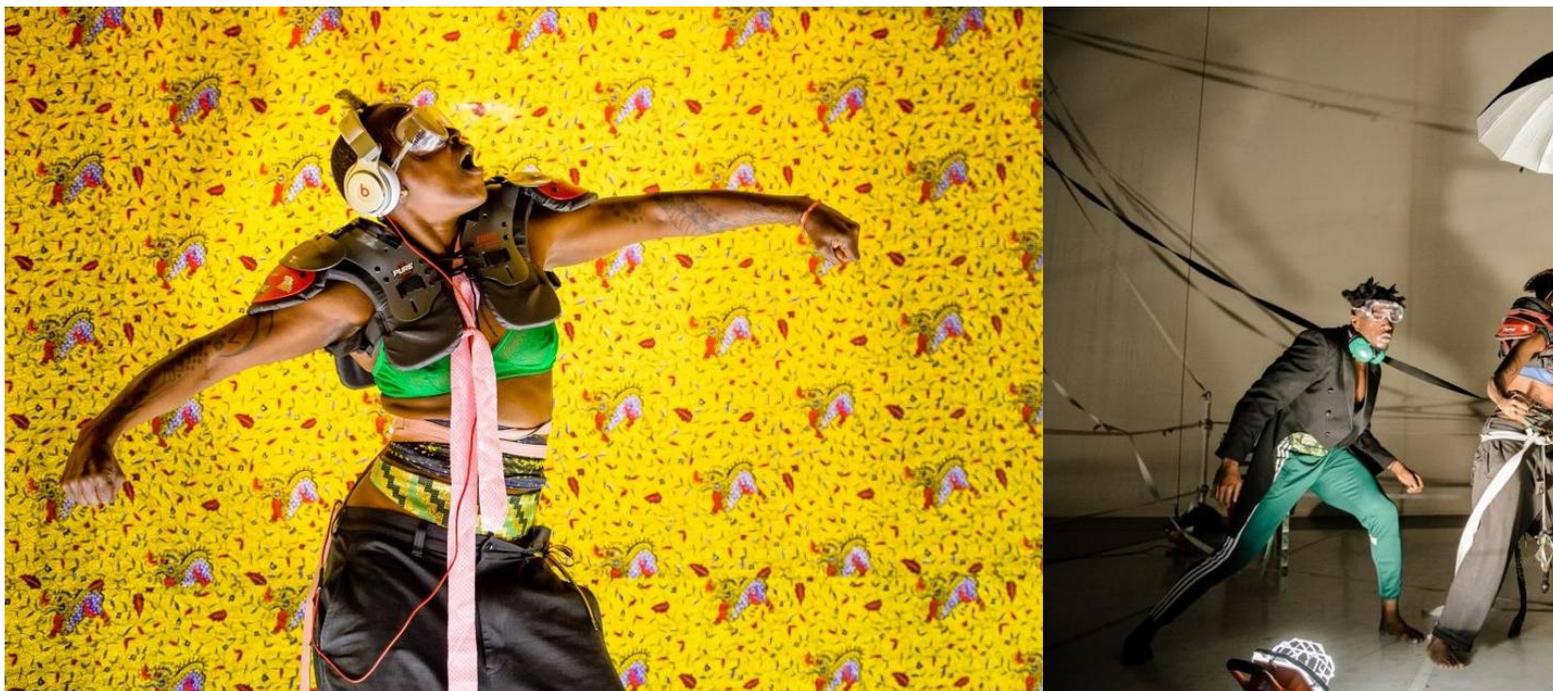


ENTERTAINMENT OCTOBER 12, 2016 6:00 AM

## Searching for her father — and what it means to be a black man



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BY REBEKAH LANA LENSEL  
[Artburstmiami.com](http://Artburstmiami.com)

Celebrated Zimbabwe-born, Brooklyn-based dancer/choreographer Nora Chipaumire returns to Miami for a third time with her latest work, “Portrait of Myself as My Father.” In a presentation this weekend by MDC Live Arts and Miami Light Project at The Light Box at Goldman Warehouse, Chipaumire veers from her usual focus on African female identity to explore masculinity in a piece that started as a letter to the father she never knew, one lost to divorce when she was 5, and to death when she was 13.

“I was interested in how I could create the kind of father that I would have liked to have,” Chipaumire says from New York. “He’d be a superhero who’d be super cool: cooler than Shaft, cooler than Isaac Hayes, cooler than Muhammad Ali, a combination of all the heroes that I believe in, the African James Bond. I tried to create a portrait of my father that was a combination of virtuosic men.”

Chipaumire began studying masculinity through sport and ended up focusing on the notion of boxing as a metaphor. Throughout the show, she performs tethered to Senegalese dancer Pape Ibrahima Ndiaye. Together they prowl the stage-cum-boxing ring, the delineation between playing space and audience marked by ropes and lights. A third performer, Shamar Watt, dressed in both coattails and athletic wear, shadows the pair. Chipaumire’s supple frame is bulked up with football pads, and hidden beneath low-slung, baggy pants, in sharp contrast to the briefs worn by Ndiaye, his body and masculinity on full display.

Nora Chipaumire discusses "Portrait of Myself as My Father"



To understand the physical manifestation of masculinity, Chipaumire, who grew up in Zimbabwe, spent time watching the way men moved during residencies in Senegal and the Ivory Coast.

“I was collecting a database of how these young men were getting down with their bodies, and the precision they moved with,” she says. “I realized there is a very specific way that men are dancing — it’s very urban, fresh and full of virtuosity, and braggadocio in the face of so many difficulties, and I was trying to embody that, and do it my way.”

“It became more about the psychological placement, and placement of sounds in my body, how I operate in the world.”

But “Portrait of Myself as My Father” also goes beyond the study of gender to explore the dichotomy between blackness and Africanness.

“Black and African are two separate ideas that I constantly work with, and wanted to understand better how they differ and the ways they intersect. I’m Black, but I’m also African,” says Chipaumire. “Black American men are much more overt, the stereotypical man’s man, the swag that’s in your face. The African man is less so, it’s much more sexy and elegant, but nonetheless there is a great deal of machismo that runs through both of them — but the African tends to couch it a bit, hidden under cultural norms.”

Exploring blackness, especially male blackness, is a particularly potent topic in the United States, both historically and currently. While the issue was not a part of Chipaumire’s original, more personal motivation for the piece, she believes it’s important to add to the ongoing dialogue about race.

“As I started working on this, Trayvon Martin was killed, and all these other black male shootings started to become an ongoing thing,” she says. “And now, with Black Lives Matter, it has become part of our daily vocabulary; we have come so far in a short time with the conversation of black males. It’s intense, and I’m very happy to be a part of a conversation that is very necessary and that is difficult.

“There is a responsibility to family,” she adds, “and that’s the African part of me. You are raised in this community that is a family, and there are responsibilities to it, and from them to you. So I’m trying to overlay the landscape of family when I’m in that boxing ring.”

*ArtburstMiami.com is a nonprofit source of South Florida dance and performing arts coverage.*

## IF YOU GO

**What:** MDC Live Arts and Miami Light Project present Nora Chipaumire’s “Portrait Of Myself As My Father.”

**When:** 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday

**Where:** The Light Box at Goldman Warehouse, 404 NW 26th St., Miami

**Info:** \$30, \$10 for MDC students; mdclivearts.org or 305-237-3010



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