

## Artistic Praxis Track

*The Artistic Praxis track put ideas into practice with this series of creative process workshops—with performance artist **Djola Branner**, poet **Roger Bonair-Agard**, dancer and choreographer **Millicent Johnnie**, and singer/ensemble theater artist **Mildred Ruiz**. This track also featured an Open Rehearsal with renown playwright **Cherrie Moraga** and director **Dora Arreola**, at work with the cast of **The Hungry Woman**, blending Greek and Mexican myth in a Chicana lesbian re-telling of Medea. And, **Hip Hop Histories & Resistance**, a dynamic panel bringing artists and scholars together, including Jeff Chang, Millicent Johnnie and Baba Israel, to explore Hip Hop's genesis, and its influence as a worldwide voice of resistance (notes on this session follow, but also see the Hip Hop Histories article by Priscilla Page, with interviews from these important artists). Artist statements by Community/One showcase performers Kristina Wong, D'Lo, Lenelle Moise, Jerry Quickley, and Jose Torres-Tama are also included below.*

### **The Performance of Biography**

An Artist Workshop with Djola Branner  
Friday April 4, 2008  
UMass Department of Theater

*This interdisciplinary theater workshop explored the dramatization of biographical and autobiographical material, identifying and discussing the pitfalls of creating biographical drama and, through writing and performance, exploring the dramatization of “defining moments” in our own (and other individuals’) lives.*

Reflection by Priscilla Page

Djola led a round of introductions and asked us to share projects that we are currently working on. Participants included a student volunteer from Mount Holyoke College, artists Rhodessa Jones, Yvonne Mendez, Manu Mukasa, Kim Euell, Kashara Robinson, Regie Cabico, and Maya Winfrey from American Friends Service Committee.

One question that Djola posed was, “What are the pitfalls of autobiographical work?” We concluded that there are serious questions around disclosure: How honest can I be? How courageous can I dare to be? He told us to give ourselves full creative license. Another pitfall is fear. Then he asked us to write down three defining moments that triggered a different way of thinking about ourselves, another person, or the world around us. He explained that these defining moments help us to isolate a small piece of a big story so that we can really get into the story. “Your work will grow from this small place. Think of it as looking at one corner of a city block instead of trying to look at the whole city.” He also told us that we can capture story

through character. For the remainder of the workshop, we each shared our defining moments and along the way we found interesting connections across our experiences. Many of the stories involved the struggles and the success of ourselves, our families, our people. Some of us focused on grieving a lost loved one and on birthing our children. Our next task is to take one of our defining moments and script it. Djola's questions here are: Who do you want to tell this story to? Is it a scene? Is it a monologue? He tells us we need to release our stories, we need witnesses for our stories. With some more discussion and the sharing of some influential sources, Joni Mitchell, Roy Orbison, *The Redemption Song* by Bob Marley, and a piece titled *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, the workshop ends.

My three defining moments:

June 2005. My mother's passing. It was sudden. I was here (in Amherst). I got a phone call that she had been rushed to the hospital. I made plans to travel and got on a plane with my daughter. She passed while we were on our way.

August 1992. The birth of my daughter. I was very young—20. I was ultimately alone a single mom in an abusive relationship. My mother, my aunt Linda and my cousin Linda were there for me when I brought Brettney into this world.

November 2002. I traveled to Manila for my first and only trip to an Asian country to attend a women's theater conference. I met Jessica Hagedorn. My friend Alice and I shared a room. I traveled halfway around the world alone and felt so free, independent and grown.

### **Louisiane Noir: Hip Hop and Black Creole Dance Forms**

An Artist Workshop with Millicent Johnnie

Saturday April 5, 2008

UMass Department of Theater

*This movement workshop explored various dance forms influential to the southern manifestation of Hip Hop culture found throughout the black Creole experience in Louisiana, such as Zydeco, Swing out, Second Line, Bounce, Gig, Buck Jumping and more.*

Reflections by Lianne O'Shea

"I dance to rejuvenate my spirit and stay balanced. It is the language I use to communicate with my ancestors, and it heightens my awareness to social

conditions that were plastered upon countless people of color throughout the world.”

- Millicent Johnnie

Millicent Johnnie is a Louisiana native who has studied multiple forms of hip-hop, jazz, Caribbean and Creole dance. She has a B.F.A. and an M.F.A. in dance from Florida State University and she has taught at colleges and universities. At Intersection V, Johnnie gave a workshop on many of these types of dance, explaining the histories behind them. In her workshop we learned of Zydeco, Second Line, the dances of Mardi Gras and modern steps such as “walk it out.”

“Zydeco” literally means “snap beans” when translated to English. It is a form of music and dance that arose from the Creole culture in Louisiana as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the first recordings of Zydeco were in 1928. Zydeco is a blend of traditional Creole music, with Cajun and African American influences; it has a fast tempo and its typical instruments are piano, accordion, washboard and guitar. The dances that are traditionally done with Zydeco reflect the music. We learned a quick two-step partner dance. Johnnie explained to us that the movements were low and close together, because they were created in tight, crowded and sweaty dance clubs in the south. Hip Hop dance today is a direct descendant of the Zydeco dances of the past.

Johnnie also taught us the traditions of dance and Mardi Gras. This type of dance evolved from the Mardi Gras Indians, who are now remembered through a ritualized dance and parade. Johnnie described this to us as a contest, where each tribe is hoping to show off the flashiest costumes and the most beautiful queen. The parade begins with the Spyboy, whose main movement is a lookout position. The traditional use for the Spyboy is to see if the other tribe has arrived and to check out the scene. Next the Flag Boy arrives, who waves the colors of his tribe. Then the tribe’s chief proceeds and he appears strong and silent. All of this procession takes place before the queen, who struts like a peacock showing her feathers. All of these characters and traditional movements are still done in Mardi Gras parades today.

Johnnie then taught us the jazz funeral tradition of the Second Line from New Orleans. Traditionally a funeral procession has a “first line” which consists of family members and close loved ones of the deceased, the “second line” consists of other members of the community and this line falls behind the first. The second liners dance, sing and play music following the procession. Second line is a style of jazz music and dance that was traditionally done at funerals, but is now used for other ceremonies as well.

Johnnie then moved to teach us the modern Hip Hop dance that is now happening throughout the nation and the world, but has deep roots in the south. This dance involves a lot of isolation

movement, like jazz, but is also very low to the ground. Also, one never stops moving whether it be the shoulders, the chest, a head movement or even just the shaking of a finger. Johnnie told of dance parties in Louisiana, and how the D.J. would always play the newest tracks and everyone in the community would try to come up with the newest and coolest dance moves at home to bring to the party. There is a clear association with the movements of Zydeco and the movements in today's Hip Hop; some rappers, such as Master P, even sample second line jazz in their songs. The workshop was fantastic to be a part of and it was very educational.

### **Open Studio: *The Hungry Woman***

With Cherríe Moraga

Saturday April 5, 2008

3:45 PM—5:45 PM

The Rand Theater

In this open rehearsal session, theater artists Cherríe Moraga and Dora Arreola highlighted the collaborative process between actors, director, and playwright by showing excerpts-in-progress of the University of Massachusetts Theater Department production of Moraga's play, *The Hungry Woman*.

Professor Harley Erdman introduced the session and Liana Thompson, graduate dramaturgy student, moderated.

- Cherríe Moraga read a piece from an essay on identity and pedagogy.
- The theater students then presented a series of scenes from the play.
- Dora Arreola:
  - This play was about layering meaning and creating connections.
- Questions from the audience:
  - What have you learned?
    - Dora says, "What I did in the first weeks is create to connections. Cherríe arrived at the right time, when I needed that creative bond."
    - Cherríe says, "It was great to be removed from the process. I came in and I cut the hell out of it."
  - What was the development of the physical language?
    - Dora says, "It was my idea. It was about being respectful to the culture. However, there are movements that just came natural to the actors."
  - Did anything new happen today?
    - Dora's response:

- With Medea’s character, I saw development and deeper connections.
    - All of the relationships are clearer.
    - Jason’s explosive nature is heightened.
  - Women of color in theater: How does it feel to work with one another?
    - Cherríe responds:
      - Dora understands me on many different levels and it’s refreshing to work with someone who gets me.
  - Is the true Medea a woman of color?
    - Developing this character was about understanding the mother and child relationship. I was speaking to a friend of mine, and I explained the story to her she said something that still resonates: “when a woman kills her child, it’s not homicide its suicide.”
  - How do the actors feel to have the playwright in the process?
    - One actor responds:
      - It’s allowed me to see the characters in a more sympathetic light.
    - Another actor responds:
      - Working with the playwright is the best. You have a different type of access to the play.

## **Hip Hop Histories & Resistance**

A Roundtable Discussion

Saturday April 5, 2008

9:30 AM—11:30 AM

Roundtable conversation facilitated by Baba Israel, with Millicent Johnnie, Jeff Chang, and Will “The Iron Sheik” Youmans.

18 attendees: 10 youth, 8 adults

**Baba:** Who has a grasp of Hip Hop history? What do you feel is missing in your knowledge?

**Kennethia:** What is the history?

**Jeff:** It started with neighborhood cultures. 1973, the Bronx. Cindy Campbell, known as “the mother of Hip Hop,” throws a party to raise money for clothes to go back to school. The gang era

is dying down. Kids come together to dance and celebrate. Cool Hurk and the four elements: rapping, emceeing, dancing, graffiti arts/visual arts.

This blows up in the 80's. With *Rapper's Delight* in 1979, it becomes a world wide phenomenon. Big Bank Hank was a rapper's manager who recorded *Rapper's Delight*. He was rapping in a pizza place and a producer heard him and brought him into a recording studio. Footnote: It is all about neighborhood culture and it spreads through the parties; you have to know where the parties are, so that you can be a part of the scene.

After the recordings begin, there is a shift away from the neighborhood focus. It is important to avoid oversimplifying things and to avoid dichotomous thinking: "All commercial work is bad. All community-based work is good." It is more complicated than that.

**Baba:** When did Hip Hop spread nationally? Was it a media-based spread?

**Jeff:** One to one interactions helped to spread Hip Hop. Afrika Bambaataa founded Zulu Nation chapters across the country. The culture spread through community efforts. There were chapters in Paris, Japan, and South Africa. On the West Coast, there were moves like poppin', lockin', and struttin' that moved to New York.

**Baba:** I would like to highlight the tension between the media transmission of culture and the community development and spread of culture.

**Millicent:** There are different cultural uprisings that are all a part of the development of Hip Hop. My father was a Jazz musician. We went to lalas, (the French word for parties). These were house parties. Electro-rockin' The musical traditions are rooted in the slave experience and in the griot tradition before that. The Caribbean experience, Senegalese physical movements are directly connected to the Louisiana Bounce.

If you listen to lyrics, in the songs you will hear repetition in the verse. This is directly connected to the repetitive nature of the labor that was being done. There were sugar cane, cotton, and tobacco crops; oil was also an industry. The workers were in the fields for 18 hours a day cutting cane. One man told me that he had to cut an acre a day of cane by himself. These repetitive movements then show up in song and dance.

By the 1960's, social movements connected to cultural movements. The cultural elements include zydeco, the Cajun and the creole which are the French speaking people of color

in the Bayou region, the Carnival Indians who are creating syncopated rhythms, and the swing and pop rhythms related to jazz. Hip Hop is a blending of all of these elements.

Every dance we made up had a name. Example: The Sissy Shannon. Your friend Shannon is gay, so you make up the Sissy Shannon for him. Our godfather was DJ Jimmy in the 1980's. He was a second grade teacher. His cousins all have dances named for them. All the wards would dance together.

Southern Hip Hop has always been a part of the experience, but it is consistently left out of the conversation about history. You guys [members of the audience] are from Springfield. You can look at Springfield's history, and find dance and movement connected to history and the four elements of Hip Hop.

**Baba:** Cultural layering is very important.

**Will:** On the Arab American history of Hip Hop, the global phenomenon ... Personal history: My school was 95% Arab American. It was in Dearborn, on the border of Detroit. There is thick segregation between Blacks and Arab Americans. Run DMC and NWA were very popular. My life was changed when I went into a store and asked for the two best tapes that they had. One was *Fear of a Black Planet* by Public Enemy and the other was a tape by A Tribe Called Quest. We listened to black music, but we didn't really interact with the culture.

Arab Americans are consistently portrayed and thought of as foreigners. vNo one really has any idea that we are here [in the U.S.]

Growing up, we were very connected to Arabic culture.

I wrote rhymes. I got on stage to freestyle. I got up and I got booed. The other thing that was happening for me was that I developed my political consciousness. In 1990, I got on a bus to DC to protest. On that bus, there was a split between what videos to play. The Arab Americans wanted to play Public Enemy and the white activists wanted to play *The Wall* by Pink Floyd. Sanctions against Iraq started with President Bill Clinton in the 1990's. I put my politics on paper when a friend of mine called looking for an emcee. I told him that I could emcee for his film, *A Tale of Three Mohammads*. From there, I started using Hip Hop as a form of resistance.

The values of commercial Hip Hop are killing our communities.

Then September 11<sup>th</sup> happened and I thought, "I don't know who did this, but we are all fucked." Arab Americans became visible at this moment. I started to have a voice. What was everyone asking after 9-11? Answer: Why does everyone hate us?

Arab Americans *in* Hip Hop: DJ Khalid, The Terror Squad. These folks don't necessarily have a political agenda. They are connected by identity.

Arab American Hip Hop is political and identity-based. The Arab diaspora has been connected to Hip Hop for a long time. French Algiers, Canada, and Egypt. The best show I ever did, the one best audience I ever had, was in Egypt. After I performed, old school break dancers came out onstage and performed.

**Baba:** This is about redefining and challenging images and identity. I have a question for Millicent. There is a Manny Fresh interview where he said that there is a real distinction between New York aesthetics of Hip Hop and Southern Hip Hop. As people created local culture, did they call it Hip Hop or something else? How connected is it? Ten to fifteen years ago, did they call it Hip Hop?

**Millicent:** They didn't call it Hip Hop, but we didn't call jazz "Jazz" until decades later. We see the same thing with the blues. We called it bounce, Zydeco.

**Baba:** We have a dominant narrative, but there are more local stories/cultures that are distinct but connected.

**Millicent:** Manny Fresh is from New Orleans. Carnival Indians are a major influence on bounce. Also, second-line music and second-line energy are an influence. When I was a kid, I didn't know that I had a part in Hip Hop. It wasn't until I went to college that I discovered this.

**Jeff:** Ten years ago I interviewed Juvenile. "Hip Hop started in New Orleans and everybody in New Orleans knows that." His statement is about claiming the world. It is a profound statement about cultural connections to Mardi Gras and Carnival Indians.

**Millicent:** DJ Jimmy is equivalent to Afrika Bambaataa. Juvenile is our Cool Hurk.

**Baba:** Question for Will: In terms of an intercultural exchange, what kinds of things are happening with traditional Arab music and rhyiming? Have you done anything like this?

**Will:** This is my dream: An Arab American Roots group.

**Baba:** What has been the reaction from elders?

**Will:** Political work is often supported by the moms. When a room full of old Palestinians heard my song about the history of Palestine, they told me that they didn't understand every word but they knew it was about them.

**Baba:** I recently traveled to Southeast Asia through Jazz at Lincoln Center with the State Department. I went to Cambodia, the Philippines, and Laos. We did shows with b-boys and b-girls there. One group was the Tiny Tunes. Our common language was Hip Hop. I would beat box and they would break dance. In Cambodia, there was a real Hip Hop community. In Laos, they were a little more blinged out. P. Diddy was their first Hip Hop music. This illustrates that distinction between media transmission of culture (P. Diddy's music in Laos) and community-based development of Hip Hop (break dancers in Cambodia had met and interacted with people). There is also a notion of a "true school" aesthetic in Australia. One person does everything, incorporates all four elements of Hip Hop. Also in Australia, indigenous Hip Hop is on the rise.

*Baba opened the discussion for questions from the audience at this point.*

**Question:** I have a question about Muslims and women in Hip Hop.

**Will:** Women perform more spoken word. Mars 1 is from Virginia. Islamic rap is very different from Arab American rap. Arab American culture is about nation, language, religion can be Christian. Muslims are a religious group of people. Muslim Hip Hop comes from many places, Africa, Asia, for example. In Islamic and Arabic culture, there is a strong value placed on spoken word. The Koran is poetry. There are traditions of oral history.

**Question:** How long is a generation in Hip Hop? What is old school now?

**Baba:** The 90's is old school now.

**Millicent:** How do you define a generation?

**Jeff:** Cycles shift about every 4-5 years. New styles emerge in 4-5 years then 'old school' folks claim that Hip Hop is dead. In the recording industry, people there are in their 30's. Every 5 years there is a turnover there.

**Baba:** It is accelerating even faster because of technology and media. Things don't really last. A dance spreads quickly and it doesn't sustain itself. In other cultures, times, and places, a dance could last 100 years.

**Jeff:** How long did people do the twist? How many versions of the Hustle did we have?

**Baba:** And now you can't do the Chicken noodle soup.

**Amina:** As time goes on, there are generations of people who don't know what old school is.

**Question:** What made Hip Hop so mainstream?

**Jeff:** Demographic shifts. In the late 1980's there was hysteria among the neo-cons—a fear of diversity; a punitive attitude towards young people in public policy; a huge growth in prison populations. There was a shift in business attitudes where diversity becomes important. In 1996, there was a consolidation of the media industry because of deregulations by the government. In the 1970's and 1980's punk, surf, Hip Hop were all subculture until media/marketing people decided to go to those cultures. In the music industry, now rap sells 60% less CD's. Someone like Tailb Kweli sells music while 50 Cent sells music, vita water, shoes. In marketing terms, this is synergy.

**Question:** What happens to the history in this commodification process?

**Baba:** There is a rich movement that happens under the radar.

**Will:** Economics and policy don't discount the cultural and organic nature of Hip Hop. Ethnic and cultural diversity, solidarity movements, and political organizing all happen. Political events for Palestine/Iraq. Hip Hop has been a part of almost every Arab American political activity.

**Jeff:** Bambaataa's influence. Grassroots movements. Run DMC played at Columbia University in support of a workers' strike.

**Baba:** In New York City, Hip Hop is a mobilizing force for education on topics like military recruitment, anti war, social justice. Because of my last name, I have been invited to Jewish events. I am politically progressive, and have been invited to share the stage with Zionists, pro-Israel people who I am not down with.

**Millicent:** In Mississippi, there is the Hip Hop Youth Summit. M.U.G.A.B.E.E. (Men Under Guidance Acting Before Early Extinction), Saddi Khali, a spoken word artist; John O’Neal, activist, storyteller, performer. Hurricane Katrina displaced a lot of Hip Hop artists. We are playing catch up. It is a challenge to be present. There is the U.S. Social Forum, the World Social Forum, the Intersection Conference.

*Baba closed the session beatboxing with Amina Jordan-Mendez. He freestyled using the following words from the group: Organize, Revolution, Freedom, Respect, Diversify history.*

### ***Community/One: Artist Statements from the Solo Performers Showcase***

Saturday, April 5  
2 pm, Bowker Auditorium

*Community/One was a showcase of excerpts by activist-artists taking on important contemporary issues in a variety of aesthetics, from spoken word to interview theater. Artist statements from Kristina Wong, D’Lo, Lenelle Moise, Jerry Quickly and Jose Torres-Tama follow.*

**Kristina Wong**  
Host & Performer

These characters are a sampling of personas from my seven-year body of guerilla pranks that I’ve played out in real-world settings. These personas subvert the status quo, drive people crazy, make others laugh, and upstage the strangeness of our times. Most important, they are my way of negotiating my place in the universe.

I’ve always been an awkward girl. As a third-generation Chinese American who never found her clique, I’m still looking for my community. Even within the communities that I might fall into by default: Asian, woman, activist, artist, I’ve always felt like a black sheep.

My first public stunt was a fake mail-order bride website, [www.bigbadchinesemama.com](http://www.bigbadchinesemama.com)

which disguised itself on the web as porn. While many of the visitors to this site read my intentions as being anti-porn, the site was actually my way of negotiating my place as an artist and activist among a larger community of artists and activists that I couldn't identify with.

I am a feminist who proclaims that the right sugar daddy might mean I won't have to write any more grants. I detest the idea of beauty pageants (but if you get me drunk enough, I'll admit it's because I'm jealous that I never had the guts to compete in one). I'm an activist (who likely cannot find Iraq on an unmarked map).

Like you, I am filled with contradictions and my guerilla-theater personas have been my way of manifesting characters who can participate in the real and imagined subcultures that I have experienced as an outsider. These personas transform my awkward identity into tangible comic characters that hilariously collide with real people and situations, often repositioning those people as "outsiders" in the world I am creating.

Fannie Wong, Former Miss Chinatown 2nd Runner-Up, has "crashed" the Miss Chinatown pageant and stood alongside the Miss Chinatown Court during their community appearances. Jenny Lee, President of the Kero Kero Pi Sorority, actually conducted a public Sorority Rush with real Asian Fraternity and Sorority Members. Officer MacGillawongster does real security searches of audience members before a show.

It goes on and on. And I'll probably still be creating this work for many years to come. Until I find my tribe!

### ***Ramble-ations* by D'Lo**

We were all made with the same spirit. It is how we use this spirit that makes us different. Sometimes we are tested on the life lessons we have acquired and sometimes we are tested on what we know, innately, as our absolute truth. Sometimes we are young when this happens. Sometimes as strong spirited youth, the world seems like it hates us even when we're not bothering anyone. Sometimes we're old souls in young bodies and sometimes we're older in our years with youthful spirits. Sometimes we want to be reminded or told that our lives are worth living or at least that we are worthy of love.

With *Ramble-ations*, I explore life, lessons, and spirit. White Eagle is the woman who my mother made me go see in hopes of making me heterosexual. Nic(ole) is a character loosely based off of my best friend who loves her femme and her bois. I find inspiration in genuine people. However, the inspiration for writing *Ramble-ations* is the fact that my LGBTQIQ family deals with a lot of pain around not being validated in society.

In addition to iconic writers and performers such as Nas, Jay Z, Queen Latifah, John Leguizamo, Chris Rock, Margaret Cho, Dave Chapelle, I am deeply moved and influenced by the incredible poets and writers who are part of the *Intersection V* conference!

### ***Womb-Words, Thirsting* by Lenelle Moïse**

Mixing a brew full of womanist Vodou jazz, queer theory, hip-hop and movement, *Womb-Words, Thirsting* is an interactive evening of patchwork poetic storytelling delivered, slam-style, from the gut. In it, I re-conceive memory and speak out about childhood, masculinity, sexuality, AIDS, cultural hybridity and reclaiming F-words.

I write about hyphens, displacement, turbulence, passion, dissonant symphonies, beautiful, flawed people and our self-love in the face of terror. *Womb-Words, Thirsting* is all about how we use language to construct and communicate our identities. I employ my specific narrative as a Black, Haitian-American, queer(ed), working-class woman to provoke a discussion about identity politics, in general. In this hyper-capitalist, anti-being and pro-doing society, we desperately need each other's stories of resistance and survival.

I want my audience to be present with my presentation and this comes from my introduction to poetry and understanding of art. I challenge the Western notion that art should be separate from everyday living. This thing that Americans call art, really, in Haitian culture, is just what we do. I have memories of my mother and how when she is really pissed off, she doesn't say anything. She doesn't say "I'm pissed off." She starts singing some old spiritual. And you can hear all the anger and all the nuance in the song she's singing. Art is life.

My uncle was a poet and a big influence on me when I began writing at age five. He would recite in church, and extend his energy through the entire room. He also taught me that a poem is not

finished until it is heard. Haitian Creole wasn't ever written, even up until about fifty years ago, so to communicate any meaning you really do have to be with someone. To this day, when my family sends letters they will often send cassettes.

In theater, I am really interested in breaking down the fourth wall and one way of doing this is by saying, "I can hear you, I can see you. We're all in this together."

### ***Un-Embedded* by Jerry Quickley**

This unflinching account of Iraqi society ravaged by war and occupation is my powerful combination of poetry, journalism and personal history. Based on my first-hand experiences as an independent reporter in Iraq, this performance explores what happens underneath the skin; how our interior geography can be affected by conflict and the ways we sometimes inadvertently lie and accidentally tell the truth of our interior emotional maps.

I look closely at what happens when we alternately deny or embrace those parts of ourselves that are responsible for allowing us to physically survive situations that aren't endurable emotionally. I look at the intersection of people, their relationships with themselves and others, and some of the self-imposed definitions of struggle, victory and survival that happen in the complexity of life under U.S. occupation.

This new work gives voice to the fears, frustrations and hopes of both Iraqis and Americans on the ground there. The sharply drawn characters include a former Iraqi commando with deep animus for both Hussein's regime and U.S. policies across the region; a Christian motivational speaker shipped in to inspire the Iraqi police; an ex-stuntman turned mercenary; an Iraqi businessman who has profited handsomely from the occupation but now lives in fear of kidnappers.

*Un-Embedded*, the second play in a planned trilogy on Iraq, offers stark and candid insights into how people live and work in war-torn communities when the cameras are turned off, when the posturing stops, and when it's time to listen to each other.

***The Cone of Uncertainty* by José Torres Tama**

I hold steadfast to a belief that art and artists can be instrumental in creating work which serves as the conscience of our times while forging a “divine marriage” between political content and experimental form.

My latest piece was born out of a personal urgency to offer a perspective by an artist who was a direct witness to the apocalyptic abandonment suffered by the people of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina’s fury, and the overwhelmed levees, which failed us like the government that had built them.

The “cone of uncertainty” is the poetic weather terminology that is actually used to describe the probable range of land where any hurricane might hit once it enters the Gulf of Mexico. It serves as a double-entendre, and alludes to the state of uncertainty in a city engaged in an arduous and lengthy reconstruction process. Almost three years after Katrina hit, a good portion of the city resembles Pompeii by the bayou, and nearly half of its poorest residents have not been able to return.

I managed to escape on the Wednesday after the storm on a pirated/stolen school bus, which was operating a rescue mission of Creole families. It is my hope that this piece reminds us of the criminal negligence exacted by a rogue administration whose “armies of compassion” remained AWOL for five days, while the people of New Orleans were made to beg for food, water and buses on national TV. It is my performed personal statement of truth against the countless lies, which have stifled all critical debate in the U.S. since 9/11. It is my performance ritual of remembrance to not forget a wounded city that is not even a mention in the national debate as we head into the next election.

As for the genre, this piece helps to further the multidisciplinary nature of my performance work with the use of two short films of the storm’s aftermath, as captured by the deft camerawork of Afro-Cuban filmmaker William Sabourin O’Reilly. His dramatic footage, juxtaposed with my corporeal performance rituals, forges a greater visual complexity, enhancing my engagement with the Latino magical realist voodoo aesthetic.