

WHITNEY

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PRESS RELEASE



My Barbarian, The Case of the Stairs, 2008. Performance, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, March 8, 2008. Commissioned by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Photograph © Alexandra Wyman

MY BARBARIAN DEBUTS A SURVEY OF THEIR WORK AT THE WHITNEY MUSEUM ON OCTOBER 29

NEW YORK, NY, October 6, 2021 – On the occasion of their twentieth anniversary, the Whitney Museum of American Art will present a survey of the creative output of My Barbarian in three parts: an exhibition, a series of live performances, and their first monograph. The members of My Barbarian—Malik Gaines (b. 1973), Jade Gordon (b. 1975), and Alexandro Segade (b. 1973)—have used performance to theatricalize the contours and entanglements of class, gender, race, and sexuality since 2000. The exhibition—created in close collaboration with the artists and drawing from the group’s extensive archive—stages My Barbarian’s work through performances for the camera, video documentation, music, sculptures, paintings, drawings, masks, textiles, costumes, and puppets. Concurrently, the performances reconceive iconic shows from My Barbarian’s history in response to contemporary contexts and exemplify the array of theatrical styles and formal strategies the collective has explored. My Barbarian’s survey at the Whitney will be presented in the John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation Gallery, with performances throughout the Museum, in the John Hess Family Theater, and over livestream from October 29, 2021, through February 27, 2022. (Complete details on the performance schedule are included below.) *My Barbarian* is organized by

Adrienne Edwards, Engell Speyer Family Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs, with Mia Matthias, curatorial assistant.

Distinguished by their humorous and accessible style, *My Barbarian* adapts a range of sources, including modern plays, historical texts, mythology, ritual, and media narratives, into structures for performances and related works across mediums. The resulting projects build on and reimagine the wide-ranging creative lineages that inform their work, such as queer and feminist theory, conceptualism, performance, institutional critique, social movements, pop culture, and political, musical, and community-based theater. The Whitney has commissioned *Rose Bird*, a new work composed, directed, and performed by the trio. This performance for the camera will be created in homage to the first female chief justice of the California Supreme Court, Rose Bird, a controversial figure due to her opposition to the death penalty—a sentence she repeatedly overturned during her decade-long tenure. Working with a variety of texts, *Rose Bird* will reimagine scenes from her biography as a teleplay and appropriate the media reports that framed her personal life and work.

“*My Barbarian*’s seriousness of play in engaging institutions, namely museums but also within academia, has been an important distinguishing factor in their work and extended through their multivalent engagement with the Whitney,” said Adrienne Edwards, Engell Speyer Family Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs. “Their style threads together some unlikely interlocutors, including camp, institutional critique, and politically conscious. *My Barbarian*’s past twenty years of making, doing, and being in art finds strength in its multiplicity of various elements and perspectives, scaffolded by each other.”

My Barbarian Performances

The live performances reconceive iconic shows from *My Barbarian*’s history in response to the contemporary context and exemplify the array of theatrical styles and formal strategies the collective has explored. All performances take place throughout the Museum and over livestream. Registration details are available at whitney.org.

Transparency 2021

Friday, November 5, 2021 7:30 pm, 8:15 pm, 9 pm

Total Runtime: 15 minutes

Transparency 2021 is a site-specific performance in which music, live feeds, text, and disco-inspired dance numbers appear throughout the building in both public areas and private administrative offices, inviting viewers to consider what is visible and hidden within the Museum’s functions. The partially choreographed and partially improvised work permeates the architecture of the Museum and temporarily blurs the boundaries of institutional spaces and information.

Alongside *My Barbarian*, longtime collaborators Miguel Gutierrez, Katy Pyle, and Will Rawls will be stationed throughout the Museum while their movements are livestreamed on flat-screen televisions. At times they will perform solo improvisations, dancing duets with the spaces they inhabit. At other moments they will move in unison, refracting the performance throughout the building. Critical and didactic fragments of text will be written on overhead projectors and spoken aloud throughout the piece, decorating the space with a dynamic layering of song, speech, and movement. Eventually, the performers will meet in the same space, mirroring each other in a *Solid Gold*-style finale.

The 2009 iteration of the work, *The Fourth Wall (Transparency)*, was performed at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and explored “transparency” as both optical phenomena and metaphor for accountability.

Transparency 2021 is accompanied by an Italo disco-inspired score produced by Nicholas Weiss (a.k.a. Nightfeelings). The costuming by Nick Nelson plays on signifiers of taste and expertise using sheer and translucent fabrics. The video component, using ubiquitous technologies such as Zoom and iPhones, is directed by Amy Ruhl.

Songbook

Saturday, December 18, 2021

Total Runtime: 120 minutes

Songbook is a musical showcase drawing from My Barbarian’s extensive repertoire over the last two decades, focusing on their early band performances. The concert will be livestreamed from Los Angeles and reunite a host of local musicians who played with the band in the early 2000s. Throughout the live broadcast, the artists will reflect on their body of work and interact with the livestream audience.

The performance will be held at 2220 Arts + Archives in Los Angeles, the venue now occupying the indoor theater space where My Barbarian premiered several performances, including *Pagan Rights* (2005) and *Purple Eyes* (2004).

Double Future

Thursday through Saturday, February 24–26, 2022

Total Runtime: 80 minutes

Double Future is a double-bill performance consisting of two musical theater pieces, *You Were Born Poor & Poor You Will Die* (2005) and *Silver Minds (Tourists from the Future)*, 2006. The 2021 restaging will take place in the Hess Theater in conjunction with the closing of the exhibition and will respond to the contemporary moment with prescient works that address class struggle and environmental collapse. The work was first presented at the Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater (REDCAT) in 2006.

Performed as a three-person play, *Double Future* employs masks, handmade instruments, lighting, and video projections to evoke mythical figures, embrace the proscenium, and reinvest theatrical conventions with the power of ritual. The artists will be accompanied by three musicians, including a guitarist, drummer, and flutist.

About the Publication

My Barbarian at the Whitney is also accompanied by the first monographic publication on the collective, which offers new insights into the work of this singular group of artists. Published by Yale University Press, the catalogue is produced through close collaboration with the group and is co-edited by the artists Malik Gaines, Jade Gordon, and Alexandro Segade, and curator Adrienne Edwards. Contributors include Joshua Chambers-Letson, Associate Professor of Performance Studies at Northwestern University, and Lia Gangitano, Curator and Director of PARTICIPANT INC. Scheduled for release on January 25, 2022, the publication includes an overview essay by Edwards and a richly illustrated visual chronology that includes texts on each of My Barbarian’s past works written by the artists. Other contributions explore the collective’s output through a lens of queer and other critical theory and contextualize it within the twenty-first-century experimental performance scene in Los Angeles and New York City. Performances and video

works are re-created using stills alongside photos, drawings, scripts, and personal materials drawn from the artists' archives, many never previously published.

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About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists at a time when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for ninety years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists themselves, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.