



RAGGA NYC, nest, 2017. installation view: RAGGA NYC x DIS Magazine Back to School Benefit; MoMA PS1, New York. Courtesy Christopher Udemezie.



RAGGA NYC is made possible with
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Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts



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Cover image: Christopher Udemezie, nest, 2017. Installation view: RAGGA NYC x DIS Magazine Back to School Benefit, MoMA PS1, New York. Courtesy of the artist

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

fORUM: Tau Lewis and Katherine McKittrick
Thursday 27 June 2018, 7PM

The conversation between Tau Lewis and Katherine McKittrick will explore their relational archives – situated in black cultural production and black studies. McKittrick will explore and query Lewis' work in relation to belonging, scavenging, retrieval; Lewis will explore and query McKittrick's work in relation to black geographies, plantocratic enumerations and black life. The discussion hopes to work through how racial belonging is tied to black interdisciplinary inventiveness.

Tau Lewis is a Jamaican-Canadian artist living and working in Toronto. Tau Lewis' self-taught practice is rooted in healing personal, collective and historical traumas through labour, employing methods of construction such as hand sewing, carving and assemblage to build portraits. Her portraits are recuperative gestures that investigate black identity and agency, memory and recovery. Recent works consider the undocumented or inaccessible historical information centres of black life such as the oceans, forests and deep underground spaces. Lewis' work is infused with material markers of time such as personal belongings, found objects, as well as plants and organisms sourced from urban and rural landscapes, as she connects these acts of repurposing and collecting with diasporic experience. Recent solo exhibitions include: Frieze New York (2018); Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta (2018); and Jeffrey Stark, New York (2018); and 8-11 Gallery, Toronto (2017). Recent group exhibitions include Chapter Gallery, New York (2018); MoMA PS1, New York (2017); Art Gallery of Mississauga (2017); COOPER COLE Gallery, Toronto (2017); Night Gallery, Los Angeles (2017); and New Museum, New York (2017). Lewis' work is represented by COOPER COLE Gallery, Toronto.

Katherine McKittrick teaches at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Her research is interdisciplinary and attends to the links between black studies, theories of anti-colonialism and liberation, and creative texts. Katherine edited and contributed to the collection, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* and authored *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Her forthcoming monograph, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, explores black methodologies.

fORUM is an ongoing series of talks, lectures, interviews, screenings and performances at Mercer Union. Please check the Mercer Union website for details about our upcoming fORUM events.

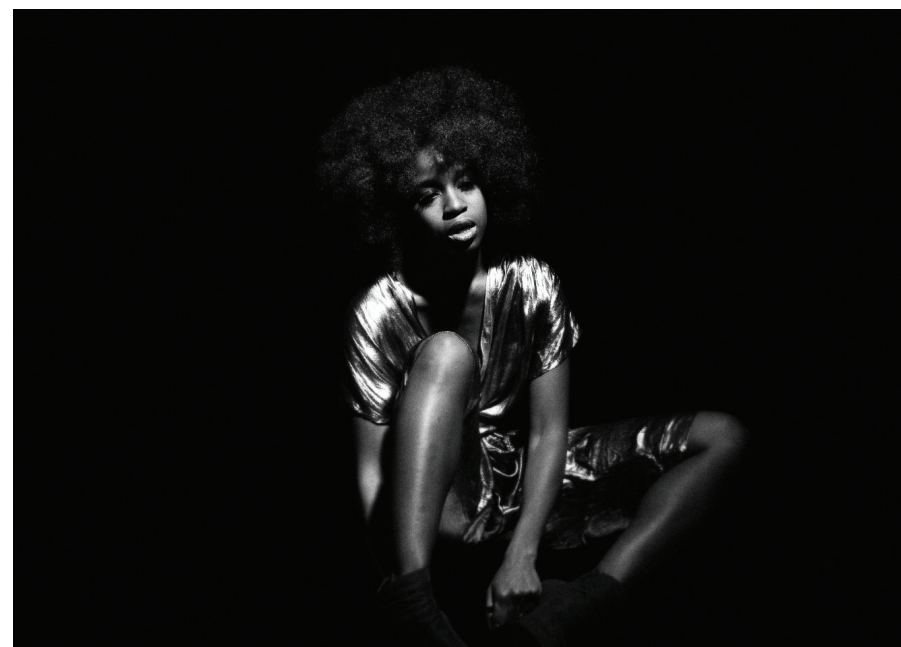
Admission to our public programming is free and all are welcome.

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ARTIST PERFORMANCE: Dana Michel
Tuesday 7 August 2018, 8PM

*when you've spent a lifetime holding back in one area, surely it's holding other areas back.
time to unravel the knot that i didn't completely realize existed (yes i did).
why i can't touch people when i?
why i get confused when there's more?
why i freeze now ?
what are the consequences of all the holding?
what other casualties have there been?*

Dana Michel is a choreographer and live artist based in Montréal. Her first extended-length solo performance piece, *Yellow Towel*, was featured on the "Top Five" and the "Top Ten" 2013 dance moments in the *Voir* newspaper (Montréal) and *Dance Current Magazine* respectively. In 2014, she was awarded the newly created *Impulstanz Award* in recognition for outstanding artistic accomplishments and was highlighted amongst notable female choreographers of the year by the *New York Times*. That same year concluded with *Yellow Towel* appearing on the *Time Out New York Magazine* "Top Ten Performances" list. Her most recent and critically-acclaimed solo, *Mercurial George*, was premiered at *Festival TransAmériques* in June 2016. Both pieces are currently on tour. In June 2017, Dana Michel was awarded the *Silver Lion for Innovation in Dance* by the *Venice Biennale*. Also in 2017 she joined *Par B.L.eux*, a company founded and directed by *Benoît Lachambre* as associate artist.



Dana Michel. Photo: Camille McQuat



RAGGA NYC

Michèle Pearson Clarke, Martine Gutierrez,
Oreka James, Aaron Jones, Tau Lewis,
Sondra Perry, Diamond Stingily, Camille Turner, Christopher
Udemezie, Syrus Marcus Ware

22 June – 11 August 2018
Opening Reception Thursday 21 June, 7PM

Made possible with Leading Support from TD Bank Group

Project Support provided by Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts



RAGGA NYC, *Bashment*, 2017. Courtesy Christopher Udemezeu. Photo: José Manuel Girona

Start of recording. Journal notes, August 10, 2031.

"We started small, telling stories on the curb. Telling stories when we got together. Telling stories that allowed us to find each other and build our community. We published these stories widely to reach others like us and create a sense of welcome for all of our people. Back when we used to prioritize written traditions over oral ones, when capitalistic ideas about preservation, archives and remembering told us whose stories were worth remembering, whose families were valid and whose lives were worth preserving, we resisted. We recorded story after story after story in every imaginable form, and created our own counter-archives of QTBIPOC magic.

"It's hard to imagine the Ragga of then, when we are so far into the *NOW*. It began as a small thing; Ragga parties then online publications until this smaller, more local engagement spread out across the Eastern seaboard and reached diasporic communities the world over. I remember meeting Christopher Udemezeu in Toronto, before the elections that sparked the fires. He was dripping with magic: a fur shawl and cream blouse, the epitome of New York fashion, glamorous in the humble brunch place where we were eating. I remember him talking of storytelling, of the ways that the Ragga family had begun to heal relationships with families estranged while deepening relationships in chosen, supportive families. He talked of re-centering our frames around diasporic communities of Black and Brown, Queer and Trans people. That brunch feels like ages ago. Before Ragga was the main organizing body of our time. Before Ragga showed us a way forward through the revolution towards community and peace.

"The *NOW* revolution came about peacefully, at the end of 2025, as a dying capital was gasping its last breaths, as giraffes finally became extinct after a decade on the endangered list, and as many were beginning to accept that we were truly fucked Earth-wise. We were living in a social world that needed radical change and Ragga, a beautiful uprising of Black and Brown, Queer and Trans people telling their truths and building families together, was there and ready to offer a different picture of what community — of what the world — could look like.

"Who would have thought that a revolution led by Black and Brown, Queer and Trans people would succeed in such a global way — seemingly changing the world overnight. The stories of that revolution are at the core of Ragga's power — what happened, how we came together, how we made something new. These stories of hope and inspiration, of struggle and, ultimately, triumph bring Ragga's network into the core of our new society. According to the official records, *NOW* began one night in February with a rally that turned from an occupation, into a movement. But we know that *NOW* began long before then, with whispered stories and tales of family, migration, queerness, and love passing through Ragga communities, deep in the soil around the rhizomatic roots of diasporic communities spread world-wide. These were the first seeds of the revolution that led to the rising of a community of outsiders ready and hungry for change. Ready and hungry for a re-centering of power and of focus.

"About seven years before that magical night of change, the Ragga family gathered in Toronto to tell stories and to enjoy being alive together through a celebration to end all celebrations. Toronto was raw from the recent election and the conservative swing in politics was leaving many feeling vulnerable and unsafe in their own city. At the Ragga exhibition and parties, people came together to commiserate, and began planting seeds of change, talks of infiltration and whispers of more radical direct action spreading through the room. We talked and dreamed and laughed and kissed and hoped for something better, something bigger to happen to make this world a place where we all felt as free as we did when we gathered through Ragga.

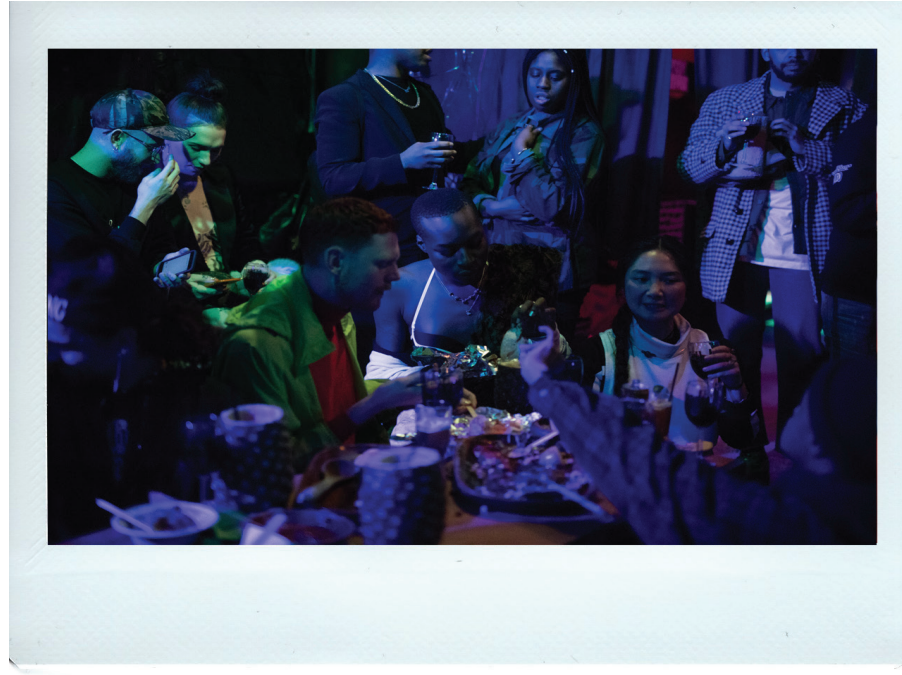
"I remember that night like it was yesterday — as one of the older-timers, I have been around for a long time, and remember well life before our *NOW*. I remember people decked out in resplendent outfits, hand-crafted with care in the months leading up to the party. The music. The laughter. The dancing. The beginnings of a yearning, of a wanting for this to be our everyday free and open community, a chosen family leading the world to a new way of being. The lyrics of *Follow Me*, by Ally-Us ringing out through the loudspeakers,

*I'm hoping to see the day,
When my people
Can all relate
We must stop fighting
To achieve the peace
That was torn in our country
We shall all be free
Follow me
Why don't you follow me
To a place
Where we can be free
Come with me
Over there*

"I remember seeing a young person dancing, crying while they danced. I came over to them and danced with them, moving to the beat as it played out through the speakers. "You okay?" I mouthed. Their face was partially obscured by the shadows but I could see wet tears streaming down their face as they said, "It's just been a long time since I felt this sense of family." We stopped moving, and I leaned in to listen. They continued, "I spent all day looking for this gathering, I kept going to the wrong places, but when I found it and came in it was like I was coming home, coming home to people I'd never met. And it's so so beautiful." I opened my arms to offer a hug, and they quickly fell into my arms and we danced 'til the end of the song before parting ways.

"In the end of times, we all followed Ragga; we found family and found that place where we could all be free. And this root magic of music and celebration is still at the core of Ragga today, in the *NOW*. The celebrations of the past still look similar today but everyone is imbued with relief and gratitude that we finally made it here, to *NOW*, in the free that we dreamed of.

"Tonight it is my turn to tell a story at our nightly gathering. After today's reflections, I think the story I tell will be this one: of how we grew from whispered stories to street-wide shouts, to change, to *NOW*. More than anything I want to share the story of the dancer that I met all those years ago, who was feeling so cut off from family because of their



RAGGA X BOOM, *nest 02*, 2018. Family dinner, New York. Courtesy Christopher Udemezeu. Photo: Lanee Bird

fear of their life choices. I want to share about their beautiful experience of being Black and Queer, and how much joy this had brought to their life, even in the face of their family's fear. I want to share about their trying to find a sense of home in a diaspora — something that would be hard for our youngest members to imagine since everyone is so connected to chosen family units *NOW*. But to remember this time before our belonging, this is essential for us to remember why we are living in the *NOW*, free, in the ways that we are. And to thank Ragga for carving out a new way of being with each other."

End recording.

I turn off the recording unit and rise up. Standing has been more of a challenge since I turned 84, but I get on my two feet and stretch my arms upwards towards the sun. I look around. A new Ragga community is being shaped before me. After all of these years in the *NOW*, I still feel that the start of a new Ragga community is so exciting to witness. I lean on my walking stick and make my way back to my home to prepare for my evening story, the recording device warm in my palm. Our stories were always what bonded us together, and I can't wait to share mine.

Syrus Marcus Ware is a Vanier Scholar, visual artist, activist, curator and educator. Syrus' work explores social justice frameworks and black activist culture. Syrus is a core-team member of both Black Lives Matter-Toronto and Blackness Yes!/Blockorama. Syrus has won several awards, including the TD Diversity Award in 2017. Syrus is a PhD candidate at York University in the Faculty of Environmental Studies.

WHAT
WE OWE
TO EACH
OTHER

Michèle Pearson Clarke
What We Owe to Each Other, 2018

In a November 2017 interview, Mia Mingus, cofounder of the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective, ends by saying, "people talk about [transformative justice] as though it's 'soft' [but] it's one of the hardest things you'll ever have to do." *What We Owe To Each Other* is a public research project in which Michèle Pearson Clarke is trying to understand and work at this hard thing through a collective learning effort. Building on her video and photography work examining vulnerability, affect and repair, Clarke is taking up weekly residence in the gallery to deepen her knowledge of transformative justice through mutual conversation, readings, workshops, and screenings. Given that transformative justice is rooted in community and accountability, Clarke invites Mercer Union visitors to participate in her research process and to join her in doing the personal work necessary to learn about healing and justice together.

Weekly sessions will be held on **Tuesday nights, 6–8PM**
26 June; 3 July; 10 July; 17 July; 24 July; 31 July; 7 August
Free and all are welcome.