

New Art

on Stage

brut



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studio brut

Zieglergasse 25, 1070 Wien

Tue. 08 & Wed. 09* April, 19:00 / Thu. 10 April, 20:00

Ariadne Randall (feat. McKenzie Wark)
Reverse Cowgirl II: Ride To The Top

Performance / Dance

World premiere

in English

Duration: approx. 60 minutes

*followed by an artist talk, Moderation: Laura Amann

Content Notes

The performance uses strobe lighting, theatre fog and punctual dazzling light as well as loud music.

The performance addresses the life and sexuality of transgender people as well as existing threats to their safety. Recommended from the age of 16.

Credits

Artistic direction Ariadne Randall **Performance & dance** Ariadne Randall, Nis Brender
Text McKenzie Wark, Ariadne Randall **Video** Ariadne Randall, McKenzie Wark, Leo Kuraitè
Composition Ariadne Randall, Theodosia Roussos **Costume design & additional concept** Nyx Ferrand **Dressmaker** Kareem Aladhami **Lighting design** Leo Kuraitè
Outside eyes Luca Bonamore, Lau Lukkarila **Choreographic support** Theo Emil Krausz
Ceramics Jacob Bartmann **Audiovisual Recording for McKenzie Wark** Isobel Ward / Dirty Tailor **Gallery representation for Ariadne Randall** Peter Gaugy (Brussels/Vienna)
Production management Theo Emil Krausz, Sophie Menzinger, Elena Müller
Administration Takelage

A co-production of Celestial Excursions – Kulturverein für Transmediale Kunst and imagetanz 2025 / brut Wien

With the kind support of the City of Vienna's Department of Cultural Affairs (MA 7), Bears in the Park, AIL – Angewandte Interdisciplinary Lab, Art x Science School for Transformation (Johannes Kepler Universität Linz / dieAngewandte), Experimental Game Cultures (dieAngewandte) and SKE-Austro Mechana

About *Reverse Cowgirl II: Ride To The Top* by Ariadne Randall (feat. McKenzie Wark)

What makes a woman a woman? This question is asked by three women of different generations in *Reverse Cowgirl II: Ride To The Top*. Through dance and music, Ariadne Randall, McKenzie Wark and Nis Brender negotiate social prejudice and female norms of beauty – only to rave on against them.

Reverse Cowgirl II: Ride To The Top presents three women from three generations: New York author/theorist McKenzie Wark joins on video, while Ariadne Randall and Nis Brender are live on stage. Ariadne Randall has a musical and artistic background, Nis Brender is a trained dancer and choreographer. Ariadne Randall's practice is rooted in a fusion of influences of Zen koans, low theory, medieval and post-war composition, blending technology and poetry. The performance has autobiographical features: Dancing was prohibited in the Christian American community where she grew up as the child of a traveling apocalyptic evangelist and a Gospel singer. Now she dances with another woman for the first time: is she her double, her sister, her competitor, her friend, her lover? In the second part, the women put on a rave dance against social prejudice and female norms of beauty, exploring the utopia of the dancefloor. They question what makes a woman a woman and deconstruct the vulnerability of beauty. McKenzie Wark, who wrote a new text specifically for the piece, will be part of the performance via video.

Info

The show on Wed. 09 April will be followed by an artist talk,
Moderation: Laura Amann.

On Thu. 10 April the book presentation of *Reverse Cowgirl* by McKenzie Wark
(Moderation: Francis Ruyter) takes place at 18:30 at studio brut. Currently fully booked.

Über *Reverse Cowgirl II: Ride To The Top* von Ariadne Randall (feat. McKenzie Wark)

Was macht eine Frau aus? Das fragen drei Frauen unterschiedlichster Generationen in *Reverse Cowgirl II: Ride To The Top*. Ariadne Randall, McKenzie Wark und Nis Brender verhandeln tanzend und musizierend gesellschaftliche Vorurteile und weibliche Schönheitsnormen – und raven dagegen an.

In *Reverse Cowgirl II: Ride To The Top* erleben wir drei Frauen aus drei Generationen: Die New Yorker Autorin und Theoretikerin McKenzie Wark auf Video, Ariadne Randall und Nis Brender live on stage. Ariadne Randall hat einen musikalisch-künstlerischen Background, Nis Brender ist ausgebildete Tänzerin und Choreografin. Ariadne Randalls Praxis wurzelt in einer Fusion von Einflüssen aus Zen-Koans, Low Theory, mittelalterlicher und Nachkriegskomposition, technischer Kultur und Poesie. Die Performance hat autobiografische Züge. In der christlichen Gemeinschaft, in der die Amerikanerin als Kind eines wandernden apokalyptischen Evangelisten und einer Gospelsängerin aufgewachsen ist, war Tanzen verboten. Nun tanzt sie zum ersten Mal mit einer anderen Frau: Ist sie ihr Double, ihre Schwester, ihre Konkurrentin, ihre Freundin, ihre Geliebte? Es geht um gesellschaftliche Vorurteile und weibliche Schönheitsnormen. Im zweiten Teil tanzen die Frauen in einem Rave dagegen an und erkunden die Utopie der Tanzfläche. Eine Manifestation, was eine Frau ausmacht, die Vulnerabilität von Schönheit. McKenzie Wark hat eigens für das Stück einen neuen Text geschrieben und ist via Video Teil der Performance.

Info

Im Anschluss an die Vorstellung am Mi., 09. April findet ein Artist Talk statt,
Moderation: Laura Amann

Am Do., 10. April findet die Buchpräsentation von *Reverse Cowgirl* von McKenzie Wark
(Moderation: Francis Ruyter) um 18:30 Uhr im studio brut statt. Derzeit ausgebucht.



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Interview with Ariadne Randall about *Reverse Cowgirl II: Ride To The Top*
The questions were asked by Flori Gugger (imagetanz curator)

Dear Ariadne, *Reverse Cowgirl II: Ride to the Top* brings three women* from different generations to the stage: McKenzie Wark, Nis Brender and you. How did it come to the collaboration?

The usual: fate masquerading as luck. Two years ago I was obsessed with the bull-leaping frescoes of the ancient, matriarchal Minoan culture, imagining a comedic way to link this vanished society with the myth the later Greeks made from its traces: the tale of the labyrinth and Ariadne; her brother Asterion (the Minotaur); and their mother Pasiphae, cursed to love a bull (UwU). So I asked around for a contemporary dancer who also had acrobatic and circus skills. When I met Nis at the premiere of *Reverse Cowgirl (Beta)*, I realized our physical similarity and difference and the poetics this could make.

McKenzie I'd always seen at parties but was too shy and closeted to talk to her. Though no one will ever believe me now that she's involved, the *Reverse Cowgirl* title had nothing to do with her at first. I was at a queer

thrift market in Brooklyn, and Nyx Ferrand (our costume designer) handed me this really cunty, cut-up, tasseled T-shirt with country fringes. Bleached onto it, backwards and handwritten, was the word COWGIRL. I had just come out as trans; I immediately flashed back to my childhood on a farm in Arkansas. I thought – Oh, it's me. Later that evening, I realized – Oh man, I've already read McKenzie's book. I'm doomed. This will be associated with her forever! She wasn't even involved yet.

But I knew early on there would be some kind of elder in the piece. At first it was a retired grand Viennese stage actor who, we learn, would have transitioned but couldn't. Then I found the chutzpah to ask Ms. Wark, and here we are. (Hey, girl.)

One of the fears people have when they're considering questions of gender and sexuality is: *Am I X enough?* It can be intimidating not to see examples from those who are a bit older. Her public transition at a later stage of life and career was an encouragement to me that evidence it's never too late to find an articulation of self that resonates. But then I had three generations, plus the composer Theodosia Roussos, a recent mother – maybe that makes four.

But, anyway, as McKenzie says, it's good not to be too interested in one's story. Anything personal in this piece is just a means to an end, a trick of the light.

What are (some of) the references you refer to in your piece? What did inspire you?

I mentioned Bronze Age Crete, whose language and culture is lost and no one really understands. They became very rich from inventing royal purple from snail juice and exporting luxury goods before a volcano destroyed their culture and the early patriarchal Greeks came in and made spooky stories about it. I joke that the proof women were in charge in Crete is they were the first in the world to have hot and cold running water in their bathrooms.

I refer to the music of the great parties from my time in New York - Spectrum and GH3TT0 G0TH1K, among others, aesthetics whose impact was later felt everywhere – because those rooms were where I first had the courage to go out and dance in glam. (Thanks, Gage!) At the same time I was studying the works of Robert Ashley and the world around him and worked around his circle for years, so good old Bob is always with me as a musician – and with Theodosia; we came up in the same post-Cage American new music culture.

I don't have to explain McKenzie's influence, I think. We're the bitch beneath the streets tonight.

What do you hope the audience would think about after the performance – or during it?

Well, if they're thinking rather than experiencing material, I've done a bad job, no?

But, myself, of late I'm feeling this koan from 12th-century China, passed down as a part of the Zen tradition. It's a dialogue:

- How does the goddess of compassion use her thousand hands and eyes?
- *It's like reaching behind you for a pillow in the dark.*
- I understand. All over the body are hands and eyes.
- *That's almost it.*
- How would you say it?
- *All through the body are hands and eyes.*

Do you have a favorite moment in the piece? Why this one?

Oh...if I answer that robs something from the audience, so I won't.

Would you like to share a link to a song / video / text that was important to you during the creation process?

My happy place during the process was Jordi Savall and the late great Montserrat Fugueras' realization of the *Song of the Sybil* chants from 14th-century Majorca. Witch women!

https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0DKDInWkHhUiUcE9g1YbUa?si=XvbYIrqWRhm6FJbI1W9D-A&pi=uNNP4A9YQ_Wqn

I also leaned a lot on the music in the Notre Dame Great Book (Magnus Liber), which contains the first written vocal polyphony; and the later Ars Nova, with its absurd yet gentle complexity. Gimme that vocal bliss!

The festival topic is TAKE A CLOSER LOOK. Where is it worth taking a closer look?

John Cage said if you find something boring, do it until it's not.

What is next to your bed on the nightstand?

My friend makes photographs of artist's nightstands. Mine was unhinged recently and we had to laugh. She took a picture: two silver snake rings from Mexico, hand armor I hoped would help cast spells for this; two bottles of absurdly spicy hot sauce; T.S. Eliot's edition of the work of Ezra Pound (world's most sane medievalist); red grapes; a small shovel; a Ziploc bag with my mother's ashes (troubled, she passed away on the day we found out this piece was funded); and a bottle of Astro-Glide. Poetry, my friend said, poetry.

Do you have a ritual – before performing or in everyday life?

When I can, I like to do an Éliane Radigue and use synths as meditation: set two oscillators in motion, let them move and interact. Laetitia Sonami, her assistant, told me that Éliane once took a decade off to meditate in a Tibetan monastery and believed it would completely change her music. When she came back it was exactly the same. Her teacher just said, of course it is. So... ritual. What isn't? When I meditated for a couple weeks alone on Hunger Mountain in Vermont I realized doing it at home is just as good. Life is enough.

Who watches, who spits, who stays?

Ariadne Randall on visibility, vulnerability and resilience

An excerpt of the interview with Ariadne Randall by

Maximilian Hohlweg for the Choreographic Platform Austria

The last *Reverse Cowgirl* piece dealt a lot with my personal story. But in a way, I want this new piece to be about the present. Whatever American Gothic aspects my particular past may have is not the point. In the piece, we are women – here and now. Of course, my personal history is unavoidable as a shaping influence. But in general, I'm more interested in the present. Because there's enough to say about that.

There's walking down the street in Vienna – who looks at me? Who spits at me? Tells me I'll go to hell, or worse? Who tells me I shouldn't be here? Who says things in various languages, thinking I don't understand? Who finds me exciting? The gay woman at the bar, the gay man at the bar, the straight man at the bar, the straight woman at the bar, none, all, neither? Who is angry if they are attracted to me? Who is confused? Who wants to hurt me when they feel that way? How is all that different from the hate one gets in other places? Who has it a lot worse than I do in all these ways and more?

There's something about being transgender, in Vienna or most anywhere: whether or not you are interested in spectacle, you can be made to become one. That's almost unavoidable here in the West. (And if you're on the runway, babe, give them a show.) It's partially a matter of statistics. The small percentage of the population that is transgender is quite vulnerable. We face systematic challenges – mental health, access to jobs, health care. We are often disconnected from our families of birth. That makes us an ideal political punching bag for those who want to create a specter.

Studies show that people are less hateful of the Other when they come to know the Other personally. Not as symbols or avatars but as human beings. In many small towns and villages – whatever happens in the bedroom, honey – people don't see out trans* folk except in media images and political propaganda. We're there anyway, whether or not we're visible, but media images are not your daughter, your friend, yourself. And any high-school mean girl knows: it's easier to slander someone who's not in the room. They

can't answer. The law is supposed to protect subaltern groups, but – surprise, surprise – it's being used against us, too.

If I went back to where I was born dressed as I am today, I'd very likely be thrown in prison. Probably accused of various horrid crimes, while we're at it. If I went to Florida and used the bathroom they decided is wrong, I could not only be imprisoned but forcibly de-transitioned. And we don't even need to get into contemporary matters in the U.S. with passports and the like.

In scary times I like to look for antecedents. We're not that special now, even if our times are. People in the past faced uncertainty the same way we do. We're here now. So maybe it's an old story. Socrates was sentenced to death for corrupting the youth. He asked too many questions. Maybe there's a sense in which trans and queer people are living answers to a certain kind of question. Questions like: can a person really be true to themselves? (Yes.) What will they give up to learn that? (Almost anything.) Will they find companions on the way? (Yes: as Jung says, when you do your work seriously, "unknown friends will come and seek you.") Against whom will these adventurers struggle? (Everyone who envies their courage.) Trans and queer people thus threaten the powers that seek to repress the human spirit for their own gain, or keep life small. (And I haven't even said "patriarchy" once.)

So, there's enough to say about that. And about the matter of being a woman, aside from being trans. That's vast enough for many lifetimes.

The full version of the interview can be found here:

<https://choreographic-platform.at/en/features/ariadne-randall>



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Biographies

Ariadne Randall is an American artist, composer and writer based in Vienna. Her work practices worldbuilding through transmedia narrative. Through strategies of material depth and formal juxtaposition, she creates spaces for imagination in sound, language and image. She holds degrees in classical composition and contemporary art from UCLA and Bard MFA. Her work has been heard widely, from Lincoln Center and a recent song cycle for the Volksoper Wien to countless basements. Her *Reverse Cowgirl Quartet* rides her gender transition towards larger questions of identity and becoming. Her debut record as a transgender woman was released to critical acclaim in 2024 on Oxtail Recordings. She is represented by Galerie Peter Gaugy (Brussels/Vienna).

Nis Fee Brender is a dancer, performer and teacher. Raised in the *Circo Soluna* theatre circus, she started appearing in circus shows at the age of two and learned the crafts of aerial acrobatics, trapeze, vaulting, unicycling, tightrope and acting. She later studied at Varium Espai de Moviment, Barcelona, New Education for Contemporary Dance, Härnösand, and SEAD, Salzburg, where she graduated in 2024. Nis Fee Brender has worked with Romeo Castellucci, Olivier Dubois, Alice Rohrwacher, Rhizomatic Circus Collective and Amanda Piña, among others.

McKenzie Wark is the author, among other things, of *Reverse Cowgirl* (Semiotexte), *Raving* (Duke) and *Love and Money, Sex and Death* (Verso). She is best known for a series of books of twenty-first century critical theory, including *A Hacker Manifesto*, *Gamer Theory* and *Capital Is Dead*. She has also written works that contribute to an alternate history of Marxism, including *Leaving The Twentieth Century* and *Molecular Red*. Her survey books on contemporary theory and problems in collaborative knowledge production are *General Intellects* and *Sensoria*. She also writes in an autotheoretical style in books such as *Dispositions* and *Philosophy for Spiders*. She is a professor of media and cultural studies at a university in New York

Theodosia Roussos is a composer, soprano and oboist. She has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, WildUP, Long Beach Opera, and as a soloist in the 2017 European Cultural Capital. Her film scores can be heard on Netflix, HBO, Amazon, and Apple TV, and she has recorded vocals/oboe for film scores by Emile Mosseri including for Miranda July's *Kajillionaire*. Theodosia Roussos has worked with John Luther Adams, Butch Morris, George Lewis and Bang on a Can, and has played oboe for stars such as Ariana Grande, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter and Weird Al.

Biographien

Ariadne Randall ist eine amerikanische Künstlerin, Komponistin und Autorin mit Wohnsitz in Wien. In ihrer Arbeit baut sie Welten durch transmediale Erzählungen auf. Durch Strategien der materiellen Tiefe und formalen Gegenüberstellung schafft sie Räume für Imagination in Klang, Sprache und Bild. Sie hat Abschlüsse in klassischer Komposition und zeitgenössischer Kunst von der UCLA und dem Bard MFA. Ihre Arbeiten waren an unterschiedlichen Orten zu sehen und zu hören – vom Lincoln Center und einem aktuellen Liederzyklus für die Volksoper Wien bis hin zu zahllosen Kellern. Ihr *Reverse Cowgirl Quartet* reitet auf ihrer Gender-Transition zu größeren Fragen der Identität und des Werdens. Ihr Debütalbum als Transgender-Frau wurde 2024 bei Oxtail Recordings unter großem Beifall der Kritik veröffentlicht. Sie wird von der Galerie Peter Gaugy (Brüssel/Wien) vertreten.

Nis Fee Brender ist Tänzerin, Performerin und Lehrerin. Aufgewachsen im Theater-Zirkus Circo Soluna, hat sie schon mit zwei Jahren begonnen, in Zirkusvorstellungen aufzutreten, und Zirkuskünste wie Luftakrobatik, Trapez, Voltigieren, Jonglieren, Einradfahren, Hochseil sowie Schauspiel gelernt. Später studierte sie an der Varium Espai de Moviment (Barcelona), bei New Education for Contemporary Dance (Härnösand) und an der SEAD in Salzburg, wo sie 2024 ihren Abschluss gemacht hat. Sie arbeitete u. a. mit Romeo Castellucci, Olivier Dubois, Alice Rohrwacher, Rhizomatic Circus Collective und Amanda Piña.

McKenzie Wark ist die Autorin von u. a. *Reverse Cowgirl* (Semiotext(e)), *Raving* (Duke) und *Love and Money, Sex and Death* (Verso). Sie ist vor allem für eine Reihe von Büchern zur kritischen Theorie des 21. Jahrhunderts bekannt, darunter *A Hacker Manifesto*, *Gamer Theory* und *Capital Is Dead*. Außerdem hat sie Werke verfasst, die zu einer alternativen Geschichte des Marxismus beitragen, darunter *Leaving the Twentieth Century* und *Molecular Red*. Ihre Überblickswerke zur zeitgenössischen Theorie und zu Problemen der kollaborativen Wissensproduktion sind *General Intellects* und *Sensoria*. Sie schreibt auch in einem autotheoretischen Stil, wie in *Dispositions* und *Philosophy for Spiders*. Sie ist Professorin für Medien- und Kulturwissenschaften an einer Universität in New York.

Theodosia Roussos ist Komponistin, Sopranistin und Oboistin. Sie ist bereits mit Ensembles wie der Los Angeles Philharmonic, Wild Up und der

Long Beach Opera auf der Bühne gestanden und war Solistin im Rahmen der Europäischen Kulturhauptstadt 2017. Ihre Filmmusik ist auf Netflix, HBO, Amazon und Apple TV zu hören und sie hat Gesang und Oboe für Soundtracks von Emile Mosseri aufgenommen, unter anderem für Miranda Julys Kajillionaire. Theodosia Roussos hat mit renommierten Künstler*innen wie John Luther Adams, Butch Morris, George Lewis und Bang on a Can zusammengearbeitet und als Oboistin für Stars wie Ariana Grande, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter und Weird Al gespielt.

15.03.
— 12.04.

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