

A close-up photograph of human skin, showing the texture of the fingers. A white rectangular box is superimposed on the right side of the image, containing the word "SKIN" in a large, white, sans-serif font.

SKIN

CREATION DOSSIER

A tender look at one-person's challenge against adversity. Trapeze, projections and some witty humour to tackle something so small as an itch

Don't.

Just Don't.

It may look adorable, but you know full well that touching that dog will have you ripping the arms off yourself. Remember the allergic reaction you took from the chipmunk in that park up West Belfast? Ironically it was called "Itchy", because it left you in shreds.

Don't do it.

It's just not worth it.

Atopic dermatitis (aka eczema) presents itself in various ways, from large scaly patches to red pustules and spots. Each person has a cocktail of triggers, unknown sparks that send the body into an insatiable, blood-hungry scratch-a-thon. But through constant vigilance and the assistance of strong steroid creams, a person can live a somewhat 'normal' life.

Meet Christopher – aerialist, acrobat and avid scratcher. A lover and connoisseur of moisturisers. A recovering eczema sufferer. He has his life together. Does he still scratch? Of course! Having eczema

doesn't bother him that much anymore, so long as he keeps to a few rules.

Moisturise, when necessary. Eat lots of oily food. Swim in the sea. Try to avoid alcohol and caffeine. – *or label it as medicinal, get off my back Dr Wells*. No touching animals *ever*. Stay away from stress, *sorry Mum*. Vacuum yesterday's dust as soon as you wake. Wear your best smile. Don't compare. Embrace the dry patches and when you can't—wear long sleeves. But most important of all: accept the fact you will look this way for the rest of your life.

Using a blend of aerial, acrobatics, light projections, and comedy, Christopher touches on the need to accept a visible difference. Shedding light on eczema and the world of skin issues, he delves into the human condition. The ability to accept and move on, but also the moments where carrying that weight can become too much. With the old Irish trait of "*sure we'll be alright in the morning,*" he uses his comedy as a tool to get deeper to the root of the issue, believing that through giving space to laughter, lightness and care, we can soothe the pain and resolve the sadness.



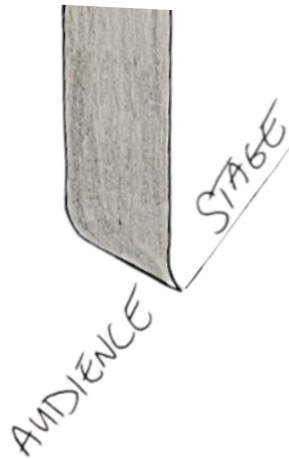
HOPE

I hope to show eczema and visible skin disorders in a way that doesn't elicit pity. I want my visibility with this condition to shed light on others in order to normalise difference—difference which does not only dwell on the suffering but celebrates individuality. This topic will speak about our differences both in terms of the difficulty of coping, but also of the hilarity and silliness of what it is to be human.

RESEARCH IDEAS

SCRIM

- To hang a projection scrim, dividing the audience from the stage, creating a world within a world. Using this scrim, play with projections cast from the stage, playing with the concept of choosing what is visible. Through this form, researching silhouettes, perspective shifts and casting images through the screen on the audiences faces.



TRAPEZE COUNTERWEIGHT SYSTEM

- A literal, physical manifestation of the emotional weight carried each day. Some days: dancing with the weight is possible. Some days: carrying it is exhausting. I will explore the relationship between me and a 30kg kettlebell. This kettlebell will be carried and held for the duration of the piece. The kettlebell can be used to counterweight the trapeze, so long as a 4-1 pulley system is installed. I will be able to use trapeze with the kettlebell lifting

me up. *One cannot move without the other.*

- Using the trapeze to float and glide, exploring the air between each joint and its cooling touch. The freedom of movement in the air to compliment the joy of movement when pain-free. This can be explored with the contrast to physical movement on the floor with/without moisturiser.

DAILY ROUTINE / AVOIDANCE TACTICS / TRIGGERS

- Exploring the ritualistic action of moisturising the full body periodically throughout the day, and how this can interrupt everything.
- I find myself using the mantra: *"calm the skin, calm the mind."* Exploring the calming nature of complying to this routine and the feeling of doing something that benefits the condition.
- Exaggerate the absurdity of the process of moisturising. I will explore the physical comedy of applying moisturiser using alternative methods to the norm. I will play with this moisturiser to facilitate acrobatic technique and connect movements between the trapeze and the floor.
- Alcohol—exists both as a coping mechanism and a trigger. Looking at the vicious circle of indulging in something harmful that gives the

mind rest. This research will be larger in field. Looked at dramaturgically as a reoccurring theme/motif.

on the idea that – *You are your own worst enemy, or you are plotting your own downfall.*

- Vacuuming the dust made by dry skin. Being allergic to yourself. Again, this will be a motif, playing

DEVELOPMENT

Everything is fine until it isn't. And after that, it'll be fine again!

- I foresee a very slow build up, obvious from the first scene that things aren't okay as they seem. Christopher has his sh*t together, but the audience know that he is due to crumble at any given moment. To contrast the silliness, this piece needs an uncomfortable chaos, a reflection of the intensity of this condition.
When the weight is just too heavy to carry.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:

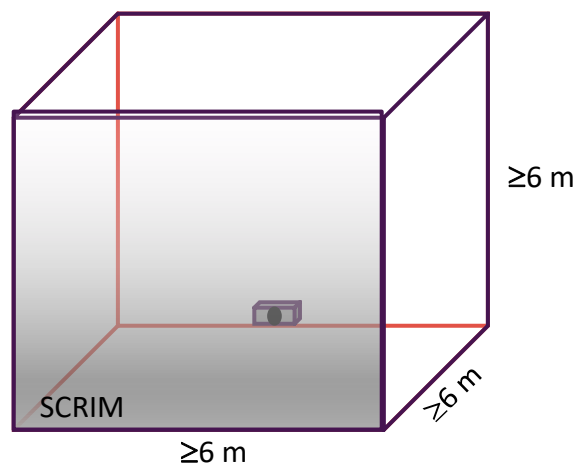
Studio of minimum dimension of 6mx6m

Potential to hang scrim at front of stage/studio – This may need a fly-bar.

Minimum of one aerial point with WLL of 500kg with 6m minimum height to rigging point,

Two points with floor/wall point would be preferential but not necessary for early creation.

A black box or at least capable of blocking natural light.



SCENOGRAPHY



Setting 1: Living room with trapeze system

Busy, condensed, potential.

Home setting for comfort/peace

Trapeze for skill language + relationship with weight

This setting will allow for a mix of aerial techniques across many apparatuses. Combining existing trapeze technical training with extensive research on alternative aerial props disguised as “furniture”. This will be used to break the expectations of a forthcoming aerial scene.

The imagery allows for the comfort and safety ambience of the characters home, where they can be settled and vulnerable, and therefore authentically portray the experience of coping with their condition.

This setting will also include the trapeze/weight system and so allows for the exploration of the relationship between the artist and the weight, in the air and on the floor.

Setting 2 and 3 are based upon the extremes of this idea. One with only the trapeze and weight relationship, and one with only “furniture”. This will free stage space for projections, however, may limit the acrobatic creative potential.

Setting 2: Trapeze/weight combination



Setting 3: Living Room





UNDERLYING THEMES

THE MAN

The beautiful man

The hurdle of talking about how you look and feel as a man. The comparison with others. You can go to the gym and get stronger, grow a beard and cut your hair, but some conditions are not curable. Unachievable beauty standards and their burden in the male world.

The intimate vulnerable man

What is a man like when he is not watched? Does he still perform? Does he still pretend he has his life together or does he remove the mask? There is pressure on men to perform and be what society expects of them. But who is the man without the pressure of being seen?

The eternally optimistic man

Being out of touch with one's own emotions. Unable to define and analyse one's mental health. Between Ireland and Northern Ireland, approx. 75% of all suicides are men.¹

¹ <https://www.samaritans.org/scotland/about-samaritans/research-policy/suicide-facts-and-figures/latest-suicide-data/>

THE ARTIST



Photo credit: Jona Harmischmacher

Christopher McAuley is an Irish/Netherlands-based circus artist. Since graduating in June 2020 from Codarts University Rotterdam with a Bachelor in Circus Arts, Christopher has spent the past few years refining his approach to performance. His contemporary work addresses human emotion, vulnerability and identity, seeking authenticity through creation. His graduation act OMI±POLONE (one of the few selected as laureate of the BNG Circusprijs 2020) revolved around his identity as a queer male and his acceptance of his natural femininity. This has sparked his research into who and what he is on stage, and how this can be shown.

For the past two years, Christopher has been touring Europe performing EXIT with Circumstances under the direction of Piet Van Dycke and looks forward to embarking on his new creative venture.

THE PLAN

Pre-research

30 January – 4 February 2023

CORPO, Rotterdam

Research

30 October – 4 November 2023

Irish Aerial Creation Centre, Limerick

5 November – 18 November 2023

Circusful, Belfast

18 November – 22 November 2023

Taking Flight, Dublin

Creation phase

13 weeks of residency

February 2024 – November 2024

Premiere

Ireland – November 2024

Netherlands – November 2024

Belgium – December 2024

Currently supported by CORPO Rotterdam, Circusful, Irish Aerial Creation Centre

Research funded by Arts Council IE.

Produced by – Circusful (Jenna Hall, Flora Herberich, Anna Treanor)



A woman in a dark bikini is lying on her stomach on a white towel on a sandy beach. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows the ocean and a clear sky. The entire image has a semi-transparent red overlay. On the left side, there is contact information for Christopher McAuley.

CONTACT

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