She can start a conga line, pose for a life drawing class, or have us holding hands in a circle, all the while beguiling us with downbeat observations and fragments of narrative drawn from everyday life.

"...This is an uplifting and effortlessly clever show. Nicola Gunn is an extraordinary comic talent. Someone should throw serious money at her and see what happens."

– **Cameron Woodhead**

**AUSSIE THEATRE:** "Part–personal confession, part–astute social commentary and part–absurdly gorgeous vision, she takes us beyond the passive aggressive bitterness of a community worker into the passion and frustration of an artist and shows us the beauty of conga lines, pink Care Bears, hand holding and falling glitter.

"Hello my name is leaves no space to hide in the dark, but don't be scared of the light because this hilarious, confronting, beautiful and weird show will leave you smiling and feeling so much better for the experience."

– **Anne-Marie Peard**

**ARTS HUB:** "Gunn's one-woman performance is bold, powerful and often hilarious – especially when she's wearing a pink Care Bear costume. The skill she shows in adapting to her audience, while still maintaining control over the workshop is astounding. She is what keeps this show alive."

– **Megan Hanson**

**INPRESS MAGAZINE:** "Gunn is astounding... That's the innate, awkward genius of this production: it reaches into the hearts of those involved and touches something you may not want to acknowledge, or even knew was there. Enter with an open mind, and you'll leave buzzing with questions and theories not only about the production, but about human interaction on a grander scale." – **Aleksia Barron**



## REVIEW EXCERPTS - AT THE SANS HOTEL

WINNER GREEN ROOM AWARD FOR BEST CONCEPTUAL REALISATION

★★★★★ This disturbing, off-kilter monologue is delivered brilliantly by Nicola Gunn, as her performance gleefully jumps the line between genius and madness...It's an acquired taste, but a real delight for the discerning, and so good that you might walk out." **Edinburgh**

★★★★ Australian performer Nicola Gunn's performance is rich in imagination, emotional honesty and playful impenetrability...the applause for one of the Fringe's most quietly bravura finales is warm and genuine." **The Scotsman**

"What happens in between is some fresh kind of madness, but it's an insanity which hangs together in a Lynchian way, leaving a holistic stain on those who braved it all the way through...If this sounds pretentious the genius of At the Sans Hotel is that it isn't at all....There are no easy answers, but the way in which Gunn has played with form and identity is a constant source of rich contemplation for days after."

– **Honour Bayes, TOTAL THEATRE**

"At The Sans Hotel is not going to be for everyone. Filing out of the performance, the faces of tonight's audience are a perfect picture of bafflement and confusion. This is a production that has absolutely no respect for theatrical convention... Indeed, [Gunn] is a performer of quite exceptional charisma without whom it is doubtful that the play would work at all. That it does is entirely down to the warmth and vulnerability Gunn captures."

– **FEST MAG, Edinburgh**

"What ever it is, there is nothing I can say to prepare you for Gunn's fascinating event which will, if you stay as close to the end as you can, leave you with the inkling that perhaps she is the audience and you are the performer. Fascinating, challenging theatre which defies any kind of criticism." – **Thom Dibdin, The Stage**

"A sophisticated exploration, very intelligent and thoroughly self-reflexive." – **The List**



In Spite of Myself developed with the assistance of Arts Centre Melbourne



MELBOURNE  
FESTIVAL



ARTS  
VICTORIA



VITALSTATISTIX

# IN SPITE OF MYSELF

NICOLA GUNN / SANS HOTEL