

Hartford Courant

Exhibit or dance set? The answer is both. Brendan Fernandes' 'Inaction' premieres at Wesleyan.

By CHRISTOPHER ARNOTT

OCT 24, 2019 | 6:01 AM



Brendan Fernandes' art installation "Inaction" is at Wesleyan University's Zilke Gallery through Dec. 8.

There's a much-quoted saying used to disparage arts critics that "writing about music is like dancing about architecture."

But Brendan Fernandes actually does dance about architecture. Fernandes creates art installations, in collaboration with an architectural firm, then choreographs thematic dances that define these spaces. He's done this for the Whitney Biennial, the Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, the Getty Museum in Los Angeles,

the Smithsonian Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., the National Gallery of Canada and elsewhere.

Now he's doing it for Wesleyan University, where his latest dance-based exhibit is "Inaction," which opened in early October.

"Inaction" is on view through Dec. 8 as an exhibit in the university's Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery. Comprised of dangling ropes, metal sculptures and a large black triangular ramp/platform, the installation can be appreciated as an artwork on its own terms.

But on four different days from October to December, "Inaction" will become the stage for an ensemble performance that Fernandes choreographed for Wesleyan dance students. The shows are on Oct. 28 at 12:15 p.m.; Nov. 2 at 2 p.m.; Nov. 8 at 5 p.m.; and Dec. 5 at 5 p.m. Admission to both the exhibit and dance performances are free.

The Nov. 2 and Dec. 5 shows will also feature professional dancer Charles Gowin of the New York-based group Movement Research. Gowin has performed in numerous Fernandes' works, and was part of the opening-day performance of "Inaction" on Oct. 2.

Fernandes will give a talk about his work after the Oct. 28 performance.

There's also a dance party on Oct. 26 at 10 p.m., which allows for a freer use of the installation. The late-night event is described as "part performance, part dance party" where "all are welcome to watch, dance, and create"; It's the latest example of Fernandes' "examinations of dancing as a site and act of liberation and resistance through queer communities."



Student dancers in action in "Inaction" at Wesleyan's Zilkha Gallery.

"I'm an artist and a choreographer," Fernandes says during a phone interview. "I work at the intersection of dance and the visual arts. I think of dance as being social and political, and I make spaces where those interactions can happen."

He sees himself as "challenging the rules of the museum, challenging how we define performance art."

"Inaction" boasts complex choreography and an original music score. The dancers (who can number as many as 10, depending on the performance) wear costumes designed by the celebrated unisex clothing designer Rad Hourani, who frequently collaborates with Fernandes.

The space is organized in large three-dimensional sculptures based on basic shapes: squares, circles and triangles. The theme of "Inaction," Fernandes says, is "play. A lot of the choreography is based on children's games. In one section, the dancers 'tag' each others. There are other games where they have to be invisible, or follow each other."

They may be children's games, but Fernandes isn't going for a childhood vibe. He says the interactions of "Inaction" convey "the synergy of the dancers working and moving with each other. It's about how games can be strategies

for political actions. In the playgrounds, there are rules, but the dancers still have to make decisions."



Brendan Fernandes' "Inaction" installation includes four more dance performances.

"It's the same with the dance party. It's a means to break down the etiquette and rules of dance. It's more open, more porous, a critical mass of people gathering."

[\[From CTNow\] Write Stuff: Hillary and Chelsea Clinton in New Haven to talk about 'Gutsy Women' »](#)

Fernandes normally works with professional dancers such as Gowin, but "when the school invited me to do a piece here, we talked about the possibilities." He's impressed with the student dancers, and how they rose to the challenges of improvising and working within the playground game themes.

He likes being able to share alternatives to traditional dance, and letting dancers explore new environments and stages.

"I come from a ballet background. If you don't do it one way all the time, you're out. Now I make spaces, change the rules."

moniquemeloche

451 N Paulina Street, Chicago 60622
312 243 2129 moniquemeloche.com

***INACTION**, a premiere performance-based art installation by Brendan Fernandes, is at the Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, 283 Washington Terrace, on the Wesleyan University campus in Middletown. Dance performances are Oct. 28 at 12:15 p.m.; Nov. 2 at 2 p.m.; Nov. 8 at 5 p.m.; and Dec. 5 at 5 p.m. Regular gallery hours are Tuesday and Wednesday from noon to 5 p.m.; Thursday from noon to 7 p.m.; and Friday through Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. The exhibition is closed the week of Nov. 25 through Dec. 2. Admission to both the gallery and the performances are free. 860-685-3355, wesleyan.edu/cfa/.*