


Artist Senga Nengudi uses pantyhose in surprising ways

 [seattletimes.com/entertainment/visual-arts/artist-senga-nengudi-uses-pantyhose-in-surprising-ways/](https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/visual-arts/artist-senga-nengudi-uses-pantyhose-in-surprising-ways/)

By Michael Upchurch

Pantyhose, on the face of it, don't seem like promising sculptural materials. But in the hands of artist Senga Nengudi, they trigger some surprisingly provocative social and sexual commentary.

"Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures," at the Henry Art Gallery, surveys her sculpture, performance and video work since the 1970s. Documentation of her early ephemeral, collaborative art happenings is as much a part of the exhibit as actual artworks. There's a marked gap between the sophistication of her recent video work and the technically crude recordings of her endeavors from 40 years ago. (Nengudi is now in her 70s.)

Still, the consistency of her vision is impressive. Working with the plainest of materials — nylon mesh, sand, wire — Nengudi creates a series of surprises. "Swing Low" and "R.S.V.P. Reverie (Scribe)," for instance, suggest quirkily distorted genitalia.

Nengudi trained as a dancer as well as a sculptor, and some pieces were conceived as "performance instruments." "Untitled (R.S.V.P.)" — with its stretchable, wall-attached, sand-anchored pantyhose legs — will serve as a kind of elasticized jungle gym for dancers Joseph "jo" Blake and Haruko Crow Nishimura to "activate" at 1:30 p.m., Oct. 1. (Lori Goldston provides live cello accompaniment.)

On the other hand, "Nuki Nuki: Across 118th St.," created in New York in 1982, almost dares viewers to destroy it as it precariously balances wooden slats on an intricate pantyhose hammock. "This piece was fragile — held together by a hope and a prayer — much like existence in Harlem in the 1970s and 1980s," Nengudi recalls. "It was structured so that if anyone touched it, it would fall apart."

The show's black-and-white photographs of Nengudi's work being put into action are striking. In "Rapunzel," the "tresses" of the artist's pantyhose-headress hang down from the window of a citadel-like building (an old Catholic school in Los Angeles) about to be demolished. Elsewhere, performers bring Nengudi's cheap materials to antic life, pulling you into some grand ritual or ceremony.

Videos of Nengudi's dance performances from 1977 through 2005 are less impressive, although "Dance Card" (1986), in which she copes with two rivalrous male partners, has some goofy wit to it.

Her more recent video works, however, are the knockouts.

“Hands” (2003-2012), just over a minute long, is a trove of rapidly transforming and intertwining palm-, thumb- and finger-shapes, nicely complementing Nancy Wilson’s plaintive “Save Your Love for Me” on the soundtrack. “Masking It” is a video loop created from photographs taken in 1979 in which Nengudi wrapped herself in masking tape to create “a costume-like covering.” In the shifting stills of the video, she becomes a totemic figure charging forward, retreating and even levitating at times.

The crowning achievement in the show is “Warp Trance” (2007), a multichannel audio-video installation with a score by Butch Morris. Inspired by Nengudi’s visits to textile mills where Jacquard weaving cards (a forerunner of computer punch cards) are used to create elaborate rug patterns, it’s colossal, mesmeric, rhythmic and lush.

Note: Corrected to remove references to this being the artist’s first museum show.

Senga Nengudi stretches the limits of womanhood

 chicagotribune.com/entertainment/museums/ct-ent-0921-senga-nengudi-20170919-story.html

KT

Hawbaker

Artist Senga Nengudi might be known for her involvement in the radical black avant-garde of 1970s Los Angeles, but bringing her work back to Chicago — the city where she was born — conjures memories of her mother and her early years in Catholic school.

“Many years ago, my mom made a major decision to leave Chicago, so it’s powerful to come back this way. The incense, the rituals, all of things I encountered in school here became significant for my future practice,” she says. “That time stuck with me all of my life.”

This influence, among other deeply personal forces, is on display at the DePaul Art Museum, in a survey entitled “Improvisational Gestures.” The show highlights the feminist spine holding up her practice, with explorations of motherhood, blackness and the female body threaded throughout the gallery.

Once a student of noh and butoh theater styles, Nengudi’s work centers around her fascination with the body and often treads the line between sculpture and performance art. One of her most famous works, “Untitled (R.S.V.P.),” exemplifies Nengudi’s approach. The piece, first activated in 1977, features nylon pantyhose that has been stretched and filled with sand. Nengudi then creates a web out of these limber legs that is attached to the gallery wall. To engage her performative element, the artist then moved and danced through the nylons, stretching them to their limits and then releasing.

“I’d just had my two children and was fascinated with this issue of pregnancy, how you expand beyond all recognition sometimes, Nengudi says. “And then your body is so resilient and just bounces back into shape — well, pretty much so. There was also the elasticity of the psyche during pregnancy, this constant resilience that the body enacts.”

Nengudi wanted to find a material that reflected this dynamic and tested a handful of possibilities before the idea of pantyhose “just hit” her. She appreciates its ranges of skin tones and its incredible flexibility.

“I started playing around and filling it, trying to find the sensuality and form that a body has,” Nengudi says. “I found the sand — another big ‘aha’ moment — and went from there.”

While Nengudi initially used her own pantyhose in the project, carrying them around in her bag, she eventually took the work a step further and began collecting nylons from the women in her life. She says that this totally shifted the energy of the artwork.

“I realized that women often wear nylons in stressful situations — a dance, a job interview,” she says. “I wanted to capture a sense of that in the nylons.”

This formula allowed her to take on other matters of the body.

“I was also interested in body distortions and body image. I kept asking, ‘What do women do to change their bodies?’ ” Nengudi says. “I was thinking about how women go through elective surgery and how the body can be distorted by life itself.”

“The whole sewn-together Frankenstein image — ‘I want these breasts,’ ‘I want these hips,’ — was on my mind in the smaller works featuring fragments of nylons,” Nengudi says. This obsession with perfection has only grown more hazardous with time, she says, and bemoans that men have also fallen victim to these social pressures. She believes that these shifts have changed the meanings of her artwork.

“Holy jamoly! Things have gotten ridiculous!” she says. “Everything — racism, sexism — has been taken to the maximum. There’s a heightened sense of urgency to my work now. These are issues I am working with, but it’s layered.” She resists the labels that come with being “a black woman of a certain age” in the arts but also recognizes how these identities come through her work.

“One quote I use in my artist’s statement is ‘from tender, tight beginnings to sagging ends,’” she laughs. “And guess what?” She says that age has given its own kind of necessary tension to the work but also speaks to the relaxation that comes with growing older.

More narrowly, Nengudi wants her viewers to take away personal meaning from the exhibition.

“I don’t believe in spoon-feeding the meaning of a piece,” she says. “That’s why I called my work ‘R.S.V.P.’ — repondez s’il vous plait — please respond to this. I want people to have a personal dialogue with what resonates with them.” Nengudi views it as an act of sharing between artist and audience.

And, it seems like one audience member in particular is Beyonce. The pop star’s 2017 Grammy performance addressed themes of pregnancy, ritual and motherhood, and shared major aesthetic similarities to Nengudi’s other 1977 performance “Inside/Out.” She believes that these images of black motherhood in contemporary art are incredibly nuanced and speak to the balance women of color have to achieve when faced with motherhood .

“I take it down to the universal level of a mother and a child, where there is the love for someone you haven’t even seen yet,” Nengudi says. “Then, you ask yourself about what happens once that baby is born. You don’t want parenting to be fear-based, but you want them to be conscious.”

It’s a vast tension, one that Nengudi uses to stretch the limits of the art world.

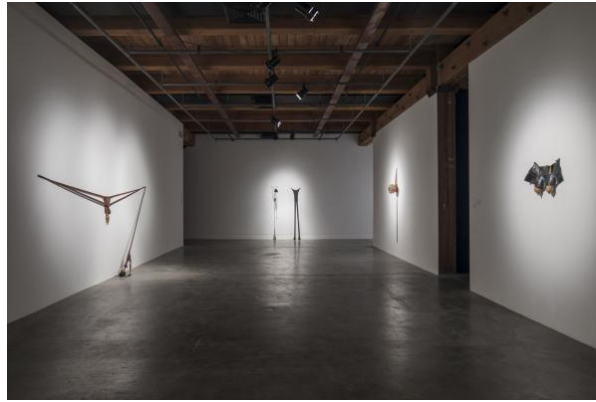
Bodily Response: Senga Nengudi at Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans

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Senga Nengudi, *Untitled (R.S.V.P.)*, 2013; nylon, sand, and mixed media.

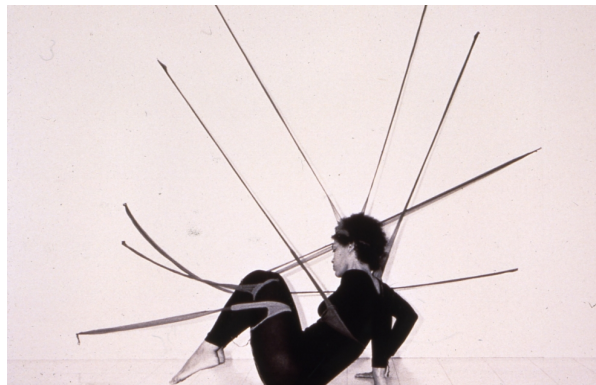
The continuing argument of what it means to be female and to make art is at the core of art's relationship to and impact upon feminism, and my intellectual and personal engagement with art and its histories.^[1] For as art historian Anne Wagner states, this is an argument "that mitigates from artist to artist and will continue to do so until women's achievements are no longer seen as 'exceptional'"—thus, it is an argument that is as exciting to answer as it is depressing.^[2] Walking around the Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans's current exhibition "Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures," I found myself wading deep into this feminist-informed space of questions and demands, eager to mobilize visual and historical relationships between female-ness, objecthood, embodiment, and achievement, perhaps as a wish to come closer to teasing out what exactly a feminist art practice might/could be. I was, of course, rewarded for my work due the rich mass of sculptural, photographic, filmic, and archival works presented within the exhibition; but I was not rewarded because Nengudi's work provided me with secure, unshakable answers to the question of what it means to be both female and artist, but because her objects and visual images capture something of the fluctuating concerns and conditions that have defined feminist art since the 1970s.



Installation view of "Senga Nengudi: Improvisations," on view at the Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans through June 18.

The highlight of "Improvisational Gestures," which was organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver and the University of Colorado Gallery of Contemporary Art, are selections from Nengudi's *R.S.V.P.* series of sculptural assemblages made of pantyhose — partially filled with sand — that have been knotted, twisted, and stretched across the walls. Conjuring the sagging, drooping, elastic conditions of the human body and its dynamic capabilities, the *R.S.V.P.* works speak of bodies of all genders and subjectivities, yet place a particular emphasis on the physical and psychic constrictions of the female body in contemporary culture.

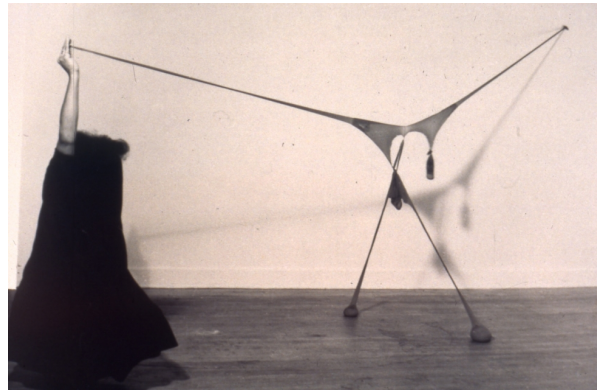
Untitled (R.S.V.P.), 2013, is a series of tan-toned pantyhose pinned in a casual horizontal across the white wall, extending into the viewer's space and spreading into the familiar open angles of legs. The ends are filled with sand, which suggest feet that touch and overlap as if to cuddle or crush one another, offering clues to the viewer to engage them as active objects that are in some state of movement. Whether that movement is joyful or threatening is ambiguous. Knots and twists hang in between the split legs, suggesting phallic forms and vaginal architectures simultaneously, however, Nengudi's overt decision to use cheap nylon undergarments suggest that the context of these forms are deeply inflected by a female body and a female's social experience of her body.^[3]



Senga Nengudi, *R.S.V.P.: Sculpture Activated By the Artist*, 1977; photograph.

Nengudi has discussed her prevalent use of pantyhose as a response to the physical and emotional changes that occurred during and after her pregnancy with her son in 1974. Amazed at the ways in which her body changed, expanded, collapsed, and re-formed, and aware of the reasons that women choose to wear pantyhose (often for professional moments that require extra courage, such as professional job interviews or presentations), Nengudi reflects on the material as a kind of corporeal cage where the edges of the body can be felt or restricted.[4]

However, these pantyhose limbs stretch (literally) into an expansive field of questions around gender entirely. Yes, these pantyhose are deeply gendered items, and register the vast field of oppressive connotations and conditions set upon the female body specifically, but they also do work to suggest that the notion of the male/female binary is not one made up of pure difference. Embodiment belongs to all of us—it is what we all share. This cancellation or collapse forces questions such as: What is a female/male body? What are its conditions, or properties? How do I know? What forms of embodiment are about belonging as opposed to exclusion?



Senga Nengudi, *R.S.V.P.: Sculpture Activated by Maren Hassinger in Performance Piece*, 1977; photograph.

Operating in and around these questions of gender, embodiment, and objecthood is the extension of these questions into collaboration and performance. The images of the artist as well as her longtime friend and collaborator Maren Hassinger performing and responding with Nengudi's works resonate powerfully, and while they engage deeply with many of the neo-avant-garde strategies that shaped art in the 1960s and '70s, such as individual authorship interdisciplinarity, and improvisational movement, they also are documents of a female partnership that turns away from the hyper-masculine narratives and contexts this art historical moment offers.

'R.S.V.P' in French poses the polite command to the recipient to "respond, if you please,"—a title that quietly instills engagement (whether as viewer or collaborator) at the heart of these works. For Nengudi, the better responses were those that occurred through improvisation and dance. Just a few years after Steve Paxton and Yvonne Rainer began their experiments with pedestrian movement and collective choreography at the Judson Dance Theater in Greenwich Village, Nengudi was working with Studio Z—a loose collective of African American artists such as Barbara McCullough and David Hammons that experimented with the conceptual

boundaries of visual and performative practices in Los Angeles in the 1970s as a way to open visual art to the fluctuating rhythms and tempos of “the everyday.” This relationship between movement, collaboration, and improvisation is deeply mined in Nengudi’s practices, and requires us to fit these sculptural objects into a much larger project of collaborations, performances, and environmental contexts that spans almost 40 years. The archival photographs that live as documentary evidence of these early performances are emphasized in the exhibition, and inspire reflection upon the ways in which these objects, informed by bodies, move and change when real bodies “activate” them.

What resonates as most potent is that the images present Nengudi and Hassinger as collaborators entangling themselves within them. Pressing, leaning, pulling, and hanging precariously outside or inside these works, Nengudi and Hassinger are individual makers and movers who share in the creation and explication of the *R.S.V.P.* works. Items like pantyhose that work to subordinate and restrict female bodies now become supportive tools for aesthetic and bodily exploration that points to the resilience of the material as well as the forms of resilience required of women and women artists alike. Leaving the Nengudi exhibition, it was clear that if there is any responsibility that women artists have to feminism, it is to make work that allows entanglement, support, risk, and collaboration to happen.

NOTES:

[1] Thank you to Allison Abey, Director of External Affairs at the CACNO, and Andrea Andersson, Helis Foundation Curator for the Visual Arts at the CACNO, for all their help and support in the writing and researching of this article.

[2] See Anne Middleton Wagner, ‘Another Hesse’ in *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O’Keeffe*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pg. 203.

[3] Nengudi has stated a number of times that the pantyhose used in these works were used, ore previously worn “as a way of accessing the residual energy of what it means for a woman to wear these garments, the imposed tightness and packaging of one’s body.” [Statement from a Museum of Modern Art Audio Interview with the artist](#), 2011.

[4] See Nengudi’s 2015 public presentation and interview with curator Nora Burnett Jones at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver for Feminism & Co.—a weekly lecture series that explores contemporary culture through issues relating to women and gender. [Link to the presentation and interview here](#).

“Senga Nengudi: Improvisations” remains on view at the Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans through June 18.

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The Power of Movement: Senga Nengudi at the Contemporary Arts Center

pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2017/the-power-of-movement-senga-nengudi-at-the-contemporary-arts-center

By [Allison M. Glenn](#)

April 19, 2017

Allison Glenn explores how collaboration, performance, and the body are integral parts of Senga Nengudi's practice, which is documented in an exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Center.



Installation view of Senga Nengudi's *R.S.V.P. Reverie 'D'*, 2014, at the Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans. Nylon mesh, sand, and copper. Courtesy the artist. Photo by Alex Marks.

The interdisciplinary practice of Senga Nengudi is deeply rooted in the confluence of performance, ritual, and corporeal objects. In 1978, Nengudi orchestrated *Ceremony for Freeway Fets*, an improvisational, collaborative performance underneath the interstate overpass on Pico Boulevard in downtown Los Angeles. It was a ritualistic offering inspired by the sparse landscape and vegetation found underneath the bridge. Nengudi adorned the

minimalist concrete support columns and the bodies of her collaborators, including artists Maren Hassinger and David Hammons, with her signature soft sculptures. Hanging like luscious fruit, their anthropomorphic forms are also reminiscent of asafetida sacks.

Ceremony for Freeway Fets was made possible through funding from an Art in Public Spaces grant administered by Brockman Productions, the curatorial arm of Brockman Gallery. Art in Public Spaces grants were made a part of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), a congressional law signed by President Nixon in 1973. Integral to the art community in and around South Los Angeles at that time, Leimert Park-based Brockman Gallery was co-directed by artists, educators, and brothers Dale Brockman Davis and Alonzo Davis.

Collaboration, community, and support were entrenched in the ethos of the gallery, which gave exhibition opportunities and representation to many artists who were overlooked by mainstream museums and commercial galleries at that time. Notable names who had seminal exhibitions at Brockman include Noah Purifoy, Nengudi, Hassinger, and Hammons, all of whom have gone on to become prominent and legendary figures in contemporary art.



Installation view of Senga Nengudi's "Improvisational Gestures" at the Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans. Courtesy the artist. Photo by Alex Marks.

Documentation from the performance of *Ceremony For Freeway Fets* hangs in a central room in the second-floor galleries of the Contemporary Arts Center, where Nengudi's touring solo exhibition and first comprehensive survey "Improvisational Gestures," curated by Elissa Auther and Nora Burnett, is currently on view. Within this intimate space, Nengudi's longtime performance practice unfolds. The collection of ephemera in this room includes documentation from *Flying*, 1982, a performance for the opening of April Kingsley's exhibition "Afro-American

Abstractions” at the Municipal Art Gallery in Barnsdall Park in Los Angeles. True to her collaborative approach, Nengudi was joined by Hassinger, filmmaker Ulysses S. Jenkins, Frank Parker, and others. During the multimedia performance, images of flying birds were projected onto the white-clothed bodies of the performers while they moved from the museum out into the courtyard space, each holding slats of venetian blind, which, as art historian Kellie Jones notes in *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* was the same material found in a sculpture that Nengudi was exhibiting within the gallery. For Jones, *Flying* “evinced Nengudi and Hassinger’s fascination with forms in space, whether sculptural or human.”

The relationship between material, memory, and the body is explored throughout “Improvisational Gestures.” *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th St.*, 1982 is a sculpture made of nylons, window blinds, and nails that was recreated from a 1982 performance of the same name. The performance, and subsequent sculpture, were inspired by what Nengudi has described as living conditions in Harlem in the 1970s and 1980s, “held together by a hope and a prayer.” The anthropomorphic, leggy silhouette of *Untitled (R.S.V.P.)*, 2013, is a commentary on the body through stages of life, such as birth, pregnancy, and aging. Five elongated pairs of nylon mesh stockings of various skin tones are stretched from the wall to the floor, weighted by sand. The feet of the nylons are precariously placed on top of one another, the arrangement evocative of dancers on stage.



Installation view of Senga Nengudi’s *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th St.*, 1982, 1982/2014, at the Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans. Nylon mesh and wooden slats. Courtesy the artist. Photo by Alex Marks.

As curator Naomi Beckwith states in “Dark Mirrors: Performance Documents as Bodily Evidence,” from the catalogue *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, there is a prominent relationship between sculpture and the body in Nengudi’s practice that “is deeply informed by a bodily knowledge of how physical presences inhabit a three-dimensional space.” Many of her sculptures were originally meant to be activated by the body, and some, like *Nuki Nuki*, were created through Nengudi’s performance practice, a fact that was highlighted through programs at the exhibition’s previous venues. Unfortunately, by the time “Improvisational Gestures” made its way to New Orleans, there were enough concerns about the fragility of the sculptures to prevent further interaction.

During opening night, Nengudi was in conversation with longtime collaborator Hassinger. There was a palpable intimacy between the artists, clearly developed through years of working together. Conversation turned to the body, and what Hassinger described as, “the power of movement” to defy bodies and body types. Nengudi revealed that she was dissuaded from pursuing dance for not possessing what was then determined to be the “correct” body type for the profession. As Jones notes in her book, the aforementioned *Flying* marked a moment of many movements, and Hammons’, Hassinger’s, and Nengudi’s explorations of the landscape of Los Angeles and their subsequent influence on the New York art world perhaps provide the most resonant examples of the power of movement.

Editor's Note

Senga Nengudi’s “Improvisational Gestures” is on view through June 18, 2017, at the Contemporary Arts Center (900 Camp Street) in New Orleans.

Review: Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures at the CAC

theadvocate.com/gambit/new_orleans/events/art_previews_reviews/article_f691dece-eabc-5371-958f-08a9bab7ccd1.html

D. Eric Bookhardt

May 30, 2017



Senga Nengudi is having a moment. The 73-year-old veteran of the edgy 1960s New York performance-art scene has become better known for her weirdly imaginative sculpture, works that art critics often associate with deeply conceptual feminist and multicultural theories. Fair enough, but they also have some fundamentally visceral or even spooky qualities about them due to the way she uses her favorite medium: pantyhose. There must be something deeply satisfying about being able to torture and contort that bane of women everywhere into surrealistic concoctions that evoke the human form while venturing into exotic new realms where the artwork stretches like ligaments, or hangs pendulously or contorts acrobatically like the old comic book hero Plastic Man. Since they hint at both pop art and pathos, Nengudi's oddly animist sculptures resonate a wide array of associations.

In works like *Swing Low* (pictured), her abstract forms appear both taut and droopy in ways that suggest tribal African sculpture — or maybe just the secret mythic underworld of the pantyhose spirits. In *R.S.V.P. Reverie "Bow Leg,"* their sinewy convolutions suggest strange praying mantis-like forms that might have escaped from one of Max Ernst's more feverish canvases. The tone is more fraught, or even fetishistic, in *Rubber Maid*, where breastlike forms emerge from under a flap of black inner tube material that looks like it could be part of Batwoman's cape. More bodily connections appear in video works like *Hands*, where gestural hand movements facilitate an almost ritualistic sense of connection with the acrobatic fluidity of her pantyhose creatures. But her videos focused on the art and mechanics of textiles show how weaving machines were the prototype for the earliest computers (illustrated by their perforated paper tape pattern codes). Weaving also invokes the Latin root word for religion, "*ligare*," which means to link or bind, just as "witchcraft" derives from "wicker," the fibers that the ancients associated with the interwoven forces of nature. Obviously, there is more going on with pantyhose than most of us ever realized.

Critic's Guide: Chicago

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Senga Nengudi, *Ceremony for Freeway Fets (Franklin Parker)*, 1978. *Pico Blvd., Los Angeles* 1978. Collaborators: Maren Hassinger, David Hammons, Kenneth Severin, Roho, Joe Ray, and Franklin Parker. Photograph © Roderick 'Ouaku' Young

Senga Nengudi, 'Improvisational Gestures'

The De Paul Art Museum

7 September – 10 December 2017

'Improvisational Gestures' is Senga Nengudi's first, and long-overdue, solo museum survey. Since the 1970s Nengudi has continually returned to readily available materials such as nylon pantyhose, sand, dirt, masking tape and nails, configuring these elements into simple but affecting installations and unscripted performances – all of which this show documents. She likens her engagement with materials to the way 'a jazz musician utilizes notes and sounds to improvise a composition'. The exhibition hails from, among other venues, MCA Denver and University of Colorado, where Nengudi has lived and taught for decades, shown here at the DePaul Art Museum in her hometown of Chicago. The show highlights Nengudi's early involvement in the Los Angeles collective Studio Z, and the overall collaborative nature of her work. This is felt most acutely in *Side by Side* (2006), a touching 10-minute video documenting

Nengudi's long-time friendship with performance partner Maria Hessinger. Ordered chronologically, the two women age before our eyes as we experience the variation of movement and limits of their changing bodies. Similarly pointing to the body in a state of transition, is Nengudi's celebrated and ongoing 'R.S.V.P.' (1977-) series of sculptures in which stretched and sand-weighted pantyhose bring to mind sagging breasts or hips unlocked by childbirth.



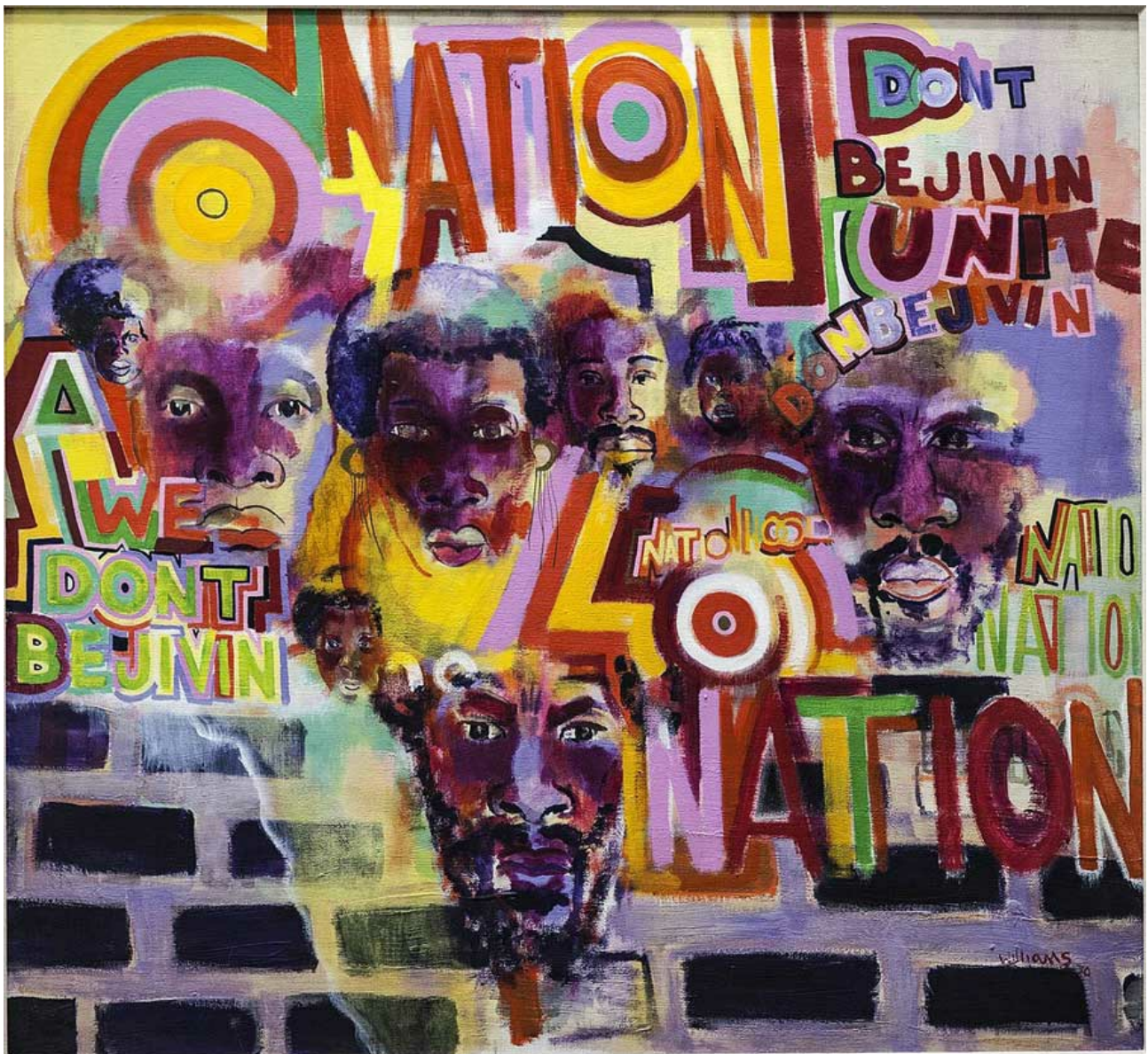
Rachel Harrison, *The First Saturday in July*, 2017, cloth, cement, enamel, acrylic, metal, 23 x 18 x 17 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Greene Naftali Gallery, New York

'Small Sculpture'

Corbett vs. Dempsey

8 September – 14 October 2017

The title of Corbett vs. Dempsey's exhibition 'Small Sculpture' is deceptively straightforward. In a rare group exhibition for the gallery, the nearly 60 small sculptures on view combine to form an energetic exercise in medium specificity, rooted in scale and volume. The density of Rachel Harrison's *The First Saturday in July* (2017), a face-sized, candy-coloured cement blob with a cherry pitter balanced on top, sits in sharp contrast to the slender, restrained verticality of Katsuhito Nishikawa's painted bronze *Untitled* (1986/2013). No larger than 29 centimetres (11.5 inches) on any side, B. Ingrid Olson's *Model for an Endless Room* (2017) is a compact yet infinite proposal. Comprised of five black, plastic DVD boxes bound by a finger-width black metal strap, Matias Faldbakken's *Untitled (DVD Squeeze #01-#05)* (2010) absurdly and humorously communicates the blunted crunch of his 'container series' in which large, commonly metal objects such as fridges, lockers and metal newspaper stands, are cinched and squeezed by colourful lever straps.



Gerald Williams, *Nation Time*, 1969, acrylic on canvas, 1.2 x 1.4 m. Courtesy: Kavi Gupta, Chicago and Geoffrey Black/Johnson Publishing Company

Gerald Williams

Kavi Gupta

9 September – 2 December 2017

Hung in an orderly, cadenced line across Kavi Gupta's N. Elizabeth St. gallery, 11 acrylic paintings on canvas showcase the colourful, polyrhythmic and politically salient work of AfriCOBRA (the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) founding member Gerald Williams. In recent years, Williams's work has been included in major group exhibitions such as the current 'Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power' at Tate Modern, London, and 'The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to now', organized by MCA Chicago in 2015. This exhibition however, is Williams first solo presentation for 20 years. Williams met fellow AfriCOBRA co-founders Jeff Donaldson, Wadsworth Jarrell and Barbara Jones-Hogu in the late 1960s. They began meeting regularly in casual get-togethers within the context of the Black Arts Movement. Their main questions, as expressed by Williams were: 'What is Black Art? And, is that something that needs to be spoken about, worked on definitively. Is there such a thing as black art?' This exhibition offers the opportunity to revisit these still prescient questions, examining Williams' new and old works alongside each other with paintings produced from 1969 to 2016.



Jennifer Packer, *An Exercise in Tenderness*, 2017. Courtesy: the artist and Corvi-Mora, London

Jennifer Packer, 'Tenderheaded'

The Renaissance Society

9 September – 5 November 2017

A steady sense of dignified care runs throughout the 15 new and recent paintings of Jennifer Packer's first solo museum presentation 'Tenderheaded' at the Renaissance Society. The

exhibition combines depictions of funerary bouquets, which Packer approaches as psychological stand-ins for people, with individual portraits of those she knows well – mostly family members and close friends. Staring resolutely out of the picture plane Packer's figures are rendered in consistent shades of pale yellow, ochre, sienna and burnt umber. This palette, combined with hauntingly dissolving forms, is reminiscent of a traditional underpainting technique in which a single de-saturated pigment is applied in the initial stages of roughly sketching out a composition. Actually, Packer moves through a multi-faceted sequence of painting, scraping, sanding and re-painting, producing each work at a measured pace. The cumulative effect lodges each work firmly within an emotion register that can be simultaneously likened to the sensuality of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's portraits or the intense legibility of Kerry James Marshall's scenes – both of whom Packer has been in conversation with in recent years.



The Roundhouse at the DuSable Museum of African American History, Chicago

'Singing Stones'

Palais de Tokyo with EXPO Chicago

13 September 2017 – 7 January 2018

Designed by visionary architect Daniel H. Burnham, the Roundhouse is a 17,000-square-foot structure built in 1881 which over the years has fallen into disrepair. Originally used as a horse stable and now incorporated into the campus of the DuSable Museum of African American History, this luminous, curvilinear room is the newly restored context for 'Singing Stones', a group exhibition presented collaboratively by Palais de Tokyo, Institut Français and EXPO Chicago. 'Singing Stones' explores the intersection between artistic process and architecture with contributions from 11 artists and designers across Chicago and France. Exhibition curator

Katell Jaffrès of Palais de Tokyo and Chicago-based architect Andrew Schachman collaborated on the site design and a bespoke display system that guides visitors through the singular space. Responding to the effects of sunlight filtering into the domed structure, Chicago-based Cauleen Smith has produced a colourful installation which bathes the room and surrounding artworks in translucent yellows, greens and blues that glide across the space like a timepiece from morning to night. A robust public programme also accompanies the show, including the opening and closing night performances of Thomas Teurlai's intriguing *Score for Bodies and Machines* (2017) in which two photocopying machines create a choreographic sequence for, and in response to, the movements of local performers Benjamin Wardell and Anna-Martine Whitehead.



David Hartt, *Carolina I*, 2017, archival pigment print mounted to Dibond, 91 x 137 cm.
Courtesy: Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago; commissioned by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts

David Hartt, 'in the forest'

The Graham Foundation

14 September 2017 – 6 January 2018

David Hartt's 'in the forest' revisits architect and theorist Moshe Safdie's unfinished 1968 housing project, Habitat Puerto Rico. Safdie constructed an ambitious number of these elegant and experimental developments across Montreal, New York, Israel and Singapore, among other cities. In Puerto Rico the project disintegrated when a government housing subsidy that developers relied on to finance the endeavour fell through. Now home to a vibrant array of

plant and animal life, Hartt returns to Habitat Puerto Rico nearly 50 years after the initial project with a series of sculptures, photographs and a captivating 20-minute film that is the centre point of the exhibition. More a study of what remains of Habitat Puerto Rico than a romanticized aggrandizement of this modernist ruin, Hardtt continues his investigations into the relationships between ideology, architecture and the environment that characterize his practice.



Michael Rakowitz, *May the Arrogant Not Prevail*, 2010, found Arabic packaging and newspapers, glue, cardboard, and wood, 6 x 4.9 x 1 m, installation view, MCA Chicago.

Courtesy: the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago

Michael Rakowitz, 'Backstroke of the West'

MCA Chicago

16 September 2017 – 4 March 2018

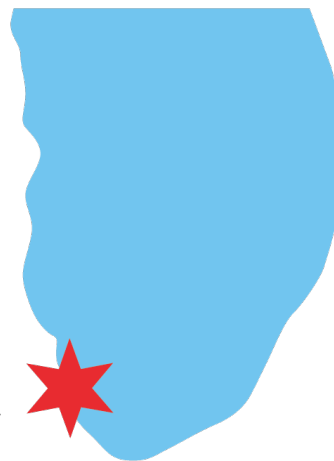
Rooted in architecture and sculpture, Michael Rakowitz's research-based practice commonly employs references to archaeology, popular culture and science fiction to humorously tease open the complex social, political and cultural relationships between the East and West. Often focusing on key moments of conflict or war, this major exhibition includes installations with lengthy, parable-like titles such as *The worst condition is to pass under a sword which is not one's own* (2009) connecting costume designs from Star Wars to uniforms designed by Saddam Hussein's son Uday (an avid George Lucas fan) for Fedayeen Saddam, an elite militia whose members dressed eerily similar to Darth Vader. Entering the exhibition, one must pass under *May The Arrogant Not Prevail* (2010), a replica of the iconic Babylonian Ishtar Gate, re-created here from recycled Arabic food packaging. Amongst other works, the exhibition also includes a new commission *The Ballad of Special Ops Cody* (2017) as well as his well-known 'The invisible enemy should not exist' (2007–ongoing) a series of sculptures that represent an attempt to reconstruct archaeological artifacts from the National Museum of Iraq, following the 2003 US invasion.

Main image: David Hartt in the forest, 2017, digital video still, Courtesy: Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago; commissioned by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, Chicago



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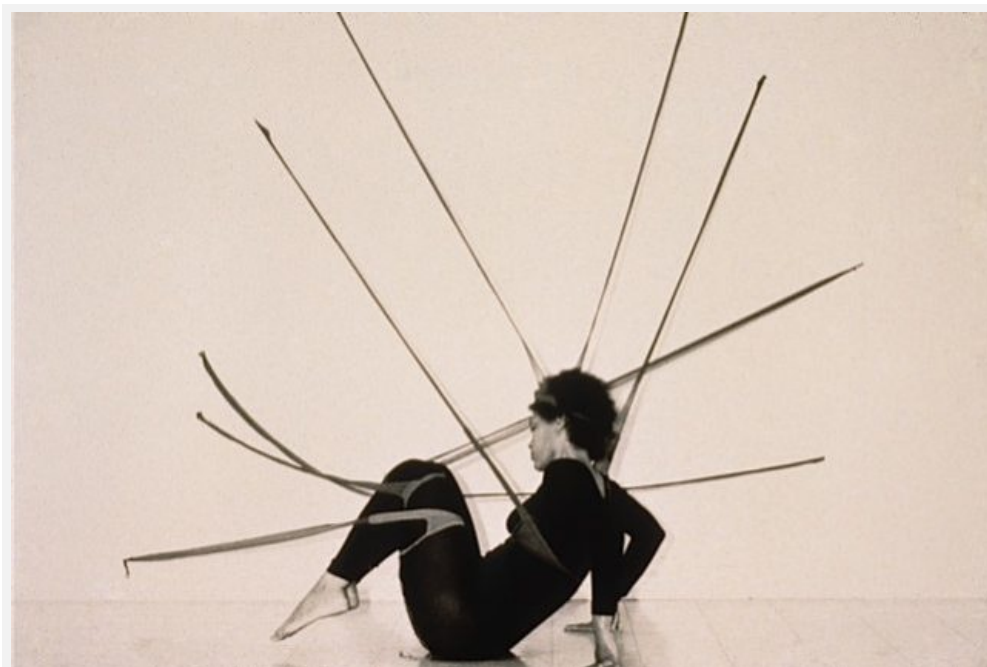
‘Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures’ Integrates Art with Dance

BY TOM WADSWORTH, EMBE (ERASE, A2) OCTOBER, 2018

The [DePaul Art Museum](#) presents *Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures*, an exhibition that surveys the sculpture, performance, and videos of American artist [Senga Nengudi](#), with works dating from the 1970s to the present.

As a multi-disciplinary artist, Nengudi integrates her passion for the visual arts, dance, and body mechanics within her work. Trained as a dancer and a sculptor, Nengudi's approach to art has been inspired by ritualistic performances from a wide range of sources including traditional African ceremonies, Japanese Kabuki Theater, and modern dance.

In 1975, Nengudi began a series of sculptures, entitled *R.S.V.P.*, which evoke the elasticity and durability of the human body. These sculptures are made from pantyhose that the artist stretches, knots, twists, and fills with sand and other found materials. Each work invites viewers to imagine their own bodies stretching in unexpected ways. There is something inimitable about each sculpture because each one seems to have its own sense of movement and rhythm as it projects outward in various directions.



R.S.V.P. sculptures activated by the artist. 1977, 1977/2014. Digital print. Courtesy of the artist.

Nengudi has also used these nylon mesh sculptures as instruments that are activated as she and other performers entangle their bodies in the materials through dance-like movements. She started these series of sculptures in the 1970s when she observed how quickly her body changed through pregnancy. These works are also her reflection and exploration on how the body evolves over time. A quote from Nengudi on the wall text sums it up best when she states, "I am working with nylon mesh because it relates to the elasticity of the human body ... from tender, tight beginnings to sagging ... the body can only stand so much push and pull until it gives way, never to resume its original shape."

Nengudi was born in Chicago (1943) where she spent her early childhood. Her family later moved to Los Angeles where she studied art and dance and afterwards spent an influential year in Tokyo, Japan. She worked with a group of avant-garde African-American artists, such as David Hammons, Ulysses Jenkins, and Maren Hassinger, in Los Angeles and New York from the 1970s to the early 1980s. While living in New York City, her work was also featured at the Just Above Midtown Gallery in Harlem.

Besides her eight nylon-mesh sculptures that are on display, there are also about 30 photographs and a couple of videos that document her interactions with her sculptures through dance and performance. There is a series of photographs titled, *Art Activity, Los Feliz Neighborhood Los Angeles* that shows Nengudi along with her collaborators tying and stretching colored nylon mesh bands in configurations that followed the outlines of garden beds in Los Angeles' Griffith Park. The photographs underscore a central aspect of many of Nengudi's performance works — the relational interaction between bodies.



R.S.V.P. sculptures activated by the artist and Maren Hassinger in *Performance Piece*. Pearl C. Wood Gallery, Los Angeles, 1977, 1977/2014. Digital print. Courtesy of the artist.

Also worth noting is a series of photos titled *Flying*, where Nengudi has various participants climb and jump off various ledges as if in flight. The participants are clothed in white with projected images of birds in flight on their bodies. The photos show the grace of figures leaping into the air while at the same time showing the vulnerability of falling as bodies give way to the law of gravity.

There are also a couple of videos that document her performance work. And there is one video by Nengudi that explores the ritual quality of textile production and repetitive physical labor.

This exhibition shows how Nengudi is a visionary as well as a master when it comes to integrating various disciplines of art. She is not merely a conceptual artist, but also a storyteller, showing us how closely people are connected together through common everyday experiences. Her artwork also hits the senses as viewers observe the resilience and fragility of not only the human body, but the human spirit as well.

Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures will run from September 7 through December 10, 2017. The [DePaul Art Museum](#) is located at 935 W. Fullerton Avenue. Gallery hours are Wednesday and Thursday 11am-7pm, Friday 11am-5pm, and Saturday and Sunday 12pm-5pm. Admission is free. For more information, you can call the museum at 773-325-7506.

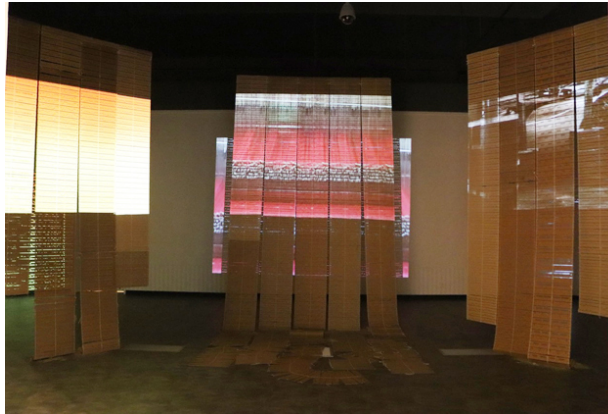
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Senga Nengudi, Fisher Museum of Art, USC, Los Angeles

University of Southern California (USC) Fisher Museum of Art

Didier Morelli



Senga Nengudi, *Warp Trance*, 2007, installation view, 2018. Photo: Juan Rojas, courtesy of the artist



Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures
University of Southern California (USC) Fisher Museum of Art, Los Angeles, January 20-April 14, 2018
Curated by Elissa Auther and Nora Abrams

Art is relational, or so it seems after walking through *Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures* at the University of Southern California (USC) Fisher Museum of Art. In the exhibition, the artist best known for her participation in the Los Angeles 1970s avant-garde is celebrated for her explorations of blackness, the female body, African and Japanese Dance, music, and religious rituals. In this iteration, the travelling exhibition's fourth venue, the show carries a strong message about the critical and conceptual potential of interdisciplinary practices. Now in her mid-seventies, Nengudi's work from the 1970s onwards resonates with contemporary aesthetics and discourse surrounding materiality, performance art, installation, and participation. Providing a selective window into her career as a multifaceted maker, the exhibition only begins to reveal the full extent of Nengudi's artistic significance.

The show revolves largely around the *R.S.V.P.* sculptures, a series the artist began in 1975. Combining everyday materials such as pantyhose, rubber, and found metal into outstretched anthropomorphic forms, the sculptures occupy the gallery space with great dynamism. Although they are completely immobile and composed of ordinary and used parts, the structures gesture outwards recreating the kinesthetic sensation of a moving and/or dancing body. Nengudi also intended them to be activated through performance, as demonstrated in a striking colour photograph of fellow artist (and frequent collaborator) Maren Hassinger, from a live event in the late 1970s. Here, Hassinger engages the work like an instrument, answering the invitation to "please respond."

Ceremony for Freeway Fets (1978), a performance that took place underneath a freeway overpass on Pico Boulevard in downtown Los Angeles, is another critical work on display. Taking place just a few kilometres away from the USC campus,

Nengudi's collaborative ethos comes alive in large colour photographs documenting the original event. Enlisting fellow artists David Hammons, Franklin Parker, and Ulysses Jenkins, amongst others, the performance highlights the interdisciplinary and ritualistic elements of Nengudi's practice as the urban concrete underbelly of the freeway is transformed into a site of collective dance and music making. Commissioned by CETA (California's Comprehensive Employment and Training Act program), which supported artists working in public settings, the artists play on traditional gender roles through improvisatory movement and costume. They also explore collective ceremonial rituals of faith and spirituality through symbolic objects and choreography.

Throughout the 1980s, Nengudi continued to work collaboratively in events including *Get Up* (1980) and *Flying* (1982). A selection of colour photographs, programs, and posters, sheds light on her evolving performative process. The most recent work on view, *Warp Trance* (2007), a room-sized, multi-channel audiovisual installation with a sound composition by Butch Morris, completes the exhibition. Projections crawl across a perforated hanging structure of jacquard punch cards bleeding onto the back wall, as overwhelming industrial sounds envelop the space. Repurposing a system that revolutionized the production of textiles and the earliest predecessor to computer programming, Nengudi evocatively distorts the audience's relationship to discarded objects, labouring bodies, and the space they share. True to form, the exhibition will close with a one-day symposium on April 14, during which the R.S.V.P. sculptures will be reactivated by Nengudi in collaboration with performers Cheryl Banks-Smith and Breeze Smith.

Didier Morelli is a PhD Candidate in Performance Studies at Northwestern University, in Evanston, Illinois. His dissertation focuses on the relationship between the built environment and the kinesthetic nature of performing bodies. He has been published in *Canadian Theatre Review*, *C Magazine*, and *Decoy Magazine*. Forthcoming articles to appear in *esse arts + opinions* (2018) and *TDR: The Drama Review* (2018). As an interdisciplinary artist, Morelli combines practice and research in both his academic and performative explorations.

Published on April 3, 2018

Artistes: Senga Nengudi

Lieu: University of Southern California (USC) Fisher Museum of Art

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