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Theatre review: The Last Supper dines out on notable deaths

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Reviewed by Cameron Woodhead

THEATRE

THE LAST SUPPER - ★★★☆

by Mole Wetherell, Reckless Sleepers, Malthouse Theatre, NGV International, until July 12



The pall of death becomes something more playful in experimental theatre piece *The Last Supper*. Photo: Heidrun Löhr

Reckless Sleepers, a band of theatrical provocateurs from the UK, are renowned for staging site-specific interventions and performance installations. Their intriguing work *The Last Supper* has been programmed as a kind of secret bonus level to the regular Malthouse season.

Tickets are pricey, but anyone with disposable income and a taste for theatrical experimentation should check it out.

A banquet table for 40 people is set in the Great Hall of the NGV. On arrival, your place is decided through a lucky dip. You're served a decent glass of wine to get you started, before three performers – Leen Dewilde, Tim Ingram and Mole Wetherell – sit down and begin to reel off names of the notable dead.



The format of the *Last Supper* is simple, but the ideas behind it are intricate. Photo: Heidrun Löhner

John Lennon. Che Guevara. Princess Di. Leon Trotsky . Elvis. Marie Antoinette. Jesus Christ. The list spools on, recalling inevitably that famous line from Dante's *Inferno*, echoed by T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*: "I had not thought death had undone so many."

If the show were nothing more than a memento mori – a modern, chardonnay-sipping version of the slaves who reminded Roman generals of their own mortality during triumphs – it wouldn't be up to much. But the pall of death turns into something more playful, sophisticated and labile.

Factoids about these deaths – time, cause, together with last words, real and imagined –

begin to flow. After each last word, the performers stuff a piece of paper in their mouths and swallow it.

Throughout, various last meals ordered by a sample of executed prisoners arrive, and are served to selected guests.

The piece attains an incantatory quality; surreal collisions between history and fiction occur. The death of Kafka is mashed up with the melting of the Wicked Witch of the West. A gruesome, blow-by-blow account of the Bolshevik murder of the Romanovs yields to a speculative sequence on the fate of Saddam Hussein's body doubles.

The annihilation at Hiroshima is evoked through a host of banal sentence fragments, all imaginary, while the artists cram their faces with paper.

While the format is incredibly simple, the ideas behind it are dense and intricate. The *Last Supper* is as much a layered work about consumption as it is about demise. Constantly shifting between nodes of horror and humour, it plays on how we devour death, before it reciprocates.

This is rigorous experimental performance that will leave you overstimulated , a bit baffled and oddly moved.