



WATER in our lives . . . Kate Battams and Natalia Ladyko interact in a Riverfestival physical performance.

Picture: Bob Fenney

Water everywhere

WE BATHE in it, play in it, dance through it and drink it. And on the scales it accounts for about 50 per cent of our body weight.

The role of water in our lives is definitely worth celebrating and, in a new Brisbane Riverfestival event, it will even be ritualised.

More than 100 emerging artists will join professional Brisbane performers at the Kangaroo Point cliffs this year for the one-off performance of *Watermark* that will take the audience on a 1km journey along the Brisbane River.

"There's fantastic ambience on the site with natural light and special lighting planned," says *Watermark* director and Queensland physical theatre director Donna Jackson.

"We're creating a few fantastic effects, and will investigate the site with the audience, leading them from scene to scene.

"Some performances will be obvious, others hidden and it will be up to the people to find them along the way. Each person in the audience may see a different show."

Watermark is the first time the Queensland University of Technology has worked with Riverfestival on an artistic event, with Jackson bringing this work to life as part of her artist-in-residency at QUT Creative Industries. Jackson prefers street lights to

Water is the staff of life and an interactive Riverfestival performance helps celebrate it, writes **Debra Aldred**

stage lights. In fact, she prefers streets to stages and has developed an artistic career around outdoor performance since founding Melbourne's Women's Circus in the early 1990s.

For the past three months, she has been teaching Creative Industries students in Brisbane her unique style of large-scale, outdoor performance which will culminate in the *Watermark* performance.

"Coming from a poor theatre background, I've learnt to create outdoor specific works because we couldn't afford theatres and so my work has developed into a method in itself."

Zane Trow, former Brisbane Powerhouse director and now QUT associate professor of performance innovation, says the artist-in-residence program is designed to give students hands-on experience in creating a professional performance for a main festival, rather than just learning about the experience in lectures.

"The program is bringing leading practitioners to QUT to work with different levels of students, from undergraduates to postgraduates, and some of those projects will emerge as public events, and some will focus on

the new Creative Industries precinct, and some will be seen across the city through industry partnerships.

"Brisbane's Riverfestival is one such partnership."

More than 100 students across the Creative Industry faculties of performance studies, music, design, visual arts, fashion and base level Creative Industries, have signed individual contracts with Jackson to participate in the event, simulating a real-life arts contract.

They each have had a large role in shaping the performance, under the mantle of Jackson's vision for the whole work.

"The idea of sustainability of wetlands in general is an overriding theme of the Riverfestival," Trow says.

"Looking at the protection of river catchments has been an overriding theme that Donna has driven through this work."

Jackson also has brought talented local artists into the mix, including Vulcana Women's Circus, Phoenix Fire Tribe, the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts, Queensland shadow artist Lynne Kent, lighting

designer Jason Organ and indigenous filmmaker Christine Peacock's Unikup Productions company.

"This is a journey as much as it is a theatre piece," Jackson says.

"Our springboard is our relationship to water, challenging the students to find new ways to use water, whether they are dancing in it, through it, or bathing in it.

"So we've been looking at ideas of rituals and theatre, and it makes for a great performance, without saying a lot we can have water in our production and it links to our emotions and the audience."

And as this is a site specific event, most rehearsals are taking place along the 1km performance site between the Captain Cook Bridge and the Naval Stores building, which makes for an interesting preview to the main event.

"People in Brisbane should be aware that there'll be women down there flicking their hair with water, and spinning wildly," Jackson says.

"There'll be ladies in lizard costumes hanging from the cliffs and shadow puppetry against the cliffs and people dancing on top of toilet blocks."

Watermark: Riverfestival event. August 27. Assemble under the Captain Cook Bridge, Kangaroo Point at 5.45pm. Show goes from 6pm-8pm. Free. No bookings required. Info: 3403 8462 or www.riverfestival.com.au