

MAMELA NYAMZA'S HATCHED ENSEMBLE: A SYMPHONY OF BODIES AND IDENTITIES

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AT FOG 2025, THE MULTISENSORY DANCE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN CHOREOGRAPHER AS A RITE OF LIBERATION AND TRANSFORMATION

When dance becomes ritual. When music is no longer just sound, but collective breathing that flows. “Hatched Ensemble”, by South African artist **Mamela Nyamza**, at Triennale Milano for FOG 2025, is much more than a performance. It is an emotional journey. It is an artistic manifesto that challenges every convention. The work, born as an introspection of the choreographer on her life as a woman, mother and artist, now extends, enriched by a company of eleven dancers, an opera singer and a multi-instrumentalist, to bring to the stage a profound and powerful reflection on ethnicity, gender identities and tradition in dance.

The scene opens with a group of dancers (**Kirsty Ndawo, Kearabetswe Mogotsi, Khaya Ndlovu, Thamsanqa Tshabalala, Dineo Mapoma, Itumeleng Chiloane, Mbali, Bernice Brandt, Noluyanda Mqulwana, Zandile Constable, Pavishen Paideya, Thimna Sitokisi**), dressed in simple but suggestive costumes: clothes pegs adorning their bodies, creating an effect of prickliness. A dance that is not afraid to expose vulnerability. They are not swans, but ostriches. And yet, the beginning is entrusted to the delicate and repetitive, almost obsessive notes of “The Swan” by Camille Saint-Saëns, in an evocative contrast between the grace of classical ballet and the physicality of African dance. Every movement of these bare-chested creatures is a metaphor. Every gesture is a discovery. The bodies, free from any frills, move slowly, almost as if they wanted to draw a sacred space. There is no hurry, only the power of a rebirth.

The naked backs of the performers, in particular, are the protagonists of an unparalleled visual poetry, in the Eden that opens and is born between metal stage objects, creating a candid nature of flowers, birds and mammals. The back, that place as intimate as it is revealing, becomes a symbol of strength and vulnerability. It is a continuous movement between full and empty, between the past and the future. And it is precisely the backs, fleeting and mysterious, that tell the story. Because this dance is not made of posed glances or beautiful faces to admire, of bodies that look at themselves in the mirror, but of silences, of shadows, of shoulders that turn and invite us to discover a new language. This is the great enchantment of “Hatched Ensemble”: it is not a performance that is given easily, but it is proposed, dosed, rationed, with a disconcerting naturalness.

The lights, delicate and almost ethereal, seem like a caress that accompanies the bodies, marking the passage from darkness to light, from solitude to community. Each gesture is imbued with an intensity that is never fully exposed, but offers itself to those who know how to look. It is not just dance, but a living installation, a moving landscape that interacts with the public, forcing us to enter an unknown territory. Mamela Nyamza's art invites us to strip ourselves of our prejudices, to let ourselves be invaded by a language that is not afraid to deconstruct.

The sense of community is palpable. The dancers, despite the individual strength of their movements, create an invisible network that envelops us. The performance becomes frenetic, almost overwhelming, while the

clothespins, plastic ponchos and metal objects become symbols of a daily struggle that transforms into a celebration of freedom. A moment of tension arrives when, between the sound of drums and the power of voices that evoke sub-Saharan Africa, the rhythm changes, becomes more impetuous, almost as if it were challenging gravity itself. But each explosion of energy is followed by a moment of quiet, as if the dance were a breath that expands and retracts.

The presence of opera singer **Litho Nqai** and multi-instrumentalist **Azah Mphago** amplifies this sensory experience, fusing Western opera with African vocal traditions in an encounter that is never just fusion, but dialogue. Every note, every beat seems to belong to a world that transcends geographical boundaries, a place where traditions intersect without ever renouncing their identity.

The body is no longer a simple vehicle of expression, but a medium that crosses history, gender and culture. Dancers are not athletes, but protagonists of a story that has its roots in the collective memory and in the present of each individual. The choice to perform barefoot, without the usual filter of ballet shoes, is an act of purity. Nothing hides the earth, the direct contact with the ground. It is as if each movement were a deep connection with the surrounding world, a testimony of a belonging that goes beyond labels.

The choreography, fruit of the visionary mind of Mamele Nyamza, is a kaleidoscope of styles and languages. The body transforms, evolves, and sometimes disintegrates, only to rebuild itself in a new language, deeper, truer. The very act of dancing, of moving, is a form of resistance: to tradition, to gender roles, to imposed boundaries, to a history of constraints and segregations. And sensuality, both in gestures and in costumes, is subtle and powerful, like a challenge that does not need to be explicitly shown to be felt.

In “Hatched Ensemble”, the body is no longer a simple instrument of aesthetic expression, but a battlefield where identities are forged and deconstructed. It is a work that speaks to all those who have experienced the frustration of not belonging. To those who have felt out of place in a world that wants us all the same, labeled and predictable. Nyamza gives us an explosion of authenticity. Her dance is an invitation to break the chains

and rebuild ourselves, step by step, without fear of losing, but with the awareness of gaining every inch of freedom.

“Hatched Ensemble” is an immersive experience that exceeds all expectations. It is a work that not only breaks the rules, but rewrites them. And this is precisely its strength: it is not afraid to be visceral, intense, alive. A choreography that stays within, changes us, and makes us reflect: not only on dance, but on life itself.

HATCHED ENSEMBLE

Concept, choreography and direction: Mamele Nyamza

Rehearsal manager: Kirsty Ndawo

Costume design: Mamele Nyamza

Opera singer: Litho Nqai

Traditional African multi-instrumentalist: Given “Azah” Mphago

Dancers: Kirsty Ndawo, Kearabetswe Mogotsi, Khaya Ndlovu, Thamsanqa Tshabalala, Dineo Mapoma, Itumeleng Chiloane, Mbali, Bernice Brandt, Noluyanda Mqulwana, Zandile Constable, Pavishen Paideya, Thimna Sitokisi

Co-producers: National Arts Council of South Africa (NAC), Makhanda National Arts Festival of South Africa (NAF)

Duration: 1h 10'

Audience applause: 4' 30”

Seen in Milan, Triennale , on March 29, 2025
Italian premiere



Tags from the story

Last Seen 2025 , Mamele Nyamza