

His life is on the line

Tristan Meecham has put up all his possessions as prizes in a game show, writes JOHN BAILEY.

Tristan Meecham's last performance, *Fun Run*, saw the artist run a marathon on a treadmill in Melbourne's City Square, dressed in lycra and surrounded by DJs, dancers, professional cyclists and a full-blown lighting and sound system. His next, *Miss Universe*, will see him battling the iconic Grace Jones to see who will be crowned the ultimate live act, with the loser agreeing never to perform again.

In between, there's *Game Show*. It's the middle work of the trilogy that has him testing his limits under the threat of unthinkable penalties. He'd never run a marathon before *Fun Run*, so there was the very real risk of collapse. His new work will have audience members playing contestants in a TV game show. The prize pool consists of everything Meecham owns.

"I'm an artist so I don't have dizzying amounts of wealth," he says. "The majority of objects I own are sentimental. We'll be displaying everything from grade 4 assignments up until things that have a personal resonance now."

When he says everything, he means everything. "Some people have interpreted that as a garage sale on my part and others have said 'yeah, I wouldn't mind a plasma TV'. It could go either way."

Where *Fun Run* tested his physical endurance, he says this next work is likely to put an equal challenge to his emotional stamina. Parading his entire catalogue of material belongings before an audience might be seen as an odd kind of portrait, but he's interested to discover what will happen when he's actually confronted by an audience hauling off his most cherished possessions, "which I've processed in my head conceptually, but I'm not sure how I'll react emotionally or physically in the space".

Putting his cherished items in the public realm might also enact some kind of transformation, he says, whereby they "become worthless in the moment of displaying them. They go from something

deeply sentimental, and then the commercialism and excess we're examining in the work dissipates that, and by the end they just become crap. That could happen as well."

The show itself will each night feature 50 contestants whittled down to a final winner, who'll have the chance to take home his belongings. While the peculiar thing that is the contemporary game

show itself will be put into question by the work, Meecham says that "it's certainly not putting [contestants] in a strict, competitive environment where we're revealing the worst in them."

While audience interaction is crucial to the work's unfolding, Meecham and his collaborators are "terrified of it", which is why viewers who don't want to be part of the work can simply play the studio audience instead.

The show is part of the inaugural Festival of Live Art and while precise definitions of that term are lacking, it's generally employed to describe work that is hinged on the unpredictability of the live encounter between artist and audience. Meecham won't know what *Game Show* will mean to his life until it's actually under way. That's the point.

Angharad Wynne-Jones is artistic director of North Melbourne's Arts House and one of the festival's organisers.

She says the premise of *Game Show* is "really, really confronting. For someone to say 'I'm going to put all of my personal possessions on the line, small and large,' that's really full-on. Tristan's charm and dynamism and showmanship are going to make it an extraordinarily fun event but at the same time, there's this question of what it actually means for him as an artist and for us as participants."

Like the other works in his trilogy, *Game Show* isn't short on trimmings. There will be studio cameras and live feeds, a choir and dance troupe. Live art might be at the forefront of contemporary art practice, but Meecham has no problem reconciling that with the pure entertainments of modern life, be it meaningless sporting achievements, mindless TV or global pop.

"I'm not interested in creating work that's just specifically for an art audience," he says. "I'm really conscious of using concepts that mean people can come and engage in the work even if it is just as a physical experience."

Game Show is on March 19-22 at Arts House, North Melbourne Town Hall. Details at foa.com.au.



Live: Tristan Meecham's show will hinge on the unpredictable nature of the event.