**STATEMENT by BRETT BAILEY on EXHIBIT B**

EXHIBIT B, a performance piece that I have made, and which has been staged at major festivals in several European cities, has been cancelled in London. This follows protest action at the premiere at the Waterloo Vaults last night, in which protestors tried to force the doors of the venue, and security guards determined that they could not guarantee the safety of performers, staff and spectators.

I stand for a global society that is rich in a plurality of voices. I stand against any action that calls for the censoring of creative work or the silencing of divergent views, except those where hatred is the intention.

The intention of EXHIBIT B is never hatred, never fear, never prejudice. It is love, respect and outrage.

Those who have caused EXHIBIT B to be shut down brand the work racist. They have challenged my right, as a white South African, to speak about racism the way I do. They accuse me of exploiting my performers. They insist that my critique of the human zoos and the objectifying, dehumanizing colonial/racist gaze is nothing more than a recreation of those spectacles of humiliation and control. The vast majority of them have not attended the work.

I appreciate that interpretations of this piece, as of any creative work, can vary; and that my intention to explore the machinations of systems of racism and how they dehumanize all who are touched by them can be read in different ways. I do not portray the world in the binaries of black and white, wrong and right, good and evil. I am an artist that works with colours and shades.

EXHIBIT B has been lauded by white, black and brown audiences and critics for the powerful stance it takes against racism, the dehumanization and objectification of black people, and the sanitization of the brutalities of European colonialism.

In EXHIBIT B there are 12 stages, tableaux vivants or installations. In each of them a performer physically characterises an objectified human being. Rather than portraying “the native in his natural surrounds” as human zoos did, each installation shows the brutality done to asylum seekers in the EU or inflicted upon colonial subjects.

EXHIBIT B is not primarily a work about colonial-era violence. Its main focus is current racist and xenophobic policies in the EU and how these have evolved from the scientifically legitimised and state-sanctioned racism of the late 19th century. These policies do not exist in historical isolation. They have been shaped over centuries. The dehumanizing stereotypes of Otherness instilled in the consciousness of our ancestors have been transmitted subconsciously and insidiously through the ages. EXHIBIT B demands that we interrogate representations that to so many people still appear innocent.

I am accused of exploiting the performers of EXHIBIT B. The implication is that those who opt to perform in the piece lack agency. In the rehearsals I emphasize that they need to find their own inner meaning in the work. We work on portraying the character that they are playing in a way that will bring dignity to this person from whom dignity was stripped. The body might be trapped, contained, framed: the spirit never. The rehearsals include exercises in endurance, self-awareness and meditation. There is a lot of care, coaching and compassion.

I have testimonies from many of the 150 or so performers – who come from all walks of life, class and professional status – about how valuable, enriching and empowering the experience has been.

The listed components in the text accompanying each installation include “spectator/s”: the installation is only completed by the presence of the spectator: the installation is not about the cultural or anatomical difference between the colonial subject and the spectator, it is about the relationship between the two. It is about looking and being looked at. Both performer and spectator are contained within the frame.

It has not been my intention to alienate people with this work. To challenge perceptions and histories, yes. Explicitly to offend: no. But I work in difficult and contested territory, territory that is fraught with deep pain, anger and hatred. There are no clear paths through this territory. The terrain is littered with landmines. Does that mean that as an artist I should not enter? I am a white South African who spent my first 27 years living under a detestable regime of racism – albeit on the side of privilege. As an artist I continually reflect in my work on that system and its ramifications and implications.

Do any of us really want to live in a society in which expression is suppressed, banned, silenced, denied a platform? My work has been shut down today, whose will be closed down tomorrow?