



SPRING 2024

indance

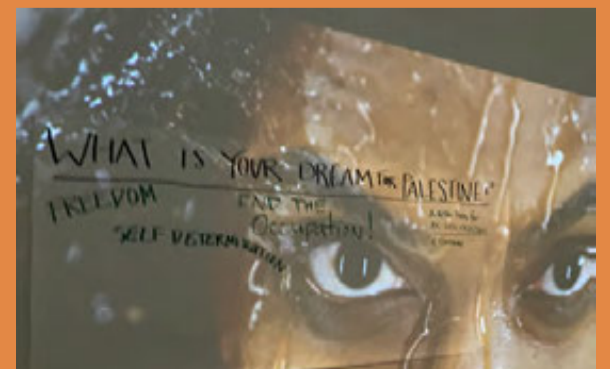
DISCOURSE + DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN + AMPLIFY



P.16 Musings on the People's Palace



P.48 An Unfolding



P.54 Dancers for a Free Palestine

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Cover: *The People's Palace*,
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WELCOME

by **ROWENA RICHIE**, Guest Editor



WELCOME, SPRING.

The articles and conversations in this issue — there are budding connections among them — explore the tension between what something is and what it means:

What is resistance, and what does it mean to Liz Duran Boubion? “To build a coalition [of co-resistance] implies that we are all connected to the suffering in Palestine.”

Why does contact improvisation matter to Jo Kreiter? “It matters as a carnival ride, inlaid into deep human connection...”

What does Joy Chenyu Lewis and Melissa Lewis Wong's mother-child relationship mean through the prism of performance? “I [Melissa] saw my mom in a new way when she sang the *Songhua River* song.” “...and she [Melissa] appreciate my being Chinese, being somebody loves to sing.”

What is beauty and what does it mean to Michael French? “It has nothing to do with...aquiline noses, or the perversity of a white Jesus, or powdered wigs...”

To Honduran artists Diana Lara and Isadora Paz Taboada having Indigenous Lenca ancestors means: “The body and the expression of dance are rooted in... the exchange between tradition and modernity...between multiple identities.”

What is extended reality, and how will Yayoi Kambara use it? “To stimulate audiences into imagining a diverse community where colonial modernity converses with these majestic lands.”

What is “The People's Palace?” And what does it mean?

This is a particularly central question in this issue of In Dance. Enjoy three articles on the topic from the perspective of: The People's Palace creator Joanna Haigood; set designer Sean Riley; and “muser” Ellen Sebastian Chang.

“What avenue is open to us...who still have dreams (plans)...in this place we call home?” Sebastian Chang muses. “Do all avenues and roads lead to City Hall, aka ‘The People's Palace?’”

The People's Palace is a new site specific work by ZACCHO Dance Theatre. Conceived and directed by Joanna Haigood, it is set in the bustling, “like twenty weddings happening all at the same time,” laughs Haigood, San Francisco City Hall. “The People's Palace” is also the nickname for City Hall coined by mayor “Sunny Jim” Rolph when it opened in 1915. “At the end of the day... ‘the people’ are very specific and not inclusive,” Haigood tells Maurya Kerr. The Beaux Arts architectural style of City Hall was chosen to represent the ideals of whiteness.

Constructed whiteness. That's what City Hall's architecture means. I've been to City Hall many times. I know what it is. I'm eager for it to mean something new. Come May 9th, 10th and 12th ZACCHO's performance will transform City Hall's architecture into: “...more inclusive narratives that more accurately reflect San Francisco's diverse and dynamic cultures and community.”

This is one of the transformations — rebirths, unfoldings, blossomings, portals I want to go through this season.

Welcome, spring!

Rowena

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Photo by Bryan Gibel

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PHOTO BY PAK HAN



TRIPTYCH

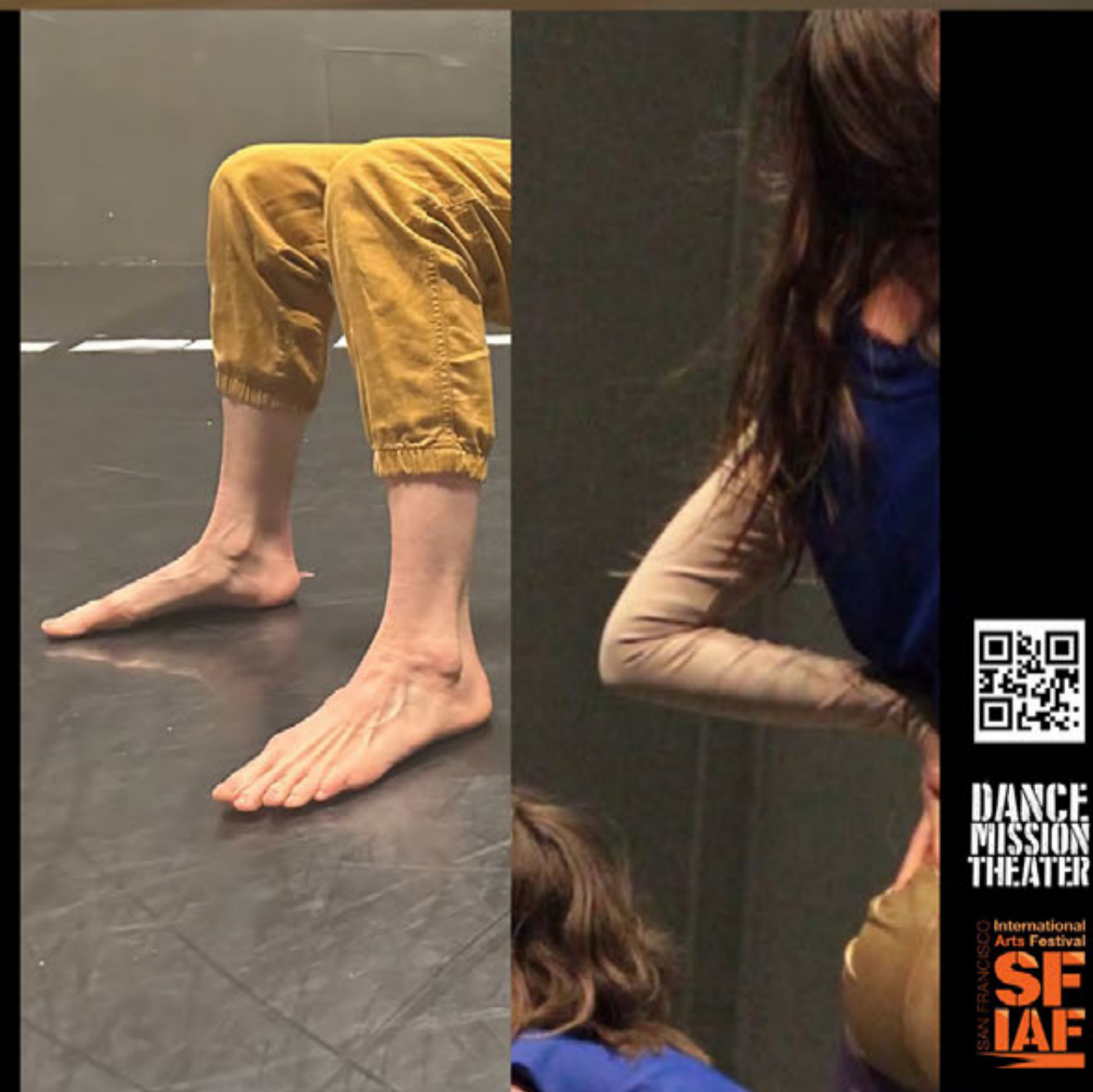
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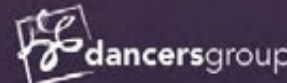
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MAY 9, 10 & 12
8 PM TO 10:30 PM
FREE

CONCEIVED & DIRECTED BY JOANNA HAIGOOD

IN COLLABORATION WITH
PERFORMING ARTISTS:
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WILLIAM BREWTON FOWLER, JR.
TRISTAN CHING HARTMAN
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SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102

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VISUAL ARTIST: MILDRED HOWARD
SCENIC DESIGNER: SEAN RILEY
RIGGING DESIGNER: DAVID FREITAG
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PRESENTS

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honor memories of lost loved ones*

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Josh Icban, Frances Teves Sedayao,
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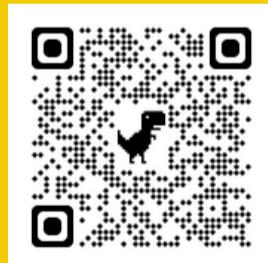
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bayarea danceweek



(Left) CounterPulse Saraswathi Lakshmi, photo by Sean Anomie; (Clockwise from bottom) Arenas Dance Company, photo by Jim Watkins; Big Moves' emFATIC DANCE, photo by Lisa J. Ellis; Ballet22, photo by Natasha Adorlee; Joaqueese Whitfield, photo by Jim Watkins

ALL DANCE • ALL FREE • ALL WEEK



We, The Majestic

J

JOANNA HAIGOOD'S *The People's Palace* premieres at San Francisco City Hall May 9, 10 and 12. I had the pleasure and honor of watching a rehearsal and later interviewing Joanna (all over Zoom). Rooted in the knowledge that neoclassical architecture, both implicitly and explicitly, reinforces the invisibility of marginalized populations, *The People's Palace* is both intervention and celebration meant to lift *every* voice. Joanna shared with me this deeply germane quote by adrienne maree brown:

"...we have to understand that imagination shapes the world and so those of us who have been oppressed by how others imagine the world, the supremacists, the patriarchs, the war mongers, the capitalists, we have to imagine something so compelling it moves us beyond and out of the compliance with our entrapment in these systems that do not love us."

Let us radically imagine *our* worlds.



PHOTO BY BRIAN GIBBY

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

MAURYA KERR: I'll just share some of my impressions from rehearsal if that's cool as a starting point. I was really struck by so many of the artists saying they felt beautifully small and held. I was thinking about that return to embrace and how rarely we get that in our lives. I'd written down in my notes something about the safety of the fetal-ness, being held that way, womb-like. Also this sense of being sideways and aslant in the world, off-kilter, that the aerial work allows you to do, and how that relates to the double consciousness Du Bois talked about, seeing the world as if

everything is slightly askew compared to people who aren't marginalized, either racially or through class. I'm wondering if that figures in for you—or what does aerial offer you?

JOANNA HAIGOOD: I guess for me, it's many different points of perspective, being able to see the world from all these different angles. Oftentimes, we feel like we know where we are, but as soon as we change our relationship to up and down, it's very different. And the things that are revealed are sometimes, well, life-changing in the biggest respect, and illuminating in terms of where we are, who we are to each other, what we are to our environment. It's a sense of scale,

really. If you've ever been down to the desert, like Death Valley, or amongst the giant sequoias, those feelings are immediately apparent or bubble up.

MK: It's also feeling small in safety, as opposed to feeling small and diminished. I feel like we're always having to be big in the world to survive, and when we feel small, it's often at our expense. So that ability to be cradled felt unique and special.

JH: Yeah, because in this context, feeling small is really about being able to feel and acknowledge the larger scale of the world. Not that we are insignificant, but that there is so much happening alongside you.

MK: That sense of scale, it's a different virtuosity and a holding space. I know that having been in your work and seen your work, it is so much about the holding of space and presence, as opposed to choreography or physical pyrotechnics. I think that's one of the great beauties of your work, plus this sense of working to place, or of place, or from place. So I was wondering about how you, within this process, how you're directing the artists, for example, in the section about liberty.

JH: For me, it is much more about mining, exploring, connecting, and sharing each other's life experiences, things that people have gone through that relate to these particular virtues

[Henri Crenier's four Civic Virtues: Learning, Liberty, Strength, and Equality], or how they relate to them in general from where they stand. And also, what are the expectations of these ideas and ideals. The whole piece, for me, is about upending the notions that the architecture proposes: white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism.

MK: It's an incredibly white space on every level.

JH: Yes, very white. When we talk about liberty from a European perspective, it's based on politics, class, and religion. But from our perspective, as people of color, it's all of these things plus these really horrific notions of race and caste, as Isabel Wilkerson would say. Liberty is linked to our struggle for humanity, a struggle we've been in for many generations.

MK: With that, the sense that not much has changed. I think you're saying that as well.

JH: It's changed... some things have changed on the surface.

MK: But the essence of how we deal with Blackness or class...

JH: And how we see and respond to each other, where our priorities are, it's still very imbalanced. The whole thing of learning: I'm working with Indigenous culture bearers Gregg Castro and Jonathan Cordero, who are helping me navigate through the idea of decolonization and come to some deeper understanding of our histories. One of the virtues is learning, and thinking about what that is from an Indigenous point of view. So much of their teaching and from where they build their social structure and relationship to life in general is anchored in this notion of harmony with nature. And that is precisely the area where we have gone so astray. Like,

we're really far off! We're always trying to control and harness nature. That idea of being the superior being on the planet has interrupted this relationship that, when it works from the point of view of integration and harmony, feeds and creates this environment where we really thrive.

MK: I think thrive in ways that we can't even comprehend. And it does seem, too, that City Hall is the antithesis.

JH: Completely!

MK: That kind of edifice, that kind of architecture, the literal and figurative whiteness is the antithesis of harmony with nature.

JH: Yeah, and there are no direct references there to our connection to nature, and no references to Indigenous people, in terms of the statuary or anywhere.

MK: It's important to go into a room and ask who's missing. And it's usually Black people; it's almost always Indigenous people. I'm never in spaces with Indigenous people. Society doesn't ask that enough—who's missing from this work space, this dance space, etc.

More on aerial-ness—the balance of support and surrender feels important and in line with Indigenous culture. I was also thinking about the folktales that slaves could fly, which I know is very present in your mind and work. Those are some things I was thinking of as I was taking notes and watching, some of those ideas and motifs that feel integral, I was going to say a Black experience, but I think it's more an integrated experience, speaking with some of the language you've been using around indigeneity.

JH: I'm impressed you could see that through Zoom. Like, that was really good watching! [both laugh]

MK: I taught over Zoom for three years, so I'm zeroed in!

I love the title *The People's Palace*. Obviously that's a reclamation—we don't think of 'palace' and 'people,' so the combination of those words is important.

JH: Yeah. This is what it was called when it was built.

MK: Oh really! I didn't know that.

JH: That's what the mayor [James "Sunny Jim" Rolph] called it. That was his desire, to create a place where people felt like they were being honored and had a place to feel celebrated.

MK: Majestic and grand, that "the people" are allowed to feel that, have that invitation.

JH: At the end of the day, it ends up that "the people" are very specific and not inclusive. But when I was at City Hall with an architectural historian, he mentioned that for him, the diversity of people in the building dispels the ideologies of whiteness and patriarchy. I don't know if you've been there on a busy day, but there are like twenty weddings happening all at the same time [laughs], *quinceañera* celebrations, just so much activity. Really, every possible type of human is there doing something deeply meaningful to them. It feels like their place, their right, and I love that about the building.

MK: That's awesome. I didn't know that. So it sounds like the intentions of the building are happening!

JH: Yes. But I also feel that the architecture, what was chosen and what it represents on the physical plane, is the antithesis of that. This project is focused on the intentions of neoclassical design in civic architecture. I think those intentions are very clear, even in the choices of the added statuary on display around the building. People might say, 'Oh,

it's a reflection of the time,' but that's also what they say about the people who enslaved others, right?

MK: Yes, 'that was just what happened.'

JH: And it wasn't like Asian people weren't here; they were here. There were Black people here, all kinds of people here. They weren't the majority, but they were here.

MK: There was enough representation to be included.

JH: That's just the thing, I mean, even in the Exposition [1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition], there was a Primitive Pavilion, where visitors got to look at these 'underdeveloped Native cultures,' while around the corner were gorgeous examples of the Beaux Arts and European architecture and culture movement; we can see which was considered to be more aesthetically beautiful and intellectually superior. But we, of course, know that to not be true.

MK: Yeah, it's always the vaulting of European intelligence. It is interesting though for a building to fulfill its intended intention, yet be modeled after whiteness. I mean, it fulfills its intentions for "the people," but "the people" aren't represented within the architecture.

JH: Well, again, it's true that at that point, white people—well, it's still true—were the dominant voice and everything else was considered lesser. [Thomas] Jefferson was really influential in this movement, particularly with the Beaux Arts and these classical styles as representing these civic ideals, and at the same time enslaving people.

MK: So we're talking about architecture and working against those symbols into more inclusivity. Is there anything beyond what's on your web-

site that feels critical to talk about with *The People's Palace*?

JH: Well, there's been a lot of discussion around dismantling many things—dismantling white supremacy, colonization, statues—and I'm not really calling for this building to be torn down. I'm more interested in being in conversation about what these things mean, what these built environments are there to support, and then how we can rethink or create interventions that bridge these worlds. And I'll be curious about what conversations come up, how we can move forward in a way that creates environments where all people feel like they belong.

MK: What's your utopian result of people seeing this performance? Or what kind of conversations would lead to praxis as opposed to just another conversation about an art piece?

JH: Well, I think it would be really great for a group of architects and artists to get together and explore what are the things that we can honor about this architecture and what are the things that we can introduce to bridge this really gaping hole.

MK: Okay—we'll put the word out! That would be amazing! [both laugh]

JH: There are some conversations about architecture and whiteness getting some traction right now because it's all operating on such a subliminal level at this point. People are not walking around in their environments aware of the lineage of whiteness.

MK: Well, I think that particularly for white people, whiteness is invisible, and so when you go into these sort of vaulted spaces, white people generally aren't asking that question of who's missing, or 'how is my whiteness loud in this space and time,' as opposed to just assuming it as the norm. Whiteness is not invisible at all to people who are not white.



JH: We're constantly navigating that relationship. I was trying to explain to someone that for us, we've been thinking about this since the moment we were conscious, and about how I work through these varying identities—that when I wake up and am going out, first I prepare Joanna, and then I prepare myself as a Black person.

MK: I wanted to talk briefly about Robert Henry Johnson.

JH: Yeah. [sadly]

MK: I was looking at your website and it was wild to see photos of me and Robert from *Departure and Arrival* [2007]. He was such an integral part of your process from the very beginning. I feel like he was such a masterful carrier of narrative in his body, of storytelling. So I don't know if I want to ask what it's like not having Robert Henry in your processes right now, just wanting to bring that huge absence into our space.

JH: Yeah, it's a very deep, heavy, sad loss. He was supposed to be in this piece—I'm dedicating it to him. He was such a deep wanderer and so incredibly gifted.

MK: Oh my God, so gifted. Like his ability to shapeshift...

JH: Yes, shapeshifting.

MK: ... was so remarkable and it looked like he did it with such ease, but I also know the appearance of ease takes a toll.

JH: He worked deeply on his craft, he really did. He worked a lot of things out, studied a lot. He was one of the few people I would only have to say a few words to and he knew exactly what I was after, almost like there was a kind of telepathic connection.

MK: I think part of the deep wandering of him was also that his instincts were so attuned from the vastness of how he inhabited the world.

JH: I really miss him a lot. I'm thinking about certain parts of this piece and about him, the conversations we would be having right now, both verbally and non-verbally.

MK: And also as someone who's probably been in your work the longest, the loss of that legacy of communication and collaboration, I imagine it's quite large for you.

JH: Yeah.

MK: So lovely to connect; thank you Joanna.

JH: So when do I get to interview you?! [both laugh]

MAURYA KERR is a bay area-based choreographer, writer, filmmaker, and the artistic director of tinypistol. Much of her work, across disciplines, is focused on black and brown people reclaiming their birthright to both wonderment and the quotidian. She is the Resident Curator for ODC Theater's 2024/25 season and recently published her first poetry chapbooks, *MUTTOLOGY* with Small Harbor Publishing and *tommy noun* with C&R Press.



PHOTO BY DREW ALTZER PHOTOGRAPHY

MUSINGS ON THE PEOPLE'S PALACE

by Ellen Sebastian Chang

PHOTO BY ROSETTA HICKS

ARCHITECTURE IS THE ANCIENT GLOBAL ART OF THE STRUCTURES OF A PLACE REVEALING THE FUNCTIONAL AND BEAUTIFUL NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE OF THE EARTH. JOANNA HAIGOOD'S ZACCHO DANCE THEATRE IS ALSO AN ANCIENT ART THAT PORTRAYS THE LIVING BODIES OF A PLACE IN MOTION, FLIGHT, AND PROXIMITY TO THE STORIES THAT BECOME ENSHRINED BUILT AND UNBUILT PLACES UPON THE EARTH.

Joanna Haigood describes her collaboration for *The People's Palace* as “an artistic intervention and dialogue with the architectural iconography with the intention to insert the communities and the narratives that are excluded from representation, and to provide a more accurate picture of who and what defines San Francisco.” I recall the architectural ideas of Christopher Alexander and his colleagues who crafted a Zen like approach towards the built world noting the beauty and soul of architecture is born from the people as a “living pattern language...A quality in buildings and in towns cannot be made, but only generated, indirectly, by the ordinary actions of the people, just as a flower cannot be made, but only generated from the seed.” ZACCHO Dance Theatre is

also a pattern language soulfully seeding for decades: dancing, singing, speaking within the natural world of trees, butterflies, and bees as an expression of the interdependent unity of all things; and a researched choreography interacting with site specific structures to reveal forgotten enforced labor or cultural contributions of enslaved Africans, silos of urban renewal and gentrification, sites of love and sustenance and the “ghost architecture” that inhabits our memories. ZACCHO Dance Theatre’s visions are spiritually engineered within the divine site of the body as an ongoing reminder that we, the culturally diverse peoples, have always been here as sacred stewardship, valuable knowledge, and creative contributions.

PLACE. PEOPLE. PROGRESS. PALACE.

Now as acknowledgement of Then.

Before all of us, this Place was soil, sand, river, bay, live oak, buckeye, poppy, elderberry, swallowtail, sea turtle, otter, mule deer, badger and more.

This Place birthed its People as Muekma, Ramaytush, Rumsen, Miwok, Mutsen, Awawas and more.

In the quest for more,

a People birthed of another Place came sailing, marching, and charging, as Spanish, Colonizers, Settlers, Prospectors, or Westward Ho's.

With an intention to occupy Place and reimagine People birthed in Place as savages, slaves, chattel, coolies, wetbacks, or sweetly as salt of the Earth, in need of control and management.

This was now a Place in the process of Progress.

Called it New World, Yerba Buena, Gold Mountain, Barbary Coast, The Paris of the West, First World, Fog City, The City but never call it Frisco or San Fran.

The Palace¹ is built and rebuilt as reflection of the beauty and aesthetics of occupying people who came sailing, marching, and charging in the quest for more.

Here we are on the steps of the Palace....

In this “now” can we rematriate ourselves within and without Palace?

¹ Middle English: from Old French paleis, from Latin Palatium, the name of the Palatine hill in Rome, where the house of the emperor was situated.

ARCHITECTURE. PUBLIC. PRIVATE.

“Neoclassicism in the US is directly related to the construction of whiteness. It was whiteness that was sought after in the many plantation houses that chose the style, justifying it as an emulation of ancient Greek ‘culture’ to separate themselves from the Indigenous peoples whose land was stolen, and the enslaved African people forced to build and work in them. Thomas Jefferson’s excitement with the work of the Beaux Arts school in Paris was motivated by a desire to make America ‘European,’ and white.”¹

Everyone and all bodies, in all cultures and societies, engages with the built world of architecture and interior design. Those high-minded ideas and concepts are simply a built place made functional or useful, beautiful, or becoming, sacred, or cherished. A place fashioned from human imaginations designed in an alchemical collaboration with the divine materials of the world, be it mud, be it clay, be it straw, bamboo, or redwood, be it stone or steel, be it glittering glass or reinforced concrete. Let us, also, humbly remember that all creatures design and build; perhaps this is the heart of our shared planet, a garden palace, where we all began before we invented cities and city halls.

Here we are in 2024 in the San Francisco Bay Area, within this modern urban city landscape where our rela-

tionships to land, architecture, interior design and built structures are strictly legislated and monitored by the bureaucratic bodies controlling and managing the status quo. What avenue is open to us people, citizens, and the public, who still have dreams (plans) for how we want our lives to be dignified and respected in this place we call home? Do all avenues and roads lead to City Hall, aka “The People’s Palace?”² This Beaux Arts structure is the symbolic locus for the paperwork for legitimacy of our dreamed (planned) lives: marriage, birth, and death certificates, permits for buildings or inspections, starting and closing a business, public health, animal welfare and more.

ZACCHO Dance Theatre is inviting us into the Palace as a site of recognition, reflection, and creative civic responses. *The People’s Palace* is the location we reimagine our relationship to public and civic spaces: How we love us. How we belong and make beautiful public³ space together, as an act so compelling that fear of difference dissolves within our embraced wonders, curiosities, and possibilities. We are the original architects, interior designers, landscapers, and gardeners. We, also, have an aesthetic rooted in our patterns of the language of beauty and morality. There is an Indigenous wisdom and skills that lies dormant in all of us together.

“...we have to understand that imagination shapes the world and so those of us who have been oppressed by how others imagine the world, the supremacists the patri-archs, the war mongers, the capitalists, we have to imagine something so compelling that it moves us beyond and out of the compliance with our own entrapment in these systems that do not love us.” — ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN

What is the design of public and private spaces? What is the “pattern language” of these codified systems which represent our diverse cultures?

Public remains the politized language that represents all of us in a democracy, taxpayers’ dollars generated for the public good that elects our public servants and yet... On closer inspection it feels like code for a kind of people struggling for access to a permissible life that has a value publicly and privately. Public becomes code for the masses as others, poor, poorly educated, poorly fed, poorly housed, lacking in health care, lacking in important work, lacking access, black, brown, yellow, queer, disabled, immigrant, on the streets and corners and benches of built space – you know them as those people in public schools, transportation, libraries, needy for public welfare and public defenders. We are a jumble amassed in a Jenga-like structure where the invisible hand pulls a piece that can crash our worlds. Which creates the feeling of private⁴ as so very aspirational, as in private property, private corporations, private equity funds, private sector, private reserve, private island, schools, universities, rooms, parties, exclusive access to that good life that is steeped in the leg room of first class. And if that is the case then why would we invite the public into our private realms?

And this is why art and architecture are so very important and very dangerous. “We are not simply receivers of aesthetics ... we are makers of aesthetics. Art has a social purpose [and] art belongs to the people. It’s not something that is hanging out there that has no connection with the needs of man. And art is unashamedly, unembarrassingly, if there is such a word, social. It is political; it is economic. The total life of man is reflected in his art.”

— CHINUA ACHEBE

The Unfinished House: a personal memory of my childhood home.

My Gran Daddy, Willie Hicks from Selma, Alabama, and his nephew John built a cinder block house for us on a small, purchased lot on the high desert dusty sage-brushed lands of the Umatilla, Palouse, and Cayuse of Eastern Washington. Cinder blocks at that time in the early 60’s were humble, cheap materials accessible to the working class in pursuit of the American hopeful dreams of a place

to belong via ownership. We moved into the house before it was finished. My Gran Mama, Rosetta Rankin from Forest, Mississippi, wept, “Lawd have mercy on us. I was raised to never move into an unfinished house. It’s a bad sign. This house will never get finished.” The house was livable, just unfinished. Our unfinished house welcomed all to our table as Mama believed that she “cooked like Jesus;” there would always be enough for us and whomever knocked on the door. In 1970, I moved to California to live with my biological mother in Berkeley. I would visit my unfinished house every year. Daddy Hicks’ intention was to finish the house, but his nephew over time succumbed to alcoholism and became unreliable. Daddy died in 1975. And Mama never wanted “another man up in my house.” Financially there was no money or skilled bodies to complete what was started. When my Mama died in 1996, I walked down the old stairs to the basement with its dirt floor, the open studs that represented two guest bedrooms, a den, a bathroom, the narrow, low sliding glass windows encrusted with cobwebs, dust, and outdoor splatters, an old couch with piles of unfolded clothes, a clothesline strung to dry clothes in winter from the old washing machine balanced on unused cinder blocks and I cried a sorrowful, pitiful woe-is-me sobbing. As I have grown into the moral aesthetics of my homeplace the house feels magical to me now – it had everything living and useful inside and outside including dirt.

We are the public, the private, individual and the collective. None of us are unique in our longing for a homeplace and a public space where we are able, as bell hooks says, “to recover our wholeness” and “be affirmed in our minds and hearts.” Yes, the settler empire’s extractive wars continue to amass mounds of rubble and slash wounds upon the lands where we struggle to live the lives we are born into as diverse creatures of the earth. It represents a lack of architectural imagination within bankruptcy of the embodied hungry ghosts of progress.

Hope is also a design:

Once upon a time the World Honored One was walking with gods and devas and humans, when he paused. He pointed to the ground and said, “This is a suitable site to build a temple.” The god Indra then plucked a blade of grass from nearby and stuck it into the ground at the spot where the Buddha had pointed. Indra declared, “The temple is built!” The World Honored One smiled.

ELLEN SEBASTIAN CHANG is a multi-faceted creative force, renowned for her impactful contributions as a director and writer. Her current projects are “the boiling” in collaboration with writer SunHui Chang and visual artist Joan Osato, slated for premiere at San Francisco’s Magic Theatre in 2025, and “Post Pardon: the opera” with librettist Arisa White and composer Jessica Jones at Waterville, Maine’s Gordon Center for Creative and Performing Arts in 2025.

¹ The Members of the Architecture Lobby. (2020, February 7). *The Architecture Lobby Statement on Trump’s Executive Order Affecting Federal Architecture*. <https://architecture-lobby.org/news/t-a-l-statement-on-trumps-executive-order-affecting-federal-architecture/>

² “The People’s Palace,” named after Mayor “Sunny Jim” Rolph’s vision to provide a spectacular City Hall for San Franciscans.

³ late Middle English: from Old French, from Latin publicus, blend of populus ‘of the people’ (from populus ‘people’ and pubes ‘adult’).

⁴ late Middle English (originally denoting a person not acting in an official capacity): from Latin *privatus* ‘withdrawn from public life,’ a use of the past participle of *privare* ‘bereave, deprive,’ from *privus* ‘single, individual.’



DESIGNING FOR MORE PEOPLE IN THE PALACE

SEAN RILEY INTERVIEWED BY ROWENA RICHIE

ROWENA RICHIE: “Sunny Jim” Rolph is the San Francisco mayor responsible for christening City Hall “The People’s Palace” when it opened in 1915. The expression referred to its intended purpose: it was not a palace for kings and queens, but for ‘the people.’ Tell me about your set design for ZACCHO Dance Theatre’s upcoming performance, *The People’s Palace*.

SEAN RILEY: I guess we start with the building itself which is the essence of site specific work. Basically we’re making a piece of time-based art in conversation with this locale. This is different and distinct from what we would think of as traditional theater where the proscenium is a blank frame in which we create a world inside, and you can move it and plug it in somewhere else and have a similar experience. But in site specific work we’re talking about making the work specifically in conversation with that locale which can only happen in that place. So in this case, the building itself, City Hall, is that locale, right? So, in terms of my approach there are two pathways: there’s what the space is, and there’s what the space means. They are different ways of unpacking the building.

Architecture is an emotion machine. It’s designed to evoke, to provoke a set of reactions from us as humans.

When we walk into a building, we get a feeling. With this space, where we have the huge vaulted ceilings, the tool that’s evoking that emotion is so powerful that you can’t help but notice it and be affected by it, but also notice that it is affecting you. There’s not a lot of subtlety in this Beaux Arts style. This style is specifically designed to inspire, to overwhelm, to impose. So, I look at the building in terms of what it is to understand what makes this building stand up. The different ways that force is managed within the architecture actually has an effect on how we feel. But also because in this specific kind of work we plan to use these spaces in unorthodox ways.

RR: This kind of work meaning site specific aerial work?

SR: Yeah, I certainly have done other kinds of site specific work, but I’m talking about doing aerial which is, you know, a wide umbrella of a term. Sometimes it involves ropes. Sometimes it just involves being in a place where humans can’t normally get to — unique access. It’s really all about drawing attention. In this context with Joanna, aerial is not just a trick, not only circus and spectacle. It is very carefully thought out to inhabit and embody the space in a unique way that’s positioned to draw attention to certain aspects that are aligned with the message of the piece.

PHOTO: RENDERINGS BY SEAN RILEY

RR: Tell me more. How do you as a set designer ‘draw attention to certain aspects that are aligned with the message of the piece?’

SR: I start to tease apart specific elements [of the building] and try to figure out okay, so how does this emotion machine work? Like what are actually the moving parts here? And that’s where I’ve started to find elements that I can play with.

RR: For example?

SR: Throughout the building, there are these busts, busts of previous mayors and other figures. And all these busts are presented on these funny plinths. It’s like a box, you know, like a four foot high by two foot by two foot box that the bust sits upon. And what that plinth means is here is an object worthy of your attention, right? So I have latched onto that shape of the plinth as a method within the context of this building, of calling attention to an object worthy of consideration and of appreciation. I’ve recreated these plinths without the bust on top as performance props. And then, because of the limited surface area on the top, right, you just follow the poetry of it. There’s all kinds of other vocabulary about the limitation of space, the confinement of that tiny plinth for human beings to dance on. And that leads to movement. It leads to storyline. It leads to all sorts of things.

RR: Are there any obvious “elephants in the room” that need to be addressed?

SR: In this space, there certainly are. The reason this piece needs to exist is the essential disconnect between what the building is today and what it purports to be, and the architectural style and the intention of that architectural style. There’s a disconnect in what this building is — our political and social center — and what it represents or what we hope it represents. What it strives to represent is inclusion, a governmental system that upholds all of the best ideals of our American style of government, which we profess to be equality and equal consideration and access.

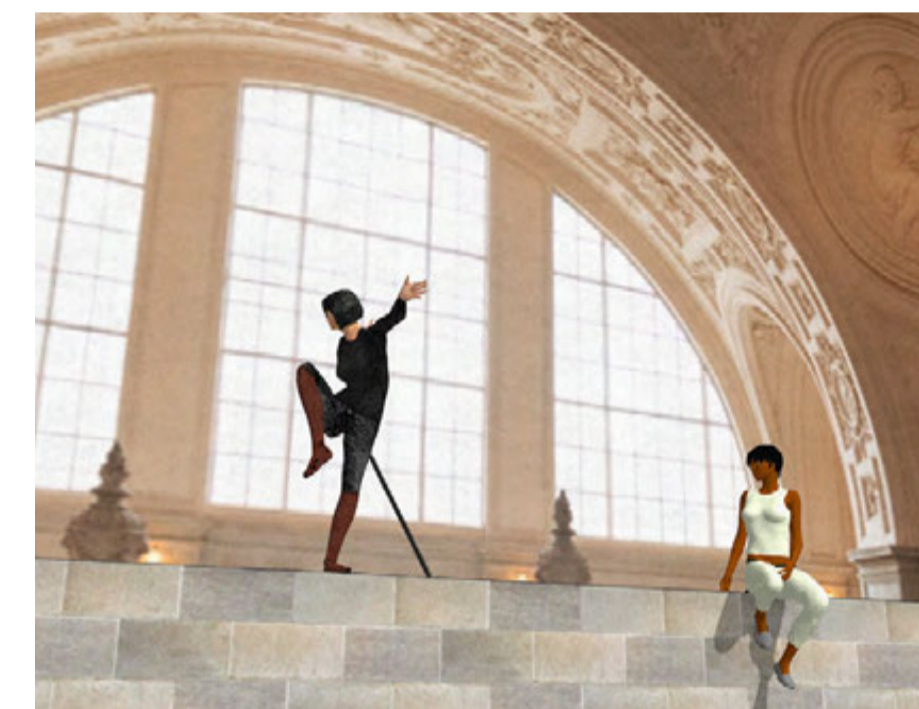
RR: Yes, and yet....

SR: And yet I think we all would agree that it’s a complicated history in this country, so unpacking what this building means is a complicated thing. I think it’s really important to note that it’s a gorgeous building. It is Joanna’s position, and mine as well, that unpacking and trying to understand and comment on this building’s architecture doesn’t take away from that fact. But the truth is that this Beaux Arts style has elements of Baroque and Rococo and is strongly influenced by Europe, and in turn back to Rome, and back to Greece. It’s got these classical shapes and forms and it’s no mistake that it was chosen because of its association with these classical societ-

ies and these classical seats of power. It was designed to place American society and American power in this inherited lineage of the great societies of the world, right? It’s all about what this architectural style uplifts and supports. And what it lifts up and supports is a vision of what is relevant and good in a society. And this particular vision of what is relevant and good in society is patriarchy and capitalism and essentially, white supremacy.

RR: And essentially, white supremacy.

SR: Yeah. The roots of this style are part of the foundation of what it means to fabricate whiteness. What it means to build an identity of whiteness. And it does so by reaching out and borrowing history from other places that for better or for worse, or truthfully or untruthfully, were identified in the minds of the people that chose this style as flourishing whiteness. I think it’s fair to say that indigenous cultures were not considered and are not considered. We see this colonial style in plantation architecture, right? We see it in all sorts of places attempting to identify with whiteness, and trying to transplant that into this space in this country.



I must acknowledge that as a cisgender white man in today's climate of identity politics, it's very difficult to separate the speaker from the message. Of course, I have invisible biases like anybody else that I can't always perfectly see. But I have been really lucky to work with amazing artists. Joanna is really one of my north stars. I've learned a lot about how to talk about this subject and how to see things more clearly. And I've also learned how to have a voice and that it is okay for me to have a voice within the subject matter. As a cisgender white man, for me to talk about white supremacy is not only possible, but important.

RR: Absolutely, yeah.

SR: So now perhaps after that whole bit, you can see more clearly why I preface that by saying that this is an amazing piece of architecture, and it's beautiful, and I love it. This is not, for Joanna, and certainly not for me, a criticism of the architecture as it sits. This is a contextual understanding of it, right? This is something that informs the way we're moving forward. So the piece is not in any way designed to slam the things but rather further complicate it. This building is supposed to be for everyone. And I think it's clear going through that building that not everyone is represented. So one of the things we really focused on — the elephant in the room — are these four rather large medallions in the ceiling. They have a relief carved within them representing the virtues liberty, learning, strength and equality. They've compiled images of lots of different symbols like you'd have on the back of the dollar bill. All this different symbolism. But they're clearly not representative of the full breadth of our society.

RR: In other words, the moniker "the people's palace" didn't really mean all the people.

SR: Yeah, in my words, I think this piece could be described as an intervention to add back and showcase the missing elements of society that have not had representation or a voice within this space.

RR: What's another example of an element you're reimagining?

SR: So the medallions — I forget exactly how Joanna put it, she said something like, 'The strength medallion is a half naked man with a sword.' Like a really muscular white guy sitting down with a big sword. This is the vision of strength that we are presented with. And I think the vision of strength that Joanna would like to present, that she lives through her life and presents in her art and that we would like to present here, is something more nuanced. It's the strength of caring and trust and respect. This is the strength of a society. This is the strength of an interrelated group of people inhabiting a piece of geography. The strength of that society lies in so much more than a sword.

RR: What's it like to work with Joanna?

SR: A masterclass in how to be a person on the earth is how I feel about the privilege of being around and working with Joanna Haigood. She creates art with a fierce bravery but without anger. How to separate those things is one of the magic tricks that she does so well. I have benefited from learning a tiny bit of that.

RR: Do you have any sense of what her secret is?

SR: Love, just love. An enormous bottomless pit of love. An enormous supply of love that governs what she does. She wrestles with subjects and realities that are often-times deeply disturbing and uncomfortable and she does so, without the bitterness that would be so understandable and forgivable. She manages to find this way to present a subject without any hint of an attack, but also never avoiding hard truths. Without having a blameful attacking component to it really opens the door for healing. There are lots of people, particularly these days, in recent times, calling attention to wrongs and highlighting aspects of our history in our society that could be better, and that's great, and they can be better and we should be looking at that. But Joanna does it in a way that makes a very, very large roof that even those who might feel alienated from the message can stand under. She holds space so that we can all come together to acknowledge and find a different way.

RR: Obviously, *The People's Palace*, the performance, is ephemeral. What trace do you want it to leave behind?

SR: The same as always, to touch hearts and minds. The reason we do theater in the first place is to affect someone. I know that sounds like a platitude, but this time based thing we do exists for a moment and it exists in collaboration with an audience member. That transformation within the audience member is actually the object that I'm crafting. And in terms of Joanna's always leading with love, I hope that we will leave with a feeling that is warm and good, even though not everything we saw is easy to see. That there's hope in it. This is an important, timely message. And it's an important place for it to be happening. I think there's power in this. In City Hall, this big governmental organization being the venue for this message to happen. This is right where the change needs to happen. This is like the bullseye.

SEAN RILEY creates unique striking environments and apparatus for time based art. He is a founding member and co-director of Cirque Mechanics, the host of television series *Worlds Toughest Fixes* and *Speed*, and a long-time collaborator on the construction of the Long Now Foundation's 10,000 year clock. Awards and nominations in design include: 6 Izzies, TBA awards, Bay Area Critics Circle, and an Isadora Duncan Sustained Achievement Award in scenic design. Riley studied Theater at UCSC and lives in British Columbia. visiblegravity.com

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photo: Robbie Sweeny



BEAUTY IN SEARCH OF A RESTING PLACE

Does an artist have a responsibility to anything or anyone other than their whim?

by **MICHAEL FRENCH** | photo by **SIMONE FINNEY**

The recognizing, capturing, and sainting of beauty is what separates human beings from beasts. In all honesty, I doubt this statement is true, but it sounds true, or at least true enough. This brings us to that fundamental, yet vexing question of what is ‘Beauty’? Hell if I know. Hell if anyone I trust knows.

But unless gibberish is your preferred form of communication, where else can we begin a conversation on beauty than with ‘why are you beautiful?’

The one thing I know for absolute sure and without even a shred of doubt, is that those witless Europeans behind slavery and colonialism, whose air of invincibility (better known as ‘power’) gave their Eurocentric ideas of beauty a certain divine vigor (better known as ‘truth’) have a lot to be accused of. When you take even a cursory glance at our world today and see what it holds dear when it comes to beauty, the blood-stained fingerprints of those thirsty Europeans are everywhere. Here’s the thing, the ‘Beauty’ I’m interested in has nothing to do with statues of naked men by the Greeks, or aquiline noses, or the perversity of a white Jesus, or powdered wigs, or eminent artists from the Renaissance, or the three-movement structure of a concerto, or fake beauty spots on TikTok, or anything to do with runways at fashion houses or airports. The ‘Beauty’ I’m concerned with is the one that every artist I know, and probably every artist I don’t know, made them want to become an artist in the first place. It’s the one that gives you reason to pause, to make you wonder, to make you ponder, that lets you believe in the idea of God, scrambles your senses, and has humanity at the very core of its existence.

Ridiculous as this sounds, and I must admit I feel a little queasy at my confidence, I believe that every artist, no matter what culture or tribe they come from, became an artist because they discovered something that spoke to the good in them, the humanity in them. Of course, if that discovery arrives when you’re eighteen years old, or, if you’re really unlucky, six years old, humanity’s the last thing you can imagine your unconsciousness wanting to talk about. But that’s okay, that’s okay. If you’re too young to realize what happened without your consent, your only responsibility is to keep on keeping on with your drawings in crayon, your songs on your toy piano, or your scribbled stories about dolphins and boats and a universe of glittery stars.

The moment of truth will return and the path which knows which way to go will show itself soon enough.

Around about here, with this very sentence, in fact, if I’m to be fair to you, dear reader, I should take my untethered, abstract idea of humanity and shape it into something concrete, something you can actually see. But fuck that!

Go write your own damn article if you want a vision of fairness! Naw, I’m only clowning around with you. But why would anyone need a concrete version of humanity when their unconsciousness already knows what it is? It would be a lonely and desolate place indeed if our instinct for humanity was not a song we all shared. Fortunately, the person standing next to you at the bus stop also has the same knowing, just as the person watching their laundry go round and round at a laundrette, just as the person buying and selling a slice of the future on Wall Street. We all have the same knowing. We all have the same knowledge.

My moment on the road to Damascus came while sitting next to my extremely self-contained Father on the dumpy yellow couch in our cramped, but lovable flat in Brixton, south-east London. Father was watching the drama “Angels are so Few” by Dennis Potter on the British television series, “Play for Today.”

I’m sure all I knew was that it was about an angel named Michael, which was, thankfully, all I needed to know to keep watching. But what I couldn’t have foreseen was that this story about an angel that arrives on the doorstep of a bored housewife, would knock me off my feet and I would keep on falling for the next ten years. Eventually my feet touched the ground again and my falling stopped, but only after I had directed my first play, Barrie O’Keefe’s “Killing Time.” That was it, that moment on the couch was my introduction to humanity and the rest of my life.

So, to that end, an artist, any artist, once bitten by their hidden humanity, sets off on their adventure with a packed lunch and a dreamy desire to add their voice to the cultural conversation. Or put another, less poetic way, a dreamy desire to make the world a better place. In my experience, and the experience of every artist I know and probably every artist I don’t know, that desire is fuel enough to create countless paintings, and countless books, and countless songs, and countless dances, and countless photographs, and countless creations that don’t have a definition. It’s an adventure fueled by the personal. But don’t be fooled by the etiquette of that word ‘humanity.’ When pushed to stand its ground by dictators or fascism or

rampant intolerance, humanity thinks highly enough of itself to respond with bared teeth and revolution, which might be hard to believe at this precise moment in time, but you can see it throughout history.

For years, all I had to do was have an inspiration by whim from the good in me and that was enough. For myself, that is, it was enough for myself to simply have a whim and follow it. And then I moved to New York City from London. And then in 1999 Amadou Diallo had 41 bullets fired at his body from point-blank range, and sometime during that same year I started to listen to Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On?” which I had heard a million times before, but hadn’t truly listened to. To be honest, my return to “What’s Going On?” wasn’t consciously to do with the Diallo murder, but unconsciously.... ?

And then, as if to relieve myself of any hesitation, I saw David Bowie at the Roseland Ballroom and had a night of pure, unrestrained, ecstasy. In the larger scheme of things, I don’t know why this rock concert has anything to do with anything, but it does, it really does.

I had lived through the butchering of Stephen Lawrence, the steel-capped boots of the National Front marauding the streets, the rocks and fires of the Brixton riots, the rebellion of the Notting Hill Carnival. But there was something about the Diallo murder, about being in America, about being on the verge of the 21st century that made it hit differently. Not long after that hail of Police bullets rang through the air, and I wish I could remember exactly when, I felt a Divine Elbow thrust itself into my ribs with real intent. The Divine Elbow said, ‘Wake Up! You’re not just an artist, you’re a Black artist, and that should mean something.’ And for the first time in my life, it did. So, here’s the thing. I was always a Black artist, obviously, but the unspooling of my faith in natural justice left me naked and shorn of all feathers, save for the fact that I now had a new coat of responsibility, and it was a coat weighted to the bone with history. From that time onward, as best as I could, I tried to correct, or at least challenge a past narrative that marooned the Black experience in the corner of the room. You could see it in what I wrote about, the plays I directed, the events I attended, where I spent my time, where I spent my business, how I let myself be.

So, here's the thing. I was always a Black artist, obviously, but the unspooling of my faith in natural justice left me naked and shorn of all feathers, save for the fact that I now had a new coat of responsibility, and it was a coat weighted to the bone with history.

That was how it was for close to twelve years and I’m proud of that time, but then fatigue set in. It’s an ugly truth that I don’t always want to admit, but slowly and surely I found myself exhausted from doing what I knew had to be done, by what I knew was my responsibility. To change a past narrative about the Black experience was to constantly wade again and again and again in the *struggle* of the Black experience, and bit by bit, day by day, month after month, year upon year, it eventually used me up. I remember thinking when no one was looking, ‘Is it okay if I create something that’s just beautiful? Something that doesn’t have anything to do with correcting a narrative? Something that doesn’t have anything to do with the meaning of history? Something that doesn’t have anything to do with anyone or anything but me and mine?’ Then I heard the painter Amy Sherald speak on the purpose of her work: “Public Blackness has been codified to be something that’s always attached to resistance, which limits our humanity and the ways in which we can imagine ourselves existing. There has to be some relief from the battle or we can never evolve as a people. I often say that my paintings are a ‘resting place,’ a place where Black people can see a reflection of themselves that’s not in resistance or contention. It’s just a Black person being a person.”

All at once, as if laid at my feet on a velvet cushion, I was given a landing and a new responsibility: Art as a ‘resting place.’

When the good people at *In Dance* asked me if I was interested in writing something for the upcoming edition, I told them that I wanted to write about the responsibility of an artist, particularly the responsibility of a Black artist.

I was put in touch with two vanguards of art as an agent of change. The glorious writer, director, and human rights advocate Ellen Sebastian Chang, whose work includes “Your Place Is No Longer With Us,” “A Hole in Space (Oakland Redux)” with Maya Gurantz, and “House/Full of Blackwomen” with Deep Waters Dance Theater. And the wondrous composer, bassist, band leader, and educator Marcus Shelby, whose works include “Harriet Tubman,” “Beyond the Blues: A Prison Oratoria,” and “Soul of a Movement: Meditations on Martin Luther King Jr.” He is currently composing music for *The People’s Palace*, a site-specific performance installation with Zaccho Dance Theatre.



ELLEN SEBASTIAN CHANG

There’s nothing like being in conversation with brilliant minds.

MICHAEL FRENCH: So, Ellen, here’s why I wanted to talk with you. For some time now, I’ve found myself on projects – some of which I’ve created myself (!) where the overriding aim is to correct a past narrative about Black folk or the Black experience. And trust me, I know the good that’s in there, how important it is to address those things, but sometimes, sometimes I just want to create something that’s beautiful and not have it be a correction to anything.

ELLEN SEBASTIAN CHANG: I hear you.

MF: Sometimes I want beauty to be my only responsibility.

ESC: I always want to create and pay homage to what I’m in love with. I’ll use this as an example. So, the very first show that I ever wrote and directed, which was called “Your Place Is No Longer With Us,” was an homage to someone I love profoundly, my muse, which was my grandmother...It was my grandmother that I learned the importance of responsibility and obligation from. They’re both words that are really testy in modern, western, mindsets. Especially the American mindset.

MF: Especially in my mindset, to be honest with you.

ESC: When I’ve done Human Rights work we talk about Helen Fine’s ‘Universe of Obligation.’ Everytime we try to teach that in relation to Human Rights, Oh My God! People hear that word ‘Obligation,’ and I’m talking about queer folks, people of color, and there’s something about that word that just pisses people off!

MF: You can put me in that group.

ESC: That’s right. Because what it sounds like is that you’re not free, you’re not liberated to do as you wish. And I go, we’re obligated all the time! Breathing oxygen is an obligation to maintain life — would it not behoove us to be responsible towards clear air in an effort to maintain healthy life? We can’t escape some form of obligation and

responsibility. We can create an *illusion* that ‘I’m doing me, this is about me, I’m living my best life,’ and all that. But I go, your best life is still in a relationship, an interdependency with everything and every being around you.

MF: Okay. So, for you, you have an obligation, but it’s only to things you love.

ESC: That’s right.

MF: And you say that you’re fooling yourself if you think you can live a life as an artist, any color artist, without an obligation to something.

ESC: Yes.

MF: I get that, but.... and I’m going to twist this around a bit... But Black and Brown people, the minute we step out our door we’re always — As the painter Amy Sherald would say, we’re always in ‘contention.’ Sometimes it’s with the people on the street, sometimes it’s with feeling like you’re always being observed, sometimes it’s with keeping the right distance so the person in front of you feels safe, sometimes it’s with history itself, and it’s fucking exhausting!

ESC: Believe me, I’ve been feeling that myself.

MF: And so, lately, I’ve been asking myself, where do Black people get to rest?! Again, Amy Sherald talks about creating work that’s a ‘resting place’ for Black people. Do you feel that responsibility in any way?

ESC: I’ve had the privilege to rest. I think it really began with the shutdown of the pandemic, to re-think how — because I too was getting exhausted of always responding to the narrative of “white” history. For me, it was, Oh My God! I don’t want to see another ‘slave narrative’ ever again in my life! And it’s not because I don’t think that narrative is important to learn and understand. Many of those narrative stories are written or produced for white people or people that have been willfully ignorant the past four hundred years. So, yes, if someone wants to take that on, to continually educate the white mindset, no problem. But for myself, I had to ask, ‘what am I curi-

ous about, what interests me,’ and in trusting what interests me — be it science fiction or rural landscapes.... What’s the relationship between birds and African history? What’s the relationship between honey and certain African cultures? *That’s* what interests me and I just want to go down those rabbit holes and ask questions. I’m going to quote Chinua Achebe because one thing he said is, “Our art is based on morality.” The earth Goddess among the Igbo people is also the Goddess of morality. So, in our aesthetic, you cannot run away from morality. Morality is basic to the nature of art.

MF: That is such an interesting way to put it.

ESC: And then I have to follow that up with a quote from Nietzsche, he says, and I LOVE THIS, “If you crush a cockroach, you’re a hero, but if you crush a butterfly, you’re a villain.” Morals have aesthetic criteria.

MF: Wow! Wow! Wow!

ESC: So, that, in relationship with Chinua Achebe, reminds me that beauty has always been something that comes with a kind of moralism, okay? And why we feel so angry and frustrated is because we think, ‘fucking white men! They can just decide that they’re going to do something and just do it for the sake of doing it,’ but that is a lie!

MF: WHAT!!!!?

ESC: The reason I say that it’s a lie is because what the white patriarchy is doing is leading with their moral authority. They’re the ones that create these notions that say a cockroach has no value therefore it should be wiped out. Notice the language of othering and devaluing humans by calling them insects, vermin or animals. White supremacist patriarchal mindsets have been the gatekeepers and standard holders to decide, ‘what is craft and what is art, what has worth and what doesn’t.’ Who gets to decide what beauty is and why!? We are talking about it openly now, these are exciting times of change.

Four days later, with Ellen’s words still echoing around my nervous system, I had a Zoom chat with Marcus Shelby and rewound the inquiry to the beginning.

PHOTO BY GRACE MARIE CECILE TOLEQUE



MARCUS SHELBY

MICHAEL FRENCH: I just want to give you the big picture of why I wanted to talk with you...

MARCUS SHELBY: Okay.

MF: It's about the idea of Black artists and the 'responsibility' we can feel to correct the past with our work. Just looking at the titles of some of your work. I mean, you've made a very clear statement as to where you're coming from....

MS: Absolutely! There's no question I feel that responsibility! 'Cuz I've had the opportunity to check the work of people like Nina Simone and Charles Mingus, and that's what they were all about. Nina Simone said, and I'm paraphrasing, but she talked about the duty of the artist. It's the artist's duty to speak on what's going on around them. I mean, that's one philosophy, but I buy into it one hundred percent! And it

can be grueling to put yourself where the action is. I did a piece on Harriet Tubman where I went to where she was born, to where she passed away — three years of incredible research, and just putting myself in all those places was really valuable to getting an understanding of her and the times and what they went through. I did the same thing with the Civil Rights piece I wrote. I went down south, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas. I put myself in places where you can see a slave block right there — I wanted to see the Civil Rights movement on a local level and find the stories that don't make it into the history books.

MF: But let me step in a little bit on that, which is... So, you're saying that you feel a duty to go into the African American experience from the angle of politics and social justice, and that the corrective narrative framework that I'm reacting to is not something that tires or exhausts you. In fact it's something that nourishes you.

MS: Most times I don't know anything about a subject beyond surface knowledge, and so for me, if I'm going to have something to say artistically about it, I need to learn as much as possible. Sometimes, like method acting, you become what you're acting. And there's a selfish part to this, because I want to gain more knowledge about a subject, get more meat on my bones.

I mean, I did a piece on the prison industrial complex.... As an artist, what am I supposed to do? Just sit by and act like it's not happening? No, that's not what Charles Mingus would have done! Look, I want to be the best artist I can be, but my aim is to see myself in the light of Mingus, Nina Simone, Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln. These are towering figures in history, a level that I'll never achieve, but if you use your work to highlight what's happening around you it's often gonna be about injustice.

MF: So being an activist and an artist are one and the same thing to you?

MS: Oooo, that's a tough one. I don't know how to answer that right now, but I know that my impulse is to show up for my community. I mean, the last thing I did that had to do with "activism," was organize a bunch of musicians to raise money for MECA, which is a Middle East children's alliance that helps send money to kids and families in Palestine.

MF: I knew talking to you wasn't going to be easy because there are some artists that remind you of all that you can do as an artist, whether you choose to or not, and you're one of them! Like this thing for MECCA, it's not somewhere I would go, quite honestly, but I love the fact that you said 'I want to do this, I want to contribute.'

MS: Well, again I ask myself, what would Nina and all those be doing right now? I mean, Gaza is such a loaded topic right now and some folks may not agree with what I'm doing, but —

MF: So be it.

MS: So be it.

MF: I understand the duty that you feel, the muses that you have and their influence on you, I get that. But to be Black is political, whether we want it to be or not, I mean, that's what we've been turned into because of history, and my version of being a Black person has never been easy going, y'know what I mean? There's always some kind of tension when I'm in public, and that's the tiring part. Amy Sherald, the painter, talks about a 'resting place' and puts it so much better than I will, but do you ever want to create something that doesn't take from Black people in tension? If you're going to talk about Harriet Tubman, there's a tension there. MLK, there's a tension there.

MS: Well, yes, is the short answer to that. That's why I started reading a bunch of Octavia Butler books. Because I looked up and I thought, man, everything I've involved myself with has to do with history and it felt like maybe I was limiting my possibilities. And I have done things outside of the 'movement' pieces, but they've all been about Black culture.

MF: I understand that.

MS: I did something about the Black experience during the pandemic.

MF: You did?

MS: Yeah, but thinking about it, it was still to do with struggle because it dealt with the protests, the expansion of homelessness in the Tenderloin, so it was still along the same lines, but.... I like that idea

PHOTO BY BETHANIE HINES

of a 'resting place.' I'm also horribly behind on so many things about our struggle.

MF: Hahahahahaha!

MS: Trust me, I'm not into the 'struggle' fetish.

MF: That's such an important phrase you just used.

MS: I mean, look how long it's taken film to reflect the diversity of the Black experience outside of "Roots" and the "Color Purple!" All great stuff, but — Y'see, I don't think stories that are centered on our struggle are absent of beauty. I mean, that's the definition of the Blues, triumph and tragedy side by side, and the human condition cannot exist without both things being represented. That's how it is, isn't it?

resting place

Word forms: resting places plural

1. COUNTABLE NOUN

A **resting place** is a place where you can stay and rest, usually for a short period of time.
The area was an important resting place for many types of migrant birds.

I've always seen creative expression as a spiritual act, as creativity is something you receive, something that comes to you, rather than something you need to search for. And no matter how it shows itself, how it manifests, it takes an extraordinary amount of faith to take something from the safety of within and put it out into the world for everyone to inspect. In the 'Booming Declarations' dept of my soul, I still believe that the artist is the slayer of autocratic dragons, defender of the bold and the beautiful, the messenger that gives life meaning. Artists give us a lot to be thankful for. Viva Le Artist!

MICHAEL FRENCH is a director, writer, actor, and inventor of brilliant things, originally from London, England. In an ideal world he would live in Morocco, have another place in Barcelona, spend three months of the year in Ghana, and have a cabin in the woods of Bath, England, where he would go to write every winter. He would meditate every day, practice Tai Chi three times a week, eat Indian food every Sunday, and be fit enough to run a marathon if he suddenly feels so inspired.

Mr. French is currently still trying to finish his first collection of short stories entitled, 'BABBLE.'

Mujer Sav/bia,^{*} Guatesi torta Yalabitata^{**}

BY DIANA LARA AND ISADORA PAZ TABOADA



PHOTO BY ISADORA PAZ TABOADA

^{*}Wise woman. In Spanish Savia means Sap, and Sabia means to be wise, we want to emphasize the meaning and relation between both words. ^{**}Lenka cacaopera language

What am I?

It's the memory of the space that existed, inside and outside of me.

What is that space?

It's my grandmother's house, the yuyuba tree in the garden, the layer of cells that originated my heart, my grandmother's chest that cradled me as a child, or my own chest.

The memory of the space moves me, as if it were a consequence of my desire to inhabit that space again, to expand there, to explore every fold, every corner, and every texture.

Who we are is essentially linked to the space in which we grew up and all the memories we have about those spaces. When we talk about the space where we grew up, we include the space of the maternal womb, the spatial configuration of embryological development, the coordinated and precise movement of cells that originates human tissues and systems.

Thus, as Honduran artists we decided to undertake the task to explore the geographical spaces inhabited by our indigenous Lenca ancestors. The Lencas are a Mesoamerican group that occupies part of the territory of Honduras and El Salvador. Currently, there are around half a million Lencas who preserve their culture, gastronomy, clothing, agriculture, dances, and

rituals. The Lenca indigenous movement is now internationally recognized for their struggles in defense of rivers and forests.

In March 2024, we held a movement exchange meeting with indigenous Lenca women in the department of La Paz, Honduras. Environmental leaders, farm workers and artisan women from eight communities in the area gathered to exchange

movement, dance, and rituals linked to nature and indigenous culture. This exchange is part of a collaborative and multidisciplinary performance led by three Honduran artists: Diana Lara, Isadora Paz Taboada (movement artists), and Gabriel Vallecillo-Marquez (video artist). The project is being developed in Honduras and San Francisco and is part of the Edge residency at CounterPulse, which will premiere in June 2024.

We were fortunate to work in collaboration with the organization Murilpaz, Indigenous Lenca Women Association from La Paz. On the first day of the meeting, the participants opened the event by performing the "compostura." The compostura is one of the original ceremonies that are configured as a dance-rite and tribute to Mother Earth. For centuries, the Lenca people have interpreted this ceremony to mark the moments of the planting and harvesting cycle. In the representation, the participants set up an altar and recreate a series of

acts and consecration movements for abundance, anticipating the arrival of the rainy season. The ritual, as interpreted through the lens of the Murilpaz organization, expands much more, as its leader Donatila shares, "We ask that the land be distributed equitably, we ask that the lands belong to women."

Each woman brought an element that is part of the altar, such as copal, colored candles, vegetables, fruits, and flowers. The candles were placed marking the cardinal points: white towards the north, which signifies purity; yellow towards the south, which signifies fertility, seed, and reproduction of women and nature; red towards the east, which signifies the blood of martyrs, the people who have resisted and been killed; and black or purple towards the west, which represents the ancestors, those who have already departed. In the center of the compostura, a green candle representing nature and a blue one representing the sky were placed.

The first day of the workshop coincided with the celebration of International Women's Day, March 8th. In Honduras, there is a tradition of celebrating Women's Day with events in communities at the local and national levels. It was then very significant that this exchange of body awareness, somatic movement, and rituals in nature took place specifically on this date.

On the second day of the meeting, we continued our exploration of movement and rituals at a specific site chosen by Murilpaz to allow contact with nature. "The island" is located an hour from Marcala by unpaved road. It is a small area of land through which a river passes, forming a water pool and a waterfall. In this place, we remembered the movements generated the previous day in this new landscape, incorporating the element of water and the guacales. Guacales are oval-shaped vessels of pre-Columbian origin made from a tree called jicara. They are used in Honduras



PHOTO BY ISADORA PAZ TABOADA



PHOTO BY ISADORA PAZ TABOADA



to carry water and for other uses in cooking and daily activities.

Another element we explored both days was the use of the Lenca language. Currently, there is a process of recovery and revitalization of the Lenca language, which ceased to be spoken in the mid-20th century. The young women who attended the workshop are learning in school to speak and write one of the Lenca languages. We encouraged the participants to write a sentence related to Lenca culture in Spanish and Lenca and to incorporate movement into the sentence. The process was creative and playful and opened the door to collaboration among women from different generations.

The scenarios of the body and the expression of dance are rooted in territories, collective memory, the

exchange between tradition and modernity, between multiple identities. Dance continues to occur in squares, in the scenarios of the everyday, and also in dance halls and theaters. Our task as Honduran performing artists is to reinterpret this wealth of movements, sounds, rituals, emotions, and language that are alive in our Lenca culture and roots. We want to share this performance with others to motivate them to explore all their roots and especially those that are less visible. It is not an easy task but it is worth the challenge.

DIANA LARA is a choreographer, performer, and somatic movement educator born and raised in Honduras. Her choreographic work is influenced by contemporary dance, contact improvisation, Body-Mind Centering training, and Latinx culture. She creates choreographies that explore the

effects of coloniality, religion, and gender on the body, and that generate rituals to peel layers of oppression. Her choreography has been staged in San Francisco Bay Area venues including the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, NohSpace, Dance Mission Theater, among others. dianalara-somatics.com

ISADORA PAZ TABOADA is a Honduran-Argentinian choreographer and performer, co-founder of DA escenica, an independent collaborative project based in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. She has been a resident artist at ADF Durham, NC and the National Choreographic Center in La Rochelle, France. She explores community narratives, practices and performances promoting collective inquiry and intercultural dialogue through dance and performance. DA escenica: facebook.com/daescenica

Visit counterpulse.org/edge2024/ for tickets and information about **Savia-SapFlow**, made possible with generous support from CounterPulse Edge Residency and German Cultural Center in Honduras.

PHOTO BY DIANA LARA



Mujer Sav/bia,^{*} Guatesi torta Yalabitata^{**}

POR DIANA LARA Y ISADORA PAZ TABOADA



*En español Savia es el líquido que circula por los vasos de la planta, y Sabia significa sabiduría, queremos enfatizar ambos significados y la relación entre las dos palabras. **Lengua Lenca cacaoopera

¿Qué es lo que soy?

Es la memoria del espacio que existió, dentro y fuera de mi.

¿Qué es ese espacio?

Es la casa de mi abuela, el árbol de yuyubas en el jardín, la capa de células que originó mi corazón, el pecho de mi abuela que me arrulló de niña o mi propio pecho.

La memoria del espacio me mueve, como si fuera una consecuencia de mi deseo de habitar ese espacio otra vez, de expandirse allí, de explorar cada dobles, cada esquina y cada textura.

Quienes somos está ligado esencialmente al espacio en el que crecimos y todas las memorias que tenemos sobre esos espacios. Cuando hablamos del espacio en el que crecimos, incluimos el espacio del vientre materno, la configuración especial del desarrollo embriológico, el movimiento coordinado y preciso de células que origina cada tejido y sistema humano.

Es así que como artistas hondureñas,

emprendimos la tarea de explorar el espacio geográfico que habitaron nuestros ancestros indígenas Lenca. Los Lenca son un grupo de origen mesoamericano que ocupa parte del territorio de Honduras y El Salvador. Actualmente, existen alrededor de medio millón de Lenca, quienes conservan su cultura, gastronomía, vestimenta, agricultura, danzas y rituales. El movimiento indígena Lenca es hoy

reconocido internacionalmente por sus luchas por la defensa de los ríos y bosques.

En Marzo del 2024 realizamos un encuentro de intercambio de movimiento con mujeres indígenas Lenca en el departamento de La Paz, Honduras. Se reunieron ahí mujeres líderes ambientalistas, productoras y artesanas de ocho comunidades de la zona para intercambiar

danza, movimiento y rituales ligados a la naturaleza y a la cultura indígena. Este intercambio es parte de un proyecto performático colaborativo y multidisciplinario liderado por tres artistas hondureñas: Diana Lara, Isadora Paz-Taboada (artistas del movimiento) y Gabriel Vallecillo Marquez (artista visual). El proyecto se está desarrollando en Honduras y en San Francisco, y es parte de la residencia Edge de Counterpulse, que se estrenará en Junio del 2024. counterpulse.org/artist/diana-lara

Tuvimos la fortuna de trabajar en colaboración con la organización Murilpaz, Asociación de Mujeres Referentes Indígenas Lenca de La Paz. El primer día del encuentro, las participantes abrieron el evento realizando la compostura. La Compostura es una de las ceremonias originarias que se configuran como rito-danza y tributo a la madre tierra. Durante siglos, los lenca han interpretado esta ceremonia para marcar los momentos del ciclo de la siembra y la cosecha. En la

representación, los participantes montan un altar y recrean una serie de actos y movimientos de consagración para la abundancia anticipando la llegada de la temporada de lluvias. El ritual interpretado a través del lente de la organización Murilpaz se expande mucho más, como comparte su lideresa Donatila: *“pedimos que la tierra este distribuida equitativamente, pedimos que las tierras sean para las mujeres”*.

Cada mujer trajo un elemento que es parte del altar como el copal, candelas de colores, verduras, frutas y flores. Las velas se colocaron marcando los puntos cardinales, el blanco hacia el norte que significa la pureza el amarillo hacia el sur que significa la fertilidad, la semilla y la reproducción de las mujeres y la naturaleza; el rojo hacia el oriente que significa la sangre de los martires, la gente que ha resistido y ha sido asesinada, y el negro o moreado hacia el poniente, que representa los ancestros, los que ya partieron. En el centro de la

compostura se colocaron una candela verde representando la naturaleza y una azul representando el cielo.

El primer día del taller coincidió con la celebración del día internacional de las mujeres, 8 de Marzo. En Honduras existe una tradición de celebración del día de la mujer con eventos en comunidades a nivel local y nacional. Fue entonces muy significativo que este intercambio de conciencia corporal, movimiento somático y rituales en la naturaleza se llevara a cabo específicamente en esta fecha.

El segundo día del encuentro continuamos nuestra exploración de movimiento y rituales en un sitio específico escogido por Murilpaz que permitiera el contacto con la naturaleza. “La isla” está ubicada a una hora de Marcala por carretera sin pavimentar. Es una pequeña área de tierra, por el que pasa un río que forma una poza de agua y una cascada. En este lugar recordamos los movimientos generados el día anterior en este nuevo paisaje, incorporando el elemento del



FOTO POR ISADORA PAZ TABOADA



FOTO POR ISADORA PAZ TABOADA



agua y los guacales. Los guacales son unas vasijas ovaladas de origen precolombino hechas de un árbol llamada jícara; se utilizan en Honduras para acarrear agua y otros usos en la cocina y actividades diarias.

Otro elemento que exploramos ambos días, fue el uso de la lengua Lenca. Actualmente existe un proceso de recuperación y revitalización de la lengua Lenca, la cual dejó de hablarse a mediados del siglo XX. Las mujeres jóvenes que asistieron al taller están aprendiendo en la escuela a hablar y escribir una de las lenguas lencas. Animamos a las participantes a que escribieran una frase relacionada con su cultura tanto en español como en Lenca y que incorporaran movimiento en las frases. El proceso fue creativo y lúdico y abrió la puerta a

la colaboración entre las mujeres de diferentes generaciones.

Los escenarios del cuerpo y la expresión de la danza se encuentran arraigados a los territorios, a la memoria colectiva, al intercambio entre la tradición y la modernidad, entre las múltiples identidades; la danza continúa produciéndose en las plazas, en los escenarios del cotidiano, y también en los salones de danza y en los teatros.

Nuestra tarea como artistas escénicos hondureños es reinterpretar esta riqueza de movimientos, sonidos, rituales, emociones y lenguaje compartirla con otros para motivarlos a que exploren sus raíces y sobre todo aquellas que son menos visibles. No es una tarea fácil pero vale la pena el reto.

DIANA LARA, coreógrafa, bailarina y educadora somática de Honduras, quien actualmente vive en San Francisco, California. Su trabajo coreográfico tiene influencia de danza contemporánea, improvisación de contacto, Body Mind Centering y cultura Latina. Diana crea coreografías que exploran el efecto de la colonización, religión y género en el cuerpo, y que generan rituales para arrancar las capas de opresión. Sus coreografías se han presentado en el Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, NohSpace, Dance Mission Theater en San Francisco. dianalara-somatics.com

ISADORA PAZ-TABOADA es una bailarina y coreógrafa Hondureño-Argentina, co-fundadora de DA escénica, un proyecto colaborativo independiente localizado en Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Ella ha sido una artista residente en ADF Durham, Carolina del Norte, y el Centro Nacional Coreográfico en La Rochelle, Francia. Ella explora narrativas, prácticas y danzas comunitarias promoviendo el cuestionamiento colectivo y el diálogo intercultural a través de la danza y el performance. Da escénica: facebook.com/daescénica

FOTO POR DIANA LARA

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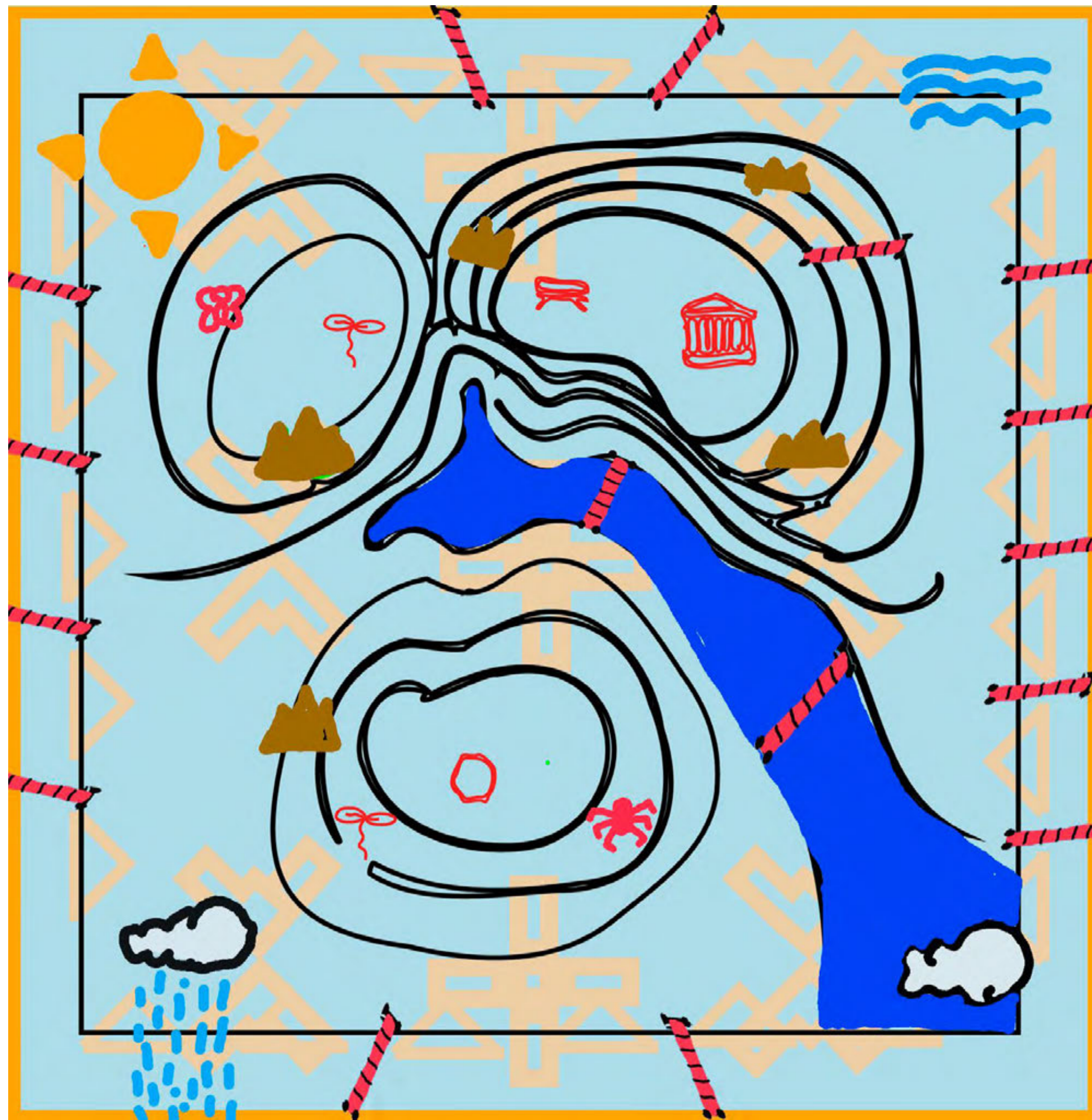


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by YAYOI KAMBARA

In January, I attended the MIT Reality Hack, an Extended Reality (XR) hackathon in Cambridge, Massachusetts as part of my professional development tour. XR is an umbrella term that includes augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) mixed reality (MR), and anything in between. The MIT Reality Hack motto, “Hack to the Future”, unfolds annually as a community-driven XR hackathon, attracting a diverse ensemble of XR professionals, brand mentors, creators, participants, students, and tech enthusiasts. There are also a LOT of prizes! This gathering serves as a nexus where attendees engage in tech workshops, discussions, project collaborations, and innovative endeavors.

But what exactly is hacking? It’s the art of coaxing hardware into performing beyond its prescribed functions, a *technicity* articulated by phenomenology philosopher Erin Manning. In her book *Always More Than One*, she draws parallels between dance-making, specifically William Forsythe’s choreography, and improvisation emphasizing the importance of pushing the boundaries of technical vocabulary to spark new creations, a *technicity* or a *hacking*, underscoring how choreographers and dance artists engage in



the manipulation of language and gestures of movement to cultivate invention.¹

The best part of this event is the wide range of backgrounds and skill levels of attendees from all over the world. Although the event requires an application process and community agreements with check-ins, I had the opportunity to meet people from the XR industry, academics, and people who simply love to play, fail, and play again. My collaborators NI DO TO XR — an exhibit on the choreographic research for IKKAI featuring interactive technologies such as an Obon dance tutorial hologram and a video game of packing and unpacking — encouraged me to

¹ Manning, Erin. 2012. *Always More than One*. Duke University Press EBooks. doi.org/10.1215/9780822395829

DANCING TOWARDS FUTURING

THE NEXUS OF DANCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIAL CHANGE WITH XR (EXTENDED REALITY)

apply. Being the kind of dancer used to being well rehearsed, or at least thoroughly planned, I wasn't sure how I could go to the hackathon if I didn't already have a plan or idea in motion. How would I fit in? What would I even do? But then I considered that maybe that was the point. What I discovered is that as dance artists, we are natural storytellers who integrate physical interactivity with design, and these skills are essential in XR.

After an intensive day of workshops ranging from sound haptic design to ethical hacking, I found myself at 11 pm in an impressive and modern MIT campus building on a multigenerational team working on a project with Ayaskant Panigrahi, Jennifer Chan, Barak Hussein, and Jesus Morales. Collectively, we embodied the intersection of programming, design, cyber security, and, of course, dance. A team of diasporic XR creatives — developers, designers, and dreamers.

Our project *Delta Reallation* introduced a game where migrants lead in designing their new settlements rooted in a mixed reality XR game. This project followed a more-than-human design ethos, placing players in the shoes of Koda and Nisa, recent migrants tasked with planning a sustainable and inclusive community. Aligned with the UN Sustainability Goal #11, the game aims to foster inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements. The Looking Glass, a 3D frame-like display, serves as a window into Koda's Meta Quest or VR headset design process, making transparent what is usually invisible: individual decision-making and its potential community consequences. After a round, players swap roles and are then encouraged to contemplate gestures of welcome for newcomers in their communities. This project drew inspiration from speculative design

principles, embracing the Protopia Futures framework to explore possible, plausible, probable, and preferable futures. Through ideation processes, world-building, and collaborative activities, *Delta Reallation* envisioned a future where diverse communities can thrive. If you are interested, check out our game building on our [DevPost](#).

Back in San Francisco, and being home, I've begun to integrate my three-week professional development tour. One of the things that has become clear is a larger research question guiding my work inspired by a conversation I was having with the co-interrogators of [Dancing Around Race](#), Gerald Casel, David Herrera, Raissa Simpson, and Bhumi Patel: how might creative practice be employed as a framework for harm reduction within the capitalist context in which we live? Through creative practice, I can actively involve and evolve, implicate myself, and invite my audiences to journey alongside me.

One of the next pieces I am working on to premier in 2026 is (a) Bathing, a fantastical, immersive dance film where viewers' bodies control a visual narrative that flickers between staid urban gardens and the natural glory of a forest or natural environment. This is to stimulate audiences into imagining a diverse community where colonial modernity converses with these majestic lands. I will use a motion-tracking camera on the audience so viewers explore how group movement affects the narrative outcomes of this film. If little



or no movement is detected, the film glitches to an alterity of a city or suburban garden, dancing a metaphor of neo-colonialism. (a) Bathing contemplates in motion the historical tensions between migration, settlement, belonging, and being responsible to a beloved place – nature. When the audience moves together at a certain speed, a metaphor for collective action, they will witness an emerging screen story that reflects the interior lives of the film's all-BIPOC cast. This culturally rich community comes from a range of socio-historical positions, yet bathing in nature together will show a poetic relationality that contests the present world's racial and colonial hierarchies of value. With the audience experiencing collective physical movement, I hope this embodied social art experience with integrated technology will help foster and imagine a cross-racial alliance for audiences to reckon with their conscious and unconscious colonial complicity.

YAYOI KAMBARA, MFA, started her career as a professional dancer and currently directs and produces live performances and multi-media works, including film and XR.

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AN UNFOLDING:

Reflections on 花和霧 *flowers and fog*

by KAT GOROSPE COLE AND KIM IP | photo by RJ MUNA

Kim Ip and Kat Gorospe Cole are creative contributors for a new show by Melissa Lewis Wong, *花和霧 flowers and fog*, made in collaboration with Melissa's mother, Joy Chenyu Lewis. The performance is a kaleidoscope of dance, drag, Chinese traditional song and Broadway tunes, dumplings, tea and mahjong.

The article below is a response to Melissa's work, capturing a moment in-process during its development. Excerpts are from a creative discussion Kat and Kim had with Melissa and Joy. Tea was being poured and small winter melon cakes were being served on a sunny afternoon in Melissa's apartment.

KAT: I first experienced Melissa's project during the midst of shelter in place, stranded in my tiny bedroom in North Berkeley. The absence of people was a weight I felt in my bones. Melissa's film version of *花和霧 flowers and fog* showed me a

tender and powerful way of connecting with loved ones from a distance. While staying in Hawai'i, Melissa had remotely collaborated with their mother, Joy, who was in Massachusetts, to create a dance film about their relationship.

Joy is in her 70s. She is a warm, thoughtful and caring person. She loves singing (yes, you'll hear her in the show). She sang at public protests in NYC in 1989 in response to the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4, 1989, and the arrests and persecution that followed. She has sung at going away parties for coworkers, expressing the sadness that is unspoken. She diligently tends to her garden in Massachusetts and waters Melissa's plants when she visits SF. She fed me (Kat) a dumpling by hand during a work-in-progress of this show.

KIM: Melissa is 31. She is a mild-spicy Sagittarius that somehow always makes time to sit and have tea. She is 1/6 of Asian Babe Gang, Hapa, Queer, humble, and really smart. She has been regularly attending protests





What would it be like to meet your parent again for the first time, after knowing a version of them for over three decades?

for Palestine and recently finished collaborating with Rebecca Fitton and Detour. Throughout her busy days she is as cool as a cucumber. About three weeks back I (Kim) shared cheesy grits with Melissa and just yesterday, she offered to spoon-feed me grits :)

KAT: In this staged version of *花和霧 flowers and fog*, Joy and Melissa share the stage, witnessing each other and asking the audience to witness them and their relationship.

For me, this is an invitation to celebrate our multidimensionality and allow ourselves to be surprised by those who are closest to us.

MELISSA: *I think it's an opportunity to meet each other in a new way and reimagine the connection... We did an open rehearsal showing at the Dresher residency in September. I remember feeling kind of like I saw my mom in a new way when she sang the Songhua River song. It was*

really powerful to see her...I hadn't experienced Joy as an incredibly powerful and captivating performer, or [to Joy:] I just hadn't had an opportunity to see you in that way. That was really special.

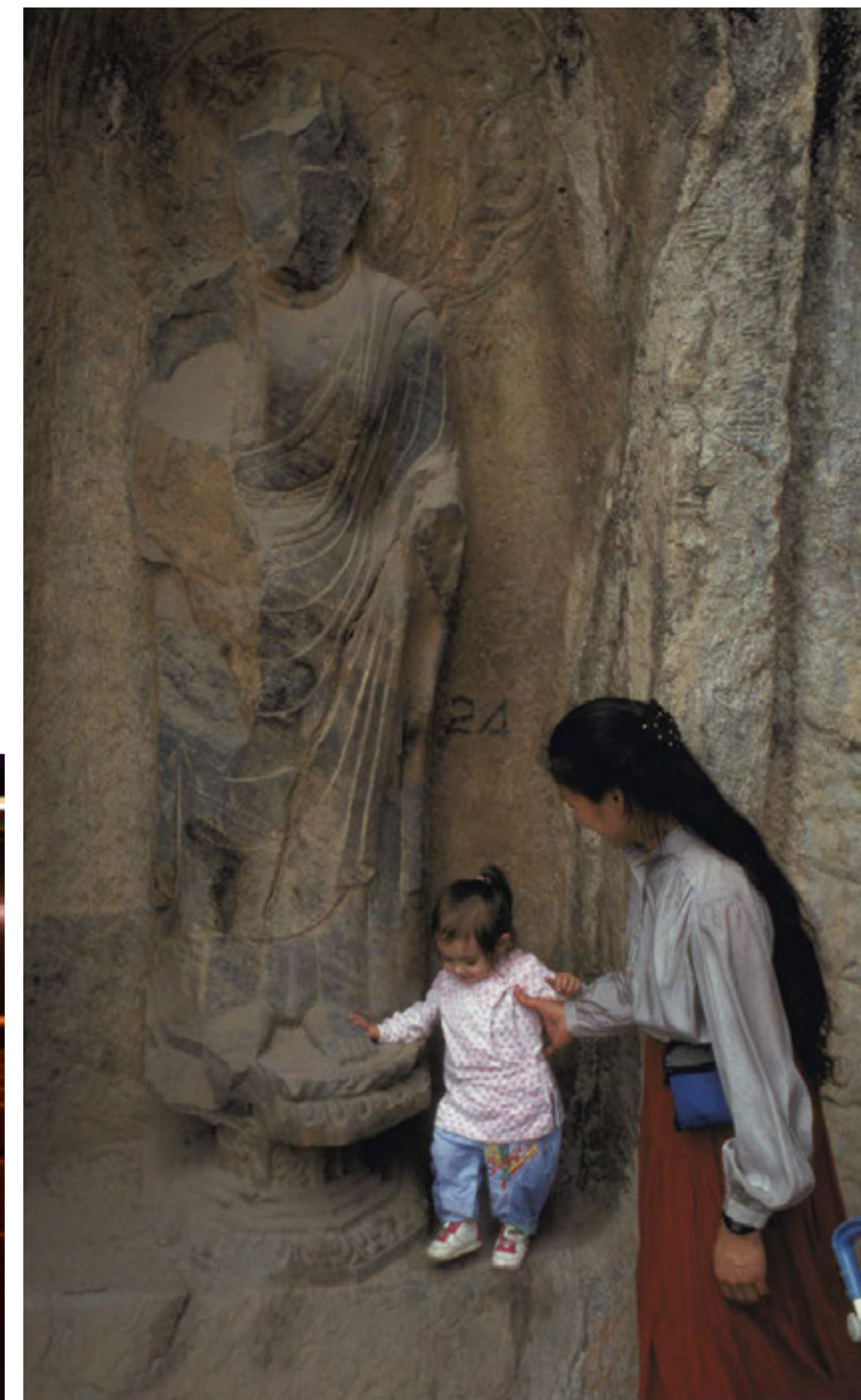
KAT: What would it be like to meet your parent again for the first time, after knowing a version of them for over three decades?

KIM: Lowkey been obsessed with what-if allegories since 2019. I think it's tied up with the whimsical, mysterious phenomena of letting yourself be vulnerable to the fantasy of what if... What if your relationship with your mum was living in the

PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWEENEY



PHOTOS (TOP LEFT AND RIGHT) TODD LEWIS, (BOTTOM) ANTHONY THORNTON



“what-if”? Which brings me to the reference of *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, a cinematic masterpiece that puts a surrealist landscape as the meeting place for creating new parent-child relationships. We observe the daughter becoming a mega villain and the mum starting to show up as her vulnerable self rather than villainous opponent. And for a portion of the film, the mum isn't sure she will share a world with her daughter until we are met with a scene where they drop into a canyon and the mum and daughter are next to each other as rocks, perhaps agreeing to be in each other's presence.

JOY: *The Chinese mother show up here and there and she [Melissa]*

appreciate my being Chinese, being somebody loves to sing. Once I was singing a song, Melissa and her Chinese dance teacher, they were dancing. [to Melissa:] I think that was when you were, I don't know, eight years old. Do you remember?

MELISSA: *Yeah. And in a way you could view this experience, this show, as just another version of that many, many years later. I feel excited to create the show and give you space to be very powerful and be very loud and really enjoy it.*

KIM: ...and isn't that what this is. A dance and storytelling performance where we as the audience get

to experience you meeting many versions of your mum? Speaking from my own experience of my mother-daughter relationship, some of us don't get to have that invitation to observe all that is present and all that is here in the passage of time. How beautiful it is to watch each other's growth into community roles and then how that refracts back to each other—perhaps this is a metaphor for watching a tea ball unfurl! Utilising performance as the medium to reflect upon this ever-changing relationship between mother and daughter is so so so beautiful!

KAT: I find it really exciting to be part of this project with both Kim

and Melissa because there's a kinship I feel with all 3 of us Asian-Am, Queer artmakers in our 30s. Each of us has been compelled to process our relationship with our mothers through our art forms. Melissa's film with her mother and Kim's project interviewing elders (about sex-

I found myself really wanting to be friends with my mother and be a form of support or a place of nurturing for my mother, because that's what I do for a lot of my friendships.

ness and sensuality) both inspired me to tell my own personal story, and here we are now collaborating with Melissa and Joy for their show. It makes me wonder, what is it that's drawing you both, Melissa and Kim, to this desire at this point in your life? For me, it's been a way to connect to my mother's culture and homeland, which I feel separate from, and to understand that grief.

KIM: I found myself really wanting to be friends with my mother and be a form of support or a place of nurturing for my mother, because that's what I do for a lot of my friendships. I began teaching a weekly elders dance class that centered around joy, creativity, and belonging—this was my baby step towards safely getting closer to reimagining the potential friendship future I will have with my mum.

MELISSA: *Perhaps we're all in different versions of departures from our families of origin and then trying to figure out if/how to return. I see the way relationships can be marked by severing (moving away, misunderstanding, inability to hold space for one another, emotional volatility, layers of trauma, teenage angst, not knowing how to talk about mixedness, and so on). Somehow I'm finding myself at a place*

where I want to warmly hold what had been severed, or be curious about reframing it with my mom. Also, to be very candid, the first idea for the film and collaboration began in early COVID moments... I really couldn't fathom losing my mom. Her health situation pointed

to the likely possibility of serious complications; I wanted to know more; I didn't want her to die. Sorry if that's dramatic. But I was learning more than I'd ever heard about Joy's struggle to have me at 42. Reckoning with how close I was to not existing, how fragile Joy's health felt, how present my own questions about having a child werelare... These enormous life/death cycle questions about mortality! The closest thing I felt I could reach for was to make something. Transforming the fear into movement, visual images, and storytelling was comforting. It brewed the tea leaves into something we could sip on, together. And I don't think that journey has ended!

KIM: [TO MELISSA:] It's taken you 31 years. You know what I mean? It takes I think 31 years to then be like, mum, I want to, let's try again. Yeah, let's try it. Now that I have context and the ability to speak this and have other people or places to work through this, I am ready now to have this part of our relationship exist... You're synthesizing your relationship through a show with many different experiences together, but you're not telling us that the relationship is a fixed image. It changes a bunch of times.

JOY: *Well, I have to thank you, Melissa, giving me the opportunity to do this. When I was in school, the professor said, 'Why do you study this voice? What are you going to do? Why do you want music major?' I said, 'I don't want to do anything. I just want to learn to sing.' [The professor said], 'That's very hard to get a job.' I said, 'That's fine. Why do I need a nine to five job? No, not for me.'*

MELISSA: *I'm genuinely grateful to Joy for her unwavering trust in expression with this project and throughout my life. I have absolutely inherited it in my own worldview and life path, thanks to her.*

Eric [Garcia] and I were also thinking about what the goal of 花和霧 flowers and fog is: why is it existing, what's the goal for the audience? For Joy and I, I think it's a playful expression or self-portrait, a strange and fantastical experience of parent and child, and an experience where there's space to interact with and receive these different dimensions of us—but also not omitting the complexity, rupture or challenges. For me, working with Joy often feels like looking into a strangelspecial mirror—seeing the parts of me that are similar, different, changing between us; and I truly hope that's a gift we can offer to audiences who come to witness us.

花和霧 flowers and fog premieres May 17-26 at the Gateway Theater in San Francisco. Info and tickets at melissalewis.art

KAT GOROSPE COLE creates subtlety and spectacle through film, performance and drag. They revel in queer frivolity and immersive theater with Detour, which they've co-directed with Eric Garcia for 15 years. katcole.works

KIM IP choreographs, directs, produces, and dramaturgically supports the creation of dance works, drag performances, and video. She is 1/2 of ABG (Asian Babe Gang) and loves poetry as much as she loves to be entertained. krimmip.com

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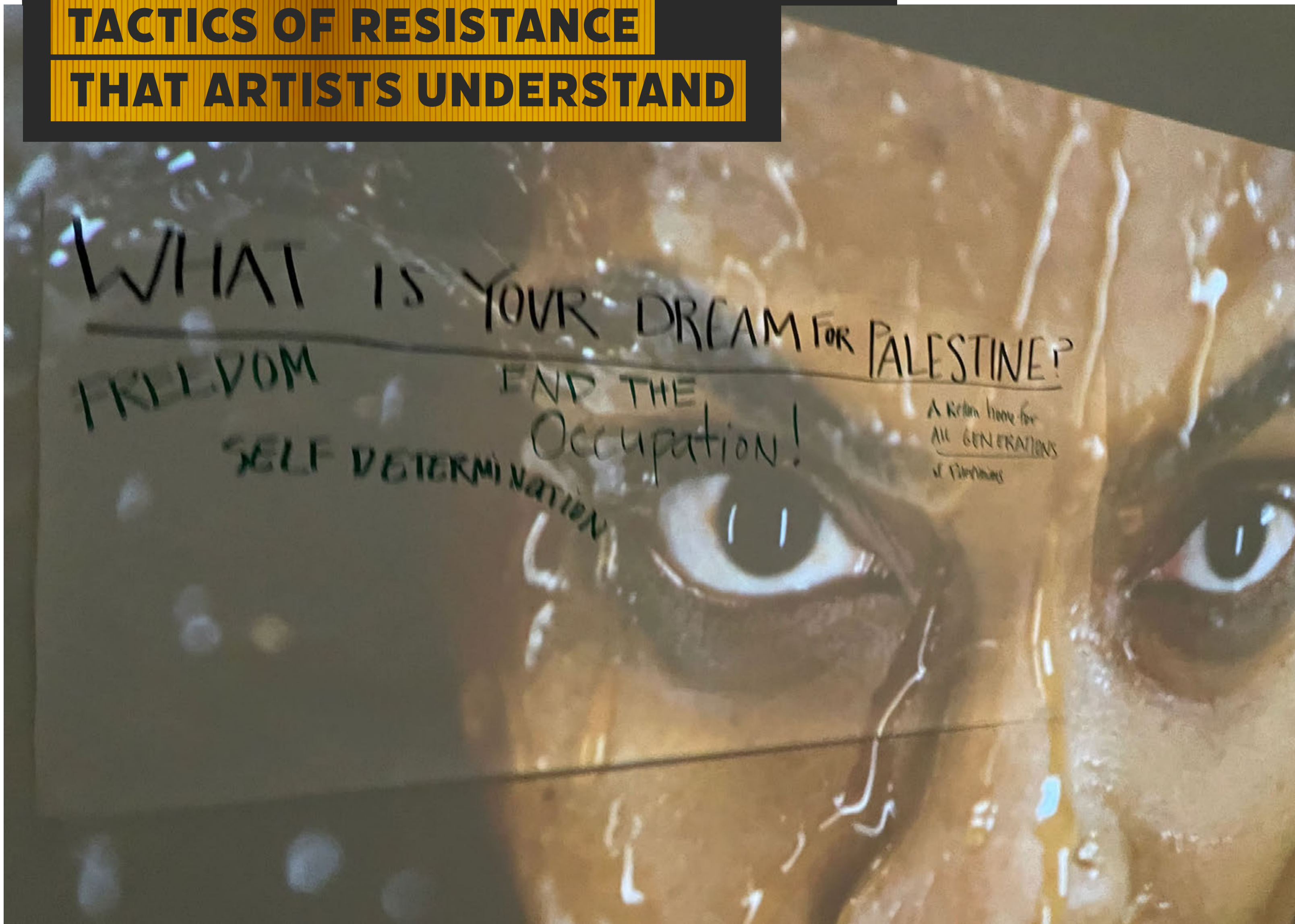
DANCERS FOR A FREE PALESTINE: TACTICS OF RESISTANCE THAT ARTISTS UNDERSTAND

BY LIZ DURAN BOUBION

As the horrors of the ongoing U.S. funded Israeli genocide in Palestine pour into our social media feeds from Gaza over the last six months, it has become more clear to me how FLACC's seemingly small, yet, public "platform" has more influence and power on a political and cultural stage than I realized. Not because we have a million followers, but because you don't have to be that big in order for the algorithms to stifle you on Facebook and Instagram. The recent congressional efforts to ban TikTok, the Twitter files report by Matt Taibbi last year, the removals and demonetizing of people-funded YouTube accounts, the ongoing silencing and firing of scholars and journalists across the country is evidence that our knowledge challenges the political narrative of which they are no longer in control. Our government and its donors are worried about dissenting voices of artists, educators and regular people exercising our 1st Amendment rights to freedom of speech—which includes sharing the raw footage of the bloody crimes against humanity in Gaza.

FLACC CENSORED BY META

Festival of Latin American Contemporary Choreographers (FLACC) had under 2,000 followers on Instagram when the Meta Corporation permanently deleted the @flaccdanza Instagram page and by extension disabled access to all three of my Facebook pages connected to my name. It happened on my birthday, October 19, days after I attended a pro-Palestine march in San Francisco which I posted



ART INSTALLATION BY COURTNEY DESHREE MORRIS



PHOTO BY SUNKISSED PRODUCTIONS

DESIGN BY MARIVEL MENDOZA

about on my personal IG account on October 14, 2023. It also happened when I was getting the most social media traffic during the 10th Anniversary celebrations of FLACC when we were purchasing a bunch of ads, boosting posts and following a lot of new accounts, including Palestinian accounts, to get the word out about our Latinx dance festival while simultaneously staying engaged and in solidarity with the people suffering in Palestine.

Between October and November 2023, [Human Rights Watch](#) documented over 1,050 takedowns and other suppression of content on Instagram and Facebook that had been posted by Palestinians and their supporters. After giving FLACC's dance festival ads three totally different warnings for violating "community guidelines," we concluded that Meta's [politically manipulated algorithms](#) had targeted us. Note to all: Make sure you have back up admins on Facebook! I still have a personal IG and we did make a new [@flaccdanza](#) account, but only FLACC's Marketing manager, Marivel Mendoza, has access to FLACC on Facebook as an administrator. We both also had our WhatsApp accounts suspended on the same day during our festival in late October, but gained them back several months later, without an explanation from Meta.

To continue leveraging our public platform, one of FLACC's solidarity efforts as a Latinx and Indigenous arts organization has included sending monthly newsletters to our subscribers promoting the [Palestinian Campaign for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel \(PACBI\)](#). The campaign, created in 2004, was inspired by tactics for successfully ending the [South African apartheid regime](#) through the power of boycott, divestment and sanction (BDS) efforts. Similarly, the liberation of Palestine will require the rest of the world to stop supporting any entity (including art and entertainment)

that is funded by, aligned with or supportive of Israel's terrorism. The boycott is aimed against the state of Israel, not against individual Israeli artists, or against Jewish artists, but against any artist or academic who supports the apartheid state of Israel and its imperialist policies against Palestine.

SOLIDARITY

I wanted to write this article for *In Dance* to encourage more dance readers to use their own platforms to take a stand and to highlight a few local dance artists in the SF Bay Area who are tirelessly working against oppression by using their personal and professional resources in solidarity with Palestine. I gathered statements and material from local dancers Leila Mire, Cookie Harrist, Tessa Nebrida, José Navarrete and Leyya Tawil. They are among hundreds of artists in the Bay Area who are uncompromising towards Israel's displacing, starving and bombing over half the Gazan population for the last six months with U.S. weaponry. Our efforts, and yours, ultimately gain strength when we are principled and united for a cause against the illegal occupation of Palestine which forces every U.S. taxpayer into sharing responsibility for this genocide in Gaza.

To build a coalition implies that we are all connected to the suffering in Palestine—as we are all connected to the western capitalist agendas in Cuba, Chile, Venezuela, Haiti, Syria, Yemen, Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia and many other countries both historically and currently. Solidarity can range from simple

awareness-building by raising the algorithms through reposting, liking or following Palestinian journalism, to signing petitions and calling elected officials, encouraging faith leaders to get involved, donating relief funds for Gazans, creating public art interventions, engaging in direct action protests, risking arrest and much more.

In early December 2023, I attended a teach-in at Bandaloop studios in Oakland by Lebanese-American researcher, dancer, scholar, writer and activist, [Leila Mire](#). Leila is a UC Berkeley PhD Performance Studies candidate who has been speaking out about how Israel and the U.S. use dance as a form of "soft power" in an attempt to normalize the Israeli occupation of Palestine and to art-wash the cultural image of Israel. In an article she wrote for [thINKing-DANCE](#) in 2021, Leila writes: "As artists, our priority should be shifting narratives to resist oppressive regimes. Art is incomplete when the voices and embodied knowledge of indigenous voices are silenced. The world is listening to Palestinians, and it is time the dance community does the same." If arts organizations and funders are aligned with indigenous rights movements and decolonization efforts, this principle should extend to Palestine.



THE SOFT POWER TACTICS OF "NORMALIZATION" IN THE PALESTINIAN CONTEXT IS PARTICULARLY RELEVANT TO ARTISTS, ACADEMICS AND CULTURAL WORKERS AS IT REFERS TO ANY ACTIVITY THAT CREATES THE IMPRESSION OF FALSE EQUIVALENCY THAT PALESTINIANS, THE OPPRESSED, AND ISRAEL, THE OPPRESSOR, ARE BOTH EQUALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE "CONFLICT"

NORMALIZATION

In a world where the corporate media headlines continue to mislabel the current onslaught a “war” as if there are two equal sides responsible for the indiscriminate carpet bombings, imprisonments and starvation of Gazans, it is important that we understand the colonial settler interest of the west and the [history](#) of the asymmetric power dynamic via the state of Israel and the people of Palestine. With the two pro-Israel talking points on repeat: “Israel has a right to defend itself” and “ Hamas is a terrorist organization” it is also important as artists that we don’t engage in activities of normalization that emphasize “co-existence” rather than “co-resistance,” or worse, conflate more dangerous messaging that being against this genocide is equal to being antisemitic. Whether there is a two state or a one state solution, Palestinians of all faiths must have the right to self determination and sovereignty over their land and lives. I recommend watching the documentary [“Israelism”](#) to get a clear perspective on the colonial indoctrination of a nationalist Jewish identity.

The soft power tactics of [“Normalization”](#) in the Palestinian context is particularly relevant to artists, academics and cultural workers as it refers to any activity that creates the impression of false equivalency that Palestinians, the oppressed, and Israel, the oppressor, are both equally responsible for “the conflict.” As defined by the PACBI website, an example of a boycottable normalization project is “a joint event that is designed explicitly to

bring together Palestinians/Arabs and Israelis so they can present their respective narratives or perspectives, or to work toward reconciliation without addressing the root causes of injustice. However, *a joint project is not boycottable if: (a) the Israeli party in the project recognizes the comprehensive Palestinian rights under international law (corresponding to the [3 rights in the BDS call](#)); and (b) the project/activity is one of ‘co-resistance’ to oppression rather than ‘co-existence’ under oppression.”*

The co-resistance teach-in at Bandaloop was organized by dancer, ally and activist Cookie Harrist, who started the “Dance Action Group” to mobilize dancers from all backgrounds, and strengthen our community’s presence at protests and direct actions. The group currently has about 50 Bay Area dancers directly involved on signal and is open to vetted activists interested in staying informed and taking direct action for Palestine now and for other causes in the future.

“The Dance Action Group serves to inform dancers of upcoming actions (via signal and in person) so we can use a buddy system for safety, deepen our relationships to each other as we take action together, and strengthen our organizing capacity as a community.”

While artists making work addressing the genocide of Palestinians is of course an important tactic in resistance efforts, I am personally investing in the tactic of taking existing community networks and repurposing them to increase the organizing capacity of a broader collective.

But I do believe if we decide art-making is our primary tactic, we must

take our work out of the theater and into the streets, to the doorsteps of complicit representatives, lobbyists, and weapons manufacturers that live right here in the Bay Area.”

— COOKIE HARRIST

BAY AREA NOW 9 ARTISTS AT YBCA

On February 15, I was invited by dancer Tessa Nebrida to join about 50 other activists and co-resistant organizations to help the Bay Area Now 9 artists at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts intervene on their own artwork in their renamed exhibit [“Love Letters for Gaza”](#) after being censored by the YBCA program, “Love Letters for SoMa.” We assisted 8 of the artists in altering their work with pro-Palestinian symbolism and messaging as an interventionist response targeting staff, funders and board members of YBCA. Following the protest, YBCA chose to further silence the artists by closing the exhibit for four weeks. The action precipitated a public hearing called by Supervisor Hillary Ronan of District 9 who strongly supported the BAN 9 artists, all of whom are people of color. A petition created by 15 YBCA employees rallied for the BAN 9 exhibit to reopen and was finally successful after four weeks of pressure from over 500 artists and community members. I asked Tessa, a Filipina dance artist who engages in decolonial art practices and has supported the Palestinian solidarity struggle for years, to lend her thoughts about the role of the artist during this time.

“I’m reminded of something Chicago-based filmmaker Merawi Gerima said: ‘In the face of genocide, when civilians are being massacred by the most powerful white supremacists on the planet, the role of the artist is like everybody else. The role is to get involved because genocide is literally a global priority, and it requires the full attention of all of humanity using all of its abilities to the maximum including art.’ It’s such a critical time of collectivizing our efforts and also doing the necessary inner work as individuals to examine the parts of ourselves with the most proximity to power. The fact that many Bay Area dance institutions, organizations, companies and artists continue to remain silent and disengaged speaks volumes to the ways in which our art form is

still rooted and dependent on Zionist funding in order to survive.”

— TESSA NEBRIDA

In solidarity with the BAN 9 artists who now call themselves Bay Area Artists Against Genocide ([B.A.A.A.G.](#)), the artists and curators of the [Fresh Festival](#) also took collective action and canceled their events at YBCA, rather than finding another location to perform. After they canceled, I reached out to José Navarrete (aka José Ome Mazatl) Mexican-American FLACC contributor, co-director of [NAKA Dance Theater](#) and co-curator of the Fresh Festival. In his letter to the artists and staff at YBCA he stated:

“An artist’s responsibility is to reflect on the political and social conditions in which we live, and it is our responsibility as human beings to take action when we see innocent people being exterminated by colonialism, western imperialism and white supremacy. YBCA claims to be ‘a catalyst of creative exploration, expression and innovation that empowers artists, inspires community and drives lasting social change,’ but unfortunately, YBCA’s actions are in direct contradiction to these values.”

— JOSÉ OME MAZATL

José not only wrote a letter of solidarity but he also asked Arnoldo Garcia to curate [RAZA CON GAZA](#) at the [Eastside Arts Alliance](#) in Oakland. The event included Latinx poets, musicians and dancers who came together for two days of art-in-solidarity, including: AntiFaSon, Camellia Boutros, Diana Gameros, Leticia García, Lubna Morrar, Madeleine

Zayas, Mabel Valdevizio, Cristina Lopez Suarez, Agustina Amiconi and more.

PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE

Finally, I reached out to Leyya Tawil, a Syrian, Palestinian, American who is an artist, a curator, and a cultural activist working in sound and dance. Leyya has been steeped in the San Francisco and Detroit dance and music scenes since 1997 while touring her work in the U.S., Europe, Russia and the Arab world. Her futurist aesthetic holds a profound sense of resilience in the unimaginable dystopia of our present world. Check out Leyya’s public art intervention four years ago, [Turku Future Folk Dance](#). Leyya is the founding director of [Arab.AMP](#), a platform for futurist live art and ideas from the SWANA diaspora and their allied communities. Her curatorial practices can be seen at Southern Exposure (SF), Arab American National Museum (Dearborn, MI), and she is also the co-founder of [TAC Temescal Art Center](#) (Oakland).

LEYYA TAWIL: *“There is an ethnic cleansing over 100 years in rollout. Solidarity actions and interventions are a crucial part of strengthening our global majority. I am grateful and emboldened by the [“Dancers for Palestine”](#) and related coalitions - they have mobilized throughout the US in order to call artistic, cultural, and academic institutions to account for their complicity - and to turn towards justice, and make PACBI and BDS commitments a loud and real priority. In this, we are together.”*

LIZ DURAN BOUBION is a second generation Chicana and queer interdisciplinary dance artist, educator and presenter bridging several communities through the coalescence of somatics, social justice, performance and contemporary dance practice. She is the founding Artistic Director of the Festival of Latin American Contemporary Choreographers (FLACC) and Piñata Dance Collective based in the San Francisco Bay Area since 2000. IG: [@pinatadances](#) and [@flaccdanza](#)



PHOTO: NEBRIDA TESSA

MY FATHER'S SWIMMING POOL

BY JO KREITER



AT 96, MY FATHER SWIMS 4 TIMES A WEEK. He doesn't just walk through the pool, feet on the ground, like the other elders. He gives his full weight to the water. Moves like a slow fish, breast stroking and head under. Before swimming there was tennis, almost daily, till he was in his 80s and he could no longer see the ball.

People describe swimming and tennis as lifelong sports. I think of contact improvisation this way as well. Maybe not so much the sports part, as CI lives in my body as an artistic practice. But its physicality will, I hope, ease me down the elders' road in my next few decades.

It's been 38 years of practice for me, with significant comings and goings from the form, but also consistent and delightful returns. The covid pandemic took us all out for a while of course. The current, post-pandemic reboot has brought new thoughts to my practice, for how contact improv matters.

CI matters as a carnival ride, inlaid into deep human connection. CI matters because of the warrior efforts that have been brought to the form by people like Ronja Ver, Jun Akiyama, Mayfield Brooks and Kathleen

Rea, to transform contact culture into 21st century equity. CI matters because of the commitments by dancers who show up to the jams week after week after week to practice joy, connection, and to deepen their skills. CI matters because of the organizers who labor for no compensation, to create community cohesion. CI matters as a strange and weird phenomenon, when measured against mainstream social norms for touch. But it's worth the trouble, as its oddities enliven, and expand how we can activate touch.

Recently, in my day job as a teaching artist, I worked with Joanna Haigood/ZACCHO on a project educating Black youth in San Francisco's Bayview about the origins of hip-hop in the Bronx. Students learned how housing scarcity, the building of a road, widespread landlord arson and

infrastructure disinvestments led Black teenagers to scratching, b-boying and b-girling, graffiti on the trains, and political messaging inside rhymes.

It's always been striking to me that the rise of hip-hop and the creation of contact improvisation happened at roughly the same time. They've both become international movement languages that live on nearly every continent. The two forms could not be more different in origin, if one looks through the prisms of privilege, race, and resource access. 50 years in, hip-hop has become commercialized. CI has not. Hip-hop has permeated into almost every culture. CI has not. But I appreciate that their origin stories sit side by side in the American history of the 1970s.

Last week I was at a contact Jam at the Finnish Hall in Berkeley, deeply

immersed in a dimensional dance with one of my favorite dance partners. In our travels around the dance floor, we ended up next to a young dancer grooving out with popping and house moves busting from his body with exquisite clarity. This was a full circle moment for me. That a hip-hop mover chose to bring his practice inside Finn Hall's CI jam space, proximate to touch, integrating with touch. I'm excited to imagine where this can go, if and as dancers blend their body knowledge into potential new form.

2024 has brought me back to teaching CI more consistently. My son is

People describe swimming and tennis as lifelong sports. I think of contact improvisation this way as well.

19 now and has left for college, giving me access to more open space and time. As I return to the work of teaching CI, I am thinking about new ways to integrate the technical demands of the form, the socio-emotional aspects of working body to body, and the puzzles the form gives us.

I've been privileged to study Steve Paxton's puzzles, rolling on down the dance floor in spirals and 360-degree circling. Steve passed on recently, and left his legacy in bodies around the globe. When I think about his puzzles now, I'm contemplating the constant fitting together of weight, consent, motion and the unknown. I'm thinking about how to travel in the dance; how to breathe; how to acknowledge harm done in the practice of the form around gender and power; how to advance communication while still leading with unpredictable pathways, and with mystery.

I'm thinking about how to value both care and risk. How to invite racial difference into the room without tokenizing it. How to embed gender expansion into how we see and celebrate another body.

In my return to teaching, I am gravitating toward simplicity. Last week

I led a room full of dancers standing back-to-back, connecting top of skull down to the coccyx. Then sliding the point of contact, one dancer slipping one center of gravity under another, so someone could leave the ground and enter exquisite suspension. There was a radical moment of commitment and elation in the room, in real time, as feet dangled. It was an essential moment that carried us forward and led to inversions and falling in the next part of class.

It's an intriguing time to be a dancer. It's a compelling time to gather with other dancers. It's my honor to teach what I can. It's the swimming pool and the tennis court, as my body ages and still has wisdom in it, and unshuffled will.

JO KREITER is a San Francisco based choreographer and site artist with a background in political science. She engages physical innovation and the political conflicts we live within. Her tools include community collaboration, a masterful use of place, an intersectional feminist lens and a body-based push against the constraints of gravity. She has spent 28 years building coalitions with women and GNC folk marginalized by race, class, gender, and workplace inequities. Her work democratizes public space. Jo has been practicing contact improvisation since 1986.

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