

Don't mess with Mamela

BY [ROBYN SASSEN](#) ON [JUNE 25, 2020](#) • ([2 COMMENTS](#))
DANCE REVIEW: *PEST CONTROL*.



TRAPPED/Trapper: Mamela Nyamza in 'Pest Control'. Photograph by Ntombazana Shabangu.

YOU DO NOT need to know the dirty politics of the arts in contemporary South Africa in order to access the angry new dance missile which Mamela Nyamza launches at this year's [National Arts Festival](#). You do not need to know the specifics of her case study. *Pest Control* is a 30-minute long daringly close-to-the-bone foray into boardroom antics; this dissertation on the to's and fro's of men in corporate power articulated head to head with lumpen officialdom and the menstruating body of a woman of power is like a diatribe. Or a war cry.

Resonant with the rawness of Steven Cohen's *Limping into the African Renaissance* of 2002, and in tandem with Albert Silindokuhle Ibokwe Khoza's [Red Femicide](#), which performed in South Africa last year, the work is not about pretty dance gestures in a controlled environment. It is difficult to watch. The sound track is harsh and repetitive, using bureaucratic language that often is not grammatically sound. The piece makes you think of Philip Miller's 2007 [REwind: A Cantata for Voice Tape and Testimony](#) and Franz Kafka's iconic *The Trial* simultaneously. You weep, you feel empowered, you feel broken as the dancer feints with her fencing costume, shouting from behind a mesh mask.

Nyamza launched herself onto the contemporary dance arena in 2008 with *Kutheni*, a work that took the hideous South African phenomenon of so-called 'corrective' rape, inflicted on black lesbians in local townships, by the horns. The guts to push social issues hard into the face of her audience – and society – has always been a central core of her real dance acumen, which over the trajectory of her rich and wonderful career has seen her able to meld difficult balletic skills with even more difficult conceptual punch. But this work raises the bar. Aggressively.

Arguably, *Pest Control*, which makes boardroom tables into dance stages and menstruation into a gesture of defiance and self-celebration, will become an iconic yardstick of protest art in a world riddled with illness, from the inside and the outside: a world where the disease of corruption and entitlement is as destructive and rude as that of a pandemic that kills.

- *Pest Control* is choreographed, conceptualised and performed by Mamela Nyamza. It features creative input by Aza Mphago (music), katty vandenbergh (videography), Wilhelm Disbergen (lighting, set and audiovisual) and Ntombazana Shabangu (photography and design). Made for the internet, it streams on the National Arts Festival website on 25 June 2020.