

SOOT AND SPIT
New Ohio Theatre, NYC
Director's Note

"And so, whether we mean to or not, the work we do is both received and created, both an adaptation and an original, at the same time. We re-make things as we go." –Charles Mee

It seems inevitable that playwright Charles Mee, who believes that there is no such thing as an original play ("Greek plays were all based on earlier plays, or poems or myths"), who is known for collaging plays and believes that an author's work is inevitably stamped by his or her own history, society and psychology, would gravitate towards the work of James Castle who himself made art from the materials at hand-repurposing anything made of paper and using ink made from fireplace soot and his own spit.

Born profoundly deaf, Castle's art could be seen as a need to make sense out of the world he was born into, translating the world around him into a rich visual language, uniquely his own, resulting in the creation of his own world. But like ALL artists, Castle made art because he needed to make art. And like any artist of any merit, he made himself into an artist through hard work, determination and with the loving support of his family and the community in Garden Valley, Idaho where he grew up.

The truth is, Castle's art, just like Mee's playwriting, transcends disability.

Both are artists. Their disability does not define their work.

As art critic Will Hylton has said, "...the value of experiencing another person's art is not merely the work itself, but the opportunity it presents to connect with the interior impulse of another. The arts occupy a vanishing space in modern life: They offer one of the last lingering places to seek out empathy for its own sake, and to the extent that an artist's work is frustrating or difficult or awful, you could say this allows greater opportunity to try to meet it."

For the past five years, I am deeply grateful to the many who have tirelessly worked to bring this unique theatrical piece to life, including the first folks at ASU's Herberger Institute for Design and Media who had the

courage to say yes to me. We would also not be here now, in NYC were it not for New Ohio Theatre and IRT's Archive Residency's, their belief in Our Voices and the tremendous support they have given to us. I think it is safe to say, we have all been irrevocably changed and made better by the pairing of James Castle and Charles Mee.

Lastly, I would like to share this with you: at its core *Soot and Spit* is about the perseverance of the human spirit, it is also about the special bond I share with my brother Jamie. Born five years before me, he happened to be born profoundly deaf. He himself communicated through drawing and only came to learn American Sign Language later in life. Having him as my brother has been one of the greatest blessings of my life. He has taught me much about love, patience, kindness, compassion, courage, tenacity, communication, the value of silence - how to feel and hear with my eyes, empathy and perhaps above all - Grace. He has taught me that each of us is deeply original and every day, no matter how hard, we must look beyond the fear of differences in order to connect.

I cannot help but believe with its questions of What does it take to really see another human being? and How do we love in a deranged world? What would it take to re-make our world? ...this piece is needed now more than ever.

Thank you for being here.

With love,
Kim Weild, Director