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SMC's MFA dance program presents the first ever 'Process Dance Festival'

Submitted by Michael Lupacchino



Photo Jen Philips photography

available online at stmarys-ca.edu/process-dance-festival. Following the performances on Saturday (June 17), there will be a reception open to the public at the Brother Cornelius Art Center Interior Patio starting at 8:15 p.m.

Cohort 2 is one of the most diverse cohorts in the brief history of the MFA in Dance program. With an age range spanning four decades, students come from multiple states and multiple countries.

Choreographers include Cassie Kosin Liu Begley (Pleasanton), Byb Chanel Bibene (Brazzaville, Republic of Congo), Danielle Ferguson (Dayton, Ohio), Joy Thiesen (Fresno), Kaveri Seth (New Delhi, India), Kelsey Bergstrom Young (San Francisco), Kevin Paul Hockenberry (Lubbock, Texas), Michael Lupacchino (East Hartford, Connecticut), Raul Galvan (Edinburg, Texas), Sarah Billings Wheeler (New York, New York), Stephanie Emmanuela Engel (Santa Cruz), and Zaquia Mahler Salinas (San Diego). The weekend of new works reflects an eclectic variety of artistic expression inspired by a wide range of personal histories and cultural experiences.

The "Process Dance Festival" features works that are the culmination of two years of scholarship and personal choreographic explorations. Tight-knit Cohort 2 presents a weekend of dynamic and unique works with the common theme of shared human experience. Bibene and Engel explore the divine, iconography, and the role that spiritual beliefs play in our lives. Seth's work is a journey through the layers of consciousness and the self, while Thiesen delves into the social issues of mental health and how dance can be used as a tool for treatment. Looking at histories, Galvan presents a study on the paths of four men who have been guided through life thanks to dance while Bergstrom Young looks at all of our "baggage" and how what we collect along our paths influences our futures.

Begley and Lupacchino offer different views of gender and intersectionality, with Begley's work diving into female sexual expression, while Lupacchino looks at masculinities in American concert dance. Mahler Salinas dissects human connection through biomythography while Billings Wheeler takes us into different spaces, both physical and abstract, that influence our lives and our beings. Freeman and Hockenberry address artistic expression as a form of freedom and healing, with Freeman's emphasis on the therapeutics of dance and Hockenberry's look at LGBTQ dance artistry and liberation. The festival features lighting designs by Danielle Ferguson and Seth, as well as costume designs by Freeman.

The MFA in Dance program at Saint Mary's College of California offers two distinct tracks of study: the MFA in Dance: Creative Practice and the MFA in Dance: Design and Production, which is the first program of its kind in the nation. Students in the MFA program span multiple generations and come from all over the world to study in the San Francisco Bay area, home of one of the largest dance communities in the United States.

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