

# MASS MoCA

## ***Choreopolitics*: Brendan Fernandes and nibia pastrana santiago Opens at MASS MoCA on April 9**

### **Multidisciplinary artists explore dance's potential to resist, heal, and connect**

**North Adams, MA, February 22, 2022** – MASS MoCA presents *Choreopolitics*: Brendan Fernandes and nibia pastrana santiago, on view beginning April 9. The exhibition juxtaposes the work of the two multidisciplinary artists, who use dance to resist, heal, and connect. *Choreopolitics* is curated by McClain Groff, a graduate curatorial fellow in the Williams College Graduate Program in the History of Art.

Both Fernandes and pastrana santiago previously trained in ballet, and through their work, invert the style's demands for spectacle, grace, and the illusion of ease. Fernandes reshapes and expands ballet through classical technique and experimental movement that challenge social and political spaces of hegemony. pastrana santiago harnesses laziness and exhaustion as a means of critiquing labor practices and training structures in ballet and the dance field more broadly. Together, their works exemplify what performance studies scholar André Lepecki calls "choreopolitics"—or planned and persistent movements of freedom—by confronting dance's histories of colonialism and marginalization, while also pointing to the form's potential for resistance.

Fernandes' work addresses issues of race, queer culture, and other forms of collective movement and protest through the examining and reimagining of ballet. His *As One* series (2017), which features photographs of classically posed ballet dancers alongside African masks, focuses on the disciplining, display, and mastery of bodies within the imperial museum space, which often viewed African dance culture as exotic and primitive in comparison. His video, *Free Fall: For Camera* (2019), which was inspired by the shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando in 2016, features a group of dancers continually falling and rising, en masse. Fernandes emphasizes the dancers' repeated return to verticality, after falling, as an expression of collective solidarity and resistance.

pastrana santiago uses moments of stillness and slowness in her work as not only a critique of capitalism and privilege, but as a challenge to the viewer's expectation of dance as entertainment or spectacle. Born and raised in Caguas, Puerto Rico, her work often visualizes and articulates the Puerto Rican experience, one marred by debt, dispossession, and displacement. In the video *NO MORE EFFORTS* (2020), pastrana santiago herself cycles between the extremes of exhaustive and mundane movement, set in locales that highlight Puerto Rico's long-standing economic struggles and the class-based dichotomy between leisure and laziness. Her text *the lazy dancer* (2013) recalls American dancer and choreographer Yvonne Rainer's *No Manifesto* of 1965 and declares the artist's resistance to traditional forms of dance, outlining the tenets of a radical new approach.

*Programming at MASS MoCA is made possible in part by the Barr Foundation, Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, and Mass Cultural Council.*

### **About Brendan Fernandes**

Brendan Fernandes (b. 1979, Nairobi, Kenya) is a graduate of the Whitney Independent Study Program (2007) and a recipient of a Robert Rauschenberg Fellowship (2014). In 2010, he was shortlisted for the Sobey Art Award, and is the recipient of a prestigious 2017 Canada Council New Chapters grant. Brendan is also the recipient of the Artadia Award (2019), a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship (2020) and a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation grant (2019). His projects have shown at the 2019 Whitney Biennial (New York); the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York); the Museum of Modern Art (New York); The Getty Museum (Los Angeles); the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa); and MAC (Montreal), among others. He is currently Assistant Professor at Northwestern University.

### **About nibia pastrana santiago**

nibia pastrana santiago (b. 1987, Caguas, Puerto Rico) holds an MFA in Dance with a Minor in Latina/o Studies from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and a Postmasters in Performance and Scenography Studies from a.pass, Belgium. Currently, nibia is co-director at Beta-Local, a non-profit organization dedicated to support artists in Puerto Rico. During the last five years, she served as the Dance Program Academic Coordinator at Universidad del Sagrado Corazón, the first of its kind in Puerto Rico. Her works have been shown at de Appel, Amsterdam, the 2019 Whitney Biennial and hidrante, San Juan. She is a 2020-2022 fellow of the Puerto Rican Arts Initiative, supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Northwestern University and University of Texas, Austin. Her first publication *Habitar lo imposible: Danza y Experimentación en Puerto Rico*, co-edited with dance scholar Susan Homar, will be published in 2022.

### **About the Clark Art Institute-Williams College Graduate Program in the History of Art**

The Williams Graduate Program in the History of Art at the Clark Art Institute sponsors annual exhibitions by graduate students. Through this program, candidates for a Master's in Art History undertake all aspects of exhibition development, including scholarly research and writing, installation design, art handling and preparation, and exhibition promotion. MASS MoCA provides space, technical support, and curatorial oversight along the way. With a deep, hands-on understanding of all aspects of exhibition production, participants have gone on to become leading curators and arts administrators.

### **About MASS MoCA**

MASS MoCA is one of the world's liveliest centers for making and enjoying today's most evocative art. With vast galleries and a stunning collection of indoor and outdoor performing arts venues, MASS MoCA is able to embrace all forms of art: music, sculpture, dance, film, painting, photography, theater, and new, boundary-crossing works of art that defy easy classification. Much of the work we show in our light-filled spaces, on our technically sophisticated stages, and within our lovely network of late 19th-century courtyards is made here during extended fabrication and rehearsal residencies that bring hundreds of the world's most brilliant and innovative artists to North Adams all year round. For more information about MASS MoCA, visit [www.massmoca.org](http://www.massmoca.org).

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