



YERBA BUENA
CENTER FOR
THE ARTS

YBCA Presents *Brett Cook & Liz Lerman: Reflection & Action*

Expansive multidisciplinary exhibition—the culmination of a unique three-year fellowship—traces the paths of two revolutionary artists focused on transformation



(San Francisco—September 22, 2022) **Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA)** will present a major new multidisciplinary exhibition ***Brett Cook & Liz Lerman: Reflection & Action***. A retrospective in forward motion, this deep dive into the past, present, and future of these two artists' revolutionary practices opens **Thursday, October 20, 2022** and will run until **April 2, 2023**.

For *Reflection & Action*, visual artist Brett Cook and choreographer Liz Lerman transform YBCA's galleries into a space for collective creation and inspiration, guided by their leadership in

collaborative art-making based in community relationships. Weaving together video, dance, installation, painting, and other interactive works, visitors are invited to immerse themselves in the complexity and wide-reaching social impact of Cook and Lerman as catalysts for enacting change in the world.

Comprising more than 150 individual works, the exhibition functions not only as a survey of the two artists' decades-long careers, but a window into their current practices and the future directions of their work. The dialogue and interplay between their overlapping interests carries viewers through five distinct thematic sections, with opportunities for visitors to interact and contribute to the exhibition.

Lerman's portion of the exhibition includes an immersive video installation that brings together more than three decades of groundbreaking choreographic works—from the incorporation of speaking roles for dancers, to unorthodox subject matter such as nuclear waste and genetics. Visitors are invited to locate themselves inside the works, including newly-recorded choreographic instructions from Lerman where participants are encouraged to respond through dance and movement in YBCA's courtyard using wireless headphones and their imagination; and a recreation of Lerman's office space that takes visitors inside her creative process. Also on view is *Back Stage* (2022), a multimedia installation of artifacts and ephemera charting her family's history, fragmented elements of a theater backstage, and original video composed by Lerman and her daughter Anna Spelman exploring her psyche and approach to her work. Lerman's *Critical Response Process* holds space in the galleries as an interactive installation, inviting viewers to become participants in her globally-renowned collaborative methodology. A reflection of Lerman's approach, the exhibition explicitly addresses the back of the mind, the swirling space of imagination and contemporary stories that form the basis for subsequent work.

Cook's portion of the exhibition includes *Gardeners of Belonging* (2022), a new series of portraits created of and by local Bay Area community leaders—around whom various public programming elements will be created—co-commissioned with Oakland's Life is Living Festival; paintings from the artist's *Black (W)hole* (2020) series in partnership with Destiny Arts Youth Performance Center, which are a healing, celebratory experience mourning and honoring the lives of six young people who died in and around Oakland; and *The Congregation* (1993–2014), more than 50 monumental scale portraits Cook painted in the Bay Area, New York, and New Jersey brought together for the first time. His paintings are accompanied by documentation and ephemera from community-led projects throughout Cook's career, telling the stories of relationships and connection across geographies and time.

This dynamic presentation is the culmination of Cook and Lerman's three years in residence as Senior Fellows at YBCA, centering artists as leaders inside the organization and in the communities they serve. Central to both artists' practices is advancing the essential role of art in social and cultural progress. Beginning as Senior Fellows in the fall of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic altered the course of their time and trajectory with the organization, bringing them into deep collaboration with YBCA's leadership.

“This collaborative exhibition is both a tribute to Brett and Liz, and a public offering of the values embodied in their work—ones we hold very dear. Anyone looking to deepen their perspective on showing up in this moment would benefit from spending time with this exhibition.” said **Interim YBCA CEO Sara Fenske Bahat**. “The legacy of these two artists’ time with YBCA will guide us as we approach our upcoming 30th anniversary in 2023, and persist long after. Their generosity, as artists and as people, has provided remarkable insight through some of our most trying times. Together they challenge conventions of how artists can help shape culture, and arts organizations holistically—especially during periods of great change.”

Reflection & Action is conceived not only as an exhibition, but as inspiration for audiences to embody their own creative power. Community and artist-centered programming, including workshops, retreats, podcasts, and panels will accompany the exhibition’s run, with collaborators including **Destiny Arts Center, Othering & Belonging Institute, Youth Speaks, Life is Living, The People’s Conservatory, Lois Brown, PhD, Director of the ASU Center for the Study of Race and Democracy**, and the changemakers, artists, dancers, and choreographers in ongoing relationship with Lerman and Cook. Additional partners and programming will be announced throughout the duration of the exhibition. Lerman and Cook also will revitalize the [*Alchemy of the Reset*](#) conversation series with dynamic leaders in arts and cultural practice focused around utilizing creative practices to inspire systems and structural change. For more information on the exhibition and related programming, visit: <https://ybca.org/event/brett-cook-liz-lerman-reflection-and-action/>.

In addition to the exhibition, three performances of Liz Lerman’s latest dance-theater piece, ***Wicked Bodies***—an intimate spectacle that explores the invisible ways and means of feminine thinking and action that cultures carry in clichés, stereotypes, and fictions—will be hosted at the Blue Shield of California Theater at YBCA. Evening performances will take place at 8pm on **Friday, October 28** and **Saturday, October 29**, and an afternoon performance will occur at 2pm on **Sunday, October 30**. For more information on the performances, and to purchase tickets, visit: <https://ybca.org/event/liz-lerman-wicked-bodies/>.

“Formulating the expansive exhibition with Brett and the YBCA team has been a deeply special experience,” said **Liz Lerman**. “Working with Brett is a particular pleasure, and crossing borders between disciplines is always so important—you find twinning in unexpected places in the work. It reinforces the best of you. It’s a deep kinship, which solidifies what you’ve done and sends you boldly into the world.”

“After almost twenty years out of public circulation, I am thrilled that the exhibition will include a series of rescued portraits and stories I have produced in collaboration with a range of individuals and communities over the course of several decades. “The Congregation” as Liz lovingly named them, represents a complexity of audiences invited to inhabit the space literally and figuratively, said **Brett Cook**. “The resulting container of people, stories, and histories will reflect the diverse communities in which Liz and I have worked where art acts as a vehicle to recognize difference and see ourselves.”

Brett Cook & Liz Lerman: Reflection & Action is free and open to the public beginning **Thursday, October 20**, with a large **public opening celebration on Sunday, October 30** from **4-7pm**, following a 2pm performance of *Wicked Bodies*.

DATES

Exhibition: October 20, 2022 - April 2, 2023 / Thursday - Saturday 12-6pm

Press Preview: Sunday, October 30 / 12-2pm

Public Opening Celebration: Sunday, October 30 / 4-7pm

Programs:

Liz Lerman's *Wicked Bodies* Dance Theater Performance

Blue Shield of California Theater

Friday, October 28, 2022: 8pm

Saturday, October 29, 2022: 8pm

Sunday, October 30, 2022: 2pm

Tickets: <https://ybca.org/event/liz-lerman-wicked-bodies/>.

***Alchemy of the Reset* Conversation Series Kick-Off**

YBCA Screening Room & Online

Tuesday, November 15, 2022 (then monthly): Time TBD

Artist Talk with Liz Lerman & Brett Cook

YBCA Screening Room & Galleries

Sunday, December 11, 2022: 2pm

Legacy Choreographers Panel Discussion

With Liz Lerman, Merián Soto & Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

YBCA Screening Room & Online

Thursday, January 12, 2023: Time 6-8pm

Educators Convening with Liz Lerman & Brett Cook

YBCA Screening Room & Online

Wednesday, January 25, 2023: Time TBD

Liz Lerman & Brett Cook @YBCA 100

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts & Online

Saturday, February 11, 2023: Time TBD

Destiny Arts Center *The Black (W)hole* Performance with Brett Cook & Marc Bamuthi Joseph

YBCA Galleries

Saturday, February 25, 2023

Closing Art, Music & Dance Celebration

YBCA Galleries

March 2023: Date & Time TBD

For updates & more details please go to ybca.org

About Brett Cook

Brett Cook is an interdisciplinary artist and educator who uses creative practices to transform outer and inner worlds of being. His public projects often involve community workshops featuring arts-integrated pedagogy along with contemplative practices, performance, and food to create a fluid boundary between art making, daily life, and healing.

Teaching and public speaking are extensions of Cook's social practice that involve communities in dialogue to generate experiences of reflection and insight. He has taught at all academic levels in a variety of subjects, and published in academic journals at the Maryland Institute College of Art, and Columbia and Harvard Universities. In 2009, he published *Who Am I In This Picture: Amherst College Portraits with Brett Cook and Wendy Ewald* through Amherst College Press, and in 2016, *Clouds In A Teacup* with Thich Nhat Hanh and Parallax Press.

Cook has received numerous awards, including the Lehman Brady Visiting Professorship at Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Richard C. Diebenkorn Fellowship at the San Francisco Art Institute. Recognized for a history of socially-relevant, community-engaged projects, he was selected as a cultural ambassador to Nigeria as part of the U.S. Department of State's 2012 smARTpower Initiative, an inaugural A Blade of Grass Fellow for Socially Engaged Art in 2014, and most recently was named a 2022 Rainin Fellow by the Kenneth Rainin Foundation. Cook's work has been featured in private and public collections including the Smithsonian/National Portrait Gallery, the Walker Art Center, and Harvard University.

About Liz Lerman

Liz Lerman is a choreographer, performer, writer, educator and speaker, and the recipient of numerous honors, including a 2002 MacArthur "Genius Grant," a 2011 United States Artists Ford Fellowship in Dance, a Deutsch Foundation Fellowship, and the 2017 Jacob's Pillow Dance Award. A key aspect of her artistry is unconventional collaborations with shipbuilders, physicists, construction workers, ballerinas, breakdancers, and dancers of all ages and styles—resulting in both research and outcomes that are participatory, relevant, urgent, and usable by others.

Lerman founded Liz Lerman Dance Exchange in 1976 and cultivated the company's unique multi-generational ensemble into a leading force in contemporary dance until 2011. Lerman conducts residencies on [Critical Response Process](#), creative research, the intersection of art and science, and the building of narrative within dance performance at such institutions as Harvard University, where she was a Visiting Lecturer in 2011, Yale School of Drama, Wesleyan University, and the National Theatre Studio, London, among others. Her collection of essays,

Hiking the Horizontal: Field Notes from a Choreographer (2011), and study of her Critical Response Process, [*Critique Is Creative The Critical Response Process® in Theory and Action*](#) (2022), were published by Wesleyan University Press. In 2016, Lerman was named the first Institute Professor at the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts at Arizona State University, where she is building a lab focused on creative research.

Support

Brett Cook & Liz Lerman: Reflection & Action, Wicked Bodies, and YBCA Senior Fellowships are made possible in part through the generous support of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and The Bernard Osher Foundation.

YBCA is grateful to the City of San Francisco for its ongoing support.

About YBCA

Opened to the public in 1993, YBCA was founded as the cultural anchor of San Francisco's Yerba Buena Gardens neighborhood. Our work spans the realms of contemporary art, performance, film, civic engagement, and public life. Centering artists as essential to social and cultural movement, YBCA is reimagining the role an arts institution can play in the communities it serves. For more information, visit <https://ybca.org/>.

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