

An Artistic Statement

I am a director, performer, and scholar with a primary focus on physical theaters, and American and African diasporic performance. As a multidisciplinary artist, my work ranges from the classical to the experimental, from text-based to body-centric, and has been performed in spaces both traditional and unconventional. I am drawn to performance that is highly physical, ancient, post-dramatic, interdisciplinary, Afrosurreal, underground, queer-punk, divine, sustainable, and aimed at individual and community development. I approach theater as a rite/right, as an art, and as a vital technology for sight, development, liberation and healing.

I call myself TheNeoGriot – a griot for a new age – a fresh take on the traditional West African figure widely known as a storyteller, but serving numerous other functions in society. The griot was artist, historian, adviser, interpreter, teacher, exhorter, warrior, witness, and more. To call myself TheNeoGriot is to assume these roles and responsibilities in my work and in the communities I serve.

My artistic research is concerned with retrieving, preserving and expanding African American cultural heritage, and in developing a personal aesthetic deeply rooted in my unique ancestry. I create worlds in microcosm, poetic experiences where elements of the African, the European and the American mingle in complex harmonies and tensions. I am particularly interested in how these interactions can play out in site-specific, immersive, and participatory performance contexts. I describe my style as “a collage by Romare Bearden, un film de Souleymane Cissé, mixed fresh with some Wu-Tang, a slice of Marlon Riggs, and a dash of anime.” It is JUNKYARD HOODOO SURREALISM. Guiding my process is the “junkyard” ethos, a philosophy promoting creative resourcefulness, sustainability, self-reliance, empowerment, and accessibility. The concept references actual junkyards as symbolic sites full of enormous potential for the transformation of the broken, the discarded and the ordinary into the functional, the meaningful and the extraordinary. It is a way towards an UPCYCLED REALITY.

I create art that harnesses the full potential of human energy to transform the mundane into the magical, and the prosaic into the poetic. I create art that engages with cosmic ideas, transcends the bounds of space and time, and activates the limitless powers of the imagination. I create art that embraces the beautiful and the ugly, and is concerned with reaching minds, hearts, and spirits. I create art that is challenging yet accessible, not impenetrable. I create art with purpose, art that feels necessary. Ultimately, **I seek to create art that is an answer to, more than a representation of, reality.**

—Mark H.