THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE

DANCE

Lichen Bouboushian's *Rupture: Sneak*

PHOTO BY AMANDA MARAIST

ENCOURAGING ART WITHOUT BOUNDARIES IN *CREATIVE RESISTANCE*

Hearing Eliot Gray Fisher and EG Gionfriddo describe the results of their mentorship program meant to run Austin dance artists through self-producing, ARCOS Presents: *Creative Resistance*, is like witnessing a firework of ideas. The co-directors of ARCOS – a multidisciplinary group that combines tech with art – keep explaining the two pieces' expanding concepts, ideas bursting outward with bright excitement.

Take their description of Lichen Bouboushian's era-spanning saga *Rupture: Sneak*, based on their grandfather's flight from Armenia, their father's evacuation from Lebanon, and the current U.S. attitude toward immigration. Audiences will arrive through an immersive sculpture, finding seats on three sides of the performance area before the dance/story portion of the work begins. "The sculpture is all of this found material that is made to resemble something ... like a disaster. It looks to me kind of like a flooded-out house, like a disaster area or a refugee camp," said Fisher during a meeting at Springdale General, a mere mile away from performance venue Crashbox. "So that's where this thing is set. And their piece is trying to kind of work through ... generational trauma."

ARCOS Presents: *Creative Resistance*
Sept. 4-12, Crashbox
arcosdance.com

And that's just the first half. The space gets cleared out during intermission, and reset with sod and clay for Venese Alcantar and Omar Mousa's piece *SalSāl (clay that makes sound)*. It's a purposeful artistic setting – the "American lawn as this seemingly anodyne sign of civilization," as Fisher describes – with dance and film elements exploring the significance of land itself. Mousa, a Palestinian-American filmmaker, connects the materials to ancient myths of clay forming the first humans. Mexican-Indigenous artist Alcantar explores existence itself as a form of resistance against encroaching forms. Their ideas reach beyond singular time and place, stretching to include eons of philosophy and experiences.

ARCOS Presents was made to foster art just like that: creations with a guiding message and no constriction. Fisher and Gionfriddo planned ARCOS to fill whatever need they noticed in the community. Their intense artistic mentorship program calls for pieces in development from artists who can use the platform and expertise ARCOS offers. Gionfriddo, co-area head of the dance program at UT-Austin, fosters thematic expressions through dance. Fisher brought his experience in film and theatre to bring together movement and multimedia storytelling.

Between the two of them, artists encounter a team poised to help create anything imaginable. Want a multi-area performance that streams to several locations tied into the history of the inspiration of the dance itself? ARCOS can help it happen. What about a multi-generational war story inspired by archival material, sparking choreography and told through documentary? Sure, why not. They'll produce it, take it to Fringe Fest, and help tie in references to ancient philosophy. Because why not.

As Gionfriddo puts it, "For us, works are very rarely discrete. There's always some sort of element of something we're exploring, or something that needs to be explored in the moment that becomes prescient again." It's art that invites growth and experimentation; more than this moment in time, it's a continuous network.

Gionfriddo's focus on prescience solidified during the development of *Creative Resistance*. ARCOS knew they wanted works with a message. Their initial call sought out dancers that were "nimble, courageous, and willing to take creative risks to engage urgent ideas." With the three selected creators, they found a common thread of displacement and the meaning of home. Each examines deep trauma of identity shattered and found, the search for home and the promises held within heritage.

–CAT MCCARREY