Molissa Fenley Papers

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Molissa Fenley Papers


Collection Number: Consult repository

Creator/Collector: Fenley, Molissa.

Extent: 40 linear feet (61 boxes, 4 cartons, 19 oversize boxes)

Repository: Mills College

Abstract: This collection documents the professional activities of choreographer and dancer, Molissa Fenley. Collection includes printed promotional materials; performance programs and playbills, publicity, and reviews; choreography notes and diagrams; correspondence; memorabilia; costumes; and photographs.

Language of Material: English

Access

Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

Molissa Fenley Papers. Mills College

Acquisition Information


Biography/Administrative History

Molissa Fenley was born on November 15, 1954 in Las Vegas, Nevada. At the age of six, she moved with her family to Ibadan, Nigeria, where her father worked for the U.S. State Department’s USAID mission. She attended intermediate school for two years in Spain, and took a few lessons in Flamenco. She returned to the United States in 1971, and entered Mills College, where she studied under Rebecca Fuller and trained in the choreographic techniques of Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey and the compositional methods of Louis Horst. She graduated with a B.A. in dance in 1975. Shortly thereafter, she moved to New York, dancing with several choreographers there and elsewhere including Carol Conway and Andrew deGroat. Fenley formed her own dance company in 1977, Molissa Fenley and Dancers, for which she composed numerous choreographic works for ten years. In 1988, she decided to choreograph and perform as a solo artist. She has received regular commissions from The Kitchen Center for Video, Music and Dance and Dance Chance; Dance Theater Workshop (DTW); Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM); Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival; American Dance Festival (ADF); Dia Center for the Arts; and The Joyce Theater, where she performed annual seasons for many years. Molissa Fenley has toured extensively throughout the United States and abroad, appearing at major dance events in the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, continental Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Australia. She has made repeated appearances at annual dance festivals such as Dance Umbrella, London; Centre d’Arts Plastiques Contemporains (CAPC), Bordeaux; Adelaide Festival, Australia; and Festival International de Nouvelle Danse, Montreal. Among the artists in other disciplines with whom she has collaborated are composers John Cage, Hamza el-Din, Julius Eastman, Philip Glass, Peter Gordon, Henryk Gorecki, Robert Lloyd, Jonathan Hart Makwaia, Pauline Oliveros, Maggi Payne, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Somei Satoh, Laetitia Sonami, Foday Musa Suso, and Jamaaladeen Tacuma, and visual artists such as sculptors Francesco Clemente, Roy Fowler, Richard Long, Tatsuo Miyajima, Richard Serra, Kiki Smith, Merrill Wagner and photographer Sandi Fellman.

Scope and Content of Collection

playbills, flyers, brochures, festival publications, opening night invitations, performance calendars, and other printed material for specific performances. It contains both United States Performances and International Performances. Series 5, Choreography and Musical Scores (1978-2015), consists of Fenley's choreography notes and diagrams, research notes and background material, and designers' sketches for stage sets. Series also consists of original notation by Meredith Monk and a copy of a Fred Frith score. Series 6, Photographs (1978-2015), contains action and still photographs of Molissa Fenley individually and with other performers. Includes photographs with Philip Glass. Series 7, Correspondence, consists of correspondence to and from Fenley, including notes and letters from collaborators, colleagues, friends and kindred spirits. Also includes correspondence regarding awards, contributions from Molissa Fenley, and fan mail. Venues Correspondence subseries contains practical arrangements for performance engagements including background material, planning, production, collaborators, and program proofs. Series 8, Other Performers, consists of correspondence, invitations, programs, and calendars of performers or dance venues. Performers, for example, include Peggy Baker, Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham and Martha Graham Dance Company. Series 9, Audio-Visual Material (1978-2015), consists of recordings Fenley's performances or of accompanying music. Series 10 comprises costumes worn by Fenley throughout her career. Series 11, Creative Miscellany, contains artwork by Fenley and materials related to other creative projects. Series 12 contains various awards and honors received by Fenley throughout her career. Container list available upon request.

**Indexing Terms**

Modern dance -- United States.
Fenley, Molissa.
Choreographers.
Dancers.

Collection Inventory
Detailed Finding Aid