

PORTFOLIO OF MAMELA NYAMZA

FROM 1984 to

DATE

**MAMELA NYAMZA:
CHOREOGRAPHER &
PERFORMER**

***BODY POLITICS: I MUST NOT
HAVE A BIG BUM...***



**BACKGROUND: INTRODUCTION TO
BALLET** 1984 to 1994

ZAMA DANCE SCHOOL TO PRETORIA TECHNIKON



- **Themes: “Republic” & “Femininities” unintentionally shaped both my personal and professional choices.**
- **Personal choice: intrigued by a dance (classical ballet) that needs to be studied.**
- **Professional choice: Ceased to be a hobby and developed into a fully-fleshed career choice against all advises.**
- **Given a full-scholarship by Mr. Grobler and Mr Raymond Ackermann to study Ballet at the then Pretoria Technikon.**
- **Experiences of discrimination because of a different shaped body; race; and indeed gender, thus inevitably influenced some of my following works: (i) Hatched; (ii) The Meal; (iii) I stand corrected; (iv) 19-Born 76-Rebels; and (v) Wena Mamela; (vi) De-Apart-Hate; (vi) The Last Attitude; and (vii) Black Privilege**

COMING OUT

HATCHED (2007)



- Recently performed this re-invented piece at the 8th Artscape Women's Humanity Arts Festival 2014 in celebration of Women's Month. Evolving choreography of this piece has to adapt to my son's age, who is a co-performer.
- It is an auto-biographic expression of personal and challenging identity matters of culture, tradition, sexuality and gender.
- The Love and Hate of Ballet is also reflected through the choice of music and choreographic vocabulary, as both classical ballet lines and African dance movement are used to tell the story.
- This love and hate is vividly expressed in the following piece called "The Meal", as it shows my own definite deconstruction of the dance.

TRANSFORMING TOOLS OF OPPRESSION

THE MEAL (2012)



- Creation of a complete new vernacular of dance to ensure creativity and innovation to the depth of dance as genre of art.

- Challenge to the conventional language of ballet, pushing both the body and body politic (audience, critics and programmers) to accept deconstruction of the dance, and not its destruction.

- The Meal is inspired by the experience as a ballet student at then called Pretoria Technikon; and relationships between generations of women.

- The piece celebrates the creative capacity that we have, aiming to always subvert and transforming the instruments of oppression and denigration into expressions of innovation and vision.

CORRECTING THE HATE

I STAND CORRECTED (2012)



- The piece is a direct artistic response to the violent epidemic of “corrective” hate rape in South Africa.

- It is a narrative of love above hate; freedom from fear; marriage over murder; resistance against rape; above all, a triumph over adversity.

- A far cry from the expected portrayal of only sadness and tears, the piece is told both in haunting and humorous or comic physical theatre.

- This is a collaborative work between two black lesbians from two different continents; a collaboration that also triumphed over misconceptions and misunderstandings.

DANCE, DOGS & DEMOCRACY

19-BORN 76-REBELS (2012)



- This piece has been an unintended complimentary work to the 20 years celebration of democracy in South Africa.
- The work is informed by the events of 1976, but breaks away from the normative presentation of the political struggle already done by other artists.
- In a space of 45 minutes, the work tells the history of South Africa, concisely.
- The choreography relies on gestures and visual double meanings to convey the power struggle between Black and White South Africans and even amongst Black South Africans (red barrets).
- The piece describes the political turmoil of 1976 with the help of two German Shepherd dogs, which were used by the Apartheid police on rioting school children in 1976.

WORK IN PROGRESS

WENA MAMELA (2017)



•This piece consolidates all the previous autobiographical works; and tables a preliminary sequel to these works: “Hatched”, “The Meal”, “Isingqala”. “Shift” and “19-Born 76-Rebels”.

•Having being subjected to be an understudy during my technikon years as a ballet student; to being an outcast from my own town, my choreographic language has become subjective and indeed topical to the current context.

•I base all my work on my life experiences as a Black child born by an alcoholic mother who became a victim of violent rape and murder; raised by a grandmother who was a domestic worker; and educated under an apartheid system.

•I believe in the power of art to change the world for the better.

THE LAST ATTITUDE (2014)

DANCING AWAY THE LIMITATIONS



- The non-dancing dancers coming together to collaborate to defy both norm and logic of classical ballet.
- The Last Attitude is an invitation to pessimists to do away with institutional prejudice in the art form.
- Black aspiring ballet dancers must belong and not just fit in to conform.
- Casting a black ballet dancer as the Principal dancer must be seen as enhancing and not altering the harmony of the piece.
- Rank and Race must be done away with in Ballet

"HATCHED 2015"

DECOLONISING BOUNDARIES OF THE ART



1. Decolonizing is also about breaking the boundaries of art
2. Just like the line between art and life should be kept as fluid as possible (Allen Kaprow), so must be the different genres of art
3. Performance and Visual Arts have always been integral part of each, and thus neither should have monopoly over each other.
4. The collaboration of performance, screening installation, and painting is assisting in the evolution of what is understood as ART

DE-APART-HATE (2016)

**SHATTERING EVERY BOX OF WHAT ART
OF DANCE SHOULD BE**

1. De-Apart-Hate is the embodiment of defiance, desperation, dismantling, and detonation of all institutional myths and fallacies that keep fellow human beings apart.

2. The work symbolizes the pervasiveness of oppressive and divisive forces that infiltrate all society.

3. De-Apart-Hate is not overtly about Apartheid, and is neither about race. It is solely about oppressive, prejudiced and intolerant forces.



BLACK PRIVILEGE (2018)

REJECTED AND UNRECOGNIZED



1. Black Privilege is the work that interrogates the concept “privilege” in a society in which people are judged and rejected.
2. The themes “hypocrisy” and “justice” are also explored in this work.
3. The work has been inspired by all the unsung heroines/women/artists who had been and still are isolated and refrained from contributing to the development of their immediate societies/artworld.

INVASIVE NEGATIVITIES



1. Pest Control is a work that seeks to eradicate the invasive negativities, which pose threats to destructive management in the arts.
2. It is a performance work of boardroom politics, performance of deterrence, performance of strategy.
3. Boardrooms are where confidential exclusive meetings take place to decide or to plot for either future, survival or revenge. *(The work and its related performance will thus depict the concept of narcissism against the concept of relevance, to expose the narcissistic exhibition of self-importance, arrogance, exploitative tendencies, and unreasonable sense of entitlement as opposed to a practice of relevance that desires to effect change for the better.)*
4. Pest Control is thus exposing the real state of the art in South Africa, the art which has had to put up with cronyism and nepotism, disadvantaging one art form for the benefit of another; benefitting some art

GROUND~~E~~D (2022
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INTER-GENERATIONAL DIALOGUE



1. The main objective of *GROUND~~E~~D* is to reflect on the contemporary narratives and dramaturgical structures that could be behind the political discourses of the time – an exercise that proposes a dialogue and a performance between a contemporary artist and audience.
2. The meaning of this word “grounded”, is multi-thronged – it has both negative and positive meanings in our social lives. Positively and verbally, ***grounded*** can mean, stability, reliability, moral compass and self-esteem. Negatively and actively, ***grounded*** can mean, punishment, confinement, forbidden, and segregation/apartness. The work will thus depict a situation of South Africa, where its democracy seems to be in a good working condition, but actually has small cracks not easy to see, leading to major harzadous and at times, fatal consequences.
3. ***GROUND~~E~~D*** is a work that uses electrical wires to depict this dichotomy of “***comfort***” yet “***cunning***” situation. Electricity is an essential part of society and communities, and very integral to the economic and social growth of the modern society – as it used for lighting, heating, cooling, and for medical purposes. In the same vein, electricity is one of the biggest dangers posed to humans through electrical shock or electrocution, if the electrical cords and wires are not properly coordinated and connected.
4. The South African constitutional democracy is thus depicted as many dangling, entangled, electrical wires, seemingly not dangerous, but, when one tramples on it by hand or foot, gets a nasty shock that can either be harzadous or

HATCHED ENSEMBLE (2023)

THE PERSONAL, THE PUBLIC AND THE POLITICAL EMBODIMENT



1. The recurring theme in HATCHED ENSEMBLE is the battle with identity as dancers of the classics, while still clinging on to their respective lives as performing contemporary artists
2. The Choreographer seeks to show the significance and particularity of each dancer's movement that has been moulded by many diverse contexts and backgrounds, through their respective dancing history as trained ballet dancers with African and Contemporary dance forms as infused with their respective experiences as Artists in South Africa.

THE HERD/LESS

NEWEST WORK IN PROGRESS (2025)



1. This is a very new work still under creation in progress.
2. The work *THE HERD/LESS* embraces the dual meaning of the “herd”: a collective of people or animal species living, eating and behaving in harmonious environment; but, at the same time it can mean a collective of people or animals being controlled as a group and not as individuals by cultural or physical tools.
3. *HERD/LESS* is about phallacy of a beautiful world evoking violent realities of continuous vulnerability.
4. The phenomenon of a “herd” should be about abundance of beauty and prosperity, but in reality it is about bounty and brutality of a controlled collective in a specific setting and environment.
5. The “Herd” should have been about the collective and solidarity, but the “Herder” treats the collective as a bunch of “herdless” people, who must follow blindly. The tools of controlling the “herdless” range from cultural-symbolic weapons to show authority, such as the spear, the arrow, the whip, and the knob-kerries.
6. The Choreographer uses the symbolic but yet powerful culturally and traditionally day-to-day weapons which represent power, identity and social status to create sounds of pondering and perplex.

THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING:

- **ZAMA DANCE SCHOOL & THE LATE ARLENE WESTERGAARD**
- **MAKHANDA NATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL**
- **NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL**
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