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For arts' sake?: Contemporary dance in South Africa

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2008-03-28T11:45:49Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/4719

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Abstract

Gregory Maqoma, a leading South African contemporary choreographer, mixes elements to create work that is unpredictable and difficult to pin down. His hybrid form of dance contradicts essentialised representations of post-apartheid South Africa. Using layered ethnographic analysis, this thesis examines his work in order to discuss the conversation between art and society in a country that is forming a new democracy. Through the questions that his work raises, this research explores what it means to be 'African', the problems of authenticity, processes of signification and its relationship to embodiment, and the place of the performing arts in the 'new' South African context. It illustrates the potency of art as social commentary, and asserts that freedom and its limits cannot be critically evaluated without considering the dialogue offered by contemporary artistic performance.

Keywords

dance, anthropology, South Africa, democracy, embodiment