

Emily Johnson / Catalyst

THEN A CUNNING VOICE AND A NIGHT WE SPEND GAZING AT STARS



PHOTO: JONATHAN GODOY

“Ms. Johnson, a magnetic performer, is adept at mobilizing people, onstage and off; you want to follow.”

—Siobhan Burke, *New York Times*, 04.17.2015

THEN A CUNNING VOICE AND A NIGHT WE SPEND GAZING AT STARS is a multi-year project focused on all night stargazing. The work includes in equal measure: making quilts, performance, storytelling, song, and a night of stargazing. It relies upon people coming together to voice intentions, witness, work, experience time, rest, and imagine.

THEN A CUNNING VOICE... is rooted in community visioning sessions created in partnership with the Minneapolis-based Native American Community Development Institute. These visioning sessions ask: “What do you want for your well-being? For your family and friends? Your neighborhood? Your city, town, or reserve?” These intentions are gathered on quilt squares which are sewn into a modular series of quilts during community sewing bees. Once created, the quilts are laid together to become one 4,000 square foot area, designed by textile artist Maggie Thompson (Ojibwe), upon which we will host all night stargazing including moments of silence, performance, stories, and First-Nations star knowledge. We want to share time, to feel and also imagine the space below us on the ground and above us in the air.

COMMUNITY SAFETY VISIONING

Shutting off lights in a park or spending the night in the rural darkness is needed to more clearly see the stars, and it is also an opportunity to spark conversation and action about safety. Safety comes to mind because many intentions voiced in the past two years have been about safety—most clearly safety from police. Many quilt squares

*meredith
boggia*
CREATIVE PRODUCER

MEREDITH BOGGIA
001+ 518.791.0376
meredith.boggia@gmail.com

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meredithboggia.com/emily-johnson
catalystdance.com

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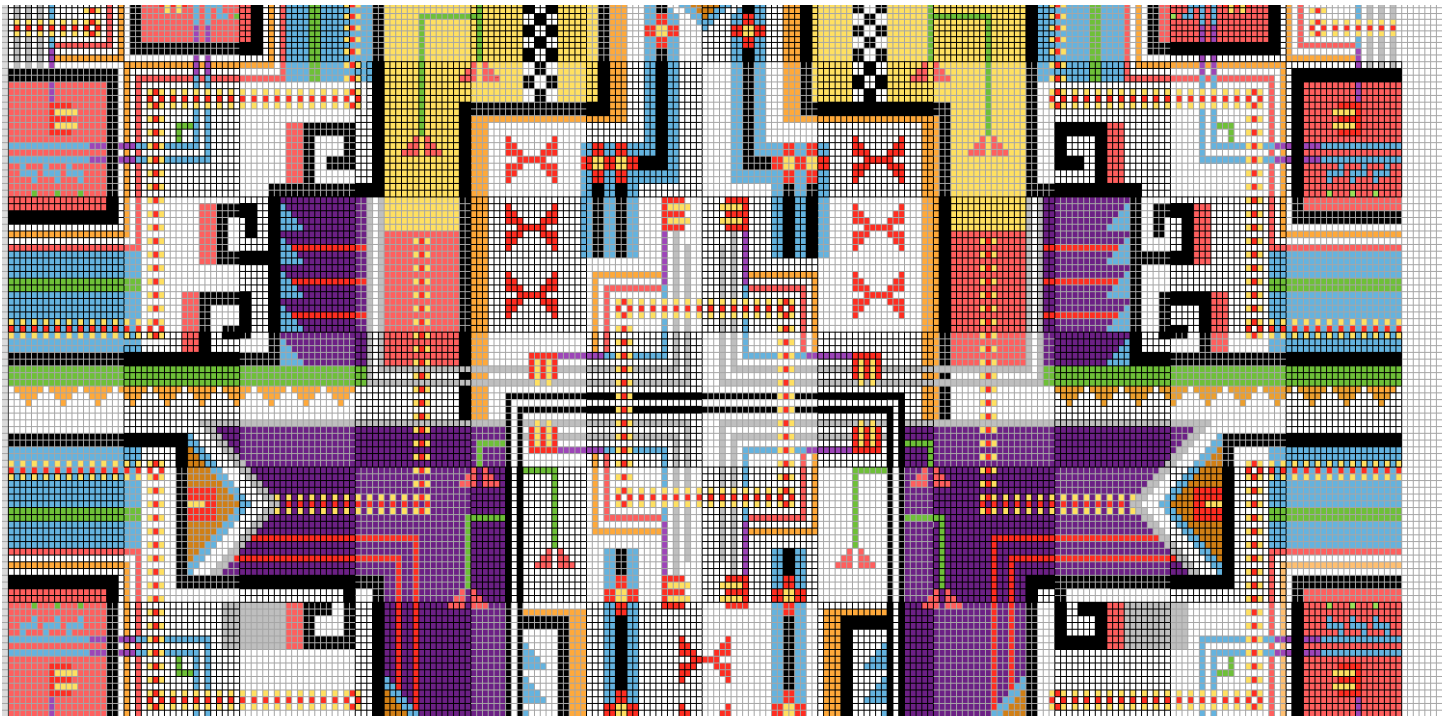


IMAGE: DESIGN OF 84 QUILTS. CREATED BY MAGGIE THOMPSON

say something similar to: “[I want] To not be afraid of police.” (NYC CVS, June 2015). One says, “[I want] The police to stop killing our kids.” (Vancouver BC, August 2015). This project cannot fix power dynamics that create racial violence but it can start to examine and shift dynamics by sharing responsibility and authorship with local residents. The process of shutting off lights will be co-organized with a local youth leadership team who develops a talking and action plan for discussing community safety with police. What excites us about this is the possibility for long term effect—building relationships between young people and police begins to change the nature of power. It changes relationship.

EMILY JOHNSON / CATALYST

Emily Johnson is an artist who makes body-based work that considers the experience of sensing and seeing performance. Originally from Alaska and currently based in New York and Minneapolis, her dances function as installations, engaging audiences within and through a space and environment—interacting with a place’s architecture, history, and role in community. Emily and her collaborators received a 2012 New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award for Outstanding Performance for her work, *THE THANK-YOU BAR*, at New York Live Arts. Her recent work, *NIICUGNI*, finished its ten city US tour in 2013 and her current work, *SHORE*—which is equal parts performance, feast, volunteerism, and story—toured to Minneapolis, NYC, Alaska, San Francisco, and Seattle through 2015. Emily received a 2014 Doris Duke Artist Award and her work is currently supported by Creative Capital, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, Map Fund, a Joyce Award, the McKnight Foundation, and The Doris Duke Residency to Build Demand for the Arts. Emily is a current Mellon Choreographic Fellow at Williams College and was a 2013–15 fellow at The Institute for Advanced Study at the University of Minnesota, a

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2014 Fellow at the Robert Rauschenberg Residency, a 2012 Headlands Center for the Arts and MacDowell Artist in Residence, a Native Arts and Cultures Fellow (2011), a MANCC Choreographer Fellow (2009/2010/2012/2014), a MAP Fund Grant recipient (2009/2010/2012/2013), and McKnight Fellow (2009).

CREATED BY Emily Johnson in deep collaboration with the performers

DIRECTED BY Ain Gordon

PERFORMERS: Aretha Aoki, Emily Johnson, Krista Langberg

VISUAL DESIGNER: Maggie Thompson

QUILT CONSTRUCTION BY volunteers in Minneapolis, North Adams, Tallahassee, Richfield MN, New York

RESEARCH, COMPANY, AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT: Julia Bither

PRODUCER: Meredith Boggia

PRESS REPRESENTATIVE: Janet Stapleton

LINKS

catalystdance.com/then-a-cunning-voice-1

Please email for studio footage of this in-process work.

BASIC THEATRICAL REQUIREMENTS

The intention is to invite audience/participants to an all night performance installation, outdoors. Technical requirements TBD.

DEVELOPMENT & TOURING PARTNERS

Development support is confirmed with Williams College, through a two-year choreographic residency supported by the Mellon Foundation. Then a Cunning Voice and a Night We Spend Gazing at Stars has received research support from MAP Fund. Development residencies are confirmed at Vermont Performance Lab (Brattleboro, VT) and MANCC (Tallahassee, FL). Then a Cunning Voice and a Night We Spend Gazing at Stars has received National Dance Project production and tour support. Presentation is confirmed: pre-premiere TBA in Williamstown, MA; New York, NY; and pending in Austin, TX.

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