

THE KITCHEN
NEW YORK CITY'S CENTER
FOR EXPERIMENTAL ART
AND THE AVANT GARDE
SINCE 1971

THE KITCHEN PRESENTS LESLIE CUYJET: *WITH MARION*, NOVEMBER 29—DECEMBER 2

Acclaimed Choreographer Constructs a Densely Mediated Performance from Memories and Research About Her Great Aunt Marion Cuyjet, a Pioneer of Dance Education for Students of Color in the 1950s

"Had she not been from Philadelphia, not asked for bus fare, not defied her mother, not been lousy at piano, I wonder if she would have danced anyway. If Essie Marie Dosey didn't take a shine to her, didn't pass her off as white to join the corps, didn't arrange private lessons for her, I wonder if she would have found her way to teach dance. Had she not bore a daughter named Judy and not left her father, I wonder if she would have lovingly named her dance school "Judimar," after their bond anyway. Had she not been a Black tenant (they called them Negroes then), I wonder if she would have been forced to rent on the second floor, taught her dancers to land the softest jumps, and moved her studio three times in five years due to noise complaints anyway." — Leslie Cuyjet

The Kitchen presents the world premiere of **Leslie Cuyjet's** *With Marion*, a new evening-length work from the choreographer, creating a densely mediated performance environment mining family archives and memory, and refracting her own notion of selfhood through the legacy of her great aunt, Marion Cuyjet. *With Marion* is organized by **Matthew Lyons**, Curator, with **Angelique Rosales Salgado**, Curatorial Assistant, and is presented November 29–December 2 at **The Kitchen at Westbeth** (163B Bank Street, 4th Floor Loft.)

Noted by *The New York Times* for her "potent choreographic voice, excavating the solo form through video, writing and, of course, the dancing body" and her "subtle, strong presence [that] unassumingly grounds the stage," Cuyjet creates in the Westbeth loft space a three-sided box of projected video loops that capture her performing on screen as she builds them in real time.

Combining archival footage with her own pre-recorded and live-captured video, these loops are experienced by the audience from outside the box, as though gazing into an externalized consciousness sifting through and reshaping memory. The density of these projections often obscures the dancer's material form—revealed only at certain angles and lighting conditions. Questioning the proximity of objects and self, Cuyjet assembles a fragmented, unstable repository of the past in order to redirect a future out from

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under its thumb.

Marion Cuyjet (1920-1996), who as a teen “passed” as white to train in Philadelphia ballet schools, was ejected from a leading dance institution after its administration found out she was Black. In 1948, she created the Judimar School of Dance, a pioneering facility that trained Black dancers (including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater artistic director emerita Judith Jamison) in Philadelphia, where—as she had experienced firsthand—they were forbidden from training in white studios.

Many decades later, Leslie Cuyjet, as a teen, idolized Judith Jamison, and displayed a poster of an iconic image of her in “Cry” on her wall; she came to understand her great aunt’s importance to a vast community of dancers when her father pointed to her presence in Jamison’s autobiography. She recalls, “It kind of baffled me that she had touched so many lives who knew her and thrived in dance career, and that she was written out of history books.

Cuyjet began developing *With Marion* in The Kitchen’s Dance and Process program over the course of 2020-21, with monthly writings published on The Kitchen’s website and an in-process showing in May 2021. She reflects on the time in which the piece emerged, a moment when we, and particularly artists working in performance, were asking: “when everything’s taken away, what do we have?” As such, the piece began with a bare-bones setup: “I have to remind myself I have my body so I have enough. A body in an empty room can still be capable of making works of art,” explains Cuyjet. That concept drove this work as she began building a projected world around her form and memory. The concentrated network of images and movements is pervaded by time-abstracted perceptions of Marion Cuyjet and the questions of privilege, classism, and passing particular story and social environment raise.

Initiated in 1990 under the name Working in The Kitchen, Dance and Process is The Kitchen’s longest running series, each year engaging artists with varied practices from which they launch examinations of dance and the methods through which it takes form. *With Marion* continues The Kitchen’s Fall 2023 programming, amplifying the experimental and future-building possibilities of archival activations within varied modes of performance, film, and visual art.

With Marion’s creative team includes **Amanda K. Ringger** (Lighting Design), **Johann Diedrick** (Sound Design), **Matthew Deinhart** and **Simon Harding** (Video Design), and **Randi Rivera** (Stage Manager).

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About Leslie Cuyjet

Leslie Cuyjet is an award-winning choreographer and performer whose work aims to conjure life-long questions of identity, confuse and disrupt traditional narratives, and demonstrate the angsty, explosive, sensitive, pioneering excellence of the Black woman. Since 2004, her tenure in the New York dance world is decorated with performances and collaborations, both formal and informal; with contemporaries, legends, and counterparts; on rooftops, good and bad floors, and alleyways; on stage, in film, art, on tour, and on the fly. “A strong, subtle presence unassumingly ground the stage,” says The New York Times. Recent honors include Foundation for Contemporary Arts Grants for Artists (Dance), Princeton Hodder Fellowship, and an Outstanding Choreographer/Creator “Bessie” Award for her 2021 work, *Blur*. Cuyjet was a Dance and Process participant at The Kitchen (2020-2021).

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About The Kitchen

Founded in 1971 as an artist-driven collective, **The Kitchen** today reaffirms and expands upon its originating vision as a dynamic cultural institution that centers artists, prioritizes people, and puts process first. Programming in a kunsthalle model that brings together live performances, exhibition-making, and public programming under one roof, The Kitchen empowers its audiences and communities to think creatively and radically about what it means to shape a multivalent and sustainable future in art. The Kitchen seeks to

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cultivate and hold space for wild thought, risky play, and innovative and experimental making, encouraging artists and cultural workers alike to defy boundaries and sending them into the world to remake art history and catalyze creative change.

Among the artists who have presented significant work at The Kitchen are Muhal Richard Abrams, Laurie Anderson, ANOHNI, Robert Ashley, Charles Atlas, Kevin Beasley, Beastie Boys, Gretchen Bender, Dara Birnbaum, Anthony Braxton, John Cage, Lucinda Childs, Julius Eastman, Philip Glass, Leslie Hewitt, Darius James, Joan Jonas, Bill T. Jones, Devin Kenny, Simone Leigh, Ralph Lemon, George Lewis, Robert Longo, Robert Mapplethorpe, Sarah Michelson, Tere O'Connor, Okwui Okpokwasili, Nam June Paik, Charlemagne Palestine, Sondra Perry, Vernon Reid, Arthur Russell, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Spiegel, Talking Heads, Greg Tate, Cecil Taylor, Urban Bush Women, Danh Vō, Lawrence Weiner, Anicka Yi, and many more.

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