
Molissa Fenley Papers

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Mills College

Special Collections, F.W. Olin Library, 5000 MacArthur Blvd.

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2017

Descriptive Summary

Title: Molissa Fenley Papers

Dates: 1973-2015

Collection Number: Consult repository

Creator/Collector: Fenley, Molissa.

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

Repository: Mills College
Oakland, California 94613

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

Donated by Molissa Fenley in 1997. Additions to collection donated in 2008, 2009, 2012, and 2015.

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

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. Series 1, Daily and Weekly Press (1978-2015), consists of press clippings, reviews, interviews, announcements, and performance calendars from daily and weekly news publications. There are numerous reviews throughout by dance critics Anna Kisselgoff of The New York Times and Deborah Jowitz of The Village Voice, among many others. Series 2, Monthly Dance Journals and Periodicals (1979-2015), consists of clippings of press features, reviews, and interviews in monthly periodicals and major weekly magazines. Dance critics include Joan Acocella, Sally Banes, Robert Coe, Thomas Connors, Arlene Croce, James Dillon, Margaret Eginton, Roberto Gautier, RoseLee Goldberg, Robert Grescovic, Claire Martin, Anna Moszynska, John Percival and Allen Robertson. Series 3, Press Releases, Press Kits and other Promotional Material (1982-2015), contains printed promotional material and a miscellany of images. Series 4, Performances: Programs, Invitations and other Publicity (1973-2015), contains programs,

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](#)
