

**La Bâtie**  
**Festival de Genève**  
**03-19.09.2021**

**Mamela Nyamza**  
**"Black Privilege"**

**Dossier de presse**





# Mamela Nyamza (ZA)

## ” Black Privilege ”

« Black privilege doesn't exist », livre Mamela Nyamza en interview. Nulle part, il n'existe une économie noire, une politique noire, une liberté: « Le seul privilège noir, c'est notre présence, notre corps. » C'est donc son corps que la danseuse, chorégraphe et activiste sud-africaine met en scène, citant sa biographie personnelle de mère lesbienne noire et africaine. Tour à tour en majesté ou rampant, son corps enchaîne les scènes d'injustice, de machisme et de racisme. *Black Privilege* dénonce une « nation arc-en-ciel » non avenue, la division entretenue entre haute culture et culture tribale, entre spiritualité et loi. Une performance comme une incantation, une incarnation de ces héroïnes humiliées et oubliées qui ont marqué le combat pour l'indépendance en Afrique du Sud. *Black Privilege* est un spectacle habité.

### Performance

Un accueil en collaboration avec le Théâtre du Loup  
Avec le soutien du Fonds culturel Sud – Artlink

### Mamela Nyamza

**Création, chorégraphie, mise en scène et interprétation**

Mamela Nyamza

**Dramaturgie et co-interprétation**

Sello Pesa

**Direction technique**

Buntu Tyali

**Création costumes**

Linda Mandela-Sejosingoe

**Création lumières et scénographie**

Wilhelm Disbergen

**Assistanat lumières et scénographie**

Buntu Tyali

**Soutiens**

National Arts Festival of South Africa (NAF), PACT Zollverein Essen – Ruhrtriennale

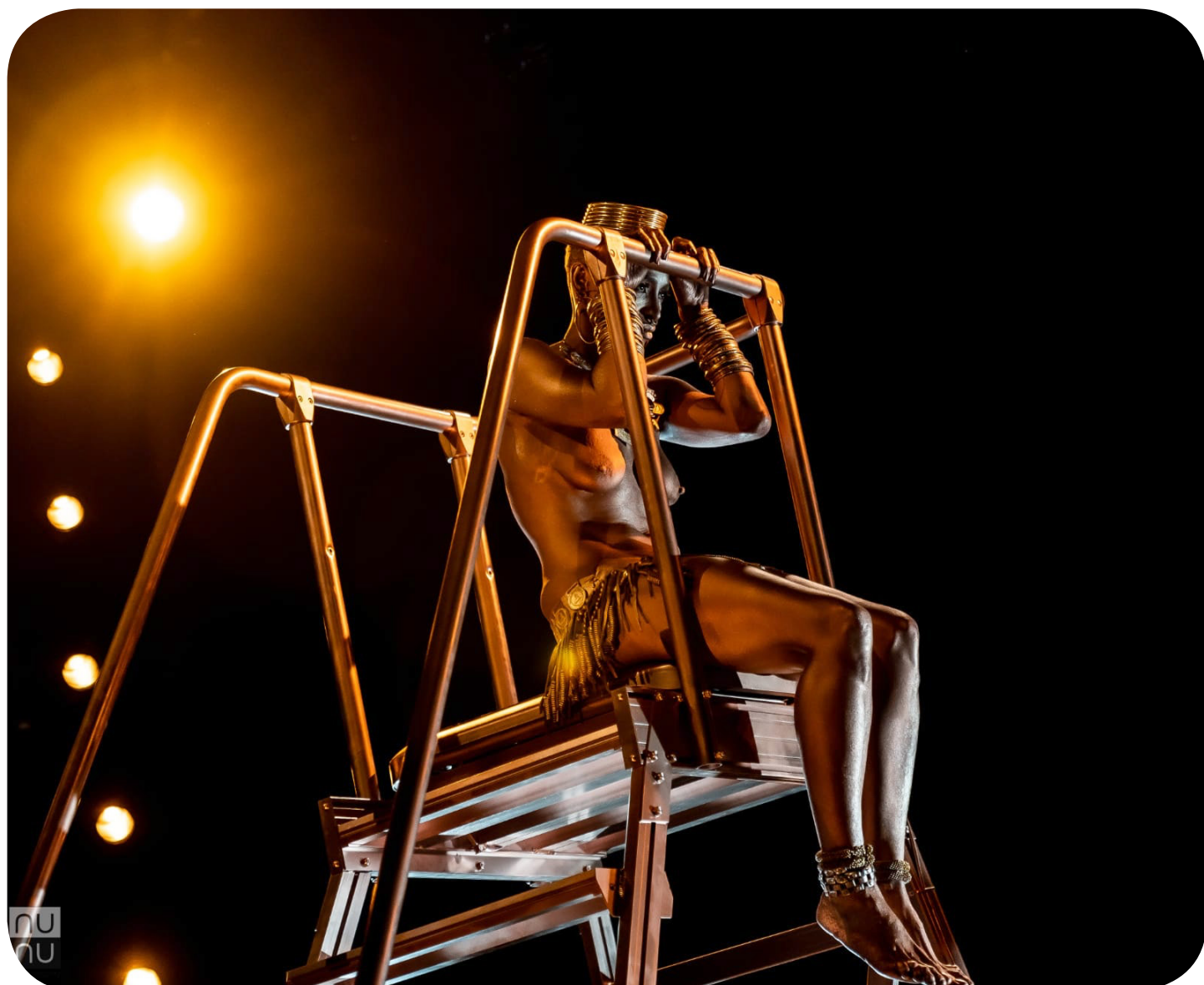
# Informations pratiques

Me 08 sept 19:00  
Je 10 sept 21:00

Théâtre du Loup  
Chemin de la Gravière 10 / 1227 Acacias

Durée : 50'

PT CHF 30.- / TR CHF 20.- / TS CHF 15.- / TF CHF 7.-



# Présentation

## " Black Privilege "

(English)

Mamela Nyamza always intends to cross boundaries with the yearn to defy categorization and limits of any one art genre. In this instance, Ms Nyamza created *Black Privilege* to remove layer after layer to reveal something unexpected. Inevitably, *Black Privilege* has been characterized as an "absurdist live art": a choreographer that questions the meaning of privilege and achievement. Ms Nyamza's work is always labelled as "confusing", "challenging", "uneasy", "stirring", "disturbing"; and indeed at times being rebuked as downright "bad" and "strange".

But

Ms Nyamza's work has never meant to be enjoyed: it is meant to move and leave one's mind whirling in thoughts and ponder.

The work and its related performance depict embodied defiance, desperation, dismantling, and detonation of all structural and institutional myths that claims privilege has been attained.

*Black Privilege* thus uses the forgotten and un-knowledged/ un-appreciated women heroes/heroines to symbolise all the injustices, hypocrises, and dishonesties that has also infiltrated the Arts Industry in South Africa.

*Black Privilege* is a layered piece that reflects complexities of current issues in our art world. Nyamza's work is not overtly about an achieved privilege by Black people. It is an interrogation of the concept "privilege", in a society in which people are judged and rejected on the basis that include, and not limited to race, gender, sexual orientation, and class. Hypocrisy and justice are themes that are explored in this work. The work has been inspired by all the unsung heroines/women who have been and still are isolated and refrained from contributing to the development of their immediate societies. These heroines are still "crawling" on the floor, seeking reprieve from recluse.

Descriptively then, Mamela Nyamza focuses her attention on the hypocritical structure underlying our societies in which everyone is permanently judged and pre-judged. Switching back and forth between a ritual in which she summons up various aspects of strong women and a court process in which powerful figures are held to account for their horrific deeds, Ms Nyamza blurs the boundaries between spirituality and the law. Rejected and unrecognized heroines of the African struggle for independence are brought back to life, judged perhaps also celebrated.

# Interview de Mamela Nyamza

## Extrait

(English)

« On paper, she is an award-winning and internationally acclaimed choreographer and arts activist. In motion, she is an arts rebel and revolutionary, committed to making dance a vehicle for conveying body politics on all social issues, rather than a simple means of entertainment. Mamela's ultimate goal is to reach the most remote of South Africa's areas, unearthing young, raw talent in the art of dance and other performing arts.

Mamela's awards have included being chosen as the Featured Artist of the National Arts Festival, Makhandla for 2018 (the first of its kind for the dance art genre); receiving the FNB Dance Indaba Award for Outstanding Performance by a Female Dancer in Contemporary Style (for 'The Dying Swan' in 2000); being chosen in 2011 as the Standard Bank Young Artist for Dance; featuring as one of O Magazine's Women of the Year in 2013, and being awarded the Imbokodo Award for Dance in 2016. Recently, she once again headlined on the Main Programme of the inaugural Virtual National Arts Festival. Now that the VNAF has wrapped, we grabbed the opportunity for a catch-up with this phenomenal female talent.

*The themes of your work read like a laundry list of social ills and injustices. Do you feel that as long as these persist in our society, art cannot provide a means of escape, but should rather hold us all to account, and compel action through the inequity presented in your performances (and indeed that of other protest art)?*

Ever since my natural body structure was rebuked and rejected by many of my ballet teachers at tertiary level, I knew then that I would be inevitably drawn to the politics of the body. The discrimination I got there encouraged me to not only base my

creation on my life experiences. I also ensured that, the experience I got at this tertiary institution will encourage me to think out of the box, and never to be confined to the knowledge that I had acquired in that institution. With this experience and background, I was also bound to be inspired by phenomenal artists, like Allen Kaprow and Martha Graham, who had this to say about the role of arts: "The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible"

(AllenKaprow)

"Dance is the hidden language of the soul" (Martha Graham)

Therefore, indeed, arts can neither be regarded as a means to escape challenges, nor can be it taken as a commodity for entertainment. Art is a direct weapon to challenge and fight against accepted anomalies, shifting the world from its normative look. Just like we can't live without water; our society simply cannot live without art. »

*Buisness & Arts South Africa, 6 août 2020*

# Biographie

## Mamela Nyamza

(English)

The choreographer and art activist, Ms. Mamela Nyamza, is formally trained in Ballet, and got further training at the Alvin Ailey New York School of Dance as visiting scholar. This is where Nyamza began to tackle the classical genre of dance, by deconstructing the traditional methods and logic of ballet and contemporary dance. Her ground-breaking works, *The Dying Swan* – innovation in the dance in 1998; *Hatched* – against patriarchy in 2007, and the *The Meal* – against elitist ballet in 2012, are autobiographical works that trample on the norms of the classics. Her other works include: *Black Privilege* – against injustices of women; and newest work: *Pest Control* – miscarriage of justice within the arts formalized institutions. Nyamza received these awards: chosen as the Featured Artist of the Grahamstown Standard Bank National Arts Festival 2018, a first of its kind for the Dance Art Genre; awarded the FNB Dance Indaba Award for Outstanding Performance by a Female Dancer in Contemporary Style for *The Dying Swan* in 2000; chosen in 2011 as the Standard Bank Young Artist for the Dance; and, In 2016, awarded the Imbokodo Award for Dance. Nyamza was also identified by the Daily Review (Australia) article by Shawn Lent in 2018 as one of the 30 International Artists to track in 2018, that are positively changing the world. Nyamza was invited to take part in the Dance Future 11: Focus Pina Bausch 2017 in Germany, where the iconic and visionary dancer, Pina Bausch, was celebrated. Nyamza was temporary based at the Theatre Chatelet, Paris in France as a Choreographer for the African Production *Le vol du Boli*, under the direction of Abderrahmane Sissako from Mali. Nyamza's vision is to make dance, as the genre of the performance art, to convey body politics on all social issues, and not to just entertain.

# Presse

## Extrait

(English)

« From a black void emerges the glimpse of a goddess.

Mamela Nyamza, appears perched on top of a bronze wheeled-staircase. Her own bronzed body in the warm light reflects the gold jewelry that adorns her head, ears, wrists and ankles. A second performer, Sello Pesa, catches the eye only a few seconds later when his cumbersome red and black magisterial robes bunch together as he physically pushes Nyamza's mobile pedestal.

*Black Privilege* embodies the dark irony of the title's contradiction. A saturation of iconographic sonography contrasts Nyamza's subdued choreography. The resulting performance seduces a gaze only to return the bright bite of a hot sun. We squint while bearing witness to her tragic fall from grace.

"Please Rise". Nyamza stands holding a gold spear while a metallic set of scales balance on her head. We observe Lady Liberty in silence. She looks past us while the scales move precariously around her bare chest. Afterwards, a vibrating exercisemachine is plugged in with a long black extension cord. When the machine is activated, a familiar electric beep ruptures the shows theatrical illusion. Standing on the platform, Nyamza exhibits her now gyrating body. At one moment while laying horizontal and stiff on top of the machine, she exhales a pained bit of laughter while jewelry is shaken off of her head.

"Please Rise". Nyamza crouches at the base of the stairs. Her wet eyes look up to meet ours. With authority in his voice, Pesa asks us to leave the theatre. We are rushed out without a curtain call.

Moments prior, Nyamza dismounted from her high post, and once laying on her back, inched her body forward as a computerized voice guided her with navigational directions around the checkered floor of the theatre. Her gilded body-paint smears a visible wake in her path. It is not until after returning to the stairs and lifting her upper body from the ground that we realize that this is no longer a monument, but an auction block. Her eyes hold the trauma of our silent looking.

Exiting the theatre, I feel punctured – slightly deflated – a testament to the performance's sharp visual clarity. Leveraging the utopic with the traumatic, Nyamza summons the past in a radical present. The result conjures a temporal whiplash that extends beyond the theatre doors. »

Jamison Edgar, *contemporaryperformance.com*, 5 juillet 2019

# Billetterie

> En ligne sur [www.batie.ch](http://www.batie.ch)  
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