OGEMDI UDE / AKUNNA MATERIAL

HTTPS://WWW.OGEMDIUDE.COM/
OGEMDIUDE@GMAIL.COM

DANCE + THEATER + INTERDISCIPLINARY COMPANY

ABOUT THE COMPANY

OGEMDI UDE / AKUNNA MATERIAL IS THE PROJECT BASED COMPANY OF CHOREOGRAPHER AND DIRECTOR OGEMDI UDE, PRODUCING ORIGINAL DANCE, THEATER, AND INSTALLATION WORKS IN WHICH BLACK DIASPORIC CULTURAL FORMS MEET AN EXPERIMENTAL CONTEMPORARY VERNACULAR. THEIR PRACTICE ENGAGES THE FLESHINESS OF BLACK FEMME AND QUEER BODIES IN MOTION AS SITES FOR ENLIVENING LOST PEOPLES AND HISTORIES. AT THE ROOT IS UNDERSTANDING THE NECESSITY OF JOURNEYING THROUGH GRIEF, AND HOW—IN THE MIDST OF IT—WE ATTEMPT TO MAKE MEANING FROM MEMORY AND SHOW EVIDENCE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LOST SUBJECT. ENGAGING A ROSTER OF WORLD RENOWNED PERFORMERS, DESIGNERS, AND VISUAL ARTISTS, OGEMDI UDE / AKUNNA MATERIAL EMPOWERS AUDIENCES AND COLLABORATORS TO RECKON WITH THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURES OF BLACK FOLKS IN COLLECTIVE MOTION.

ABOUT OGEMDI

OGEMDI UDE IS A DANCE AND INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTIST BASED IN BROOKLYN. HER PERFORMANCE WORK FOCUSES ON BLACK FEMME LEGACIES AND FUTURES, GRIEF, AND MEMORY. HER WORK HAS BEEN PRESENTED AT KAMPNAGEL, THE KITCHEN, GIBNEY, HARLEM STAGE, DANSPACE PROJECT, ABRONS ARTS CENTER, BRIC, ISSUE PROJECT ROOM, RECESS ART, AND FOR BAM'S DANCEAFRICA FESTIVAL. AS AN EDUCATOR, SHE HAS TAUGHT AT THE NEW SCHOOL, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE, AND UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS. SHE IS A 2026 FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS GRANTS TO ARTISTS RECIPIENT, 2025 NYSCA/NYFA ARTIST FELLOW IN CHOREOGRAPHY, 2025 PRINCESS GRACE HONORARIA IN CHOREOGRAPHY, 2025-2028 JEROME HILL ARTIST FELLOW, 2024 NEFA NATIONAL DANCE PROJECT PRODUCTION GRANT RECIPIENT, AND A LIVE FEED RESIDENCY ARTIST AT NEW YORK LIVE ARTS. IN JANUARY 2022 SHE APPEARED ON THE COVER OF DANCE MAGAZINE FOR THEIR ANNUAL “25 TO WATCH” ISSUE. SHE HAS PUBLISHED A BOOK WATCH ME IN A COLLECTION EDITED BY THOMAS F. DEFRANTZ AND ANNIE-B PARSON: DANCE HISTORY(S): IMAGINATION AS A FORM OF STUDY PUBLISHED BY DANCING FOXES PRESS AND WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY PRESS.

OGEMDI UDE / AKUNNA MATERIAL PERFORMANCE WORKS

MAJOR (2025)
PREMIERED AT KAMPNAGEL'S INTERNATIONAL SUMMER FESTIVAL (HAMBURG, GERMANY) IN AUGUST 2025. US PREMIERE AT NEW YORK LIVE ARTS (NEW YORK, NY) IN JANUARY 2026 FOLLOWED BY A NATIONAL TOUR. *MAJOR* IS A DANCE THEATER AND ARCHIVAL PROJECT EXPLORING THE HISTORY, PHYSICALITY, AND INTERIORITY OF BLACK FEMME MAJORETTE DANCE.

WHAT WANTING WANTED WITH WHAT WANTING WAS (2024)
PREMIERED AT THE KITCHEN (NEW YORK, NY) IN SEPTEMBER 2024. A SOLO ABOUT LONGING AND LOSING.

CAMEO (2023)
PREMIERED AT GIBNEY (NEW YORK, NY) IN APRIL 2023. A DUET ABOUT PRESERVING AND LOSING MEMORIES THAT FEATURES A MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATION, A LIVE SOUNDSCAPE, AND A COMPLEX IMPROVISED SCORE. STRUCTURED AS AN ELABORATE MEMORY CARD GAME, THIS WORK CHALLENGES PERFORMERS TO ENGAGE IN AN ESSENTIAL BLACK CULTURAL PRACTICE - SHARING THE STORIES THAT MAKE US WHO WE ARE, EVEN WHEN WE HAVE FORGOTTEN PIECES ALONG THE WAY.

I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU MEAN (2022)
PREMIERED AT DANSPACE PROJECT (NEW YORK, NY) IN MAY 2022. A PART OF PLATFORM 2022 FESTIVAL: THE DREAM OF THE AUDIENCE (PART II) CURATED BY JUDY HUSSIE-TAYLOR. THIS PIECE PLAYFULLY EXPLORES THE ROLES OF STORYTELLING AND LYING IN RECOVERING CULTURAL MEMORY, ESTABLISHING KINSHIP AMONGST BLACK FOLKS, AND PROCESSING PERSONAL GRIEF.

DIG/HEAR/SING/-- (2022)
PREMIERED AT ABRONS ARTS CENTER (NEW YORK, NY) IN APRIL 2022. CREATOR, PERFORMER. A TRILOGY OF EVENING LENGTH SOLOS INTEGRATING MOVEMENT, VOICE, AND INSTALLATION, TO DERIVE COPING RITUALS IN THE AFTERMATH OF LOSS.

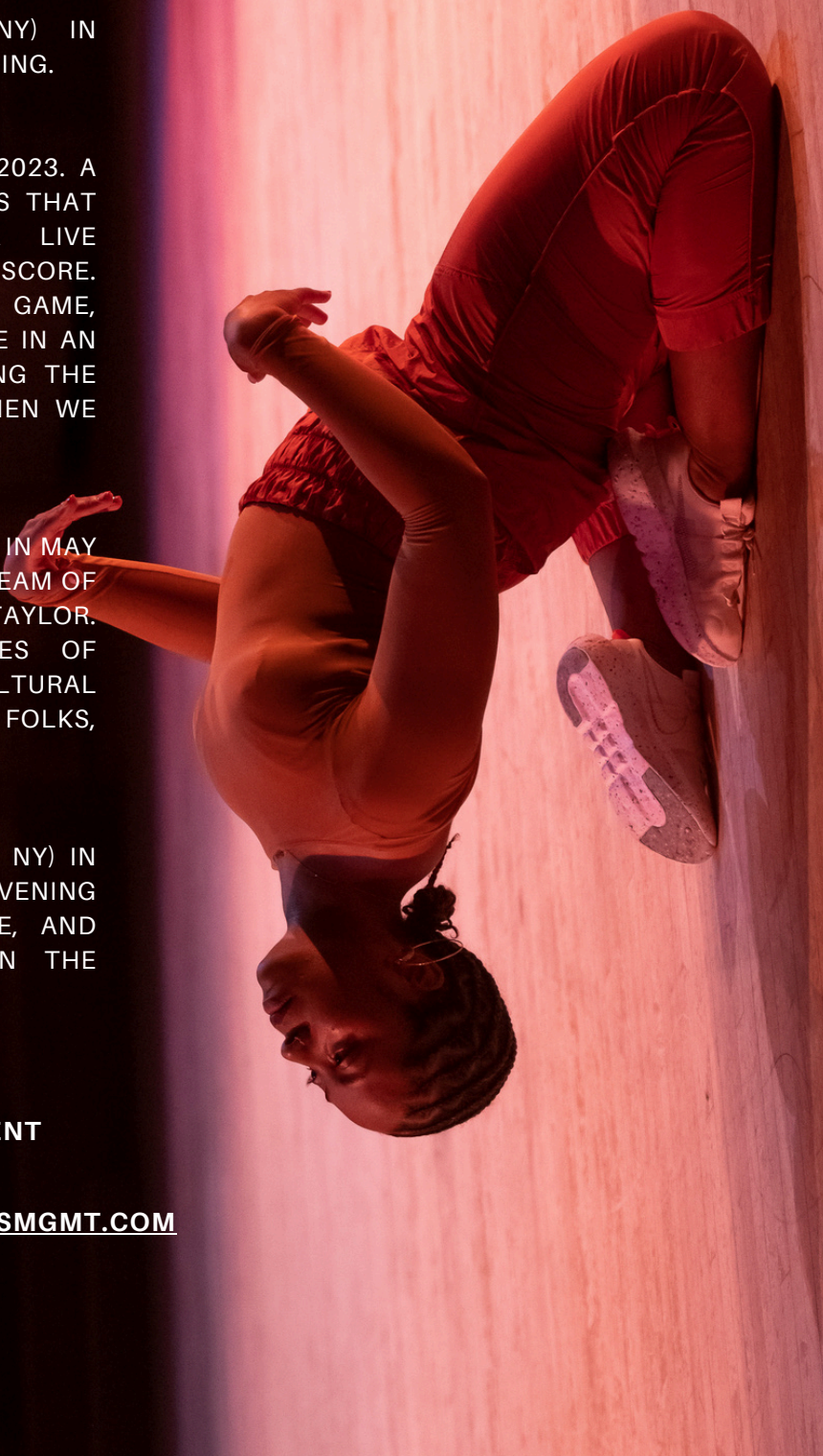
FULL RESUME

FOR BOOKING CONTACT LOTUS ARTS MANAGEMENT

LOTUSARTSMGMT.COM/OGEMDI-UDE

SOPHIE MYRTIL-MCCOURTY / SOPHIE@LOTUSARTSMGMT.COM

LOTUS ARTS MANAGEMENT



MAJOR (2025)

MAJOR IS A DANCE THEATER PROJECT EXPLORING THE PHYSICALITY, HISTORY, SOCIOPOLITICS, AND INTERIORITY OF MAJORETTE DANCE. IN MAJOR, SIX BLACK FEMMES EMBRACE MAJORETTE FORM - A FUNDAMENTAL RELIC OF BLACK GIRLHOOD - TO UNDERSTAND THEIR ADULT PHYSICALITY AND EMOTIONALITY. EXPERIMENTS IN IMPROVISED AND VERBATIM LANGUAGE INTERTWINE WITH A MUSIC SCORE THAT INTEGRATES SOUTHERN RAP, HORNS, DRUMLINES, AND MELODIC R&B AND SOUL BY LAMBKIN. THE CHORD ARCHIVE IS SHOWCASED ALONGSIDE PERFORMANCES, A PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL DOCUMENTATION OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND PERSONAL HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS FROM FORMER MAJORETTE DANCERS. A FIERCE INVESTIGATION OF PHYSICAL MEMORY, SEXUALITY, SENSUALITY, AND COMMUNITY, MAJOR IS A NUANCED LOVE LETTER TO THE FOLKS WHO TAUGHT THE TEAM HOW TO BE PROUDLY BLACK AND PROUDLY FEMME.

DOSSIER AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

MAJOR'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

IN THE WEEK LEADING UP TO PERFORMANCES, THE COMPANY MEETS WITH A MARCHING BAND AND MAJORETTE TEAM LOCAL TO THE VENUE'S CITY. A NEW ENDING FEATURING THESE GUESTS IS FORGED IN COLLABORATION WITH THESE STEWARDS OF THE FORM. THE COMPANY ALSO HOSTS A MASTERCLASS, TEAMWORK, DURING WHICH PARTICIPANTS LEARN MAJORETTE TECHNIQUE AND PERFORMANCE ARCHIVAL METHODS. FEATURED ALONGSIDE PERFORMANCES, ARCHIVIST MYSSI ROBINSON COMPOSED AN INSTALLATION, THE CHORD ARCHIVE, A COLLECTION OF DRAWINGS, POETRY, AND SHORT FILMS DOCUMENTING MAJOR'S DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION PROCESS. THIS INSTALLATION INCLUDES INTERVIEWS WITH FORMER MAJORETTES ENGAGED WITH AT TOURING SITES. FOLLOWING THE TOUR, THE CHORD ARCHIVE WILL BE AVAILABLE DIGITALLY, AND SHARED WITH DANCE ORGANIZATIONS THROUGHOUT THE US.

MAJOR TOURING SITES

PREVIOUS TOURING SITES

KAMPNAGEL INTERNATIONAL SUMMER FESTIVAL

AUGUST 7-10, 2025
HAMBURG, GERMANY
WORLD PREMIERE

ON THE BOARDS

JANUARY 29-31, 2026
SEATTLE, WA

LIVE ARTERY / NEW YORK LIVE ARTS

JANUARY 7-10, 2026
NEW YORK, NY
US PREMIERE

USC VISION AND VOICES

FEBRUARY 4, 2026
LOS ANGELES, CA

OZ ARTS

FEBRUARY 12-14, 2026
NASHVILLE, TN

UPCOMING TOURING SITES

DANSPACE PROJECT - PROSPECT PARK

JUNE 19 2026
BROOKLYN, NY

JACOB'S PILLOW

JULY 24, 2026
BECKET, MA

LINCOLN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

JUNE 24 - 27 2026
NEW YORK, NY

DUKE PRESENTS

OCTOBER 2026
DURHAM, NC

PRESS FOR *MAJOR*

TRAILER

SELECTED PRESS FOR *MAJOR*

Ogemdi Ude on Exploring Majorette Dance With MAJOR

Ogemdi Ude is known for interdisciplinary works that excavate grief, tunneling through despair in search of joy.

Dance Magazine / Jan 8

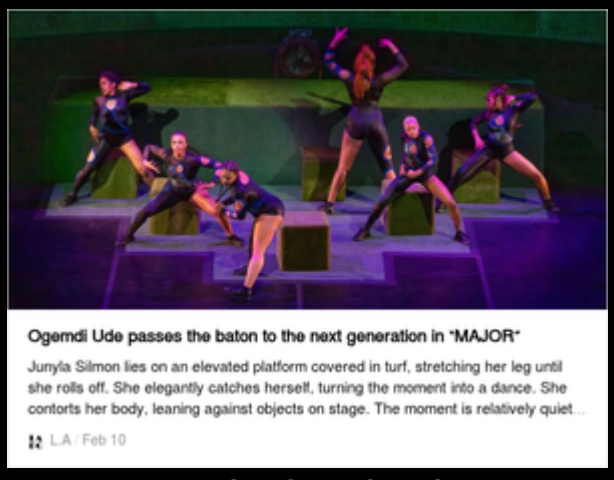
DANCE MAGAZINE

Dance Major

On the rear wall of New York Live Arts' black box theater, two grids of a dozen headlamps each resemble the glaring light towers of a sports arena. Ogemdi Ude's "Major" is inspired by majorette teams of historically Black colleges and universitie...

Fjord Review

FJORD REVIEW



Ogemdi Ude passes the baton to the next generation in "MAJOR"

Junyla Silmon lies on an elevated platform covered in turf, stretching her leg until she rolls off. She elegantly catches herself, turning the moment into a dance. She contorts her body, leaning against objects on stage. The moment is relatively quiet...

L.A. / Feb 10

LA DANCE CHRONICLE

Review: MAJOR at OZ Arts Nashville

What did our critic think of MAJOR at OZ Arts Nashville?

BroadwayWorld.com / Feb 14

BROADWAY WORLD

CAMEO IS A DUET ON PRESERVING AND LOSING MEMORIES THAT FEATURES A MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATION, A LIVE SOUNDSCAPE, AND A COMPLEX IMPROVISED SCORE. STRUCTURED AS AN ELABORATE MEMORY CARD GAME, PERFORMERS ARE CHALLENGED TO ENGAGE IN AN ESSENTIAL BLACK CULTURAL PRACTICE – SHARING THE STORIES THAT MAKE US WHO WE ARE, EVEN WHEN WE HAVE FORGOTTEN PIECES ALONG THE WAY. CAMEO MARKED OGEMDI'S FIRST EXPERIENCE AS LEAD PROJECTION/SCENIC DESIGNER.

PREMIERED AT GIBNEY (NEW YORK, NY).

CAMEO (2023)

I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU MEAN (2022)

I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU MEAN PLAYFULLY EXPLORES THE ROLES OF STORYTELLING AND LYING IN RECOVERING CULTURAL MEMORY, ESTABLISHING KINSHIP AMONGST BLACK FOLKS, AND PROCESSING PERSONAL GRIEF. THE WORK ADDRESSES THE FISSURES IN PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY THAT A TRAUMATIC EVENT CREATES AND HOW WHEN WE DON'T REMEMBER, WE FABRICATE TO MAKE SENSE OUT OF WHAT WE DO. I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU MEAN IS A SPACE FOR COLLABORATORS AND AUDIENCES TO EXPERIENCE THE HEALING AND PROTECTIVE POWER OF STORYTELLING AND THE WAYS LYING CAN OFTEN HELP US MAKE SENSE OF AN ESSENTIAL TRUTH.
PREMIERED AT DANSPACE PROJECT (NEW YORK, NY).

SELECTED PRESS FOR *I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU MEAN*

"I know exactly what you mean" A Community of the Curious with Ogemdi Ude by maura nguyễn donohue

maura nguyễn donohue is the Writer-in-Residence for Platform 2021: The Dream of the Audience and Platform 2022: The Dream of the Audience (Part II). Her reflections on the Platform 2022 performances and events are posted...

Danspace Project · Dec 15, 2022

DANSPACE PROJECT

Making Dance Out of Survival Skills and Reckoning With Grief (Published 2022)

By Gia Kourlas April 27, 2022

Live audiences return for a new platform at Danspace Project featuring Mayfield Brooks, Rashaun Mitchell + Silas Riener, Jele Paloumpis and Ogemdi Ude.

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES

DIG/HEAR/SING (2022)

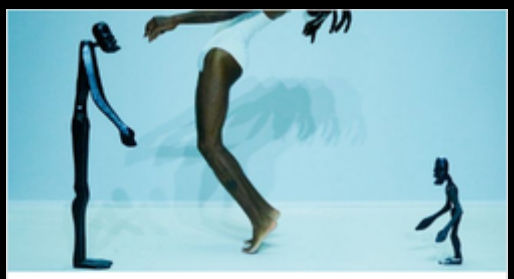
DIG/HEAR/SING CONNECTS A TRILOGY OF EVENING LENGTH SOLOS INTEGRATING MOVEMENT, VOICE, AND INSTALLATION TO DERIVE COPING RITUALS IN THE AFTERMATH OF LOSS. THESE WORKS WERE BUILT BY GRIEVING THE LOSS OF THREE LOVED ONES, AND PRESERVING THE LANGUAGE, MOVEMENTS, AND CREATIVE ACTIONS THAT EMERGED FROM THAT GRIEF. THIS TRILOGY IS AN EFFORT TO OPEN PORTALS TO THE DEAD, TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEM, RETELL THEIR STORIES, AND PRESERVE THEIR MEMORY. CAN WE CONNECT TO PEOPLE WHO AREN'T HERE ANYMORE BY MAKING SOMETHING OUT OF ALL THE BITS THAT ARE?

PREMIERED AT ABRONS ARTS CENTER (NEW YORK, NY).

FELLOWSHIPS + AWARDS - OGEMDI UDE

FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS GRANTS TO ARTISTS, 2026
PRINCESS GRACE HONORARIA IN CHOREOGRAPHY, 2025
NYSCA/NYFA ARTIST FELLOW IN CHOREOGRAPHY, 2025
JEROME HILL ARTIST FELLOWSHIP, 2025-2027
LESLIE LOHMAN MUSEUM OF ART ARTIST FELLOWSHIP, 2025
DISABILITY. DANCE. ARTISTRY. DANCE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM, 2020, 2023
DANCEWEB SCHOLARSHIP, 2021
GIBNEY'S MOVING TOWARD JUSTICE FELLOWSHIP, 2021
NYU CENTER FOR BALLET AND THE ARTS RESIDENT FELLOWSHIP, 2020

SELECTED PRESS FOR OGEMDI UDE / AKUNNA MATERIAL



Mackenzy Bergile Ogemdi Ude Sommerfestival

Nachdenken über den Kolonialismus und überbordende Frauenpower in der Hamburger Kampnagelfabrik.

tanznetz.de / Aug 9, 2025

TANZNETZ

Sommerfestival auf Kampnagel: Tanz als Spiegel der Identität

Laut und überbordend aber auch leise und still werden die Stucke beim diesjahrigen Sommerfestival auf Kampnagel.

ndr.de / Aug 7, 2025

NDR

Black Femmes Dances

Der Südstaaten-Tanzstil „Majorette" wurde von Schwarzen Frauen ins Leben gerufen. Die US-Choreografin Ogemdi Ude will – wie auch bereits Beyoncé – mit ihrer Performance Tribut zollen.

Missy Magazine / Jul 7, 2025

MISSY MAGAZINE

IMPRESSIONS: Harlem Stage Presents "E-Moves 2023," Curated by Stefanie Batten Bland

"African Americans, hybrid in composition already, are constantly navigating making methods that are expressed through past and present geographical constructs," says Bland. "The more I can support makers through theatrical movement...

dance-enthusiast.com

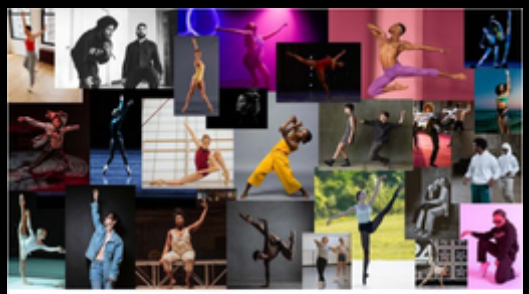
DANCE ENTHUSIAST

IMPRESSIONS: Rena Anakwe, ms. z tye and Ogemdi Ude at The Kitchen's Dance and Process

"These artists challenge notions of performance through a participatory ethos that invites and implicates the spectator [...] Together, Anakwe, tye, and Ude offer an evening of generosity, abandon, and deep care — I'd go back for more." — Sarah...

dance-enthusiast.com

DANCE ENTHUSIAST



Introducing Our 2022 "25 to Watch"

The dancers, choreographers and companies on our annual "25 to Watch" list offer several answers to the question of where our field is headed.

Dance Magazine / Feb 8, 2022

DANCE MAGAZINE

FOR FULL PRESS LIST VISIT OGEMDIUDE.COM/ABOUT

dancemagazine.com

JANUARY 2022 $8.99

DANCE® magazine

move and be moved

Ogemdi Ude

GET PLAYFUL
THE VALUE OF FINDING FUN IN THE STUDIO

MUST THE SHOW GO ON?
QUESTIONING THE CULTURE OF PUSHING THROUGH INJURY

TEAM SPIRIT
RETAIN YOUR ROSTER DURING "THE GREAT RESIGNATION"

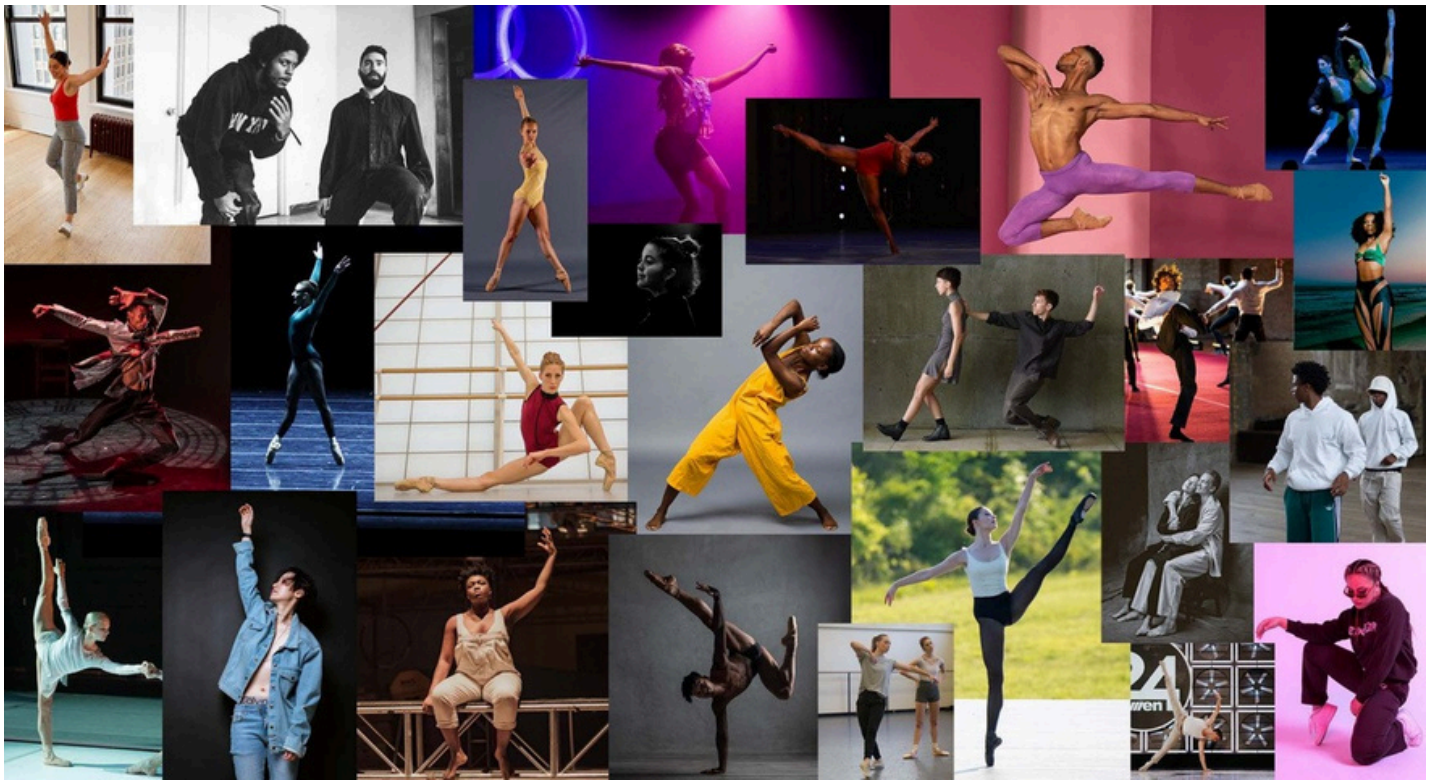
25 TO WATCH
The Artists Poised For A Breakthrough

FIND YOUR MANTRA
THE POWER OF STRATEGIC SELF-TALK

DEALING WITH REJECTION
WHEN AUDITIONS DON'T GO THE WAY YOU WANT

MAKE IT JUICY
5 TIPS FOR DEEPER PLIÉS

SUMMER STUDY GUIDE



25 TO WATCH

Introducing Our 2022 "25 to Watch"

Dance Magazine December 20, 2021

What's next? Our annual list of dancers, choreographers and companies on the verge of breaking through offers several answers to the question of where our field is headed. We're betting we'll be seeing–and hearing–more from these 25 artists not just this year, but for many more to come.

Ogemdi Ude

If there's a throughline to the genre-bending work of choreographer Ogemdi Ude, it's how Black folks' experiences–especially their grief–lives in their bodies.

OGEMDI UDE. PHOTO BY JAYME THORNTON

It shows up in Living Relics, a collaboration with visual artist Sydney Mieko King that asks participants to locate grief in their own bodies and then physicalize it by making plaster molds of those places, and in her tour-de-force solo Nothing Like That Is Ever Going to Happen to Me Again, where she searches for memories of those she's lost, desperately piecing together bits of movement and text.

But there's also joy to be found in Ude's work: Though she claims she isn't tech-savvy, she's been playfully exploring video and multimedia since long before virtual work became the norm, and she often sources memories from her Atlanta upbringing, where her first exposure to dance was majorettes. Ude works as a doula, as well, which she sees as deeply interconnected to her dance practice–especially in the form of AfroPeach, a collaboration with fellow dancer/doula Rochelle Jamila Wilbun that offers postpartum dance workshops.

Through a pandemic defined by collective grief, Ude has been prolific–and she's gotten her due notice. In addition to continuing to perform with choreographers like iele paloumpis and Marion Spencer, her 2022 and 2023 are stacked with commissions and residencies, including at Abrons Arts Center, Gibney, Danspace Project, The Watermill Center and BRIC, plus more to be announced.

–Lauren Wingenroth

“I know exactly what you mean” A Community of the Curious with Ogemdi Ude by maura nguyễn donohue

December 15,2022

Ogemdi Ude, Symara Johnson, and Selah V. Hampton in Ogemdi Ude's "I know exactly what you mean," May 2022, Part of Platform 2022: The Dream of the Audience (Part II). Photo: Ian Douglas.

maura nguyễn donohue is the Writer-in-Residence for Platform 2021: The Dream of the Audience and Platform 2022: The Dream of the Audience (Part II). Her reflections on the Platform 2022 performances and events are posted, accumulatively here, in Issue 14 of the Danspace Project Online Journal. Her reflections on Platform 2021 can be found in the Online Journal Issue 12 and in the Platform 2021-2022 catalogue.

In this essay donohue brings bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Janet Jackson, among others, into conversation with the biomythographic fabrication and fabulation presented in Ogemdi Ude’s Platform 2022 premiere work, I know exactly what you mean.

This essay is offered in both audio and text. Read or listen below.

In her essay "In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life" from *Art on My Mind Visual Politics*, bell hooks declares the photographic snapshot collection displays in Black households as essential and revolutionary tools in the construction of a Black identity. "The history of black liberation movements in the United States could be characterized as a struggle over images as much as it has also been a struggle for rights, for equal access." A recent Juneteenth photo essay and accompanying writing by Tiya Miles and Michelle May-Curry "Holding Tight to Family in What's Left Behind" considers the place images have as heirlooms for those who were violently dislocated from ancestry and historically barred from the accumulation of capital among people worshiping the accumulation of capital. Miles and May-Curry state "weaving stories of kinship and care across the generations. In the American lands of the African diaspora, kinship has persisted and family bonds have endured – preserved by and reflected in heirlooms."

When an image becomes a precious artifact, the adage, *an image is worth a thousand words* might have the capacity to over-run the griot, the storyteller, the orator and the orature. However, in *I know exactly what you mean,* Ogemdi Ude devises a recovery of cultural memory, with collaborating performers, Selah V. Hampton and Symara Johnson, through a mash-up of true and tall-tales, painting imagistic personal histories with an array of careful and chaotic snapshots of word and play. If one needed to teach a lesson on bringing Audre Lorde's literary device of biomythography into choreographic being, this would be high on my bibliography. During a preparatory conversation for the second Conversations Without Walls: *The Dream of the Audience* for Platform 2022, fellow discussant, devynn emory said "there is grief in the gap." And while Ogemdi brings in personal grief, she also exploits the possibility of gap spaces as realms of great opportunity. As she states in the introduction to a conversation with Selah, that appears in the Platform Catalogue, *I know exactly what you mean* is about "All the ways we navigate gaps in knowledge in order to create some semblance of a cohesive narrative of where we are and who we belong to."

The 2016 Danspace Project Platform *Lost and Found: Dance, New York, HIV/AIDS, Then and Now* included an evening curated by Eva Yaa Asantewaa called *the skeleton architecture, or the future of our worlds*. In notes for that Bessie-award-winning performance and historic event, both in a revisionist sense and in sweeping scope, she quoted the vital directive from seer and speculative fiction writer, Octavia Butler that "you got to make your own worlds, you got to write yourself in." And here, once again, a Platform became a platform, a space upon which and into which worlds could be built and find themselves in a shared system orbiting a common dream. And here, once again, the celebration of a fantastic and fantastical black femme community went from the realm of speculative fiction into this known realm at East 10th and 2nd. And here, once again, a live performance became a community of the curious with the space and time for belonging.

Throughout Ogemdi's work, the play of words, the way of words, and the sway of words piles up and spills out. A huge industrial printer sits at the edge of the stage and spews spools of paper, printing, in real-time, the various stories the dancers tell. During a latter part of the work, the dancers kneel and crawl reading from it. Why wouldn't any of the stories these performers keep telling, de-composing and re-composing in tandem, in concert, and in delicious cacophony, not be actual events? But also, what's so cool about being real when the fabrication is so much more fluidly fantastic?

Ogemdi, Selah and Symara begin the piece by sitting casually on the steps under the arch of the altar, in the sanctuary of St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, while audience members continue talking with one another. As the work progresses the dancers speak of painfully awkward or scintillating moments, from childhood or adolescence, that never reach a final resolve. Before one can finish a story, another begins. These stories are told in succession, in simultaneous overlap, with the dancers sometimes crawling across the floor with microphones, the words projected onto the walls behind them or printed onto rolls of unfurling paper. Written into our imaginations are the fantastic possibilities of multi-layered lives and a way in which Ogemdi can, as she says, collect the experiences of others as a balm for Fear-of-Missing-Out.[1]

How do we meet the chronic ache of existing inside and alongside times of massive loss and grief? So often at Platform events, the way a work speaks to the larger world and acts as a beacon, a time capsule, and a harbinger all at once, sits deep in my center of gravity. Throughout Ude's I know exactly what you mean, I feel myself bouncing along to a juicy playlist, delighting in the well-crafted shifts in and out of shared time and movement and an easy sense of familiar femme feelings and dance-related near disasters. But, I also felt the effort to accumulate collective narratives against the larger tides of erasure. Here is the kind of adrienne maree brown Pleasure Activism that makes new worlds in the wild imaginations and reclamations of belonging and freedom when we "invite people to the pleasures we have constructed from dreams and thin air." Or, as the famous scribe Janet Jackson sings out over the speakers:

Baby you can't hold me down
Baby you can't hold me down
After all the lovin' we've been through
And after all you've put me through
Yeah yeah, hey yeah (oh)
Love me, hey yeah, love me yeah

It's the pleasure principle

---

[1] "I collect, I borrow, I place myself where I wasn't in the first place – a putty like a glue – I take on what they say I'm allowed to… I add a little more." — Ogemdi Ude, I know exactly what you mean

Maura Nguyen Donohue is the Director of the MFA in Dance at Hunter College. She was Platform 2021: The Dream of the Audience Writer-in-Residence and her last pre-pandemic, in-person days of 2020 included sharing breath and food as a member of Danspace Project's Kin and Care Research Group. Her "Whitelashing: White Fragility in the Ivory Tower" was part of Gibney Dance's inaugural volume of the journal Imagining, edited by Eva Yaa Asantewaa. She wrote the Education Track Essay/Exercises in Imagination and served as a Keynote Panelist and Community Facilitator for DanceNYC 2021 Symposium. She has published academically in the collection Contemporary Directions in Asian American Dance and for the Women and Performance Journal. She has also written for Culturebot, American Theater Journal, Dance Magazine, the Dance Insider, MR's Performance Journal and was guest editor for Critical Correspondence's "University Project." With La MaMa's Great Jones Repertory Company since 1997, she has toured the US, Europe and Asia. From 1995-2005 Maura Nguyen Donohue/inmixedcompany was commissioned and produced regularly in NYC and toured extensively across North America, Europe and Asia. As artistic advisor for Dance Theater Workshop's Mekong Project, Donohue curated and facilitated international exchange and residency programs for Asian diaspora artists in the US and Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. She continues to create and perform works in her "Tides Project" series, using reclaimed plastics and oceanic detritus to examine the legacies of bodies ecological and diasporic. She thanks the ancestors and the two incredible offspring for keeping the path clearly lit.

PRINCETON
ALUMNI WEEKLY

TIGER OF THE WEEK

Ogemdi Ude ’16 Turns Grief Into Joy Through Dance

Afteradance careerof fitsandstarts,Ude’s choreography is taking off

Ogemdi Ude ’16*Sophie Schwartz*

By Anna Mazarakis ’16
Published March 22, 2022
2 min read

Ogemdi Ude ’16 often joked with a friend that she would one day make *Dance Magazine’s* famed list of young dancers poised for a breakthrough, but she says she never actually expected it. Then she got a call from the editor telling Ude they wanted her on the cover. In January — with one leg raised and her head cocked, a smile on her face — she stood out behind the headline: “25 To Watch.”

“It feels really cool that other people are interested in the way that I work,” Ude says, “and I feel really grateful that I kept doing this thing that I felt like sometimes people were telling me not to do.”

Ude’s dance career has had many fits and starts. She took her first ballet class at age 4 at her mother’s urging, but didn’t like it and stopped. Later she changed her mind and joined her middle school’s dance team, which included majorette dancing. When she then initially failed to make the dance team in high school, Ude took dance classes until she made that team.

When Ude arrived at Princeton, she auditioned for all of the big dance companies and got callbacks a few times, but she never made the final cut. Instead, she devoted herself to the dance and theater departments.

“I kind of just tried to just maximize all that I could do with the department,” Ude says. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise since department work helped Ude find the kind of dancing she actually liked, rather than the kinds she thought she was supposed to like. “The department can be quite open-ended, and so I just took a little bit more time to explore.”

A pivotal moment for Ude happened in the fall of her senior year, when she went to see a solo performance by the acclaimed dancer Bill T. Jones. She remembers sitting in the lobby afterward, almost mourning the end of her dance career, thinking that she wasn’t “allowed” to have a career as a dancer due to her previous audition rejections. Her professor, Stuart Singer, pushed back on that idea and encouraged Ude to find her own path.

That path has led to *Dance Magazine* calling Ude’s work “prolific” and “genre-bending.” Reflecting on the honor, she says: “I think we have moments in our life where we feel really affirmed that all of the decisions that we made that might feel very worrisome at the time have led us to something that feels really good and that feels really right.”

Ude’s choreography deals with death and grief, a theme that’s carried over from her senior thesis on death in Black performance art. She says that an essential part of her work is telling the stories of people she has lost and showing how they

are a part of her. She pushes past the idea that grief is just simply sad.

“I want there to be parts that are engaging people from a range of emotions,” Ude says. “Also, just talking about the people we lost, that we loved, is really joyful. Knowing and loving this person wasn’t sad, it was incredibly joyful and I want to share that.”

Dance Magazine noted that the next two years for Ude will include commissions and residencies at Abrons Arts Center, Gibney, Danspace Project, The Watermill Center, and BRIC, among others. Ude’s full schedule can be found on her website, www.ogemdiude.com.

Published in the March 2022 Issue

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

Ogemdi Ude with Lauren Wingenroth

The Brooklyn-based choreographer is having a moment, mounting five new works at New York City venues this spring.

Ogemdi Ude in *Nothing Like That Is Ever Going to Happen to Me Again*, 2019. Photo: Sydney Mieko King

When I ask Brooklyn-based choreographer and performer Ogemdi Ude how she's managing to prepare for four performances at once, she corrects me: It's actually five.

This month, Ude will perform a trilogy of solos—*Dig*, *Hear*, and *Sing*—at Abrons Arts Center, her first major New York City commission. She won't have to wait long for her second major New York City commission: Her *I know exactly what you mean* will premiere at Danspace Project a month and a half later, as part of their 2022 Platform: *The Dream of the Audience (Part II)*. And, from March 21st to 25th, she'll present a work-in-process of *Living Relics*, a collaboration with photographer Sydney Mieko King, at BRIC.

The logistics of such a line-up would present a challenge to any artist, Ude included. But otherwise, this is just how she likes it. “My brain is really fried if I’m not switching things up,” says Ude, who also works as an educator and a birth and postpartum doula. I spoke to Ude about her many upcoming performances, “feeling big and working small,” and how she uses language to expand the body.

Lauren Wingenroth (Rail): How has it been working on all these shows at once?

Ogemdi Ude: My brain is always going off. I'm an Aries. And I have a lot of starts. And I have a lot of middles—it's hard for me to finish. So when I was looking at the year ahead, knowing I was gonna have all these different shows, that was something that I really prized. I do this thing where I’m making up something, and I don’t necessarily know what I made it up for. I’ll just sit and be like, “Okay, attach it to something.” And then I take a Post-it note and write it down, and then post it on a project board—I have five big white sheets of paper in my living room right now where I’m mapping out every piece. And sometimes there’s crossover.

I just try to organize my thoughts as best I can, and sometimes create arbitrary rules like: This is a piece where I do more talking. So if I have this general idea about talking, maybe I just put it in here. Or, for one piece, I know I’m working with a group of dancers. If I have this movement that feels super technical, then I'm going to bring it to that work. I’ve been doing a lot with language recently, recording myself on stream-of-consciousness rants to finish the scripts for the three solos. And I’ll listen to it back and be like, “Oh, I thought this was for one piece, but I’m actually gonna move it to this other one.” And so just trying to take a second to put something out, step back, look at it, question whether or not it's meant for the space that it's in, and then move it into the scores that feel more aligned with it.

Rail: For the Abrons commission, what made you want to do three separate solos?

Ude: I get really bored really easily. It's not helpful, because I'll start with an idea, and it's hard for me to stick with it. In my day-to-day practice of going from teaching to dancing or going from rehearsal to doula work, I find a way to pour bits of myself into different cups. It was also just a particular challenge I wanted to set on myself. It felt like these ideas are coming up in what feels like incredibly different, but still correlated, containers. So, can I give kindness and grace to each of those containers?

Ogemdi Ude in *Nothing Like That Is Ever Going to Happen to Me Again*, 2019. Photo: Sydney Mieko King

Rail: Do you consider the three works a trilogy?

Ude: They're a trilogy, because if I'm working on them at the same time, they have to be. And even though the Danspace group work is very different from the Abrons trilogy, when I've written about it, it's with similar language because what's in me is always going to be in me, and it's going to come out in a couple of

different permutations. And so I definitely do see them as a trilogy—a trilogy I would never have the energy to perform in one evening. And it feels like it's pushing me to try not to put everything into one work. I think opportunity in New York feels so slim, because it is slim, that we think, "These are all of my ideas and I need to put them out." If I have a space, I need to put every single idea I have into that space. I have a huge tendency to want to do that, but this format helps me split those ideas up. And to be a bit more kind about it, because then I'm like, "if I didn't get to it here, I'll get to it in another one." It helps me to feel big, but work small. And that's something I grapple with a lot, because I have intense feelings, but I like accessible work. I like work that you can step into without needing to pull apart every single thread.

Rail: What are some of the threads in the three solos? Ude: They are dealing with: How can I find coping processes and rituals for experiences of grief? And how can I grapple with the memories, the pieces of people that I've lost in all the bits that I still have? And what is this continued relationship that I have to grief in my day-to-day: in the ways that I present myself as a person, in the ways that I interact with celebration, that I engage with milestones, and that I try to move forward?

The name of this project comes from an essay by Suzan-Lori Parks, called "Possession." In it, she says she's calling on Black theater artists, and pushing the pursuit of history making, as in like, create your own stories. She writes, "Locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it down." That line always really held on with me, and the waves of me trying to dig and listen and then mark down have asked me to grab on to different materials, and have asked me to look at the same thing, perhaps through a couple of different lenses. And so with the first piece, I'm working

with paper and crayons, and just really feeling like, “How do I mark the space that I'm moving through?” The second piece, I'm working with projection and live feed. And then in the third piece, I'm working with myself, I would say, and working with sound in different ways. A huge connection point is always going to be language—my theater background informs my use of language and my relationship to devised language as well. Language is always the thread—I move with language, I dance with language; it’s essential to find an extension of my body, because I feel very limited in my body, for reasons I can explain but also can’t explain. So language has always been supportive in that, and I can dance with the language—the words can be broken up and parsed apart, and the way that I move my mouth can transform how it sounds, the tone, the vibration, the texture of it. Language is such a beautiful shapeshifter, and the way that it comes about in my work in these three solos is with attention to those shifts of shape.

Ogemdi Ude in *Nothing Like That Is Ever Going to Happen to Me Again*, 2019. Photo: Sydney Mieko King

Rail: Tell me about the Danspace work.

Ude: It's based on a poem by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, where she mentions “the dream of the audience.” Part of me has really thought about the way I’m presenting myself through the tales I tell about other people. So I say, this piece is about lying. And yes, it’s about lying to some extent, but in a lot of other ways, it’s about the stories that I pull together to have a more coherent understanding of who I am. And I also ask, continuing the thread from the Abrons pieces: What are the ways that I try to bring a person back through telling the stories that might not be completely true, out of a desire to make the person and their impact and my experience of them true? Who is this invisible audience that I feel I have to prove my grief to, or I have to prove my relationship to or my cultural bond to or my lineage to? And how do I put together something that I then share with that invisible audience that makes me feel a little bit more grounded in my truth?

Rail: What does that movement look like?

Ude: Oh, it’s fun. I come from a background of majorette dancing—that was the first dancing I ever really experienced. That thrusting, and super presentational and just grooving coordination is exciting, and something I’m continuing to work with. And I really love to work with the mouth, like what weird faces and shapes we can make with it. We’re moving together a lot, and just finding a groove and a bounce with each other. We’re using a lot of trap music and music out of Atlanta from the early and mid-2000s in a way that we feel really connected to. And we’re just finding these ways to root into this belonging to each other, like, I’m going to turn on the song, and I’m going to just vibe with my friends. The movement is a mixture of that desire to just vibe with your friends, and to be the nastiest version of yourself that you try to perform in the mirror but that you don’t necessarily know yet how to put in front of other people.

Lauren Wingenroth is a New York City-based writer. Her work has appeared in *Dance Magazine*, *Pointe Magazine*, *Dance Teacher*, *Playbill*, *ESPN*, and other publications.

Ogemdi Ude's MAJOR. Photo by Fabian Hammerl, courtesy New York Live Arts.

NEWS

Ogemdi Ude on Exploring Majorette Dance With MAJOR

Margaret Fuhrer

January 6, 2026

Ogemdi Ude is known for interdisciplinary works that excavate grief, tunneling through despair in search of joy. But her first dance love was the spectacular showmanship of majorette teams. Growing up in Atlanta, she admired the majorettes at local football games. In middle school, she immersed herself in majorette dance, which was created by Black women and femmes at historically Black colleges and universities.

Ude's MAJOR revisits that early passion. A collaboration with six dancers and the musical artist Lambkin, the work—making its North American debut at New York Live Arts January 7–10 before touring—considers majorette dance from both a sociopolitical and a personal perspective.

OGEMDI UDE. PHOTO BY CHIDOZIE EKWENSI, COURTESY NEW YORK LIVE ARTS.

How did your childhood experiences inspire MAJOR?

Majorette dance taught me the importance of community building. It asks you to be disciplined, not just for yourself but for the team–for the cause of unison, which is so compelling. It was the first thing that I felt like "This is my realm."
I was always in awe of the practice, even when I was doing it. There was fear, too, rooted in that reverence, and a deep desire for belonging. Majorette dance can be very exclusionary, and if you don't make the team, you can't really learn it rigorously.
I fell away from majorette dance when I went to boarding school and college. But a few years ago I started to come back to it. A lot of my work deals with nostalgia, and here was this both new and old challenge.

Your rediscovery coincided with a moment when majorette dance was getting more mainstream attention.

Yes, and I see the desire and the beauty of everyone wanting to engage with it. But I also understand that people who went to historically Black colleges want to hold on to things that feel specific and rare to them. A huge part of this work is diving into "What does it mean to perform Black cultural artifacts outside of their original context?"
The people involved in MAJOR, we always say, "We're a team, but we're not a majorette team." A majorette team is really specific to HBCU campuses. We're working with majorette form and ideas, but we don't get to be a majorette team.

What research did you do?

A lot of writing and reflection. Watching a lot of videos. All of these majorette teams have their own languages–the Prancing J-Settes of Jackson State give a very different energy than the Southern University Dancing Dolls. I wanted to start to learn each language, and I was looking for the physical throughlines you see in all of these styles.
I worked with an archivist, Myssi Robinson, to figure out which elders, which stewards of the form to talk to. And we would go to homecomings and football games to make sure we were seeing things in person.

OGEMDI UDE'S MAJOR. PHOTO BY FABIAN HAMMERL, COURTESY NEW YORK LIVE ARTS.

What did the in-studio process look like?

The cast is a mix of people who are from the South—who had experience with majorette dance either when they were younger or in college—and then people who have just revered it from afar. All of them have contemporary dance backgrounds. So it was about seeing how majorette dance reorders your body, and what your physical instincts are when you're trying to create something new using that form.

MAJOR premiered in Germany last summer. Has it evolved since then?

We were embraced by the German audience, but they don't really have an understanding of what majorette dance is or the communities it comes from, so the show felt like an introduction. In the U.S., people have more context, so we can get into the nitty-gritty. Instead of just showing you what majorette dance is, I'm going to show you what it does to me.

You describe the piece as both an investigation and a love letter. How do those two modes coexist inside it?

The investigation is about: Can you return to an older version of your body? How do you have to rearrange your current self to do something that felt good when you were younger? And can it do the same thing for you now, or new things?

The love letter is to the Black femmes that I get to work with, and to the femmes who started this form—people we hold up as giants. Making MAJOR helped me pay attention, deeply and with a caring eye, to what it means to forge Black femme community.

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

PREVIOUS
Dance | In Conversation
ALEXAWESTwithDylan Sherman

NEXT
Dance
Alethea Pace's Counter-archival Choreographies

DANCE | NOVEMBER 2024

When the Artists Write the History Books

Twelve choreographers sharetheirversions of how, when, and why humans have danced throughout time.

By Kyle McCarthy

Photo: Jasmine Fridman.

Artists are vultures. We scavenge the past, taking what's useful, and leaving the rest. I once heard a Pulitzer-Prize winning novelist sniff and say he'd never read George Eliot: Too boring. Not in his lineage.

So what happens when practicing artists become the historians of their form? Is the resulting story full of holes, or is it more tightly woven than the canonical one? In *Dance History(s): Imagination as a Form of Study*, Thomas F. DeFrantz and Annie-B Parson ask ten of their fellow dancer-choreographers, plus themselves, to "tell dance

Dance History(s): Imagination as a Form of Study
Thomas F. DeFrantz and Annie-B Parson, Eds.
Dancing Foxes Press, Big Dance Theater, and Wesleyan

history as you know it to be," and I was curious what this artist-centered approach would yield.

University Press, 2024

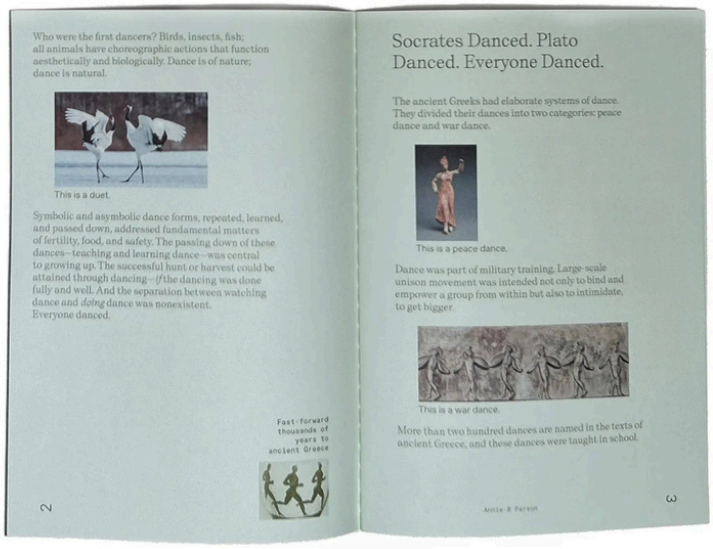
Something fun: right away this book asked me to dance.

Unfolding the gorgeous map-sized introduction, silkscreened with haunting autumn leaves of glowing auburn and orange, I found myself walking around its perimeter, squatting on the floor, gasping softly with admiration.

And like many maps, I had to flip it over to get all the information: on the far side is DeFrantz's ecstatic introduction, accompanied by Parson's whimsical tarot card-esque illustrations. As DeFrantz explains, ten of the twelve contributors are people of color, and most are non-male; this matters because conventional dance history is riddled with omissions, biased toward white men, and, like most linear narratives, guilty of pretending that A leads inexorably to B and onward to C.

This project, then, is a corrective. Even the form of the book—twelve pamphlets, individually bound—pushes back against that usual structure of historical authority. Here, there can be no open or closing chapter, no tidy chronology. The pamphlets, spread out across my study floor in their saturated hues, reminded me of zines and Marxist bromides, handed out by true believers on the street: something urgent, personal, and political.

What emerges from the collection is a sense of dance history as invocation and list, elegy and collage. Nearly everyone writes a tribute to those dancers who shaped them, telling a history that leads inevitably to themselves, which would be obnoxious if there were only one author. But with twelve contributors, the book becomes polyphonic, singing that dance history goes here, and here, and here: to the border, the ocean, the ring shout; to Michael Jordan's slam dunk, and the Lindy Hop, and big joyous parties in working-class Latinx Chicago.



Who were the first dancers? Birds, insects, fish: all animals have choreographic actions that function aesthetically and biologically. Dance is of nature; dance is natural.

This is a duet.

Symbolic and asymbolic dance forms, repeated, learned, and passed down, addressed fundamental matters of fertility, food, and safety. The passing down of these dances—teaching and learning dance—was central to growing up. The successful hunt or harvest could be attained through dancing—*if* the dancing was done fully and well. And the separation between watching dance and *doing* dance was nonexistent. Everyone danced.

Fast-forward thousands of years to ancient Greece

2

Socrates Danced. Plato Danced. Everyone Danced.

The ancient Greeks had elaborate systems of dance. They divided their dances into two categories: peace dance and war dance.

This is a peace dance.

Dance was part of military training. Large-scale unison movement was intended not only to bind and empower a group from within but also to intimidate, to get bigger.

This is a war dance.

More than two hundred dances are named in the texts of ancient Greece, and these dances were taught in school.

Annie-B Parson

3

Photo: Jack Lazar.

Bebe Miller gives us directions from her childhood subway stop to Henry Street Settlement, where her intrepid mother brought her and her siblings for art and dance classes. Eiko Otake writes direct, touching letters “to those who danced and died,” including Dore Hayer, who killed herself when a knee injury threatened her dance career, and Kazuo Ohno, a founder of Butoh. Okwui Okpokwasili pays tribute to gestation and double dutch; Mariana Valencia invokes La Lupe, her friend’s hug, and the bar Julius’, each item lovingly footnoted, as if to say that this, too, is worthy of scholarly care.

Annie-B Parson comes closest to telling the textbook history of dance, though she narrates from a wise child’s perspective: “In the beginning everyone danced,” she writes, wry and knowing as she leads us briskly through ballet, modernism, postmodernism, and into the COVID era. Her history mourns, in

part, the transition from dance as collective social practice to dance as Art, a concern that maura nguyễn donohue echoes when she writes of how dance became formalized into "us/do and them/watch;" donohue is also hilarious as she reflects on supporting her postmodern dance career by stripping in Times Square: "I'd already been naked all over downtown—why not get paid for a change, right?"

These personalized litanies, which all seem to converge on the Lower East Side in 1983, can feel insular. A relief, then, to turn to the writers who opt instead for a sociological lens. Keith Hennessy suggests that dance history is intertwined with the history of AIDS, urban real estate, and sex work. Andros Zins-Browne gives us "the dance of history" by contrasting two figures who were *moved:* Henry "Box" Brown, who famously shipped himself to freedom, and Freddie Gray, literally and deliberately driven to his death. Not for the nostalgic or sentimental, Zins-Browne wrestles with the violence in dance, and the way origin stories "can be coercive or indifferent, as well as nurturing."

Others turn to narrative, that old, trusty, wily technology: mayfield brooks tells an Edenic fable of how the human desire for competition alienated us from the natural world. I found it overly sentimental, though their outrageous claim that plants were the ones who taught us to dance delighted me. More bracing is Thomas F. DeFrantz's Afrofuturist day-in-the-life of an adjunct dance instructor in the twenty-second century. In it, TeleBrea teaches over ten thousand students the history of Black Social Dance simultaneously via neural implants that "nag" them into motion. Through TeleBrea, we learn our future history: the disasters to come and the dance forms they'll inspire, such as the "be-a-man partner dances that had developed in the megajails of the 2060s." What's heartbreaking is how plausible it all sounds.

Photo: Jack Lazar.

Javier Stell-Frésquez's interrogation of the double erasure of Indigenous dances and Two-Spiritness is printed partially in reversed lettering, so that I had to keep getting up and standing before the bathroom mirror to read it. The gimmick was both cool and annoying, a trick that turns the question of self-revelation on the reader as I watched myself read about the history of US and Canadian efforts to eradicate Native dance.

These photo-essays, fables, and fictions were all clever, but none struck me as deeply as Ogemdi Ude's joyful homage to the majorette dancers at Black Southern football games, who "enter with a strut" and embody "Black femme sensuality organized into eight counts." In a brilliant paragraph, she eviscerates the contemporary dance world for lionizing Ohad Naharin, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, and Trisha Brown for supposedly pioneering, respectively,

groove, complex counts, and "posturing in public space," when the majorettes have been employing all these techniques for far longer. Ude's essay is both celebration and corrective: why, she asks, was she asked during her dance training to forget the majorettes—this first, joyful way of moving—in favor of "Ohad, Anne, and Trisha?" Hers is history as reclamation, an affirmation of overlooked artistry.

After reading these pamphlets, I was pleasantly stirred up, buzzing with ideas, but confused, too, as if I had been in a seminar room with twelve professors shouting at once. Did I learn anything, I wondered. Was this history?

Surely it was not comfortable history, of the kind I knew best: comprehensive, linear, with artists all put in proper perspective, and the violence and racism neatly hidden. It was irritating to be discomfited, to have to get off my ass and unfold a map-sized introduction, or squint at words reflected in the bathroom mirror, to see myself blurry and faded, baffled and still, trying to understand words not necessarily printed for me. This was, perhaps, the most important lesson of all.

Kyle McCarthy is the author of the novel *Everyone Knows How Much I Love You*. Her essays have appeared in *Lux*, the *Paris Review Daily*, and elsewhere, and her second novel, *Immersions*, is forthcoming from Tin House.

fjord

DANCE MAJOR

On the rear wall of New York Live Arts' black box theater, two grids of a dozen headlamps each resemble the glaring light towers of a sports arena. Ogemdi Ude's "Major" is inspired by majorette teams of historically Black colleges and universities, and the rousing half-time dance routines backed by drum corps and marching bands that raise the pulse of the crowd at football games. By bringing this dance style onto the concert stage, Ude calls attention to something deeper than team spirit. "Major" is about the power of the Black femme body.

Performance
"Major" by Ogemdi Ude
Place
New York Live Arts, New York, NY, January 10, 2026
Words
Karen Hildebrand

"Major" by Ogemdi Ude. Photograph by Maria Baranova

The 55-minute show opens with an aspiring dancer doing warm-up stretches on a bench. We catch bits of self-talk—"I can"—and I imagine her dreamy ambitions of making the team. Her longing conjures up the arrival of a team of actual majorettes, who enter the stage via the spotlighted aisle next to my seat. In spangled blue warm-up jackets and pants with one leg cut off at the knee, I can feel the game energy they

bring, their self-assurance as they each grab a mic stand onstage and begin a rehearsal. The team captain calls out directions and demonstrates the routine: “Take hands and place on right hip. Pop elbows. Pop hip.” The sound score offers rapping with a hypnotic hip hop beat. One grinning dancer down front is doing everything except the demonstrated moves. She’s found her own groove, undulating and improvising. Soon all are conducting their own versions of the drill.

The dancers clear the stage and re-enter in full performance regalia: form-fitting black lycra, glossy lips, glowing flesh. Rehearsal is over. The horn section of a marching band replaces the hip-hop music. A whistle blows and the team of six is running in place, then marching in pattern. They form a kick line down the center. The precision moves are conducted in unison, with thrusting pelvis and swiveling hips. They kick, turn, take a deep plié in second and slap the floor. The mood is playful, teasing, flirty. One of them gives the audience a wink. At the end of the number, they take seats on pedestals with arched backs, their arms crossed, hands perched in a stylized tilt on their knees. Even at rest, they are working a pose.

“Major” by Ogemdi Ude. Photograph by Maria Baranova

When performer song aziza tucker scoots a chair into the space for a solo, the vibe shifts from football field to late night dance club. She begins to twerk, and the entire team joins in. They shake their booties in all kinds of positions—lining up backside to backside, twerking while balancing on one shoulder. Somehow, they manage to jiggle even as they sink into the splits. They shake and quake and tremble. We are in the church of twerk. And it’s glorious.

The spotlight frames tucker, whose body is now twitching all over as if shot through with electricity. When she sinks into a crouch, still quivering, I get a hit of " The Dying Swan." The music slows with a dramatic instrumental number. tucker takes a long moment to recover, then launches into a fierce spoken word solo: "I'm here to find the pose and hold it. I'm here to watch. I'm not being watched. I'm making you watch. This is rupture . . . This is a game. I didn't call the count. I'm commanding the count." She repeats the poem, raising goosebumps on my arm. I begin to understand the statement Ude is making beneath the seductive posturing. These women dance for the sole purpose to celebrate and enjoy their bodies—not to perform for the male gaze. They are reclaiming a power that has been misappropriated in our culture. "I'm not being watched. I'm making you watch."

"Major" by Ogemdi Ude. Photograph by Maria Baranova

"Major" ends with a return to the original dreamer, Junyla Silma, who is now joined by Kayla Farrish in a duet. They seem to be practicing and teaching themselves steps and stunts of the dance team they just witnessed. They vocalize the counts: dee-dah, dee-dah, dah-dah-dah. *Yes!*

A real-life drum corps from Brooklyn United, an inner-city music and arts program, makes a cameo appearance for a grand finale, with snare, symbols, bass drum, and a rousing dance team drill by the Brooklyn United Majorettes. Ude has effectively guided us back to the football field on an invigorating Saturday afternoon. The drill is uplifting, the energy euphoric, the dancers, heart-poundingly wholesome. Yet they give just enough hip swagger and chin thrust to remind us we can't look away.