

# CHICAGO

SEP 18-21

# PERFORMS

# 2025



MUSEUM OF  
CONTEMPORARY ART  
CHICAGO

# MCA

# A NOTE FROM THE CURATOR

It is with great pleasure and urgency that I welcome you to the fourth iteration of *Chicago Performs*, an annual festival showcasing the wealth of live art and performance made by and for Chicago-based artists today. Since the last installment of the festival, the local and national ecology for art and culture has suffered significant losses. National funding streams, on which arts programs have relied for decades, have disappeared or shifted focus, leaving artists with little time to create backup plans to complete their projects. In Chicago the performance community mourns the loss of Links Hall, a vital space where many independent artists found a home for their work. Artists have always had to do more with less, but now they must become even more resourceful to achieve their goals—which is why opportunities to celebrate local artists, like this one, remain so very important and all too rare.

The artists of this year's series each represent unique cultural lineages and strategic approaches, though all are part of Chicago's experimental dance community. Robyn Mineko Williams, an alumna of Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, has produced her independent, immersive choreographic projects in

unexpected locations across the city and nationally since 2015, including theaters, restaurants, nightclubs, and galleries. Often collaborating with popular musicians, Mineko Williams creates intimate works for audiences craving more than a passive viewing experience. For Vershawn Sanders-Ward, a visit to the prestigious École des Sables dance school in Senegal served as the inspiration for founding Red Clay Dance Company in 2008, creating a platform for both her choreographic projects and social justice activism. She continues a legacy of Black women-led dance companies in the US, among them Lula Washington Dance Theatre, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance, and Dayton Contemporary Dance. Finally, Helen Lee is an active member of Chicago's improvisation community, where they combine their South Korean heritage with their education in dance and film from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Lee has extensive training as a somatic practitioner in yoga, meditation, and mindfulness, which they combine with performance in new and unexpected ways.

Despite their differing approaches, each of these artists is currently exploring themes of remembrance and grief while making space for joy and healing. In *To Leave You*, Mineko Williams creates a cinematic landscape in which performers recollect and explore the imprints we make in each other's lives, tangibly and intangibly, through words, gestures, and memories. In *Freedom Square: Black Girlhood Altar*, Red Clay Dance Company honors the lives of missing and murdered Black women and girls in a creative response to a mixed-media installation, featured on stage, designed to transform sites of trauma into spaces of collective remembering and power. Helen Lee's iterative project *Curiosities of Wellness in Bodies of Grief and Joy* invites audiences to engage in intimate one-on-one experiences with artists that incorporate body-based rituals of mindfulness and healing, challenging the very idea



of how to participate in performance and life.

Choreographer Miguel Gutierrez, whose work was featured on the MCA Stage in March 2025, recently mused on the potency of dance to capture the zeitgeist and reflect how people value themselves and their community: "[dance] shows a group of people in a state of working together and coordinating while holding autonomy and interdependence at the same time."<sup>1</sup> Though performance includes many distinct movement-based practices, at the core of each is a connection to the body. Amid ongoing political and social discontent, embodiment remains a powerful tool for processing emotion, strengthening resolve, and understanding ourselves and each other.

As you witness and participate in this week's performances, I invite you to breathe deeply and often, and to connect with your own body and the wisdom it holds. If we can quiet the nervous system long enough to hear what our bodies have to say, perhaps our capacity for connection and empathy can expand as well.

—Laura Paige Kyber  
Assistant Curator of Performance

*Chicago Performs* is organized by Laura Paige Kyber, Assistant Curator of Performance.

## THANK YOU

*Chicago Performs* is supported by the New Works Initiative, which puts the creative process at the heart of the MCA's relationship with Chicago by supporting the development of new performances and creative projects. Lead support for the New Works Initiative is provided by Elizabeth A. Lieberman.

Lead support for the 2025–26 season of MCA Performance is provided by Elizabeth A. Lieberman.

Generous support is provided by Anne L. Kaplan; and Carol Prins and John Hart/The Jessica Fund.

The MCA is a proud member of the Museums in the Park and receives major support from the Chicago Park District.



COVER, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Robyn Mineko Williams. Photo by Chris Strong; Red Clay Dance Company performs *Field: New Ground* by choreographer Bebe Miller, Dance Center of Columbia College, 2025. Photo: MReid Photography; Helen Lee. Photo: Bill Federking.

INTERIOR, FROM LEFT: Red Clay Dance Company performs *Field: New Ground* by choreographer Bebe Miller, Dance Center of Columbia College, 2025. Photo: MReid Photography; Nate Kinsella and Robyn Mineko Williams. Photo by Chris Strong.

1. Miguel Gutierrez, interview by Laura Sullivan Cassidy, On the Boards, Seattle, WA, posted April 30, 2025, by On the Boards, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/k2AKgd4mFRM>.

SCHEDULE

THU, SEP 18, 2025  
7:30–8:30 pm  
Performance: Robyn Mineko Williams & Artists,  
*To Leave You*  
Edlis Neeson Theater

FRI, SEP 19, 2025  
7:30–8:30 pm  
Performance: Robyn Mineko Williams & Artists,  
*To Leave You*  
Edlis Neeson Theater

SAT, SEP 20, 2025  
10:30 am–1:30 pm  
Performance: Helen Lee/Momentum Sensorium,  
*Curiosities of Wellness in Bodies of Grief and Joy*  
MCA Commons

3–6 pm  
Workshop: Helen Lee/Momentum Sensorium,  
*Curiosities of Wellness in Bodies of Grief and Joy*  
MCA Commons

7:30–8:30 pm  
Performance: Red Clay Dance Company,  
*Freedom Square: The Black Girlhood Altar*  
Edlis Neeson Theater

8:30–10:30 pm  
*Chicago Performs After Party with Live DJ*  
MCA Commons

SUN, SEP 21, 2025  
2–3 pm  
Performance: Red Clay Dance Company,  
*Freedom Square: The Black Girlhood Altar*  
Edlis Neeson Theater



Visit  
[mcachicago.org/  
chicagoperforms](https://mcachicago.org/chicagoperforms)  
to access  
the full program  
notes including  
interviews with  
the artists,  
complete billing  
information,  
and ticketing.

UPCOMING AT THE MCA

Oct 18, 2025–Feb 22, 2026  
*Yoko Ono’s Instructions*

On Saturdays, Sundays, and select Tuesdays during the major exhibition *Yoko Ono: Music of the Mind*, experience the artist’s ground-breaking instruction-based artworks live at the MCA. Around the museum, performers from all walks of life will activate Ono’s instructions from her influential 1964 artist’s book *Grapefruit*, containing deceptively simple instructions that lead to unexpected and poetic performances.

*On Stage*, the MCA’s headline performance series, returns in Spring 2026. More information coming soon.

Find more information on upcoming performances and programs at [visit.mcachicago.org/events](https://visit.mcachicago.org/events).