

Low Lives

Voyeur transfer

You won't have to leave your home to watch an upcoming exhibition of performance art, finds **Joshua Muiwa.**



Web's garage Low Lives will be broadcast across the world

In 2007, the New York-based multidisciplinary artist Jorge Rojas locked himself up in a box made of cardboard and wood for a week. The container, measuring 14 feet by 8 feet by 8 feet, was transformed into Rojas's home and workspace, and visitors to the gallery in which it was housed peeked through holes in its walls to get a glimpse of what the artist was up to. Rojas also broadcast his life in the box using streaming video, accessible to anyone who visited the website that hosted it. Among the bizarre and amusing shorts he made was one of him instructing the viewer on how to get a facelift, as he distorted his own face by sticking strips on cello tape on it. According to Rojas, the work, titled *My space*, aimed to examine ideas such as privacy, physical versus virtual interaction, and voyeurism. Streaming video, with its fuzzy image quality and discontinuous sound, was an apt medium to deal with the subjects, he said.

Rojas's interest in streaming video also extends to his work as an independent curator, notably in an upcoming exhibition of performance art, part of a yearly series called *Low Lives*. "The idea behind the show, which took shape in August of 2009, is the transmission of ideas beyond geographical and cultural contexts through live performances," said Rojas. The word "low" in the exhibition's title, he said, refers to the "low-fi aesthetics" of the medium, while "lives" indicates that the works are performances, occurring live. "These low-fi requirements of a computer, internet connection and webcam allows for a democratisation of performers as well as audiences," said Rojas. "Though technology is not required to elevate a performance, the use of technology does change the notion of

performance, dance and movement".

This year's edition of *Low Lives* is the third, and is being co-produced by Chez Bushwick, an artist-run organisation based in Brooklyn, New York, which focuses on interdisciplinary art and performance. The schedule for this year has an increased emphasis on the work of performance artists. "Adding movement to the mix is an exciting proposition," Rojas said. "The notion of the dancer and the audience being in the same physical space is disturbed, which urges a natural sense of curiosity as well as inherent voyeuristic tendencies." In his view, the arrangement also introduces a vulnerability to the performance. "Because the artist is performing in front of the whole world from behind a computer, there is an inherent sense of being watched and observed," said Rojas. "This adds to work and the experience of watching that work."

In Bangalore, *Low Lives 3* will be hosted by the Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts (viewers may choose to watch the performances at home on their computers or at one of 22 hosting venues across the world). Jayachandran Palazhy, founder and artistic director of Attakkalari, agreed with Rojas's notion that the medium would alter the experience of watching a performance, as well as the relationship between a performer and a viewer. "The dancer doesn't know his audience," said Palazhy. "The audience can even leave the performance." A project like *Low Lives*, said Palazhy, aids in "blurring the lines between the producer and the disseminator of the work". According to him, this acquires a particular political significance given how protests and uprisings today often begin on the internet. "If one looks at the recent uprisings

in the Egypt and elsewhere, then one can claim that these are large scale choreographies mediated through these new technologies," Palazhy said. He cautioned, however, that striving to adopt a democratic medium and method could affect the quality of work. "The danger with this medium is also that 'anything goes' could become a mantra, and so there needs to be a curatorial hand with these kinds of exhibitions," he said.

For Rojas, the most exciting aspect of *Low Lives* is the possibility of creating curiosity across the world, not just about performance

'Through streaming video one can break cultural, political and social zones.'

and movement art, but also about cultures. "Through the medium of streaming video one can break through time, and cultural, political and social zones to broadcast ideas, forcing audiences to either engage or disengage," said Rojas. "These interventions create curiosity, which in turn leads to exploration and then understanding. If this platform makes audiences curious about performance and movement in general, it will be an accomplishment."

See *Streaming video in Dance*. To watch online, log on to www.ustream.tv/channel/low-lives-3 between 5.30-8.30am on Sun Apr 30. For more details on the event, log on to www.lowlives.net.