RHODNIE DÉSIR: CONVERSATIONS

ON VIEW
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ABOUT

In her multidimensional choreographic career, Dancer/choreographer Rhodnie Désir created BOW'T TRAIL, a choreographic-documentary journey in which she has conducted research throughout the Americas since 2015. Her work included visits to countries such as Martinique, Brazil, Haïti, Canada, Mexico, and the United States to immerse herself within the African and afro descendant cultures and rhythms generated from the ingenuity of her ancestors since the Slave Trade. The resulting nine choreographic works are archived in five hours of carefully recorded content accessible in 75 videos on a Webdocumentary platform (bowttrail.com), a feature movie (ARTV), and BOWT TRAIL Young Leader project (Booker High School).

Désir’s inaugural exhibition, Conversations, is a co-creation with artists Paul Chambers, Lighting Design; Engone Endong, Music Composer; Manuel Chantre, Video and Sound Design; and Cecilia Bracmort, Curatorial Advisor, who combine video, light, and sound to sculpt the space to explore Désir’s experiences on the BOWT TRAIL and bring the on-stage performance into a new gallery-based medium. The installation evokes a liminal space, which is the in-between or transitional space that is often accessible through visions and rituals. With a cumulative and polyrhythmic approach, the artist seeks to share her perspectives through a plural conversation between the past and the present.

The video installation work activates a new poetic signature from Désir’s original travels by using a specific documentary aesthetic to create a contemporary artistic work and places the people and the lands she encountered in a common dialogue with each other.

Recognizing that dance is a powerful, political communication tool, she uses her knowledge to build a new vocabulary within the space that contemplates the physical, sacred, and ethereal body. In Conversations, Desir shares and extends the space to her audience—a space that she and her ancestors may have traversed in order to connect, moving beyond words towards resistance. By interrogating the notion of what constitutes a body, she seeks to move beyond the human body and imagine the gallery space as a body all on its own. The installation beautifully illustrates the transformational power of the space and its movement to build and elevate the conversation about the Black community and its history.
DÉSIR, RHODNIE | CHOREOGRAPHER, ARTISTIC AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Rhodnie Désir has created nearly fifteen choreographic works. Her flagship piece BOW'T TRAIL Retrospek and her pioneering memoir journey BOW’T TRAIL have earned her two awards from the Prix de la danse de Montréal (2020): The Prix Envol and the highly coveted Grand Prix de la danse. Rhodnie Désir’s documentary and Afro-contemporary choreographic signature is anchored in African and Afro-descendant rhythmic languages rooted in places like her homeland (Haiti), as well as in rest of the Caribbean, and in Central and Sub-Saharan Africa. A performer of remarkable power and uncompromising integrity, she surprises her audiences with her great ability to connect to their humanity. Her unique approach, her words, her performances and her civic actions have brought her strong international recognition and have led to her appearing as a guest speaker at numerous organizations and universities, as well as at UNESCO, among others. In January 2021, she was chosen as one of the “25 to watch” by Dance Magazine in New York. In April 2021, she was nominated by APAP for the prestigious career award THE AWARD OF MERIT FOR ACHIEVEMENT IN THE PERFORMING ARTS 2021, alongside Yo-Yo Ma and Ronald K. Brown.

BRACMORT, CÉCILIA | CURATOR CONSULTANT

Cécilia Bracmort is a French born, Montreal based curator and artist. Her Caribbean heritage (from Martinique and Guadeloupe) influences her artistic and curatorial practices that focus on the notions of individual or collective identity, memory and history. Cécilia considers herself as an art-listener and art-matchmaker. Her artistic and curatorial projects are made to connect worlds, social environments and concepts that don’t usually mix. Through her multi-focal vision linked to the different layers of her identity, Cécilia Bracmort’s projects seek to form bridges between far reaching themes such as sports, ecology, trauma and mythology. In this vein, her 2019 curatorial project Reclaiming My Place presented at the Warren G. Flowers art gallery at Dawson College in Montreal featured the work of three visual artists and gave a better visibility for the work of WOC in the art milieu. Through her work, Cécilia aims to open doors to make visible new ideas and identities, and to encourage people to think outside the ‘white’ box and to invite them to see anew the world under a different lens. In 2017 Cécilia was the guest curator as part of the Montreal/Havana exchange, produced by RCAAQ in collaboration with the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Cuba. Since August 2018, she works at the artist-run Centre Articule, as Administrative Coordinator.
CHANTRE, MANUEL | VIDEO AND SOUND DESIGNER

Manuel Chantre is a visual new media artist, composer and production director based in Montreal. He creates sculptures, installations and performances by including light, video projection, music, interactivity and digital fabrication. Since 2004, his works have been created for renowned international institutions in media art, art galleries, events, public art, commercial projects, and private collections. His work offers a fictional universe that is both physical and descriptive and he explores the memory, identity, and inhabited, imagined, intangible or virtual spaces made by humans. His desire is to create a non-linear narrative frame made up of elements that induce the recall of personal experiences or memories of the audience. He is interested in the three-dimensional properties allowed by multi-screen projection, 360-degree immersive environments, the materialization of beams of light as well as the projection in domes or transparent structures that he designs. He showed his works at over 70 events and exhibitions presented by internationally renowned institutions such as the Society for arts and technologies SAT (CA), the City of Montreal, the International Digital Art Biennal in Montreal (CA), Mutek (CA), the Mapping Festival (CH), Filux Festival (MX), File Electronic Language International Festival (BR) and Toronto Scotiabank Nuit Blanche (CA) amongst other.

Chantre created the video projection work featured in BOW’T TRAIL Retrospek by RD Créations, which premiered in February 2020, and started his work with the company in 2019. Conversations is his second collaboration with RD Créations.

CHAMBERS, PAUL | LIGHTING DESIGNER

Paul Chambers is a visual artist, as well as a lighting and stage designer. From 2008 to 2013 Paul assumed the role of Technical Director of the Montreal presenting organization Tangente: Laboratory of Contemporary Movement. His interest in collaboration and supporting new projects has always stimulated his artistic career. Since 2007, notably with studio 303 (Montreal), he has been leading educational workshops for artists who would like to deepen their knowledge of lighting design. Paul has also been a lecturer at Concordia University since 2015 in the Contemporary Dance Department and he is a mentor at the prestigious National Theater School of Canada.

In 2013 Paul and David- Alexandre Chabot (designer & teacher) invented CHA, a collective that aims to create works with artists from different disciplines in order to share their visual aesthetics and method of collaboration.

His most recent designs include collaborations with Public Recordings, 10 Gates Dancing, Dorian Nuskind-Oder [Delicate Beast], Ben Kamino, Amanda Acorn, Katie Ward, Maria Kefirova, Thierry Huard, Parts & Labor Dance, Lara Kramer Dance, Destins Croisés (Ismaël Mouaraki) and the Montreal Complément Cirque festival. Paul Chambers’ collaboration with Rhodnie Desir Company started in 2020.
ENDONG, ENGONE | MUSICIAN/BEATMAKER/COMPOSER

Field recordist and an instrument of his ancestors, Engone Endong offers an alternative approach to music and gabonese tradition by cleverly mixing ancestral knowledge with contemporary electronic, hip-hop and experimental sounds. Collaborating internationally as a DJ/producer with such artists as Elom 20ce from Togo, Pamela Badjogo/Prix RFI Découverte finalist, and Société des Arts Technologiques, he also composed soundtracks for the movie “Les Etats-Unis d’Afrique: au-delà du hip-hop”, by Yanick Létourneau (PERIPHERIA, Prix de la Critique RIDM 2011). He performed alongside the legendary American DJ Rich Medina and was the headline of the Piknic Electronik festival in 2013. His politically instrumental album #OKENG was critically acclaimed by OKAYAFRICA and AFROPUNK. Since 2017, he has collaborated with Rhodnie Désir on many works such as Dusk Society (2017), BOW'T TRAIL Retrospek (2020), Conversations (2021), and he is currently working on her new piece MWON’D (2022).

THÉRIAULT, SAMUEL | PRODUCTION AND TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

For over 15 years, Samuel Thériault has worked professionally in the entertainment industry, mainly in dance and for corporate events. His work focuses on technical direction and video. In the role of Technical Director, he has led both the creation and touring of multiple projects that have been presented in Canada and internationally. The variety of his skills allows him to collaborate on projects for scenic shows, site specific performances and museum installations. He is a graduate of Cegep Lionel-Groulx 1999 - 2003, with a degree in Stage Management. As a professional production manager and technical director, he collaborated with such companies as Par B.I.eux (choreographer Benoît Lachambre), Petit Théâtre de Sherbrooke, Les Deux Mondes, Théâtre Le Clou, APASQ, Cas Public (choreographer Hélène Blackburn), Destin-Croisés (choreographer Ismaël Mouaraki), Pro-Staging, Digicast, Salle Pauline-Julien, Ville de Montréal, and Ville de Repentigny. He joined Rhodnie Desir in 2020 as Technical and Production Director for all of her artistic activities. His presence for the tour is required to direct all of the technical aspects of the live performances with the choreographer and performer, including complex light cues, video set up for real time projection and responsive interpretation of improvisational elements guided by the performers.

COMPANY

RD CREATIONS

Since 2017, RD CREATIONS (RDC) produces and presents creative projects by artistic director and choreographer Rhodnie Désir. Simultaneously authentic and contemporary, the Montreal-based organization operates internationally using an innovative artistic approach that questions socio political trends, explores movement, defies the imagination, engages citizens, transmits knowledge while archiving the
memory of its people. Rhodnie’s choreographic-documentary work is quite unique and unlike anything seen before. Each of its components aspires to be a voice for the voiceless and to engage directly with the communities from which it draws its inspiration. Whether through presentations, grassroots-level cultural mediation or choreographic works, RD Creations acts as a social archive, leaving a legacy of cultural wealth. It believes in the potential of combining multiple media in the same choreographic work, allowing it to evolve according to the social realities and cultures it encounters. Deeply rooted in ancestral cultures, RD Creations is committed to respecting cultures by fostering genuine collaborations and prioritizing listening, discussion and interaction. These collaborations take place in and across political, media, government, social and community spheres, leading to valuable partnerships for example with 45 partners, 130 specialists and 15 musicians for the BOW’T TRAIL project. The repertoire has 16 works, including ten since 2017. In 2020, the company won Prix Envol from Prix de la danse de Montreal.

THANK YOU

Rhodnie Désir wishes to sincerely thank The John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art Director and staff, with a special thank you to the project curator, Sonja Shea, for her patience, coordination, and teamwork. Rhodnie is also grateful for the Board of Directors of RD Creations and The Ringling Museum, the sponsorship of the Ellin family, the Manatee County Community Foundation, the Canada Council for the Arts, the RD Créations artists and staff, Cusson Management and especially Valerie Cusson for guiding her to this amazing space.

Rhodnie respectfully acknowledges the ancestors and all the people who have made the BOW’T TRAIL and this inaugural Exhibition possible.

“Although some people thought I completed the TRAIL throughout the Americas by myself, this journey could not have been done without the people I encountered along the way and the many conversations that I experienced. From mouth to ear, from ear to heart, these conversations permitted me to sculpt and visualize the lands on which I could walk. This exhibition is built in the same way, collectively and with the expertise of these collaborators: Paul Chambers - Lighting Designer, Engone Endong - Music Compositor, Manuel Chantre - Video and Sound Designer, Cecilia Bracmort - Curatorial Advisor, Samuel Theriault - Production Manager.”

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