

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation

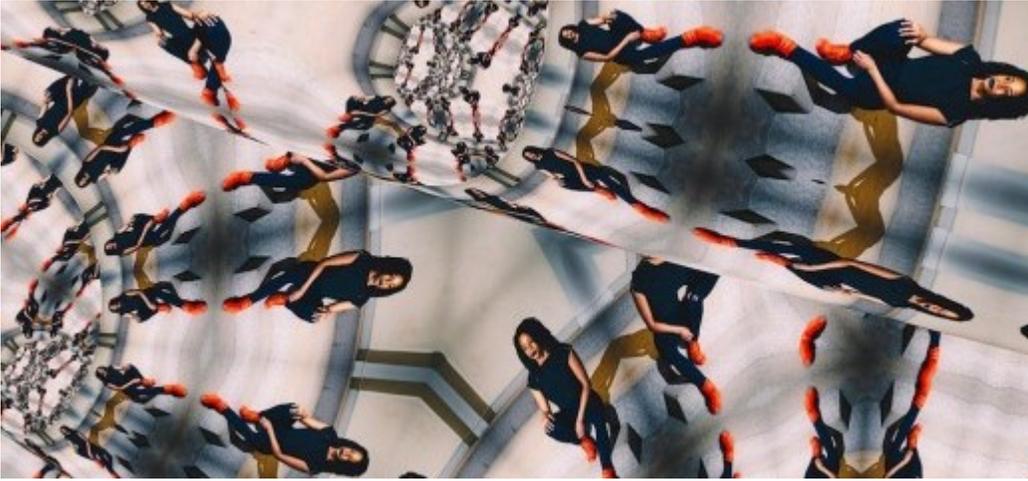


Photo: Fernando Maneca

desire dreams: portals to freedom

by L. Graciella Maiolatesi

"welcome to the kaleidoscope; Black dream space.

how do you hold your body when you've got something important to tell the universe?

let's practice really being together in this portal." –TEMPO AKA HOT SECOND

the Zoom call is whirring, alive with energy as we wait patiently for the show to start: the portal to open. co-commissioned by [Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance](#) (BAAD!) and [651 ARTS](#) (Brooklyn's premier institution for the African Diasporic performing arts), we are here to witness the two night premiere of [MBDance's](#) *Desire: A Sankofa Dream*. MBDance's artistic director, Maria Bauman-Morales, is a Black-queer movement maker, community builder, and anti-racist organizer who received her MFA in Dance from Temple University, and is someone who i have admired ever since we met at [Urban Bush Women's 2015 Summer Leadership Institute](#).

a sea of predominantly Black faces fills the screen, although some screens are covered by colorful patterned cloth, similar to fabric i saw when traveling in Ghana. the difference of each Zoom frame transforms the gallery view into a technologic patchwork quilt, and we are ready to be gathered, folded, brought into this world.

Maria invites us into what she has coined the kaleidoscope, a virtual Black dream space, and explains what it means to exist here:

1. the kaleidoscope is a constantly shifting world. go where we feel called
2. we have agency to turn our fourth eye (Zoom cameras) and mics on/off
3. engage with desire disks— slides that will appear throughout the work offering suggested interactive tasks or actions
4. be present
5. play. practice freedom. be honest with your desires

a soft humming begins, and breathy moans are heard off screen. one of the colorful cloths is lifted and we see a close up of a dark brown eye followed by bright blue lips. we learn that this being is named TEMPO AKA HOT SECOND, and that they will be one of our guides through the kaleidoscope. Light-skinned with three buns twisted on their head and dressed in a jumpsuit with colorful swirling print that covers a large pregnant belly, TEMPO begins to tell us stories of their lineage. carving through space with their arms and belly, TEMPO clears pathways as they prepare to birth this new world. as they do so, five more kaleidoscope guides lift the fabric from their cameras, and they begin to dance, opening portals to their own worlds.

here, i remember that i too am a part of the kaleidoscope, and i begin to play with how i am able to witness this/my/our community. i pin GEORGINA'S frame and joyfully drink in their muscular body dressed in hot pink with hair in puffy bantu knots (*don't hurt 'em now!*). reaching with one arm in front and one behind, GEORGINA uses their fingers to pull themselves through space, stretching until they gently arch backwards. They slice through the air with their arm; dropping down to bent knees, they slowly roll their head around their neck.

i go back to gallery view and note that each kaleidoscope guide has multiple cameras set up in their personal space. witnessing the guides move in their frames, we see the contrast of their movement and the colorful fabrics that continue to cover/uncover fourth eyes (Zoom cameras). this shifts the space, and for those of us who are witnessing we see the forming of the virtual kaleidoscope: worlds and portals opening and collapsing inwards, expanding the realm of Black dream space. as TEMPO continues to share their stories with us, i pin a new guide, FELICIA, and hit speaker view, allowing me to witness FELICIA and TEMPO in a virtual duet. viewing them through multiple fourth eyes (frames), we see them moving both together and apart, at times mirroring each other with the same choreographic phrase, while other times they stare at each other/us/through us, in rapture.

flashing a toothy blue lipped smile, TEMPO explains that more worlds may open up soon, and that if we'd like to be there all we have to say is "go." numerous "go," "G-O," "gOOO"s fill the chat box, and we receive notice that the host is placing us into breakout rooms, aka clarity portals. in my first clarity portal i am with fifteen other participants and a kaleidoscope guide named BABY LOUD. BABY LOUD has a trickster energy; as they talk to us about one idea, they interrupt themselves with another. This interrupts their movement, causing them to shift from softly caressing their face to leaping wildly about their space, throwing their hands up in the air as they laugh gleefully. they ask us to turn our fourth eyes on, and if we are able, to raise our hands in front of us and wiggle our fingers. a melanin sea of dancing fingers washes across the screen and BABY LOUD exclaims, "girl yous fly! i ain't never seen no fingertips like this! now i jus' need yous to rock with me, fingertips out—thas how we pray." we rock in silence until we are cut off by the central line of the kaleidoscope, TEMPO calling us all back to the collective thread.

we have all returned from whatever clarity portals we were in. kaleidoscope guides continue to dance in their spaces. in a corner frame a Black baby suckles a dolls head, completely enthralled by the motions happening on the screen. in another frame, two Black siblings twirl around, their eyes glittering with joy like they have a secret, aware that they are not a part of the performance but completely a part of it at the same time. TEMPO asks us, "will you try? will you practice?" a desire disk appears on the screen suggesting that we, "are invited to give ourselves a refreshing deep breath and whisper our prayers aloud." TEMPO continues, saying, "some us, some us gone go. say they names and let 'em fly." as kaleidoscope guides continue to move, we hear breath fill our collective space and one by one folx unmute themselves to say names of ancestors, echo asé's, and exhale together until we are one overlapping name, alive on our tongues. we hear Maria's voice singing offscreen:

fillllllyyyyyy

fly, fly, fly

fiLILLLLLyYYYYYY

the kaleidoscope guides begin to cover their screens with the colorful fabric, but we can still hear their breath. we still feel the ancestors traversing through the portals we have created, calling on us to be with our desires. to practice freedom. daring us to dream.

?Artistic Director: Maria Bauman-Morales

The Company: Audrey Hailes, Angie Pittman, Courtney Cook, Johnnie Mercer, Ziiomi Law, Wendell Gray II, Sharon Bridgforth

[Desire: A Sankofa Dream](#), MBDance, Zoom, Jan. 22-3.

By L. Graciella Maiolatesi

February 7, 2021