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Spring 2018

Belladonna

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University of Iowa

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Recommended Citation

Russ, Arianna. "Belladonna." MFA (Master of Fine Arts) thesis, University of Iowa, 2018.
<https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.3p3e3q71>

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BELLADONNA.

by

Arianna Russ

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of
Fine Arts degree in Dance
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2018

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Rebekah Kowal

Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Arianna Russ

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Dance at the May 2018 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

Rebekah Kowal, Thesis Supervisor

Armando Duarte

Melinda Myers

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Very special thanks to Dan Fine for his collaborative brilliance and for encouraging me to be brave. Thank you to my family for their love, support and inspiration—you mean the world to me and I love you all. To my friends and colleagues for lending your ears and creative aptitude, and to my outstanding committee who has been compassionate and supportive throughout this process, I am so grateful. Thank you, Briana Maxwell, Mariana Tejeda, Juliana Waechter, Jeff Crone, Rick Loula and the Performing Arts Performance Unit for bringing my vision to life. Finally, an enormous thank you to the audience members for supporting this concert and the arts.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Belladonna investigates themes of femininity, feminine identity and the navigation of self and power within socially constructed gender rules in conjunction with two separate choreographic works—*Nacirema* by Chafin Seymour, and *Filtered* by Hanna Bricton. Each particular work offers unique and comparative experiential perspectives that speak to the multiplicities that comprise female and feminine identity. The performative intention of *Nacirema* in this context aims to address voice, agency and representation as a female artist within a male-choreographed and idealized experience; *Filtered* explores female power and athleticism while probing the problematics of self-image cultivation through popular contemporary forums, ie. Social media; *Belladonna* delves deeper still into the representation, expectation and cultivation of femininity.

Across these correlating albeit separate works, I was inspired to unpack the conflicting experiences of obtaining and maintaining power as a woman, and I was curious as to whether or not the manipulation of a woman's own sexualization for the regain of power signifies her freedom, or whether it traps women in the social constructs of womanhood. These assembled works serve as an assortment of perspectives and contexts from which I view the complexities of what it means to exist in the female/feminine narrative—not only as a display of my own performance but as a performance of universal and multifaceted femininity.

PROGRAM

belladonna.

*How can a plant
So deadly
Have such a beautiful name?*

*'Pretty lady'
But not
When the rash starts to blossom.*
-Skye Kennard

Choreography and Performance: Arianna Russ

Digital Media Design: Daniel Fine

Photography: Dana Keeton

Music: Sound design by Arianna Russ, incorporating selections from the following:

The Queen, Michael Wall
Samples from vintage Maybelline commercials
Human, Svedaliza
Opening and other selections by Philip Glass

Costume Design: Arianna Russ

Lighting Design: Jeff Crone

Funding for this performance event provided by The University of Iowa Internal Funding Initiatives and the University of Iowa Digital Publishing Studio Summer Fellowship.

Artists' Note: We recognize that it is our responsibility to acknowledge the predicament of unequal power dynamics between men and women that are often found in art and dance-making. While the concept, artistic decision-making, and digital design of Belladonna has been a truly collaborative effort, we acknowledge the complicated relationship that often arises in the projection of male-referenced ideology and creative content onto women's bodies. We believe it is our obligation as informed, empathetic and progressive creatives, to present work that not only acknowledges, but also helps to shift the paradigms that govern the experience of marginalized individuals.

This work contains nudity.

Filtered

Choreography: Hanna Britson
Music: Sound score by Hanna Britson featuring excerpts from *(I've Had) The Time of my Life* by Bill Medley and Jennifer Warnes with spoken text by the dancers
Costume Design: Ashley Bassett, Angella Betina Carlos, Arianna Russ
Lighting Design: Courtney Schmitz
Dancers: Ashley Bassett, Angella Betina Carlos, Arianna Russ

Arianna Russ is an MFA candidate in Dance Performance here at the University of Iowa, as well as a recipient of the Iowa Arts Fellowship and the Digital Scholarship and Publishing Studio Summer Fellowship. She began dancing in her hometown of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and received her BA in Dance along with a BS in Human Physiology from none other than the University of Iowa in 2013. Upon graduation, Arianna performed at New Territory/Cuerpo de Danza in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Harvest Chicago Contemporary Dance Festival, and Green Space Bloom Dance Festival and DUMBO Dance Festival in New York City before joining the Milwaukee Bucks Dancers in 2014. She represented the Milwaukee Bucks for two seasons, during which she traveled and performed internationally in London and throughout Canada as a leading dancer. Arianna continues to perform and teach at the University and across the Midwest.

