

W.O.M.B. (Worth of My Body) at KSelekt – April-May 2024

W.O.M.B. at K:Selekt:

W.O.M.B. (Worth of My Body) is a multidisciplinary choreographic work that tackles the issues of pregnancy, motherhood and body image, which can be both painful and liberating. It successfully premiered at Dansekappellet 24th-27th March 2022. In 2023, it was presented at Det Frie Felts Festival in Aarhus, at GRASP Festival in Roskilde, and at the "Building Bridges" seminar in Helsinki, Finland. It was selected to be part of the KSelekt season 2023-24 at Det Kongelige Teater, Lille Scene. The production period runs from April 8th to May 30th 2024.

The piece is a tribute to the life-giving female body and an encouragement for women to question the cultural judgements of body changes caused by pregnancy.

W.O.M.B. is a performance that embraces all the poetry, compassion and suffering that comes from creating life. The performance invites a reflection on the body's ability to change through the different cultural perceptions of motherhood of the three dancers who come from African and Afro-diasporic cultures. Nobody can go through motherhood without being transformed. It is one of the most life-changing events. In an era of physical scrutiny, particularly in Western culture where so-called physical flaws are to be removed or hidden, W.O.M.B. (Worth of my Body) pays homage to the body that bears the signs of creating life. Stretch marks, altered body shape and changed skin elasticity are not concealed.

In Danish and English, the word 'stretch mark' shows a negative appreciation of body changes. In my mother tongue, a Central-African language called Gbaya, stretch marks are called 'tattoo of the ancestors', a word laden with pride in the continuation of life and transmission.

The creation of W.O.M.B. was triggered by the painting "Natural Circle" (1992) by Danish artist Michael Kvium, which serves as the visual anchor for the piece's scenography and the starting point for the exploration of the theme of motherhood as transformative experience.

CONTEMPORARY DANCE EXPLORING CONNECTIONS:

In my choreographic practice, I explore the connection between different dance styles. I use contemporary dance as a space for exploration of genre hybrids and to create synergy between different dance techniques and expressions. The choreographic vocabulary of W.O.M.B. (Worth of my Body) includes dashes of Afro-Brazilian, traditional Ghanaian and Guinean dances, that each dancer brings, as we portray our respective journey as mothers.

This meeting between genres takes place in a scenographic space that alternates between effective simplicity and strong visual images, performed to live music.

RELEVANCE AND RESONANCE OF THE PIECE:

The audience of W.O.M.B. was very diverse. The response was overwhelmingly positive and comforted me in the belief that W.O.M.B. (Worth of my Body) is relevant for everybody but especially for women around the world. Many audience members said they could relate to the piece even though they were not mothers, or women for that matter, as a critique pointed out in her

review: "However, the lack of experience with pregnancy does not prevent me from both feeling mirrored and seen by W.O.M.B." (review in *Den 4 Væg*).

The piece resonated among mothers who could absolutely identify with the different narratives of the work, as one of the critiques wrote: "This evening in the Dance Chapel you cannot fail to notice the completely unique heat and lively atmosphere in the foyer and hall. There were mothers on the stage and even more in the hall, giving a standing ovation for the premiere." (review in *Iscene*). The piece also had a particular meaning among Black women who said they felt represented on stage for the first time.

Highschool students attended the performance, mothers brought their young daughters and sons to start a conversation about body awareness and body representation. One of the common feedback is that the piece prompts a lot of conversations and experience sharing around this topic.

Finally, the uniqueness of the vocabulary and aesthetics were pointed out in several reviews such as this one: "A major force of the performance is the well-functioning mix of styles such as modern, African and Afro-Brazilian dance, and - as mentioned earlier - also glimpses of butoh-inspired movements" (review in *Danstidningen*)

Timeline:

Place: Det Kongelige Teater, Lille Scene

Production period: April 8 – May 30 2024

Premiere and performance period: April 29 – May 5 2024