

# EXÓTICA

80 min - english

AMANDA  
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Many dancers and choreographers of color from different parts of the world and cultural contexts or of mixed heritage enjoyed great success in early 20th century Europe. Still, they have been forgotten and silenced because they either did not fit in the Western canon nor represented monoculturally defined European nation states. Choreographer Amanda Piña breathes new life into their works with *Exotica*.

La Sarabia, (1878-1988), Nyota Inyoka, (1896-1971), François (Féral) Benga (1906–1957) Leila Bederkhan (1903-1986) once traveled through Europe presenting their dances. What kind of work did these dancers and choreographers of color made at the time? How can we understand it today? What is still present of their contexts today? What kind of work did these dancers and choreographers of color made at the time? What relevance does it have today? What is still present of their contexts in our contexts of work within Europe?

Exotica is an exuberant ritual conceived as a séance through which dancers as ancestors, queer and femmes of color from the past and the present re-appear on stage and come into conversation with the gaze of the audience. Their performative presence opens a space for reenactments; initiating invocations, exorcisms and a celebration.

Amanda Piña:

*“Within this new volume of research I would like to get to know my direct ancestors; Women and queer fellow artists, dancers and choreographers of color living and working in Europe at the beginning of the 20th Century. To host their reappearance is the vision and intention of this new work, an invocation and a spiritual quest on the implications of whiteness, understood as an -invisible for itself- embodied ideology, an unmarked and unnamed position”.*

## CREDITS

Artistic direction | Amanda Piña

with and by | Ángela Muñoz Martínez, Kabangu Bakambay André, Venuri

Perera, iSaAc Espinoza Hidrobo, Amanda Piña

Dramaturgy | Nicole Haitzinger

Integral Design | Michel Jimenez

Stage Set + Scenography | “Forêt Asiatique” (1921) by Albert Dubosq, reproduced by Decoratelier Jozef Wouters **as part of Amanda Piña’s contribution to Infini I #18** (2022)

Technical Direction | Santiago Doljanin

**Light Design support | Krispijn Svhuysmans**

Music | Zevra, Dombolo?, Cumbia?

**Lyrics | Amanda Piña, singing Venuri Perera, Angela Muñoz, Bared Kabangu Bakambay, iSaAc Espinoza Hidrobo & Amanda Piña**

**Live Music | Ángela Muñoz Martínez, and performers**

Sound Design | Dominik Traun

Costumes | Federico Protto

Director’s assistant | Pierre-Louis Kerbart

Production and Distribution | neon lobster / Giulia Messia & Katharina Wallisch

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AMANDA PIÑA / NADAPRODUCTIONS

# EXOTICA





Frieze Aziatiek, historical scenography

## THE DARK SIDE OF MODERNITY



## A RITUAL INVOCATION

Within this arts-based research I would like to get to know my direct ancestors, artists, dancers and choreographers of color living and working in Europe at the beginning of the 20th Century. Women and /or queer fellow artists whose works were highly recognized at the time, to later disappear, leaving almost no traces in art or dance history. To host their re-appearance is the vision and intention of this new work, an invocation an spiritual quest on the implications of whiteness, understood as an -invisible for itself- embodied ideology, an unmarked and unnamed position.

The selected artists I would like to invoke and bring again to life worked with methods other, or 'not only'- western. Their live performances hosted the reappearance of ancestral entities, rhythms, ontologies. Their epistemic disobedience to the western forms of knowing, through/ with bodies, was rooted in the speculative perspective of diaspora. Their dances produced other worlds of meaning and sensing, which had to fit into the frames of audience ship, frontality, authorship, the theatre

Immersive, a trip into the magic of what bodies can do, naked, close by, a political, erotic uprising, embodied and spiritual.

## AN ANATOMY OF THE WHITE GAZE

Exotica proposes a condition, in which to be, at crossroad of facts and experiences that determine a certain form of public appearance for the artist, and a context for the art work. While some (white and male) artists were being featured at the Modern Art fairs and exhibitions of the time, other-queer or female, "new" or second generations European-artists were featured at the international colonial exhibitions, were the term 'exhibit' gained other connotations.

The institutional framings for the modern arts, worked reproducing the othering schemes of coloniality. One could, depending on those frames, be part of an exhibition or be the one exhibited at the 'human zoos' of the time. At the core of this divergence in framings, the operating colonial notions of race, gender and class, determined the working possibilities for women-artists-of color available at the time in the colonial metropolises. Standing in the slippery terrain of their intersectional existences, on their way towards their artistic and economic independence, their bodies and works were tokenized but also translated into value and carried onwards by a practice of theatre very on vogue at the time, a frame within which their first appearances as artists could exist, the shows of theatre de Variété or the Revue.

#### *Dramaturgy of a contemporary, ancestral Theatre de Variété:*

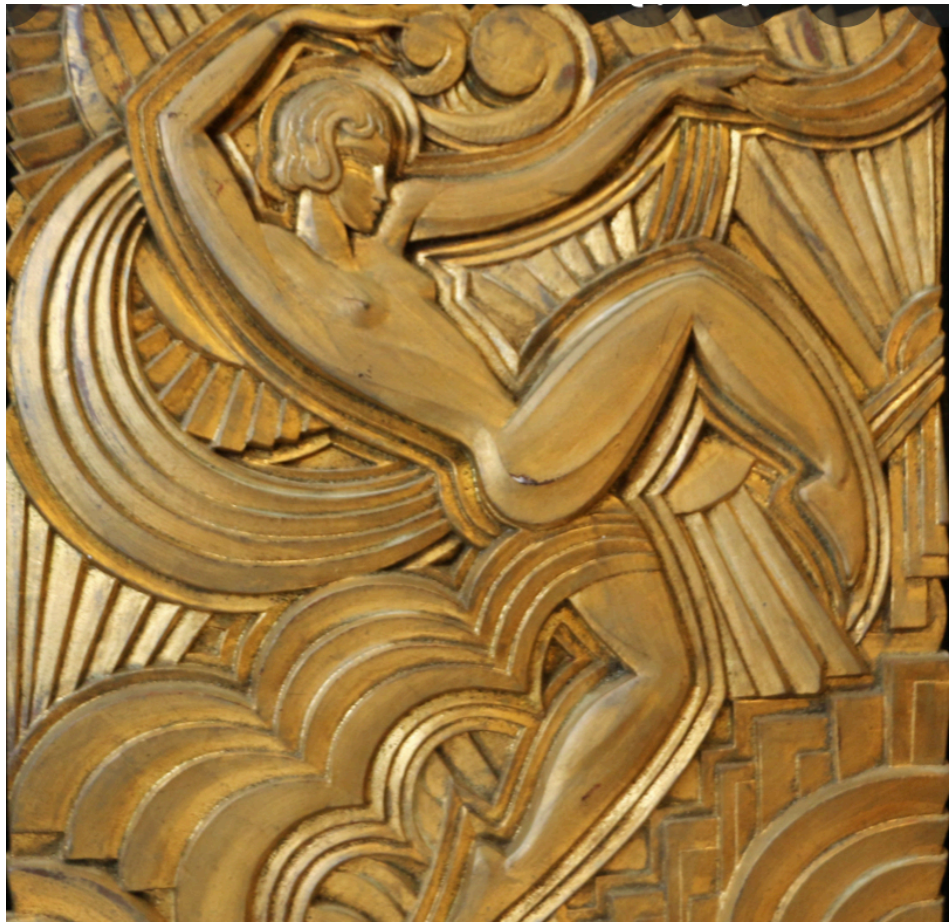
The exotic and exotified can be thought of from many different perspectives, as a problem in the eye of the ones who see, witness, or consumes certain spectacles, experiences, rituals; Exoticism can be understood as the incapability of dealing with otherness which turns difference into a fetish for consumption. When embodied purposely, as a realm of possibility, shape shifting, identity speculation, glamour, creativity and dreaming are fertile terrains for artistic research practices, dances and performances.

Whiteness as a concept has emerged and is becoming popular at the beginning of the 21st century; With the coming to age of decolonial discourses, theories and practices originated in the Americas and elsewhere, especially the ones developed by Latin American and Caribbean scholars and after the Black Lives Matters movement, we can speak about whiteness as a uncharted territory of inquiry within European critical theory and the arts.

The white gaze as a concept is not here meant as a skin color of the viewer, but as a not informed, not reflected and less self-reflected category of looking from a modern-colonial "privileged"/ "provincial" place.

How does this gaze operate? Is it individual? Collective? Private? Public? Institutional? Artistic? Curatorial? Does it exist per default? In which way is it possible to reverse it? To deflect it! Who are the allies in this process?





## DIFFRACTION/REFRACTION /DEFLECTION

Diffraction refers to various phenomena that occur when a wave encounters an obstacle or opening. It is defined as the bending of waves around the corners of an obstacle or through an aperture into the region of geometrical shadow of the obstacle/aperture. The diffracting object or aperture effectively becomes a secondary source of the propagating wave.

Refraction of light can be seen in many places in our everyday life. It makes objects under a water surface appear closer than they really are. It is what optical lenses are based on, allowing for instruments such as glasses, cameras, binoculars, microscopes, and the human eye. Refraction is also responsible for some natural optical phenomena including rainbows and mirages.

One of the basic predictions of general relativity is that light is influenced by gravity. For instance, light passing a massive body is slightly deflected. This is the basis for what is called gravitational lensing.

The staging is a ritual for hosting the reappearance of the artists mentioned above and proposes a double reappearance: the reappearance of three (almost) forgotten dancers in a reappearing variété context. By means of 'compossession' I/we let reappear the 'darker' side of modernity in a double sense: (1) an anatomy of the 'white' gaze and (2) a composessed experience in which a dancing and experiencing with closed eyes may become possible beyond the logic of the spectacle.

Compossession combines composition and possession, referring to forms of different knowledges beyond a 'western' conception, and integrates practices from Caribbean, creole and indigenous practices. As an alternative to that notion of composition, compossession operates in decolonial terms beyond the notions of time, space, subject, object proposed by "the contemporary" as a continuation of modernity/coloniality.

How to unspell the white gaze? To diffract it, refract it, deflected?

The piece proposes a light study, a study of the gaze and the possibilities of making the invisible aspects in which whiteness as modernity/ coloniality are reproduced visible in order to engage different in the process of being together in the theatre.





Nyota Jnyoka

Phot. Rosie Ney

## ARTISTS 2020's:

Juan Carlos Palma, Venuri Perera, Dafne Moreno, Daphna Horenczyk

## ARTIST 1920's:

La Sarabia, (1878-1988),

Mexican –French artist, the great grand aunt of my father. She left early to Paris to study dance and never came back to México, She danced for of the last Russian Zar and created an invented Folkloric dance that was partly Brazilian and Spanish partly her own dance inspiration. She had a daughter who also was a dancer and who was a friend of Maurice Bejart, Not much material is found only images of her dances. She died in poverty in Marseille at the age of 98 years old,

Nyota Inyoka, (1896-1971)

Born to a French mother and a father of color, most likely in the French historical colonial context. She spent her childhood and pursued her education in Paris. Following her 1917 debut in Paris, she began to gain a reputation as a dancer and choreographer in 1921 with her performances at the Théâtre Oasis of the well-known Parisian couturier Paul Poiret, who contributed to staging her as a europeanized icon of Indianness with his spectacular costumes. In 1923 Nyota Inyoka was hired to dance in John Murray Anderson's Broadway-Show Jack and Jill at the Greenwich Village Follies in New York, but never actually made it to Broadway. Instead, Inyoka initially performed at special sunday concerts for New York's elite and in 1924 at the Boston Fine Arts Museum at the invitation of the author Dhan Gopal Mukerji and possibly also of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, a well-known historian and philosopher of Indian art who was there as a curator. Back in Europe she performed at the Exposition Coloniale (1931) with her company Ballet Hindou, which was orientalized in reception. Most likely the members of Inyoka's company were primarily young Parisian women with mixed heritage. In 1939 she performed at the New York World Fair. After the war she continued performing with her company (notably in August 1952 during the Venice Biennale at Palazzo Grassi where she presented an evening-long ballet for a cast of 24 dancers and an orchestra of 32 musicians called La Crysallide and depicting a spiritual journey), lectured, taught yoga, and was in contact with a broad range of personalities in the arts and in politics, among them Gaston Baty, Serge Lifar and Gamal Abdel Nasser. She died in Paris in 1971.



### François (Féral) Benga (1906–1957)

Probably one of the most fascinating figures of Parisian modernity. Having come from the (formerly French-ruled) Republic of Senegal, migrated to the Parisian metropolis, and performed in the so-called *Revue Nègre* as well as in artistic cooperation with the Parisian avant-garde, the dancer almost fell into oblivion in the 20th century historiography. He was born in Dakar as the illegitimate son of a Lebu father and a Serer mother. His childhood was marked by conflicted genealogical and dynastic structures and positions, involving the resolute assimilation to work and, especially, work for the French colonial regime on the father's side and warring resistance against it on the mother's side. Aside from receiving a fairly non-professional education at a state school, he was active in a choir of missionaries. As a seventeen-year old, he went to France with his father. In the Parisian revue-context, he would accompany, for instance, Josephine Baker's "danse des bananes" (1925) on the tom-tom drum. In the early 1930s, he emerged as one of the stars of the revue *Un coup de folie* at the Folies-Bergères. In the early 1930s, however, Benga goes beyond the typecast assigned by the conventions of music hall. His performance as a limping black angel in Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un poète* (1930) points the way towards attributions such as *Bel Adonis nègre* (beautiful Negro Adonis), *Dieu de bronze* (Bronze God) or *Le Mercure noir* (Black Mercury). In 1934 Benga embarks on a research trip to West Africa together with Geoffrey Gorer, a British anthropologist. It is clear that Benga and Gorer become romantically attached. In monograph *Africa Dances. A book about West African Negros* (1935) Benga's photographs of dances as central to the publication but he is given almost no credit for his contribution. In 1938 he opened an African cabaret-restaurant in Paris. After WWII Benga had intensive contact the Parisian philosophical circle, notably with Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. He married his cousin from Senegal, had a son with her in 1955.

### Leila Bederkhan (1903-1986) (also: Bedirkhan, Berdihani, Bedirxan)

Born in 1903 in Constantinople. Her father came from the last ruling family of the autonomous Kurdish Empire. After leaving the father, her Austrian-Jewish mother moved to the court of the Khedive of Egypt to work as a dentist. They lived for ten years in Cairo and had the possibility to participate in the rich cultural life within the harem, but also within the city f.e. in the opera-house where Bederkhan had her first contact with ballet. The adolescent Leila was educated at a prestigious boarding school in Montreux, Switzerland, and lived then between Munich and Vienna. She studied dance with the prima ballerina of the Viennese court opera Cäcilie Cerri<sup>[1]</sup> (who was of Italian descent) and made her first appearance in 1924 in the great hall of the Wiener Konzerthaus. After this big success she went on tour in Europe and the USA. In 1926 she moved to Paris where she later met and married the French painter Henri Touache. Bederkhan ended her active dancing career in the 1940s and founded a dance school in a Parisian suburb where she lived until her death in 1986.

