

Look back on the 17th edition of Festival TransAmériques

A Festival That Transformed Us

From May 24
to June 8 2023

Montreal, Thursday, June 15, 2023 - During 16 exciting days full of artistic brilliance, in 18 venues across the city, **24 dance and theatre shows** brought together over 260 artists from 21 countries with audiences eager to discover their work. This 17th edition of Festival TransAmériques (FTA), taking place from 24 May to 8 June 2023, drew close to 36,000 festival-goers, with a 6% rise in number of sold tickets compared to 2022 and an overall attendance rate of 92%. 49 performances were sold out, testifying to Montreal audiences' enthusiasm for bold and imaginative work. Day after day, the encounter between truly exceptional artistic work and the Festival's spectators in both theatres and public spaces gave shape to a transformative space for all involved.

“In addition to its interest in the vibrancy of Latin America and in Black artists from around the world who are shaking up the performing arts, FTA is also turning into a key player in the resurgence of Indigenous arts. A sociopolitical transformation. [...] Montreal is leading the way.”

— **Philippe Couture**, *Humanite.fr*, June 6, 2023

This second edition under co-artistic directors Martine Dennewald and Jessie Mill underlines FTA's seamless transition into new times, marked by a strong presence of artists from the Southern Hemisphere, a celebration of First Peoples' arts practices, and a passion for unheard voices and narratives that capture the complexity of the world today. Hailed as a trailblazer since many years, the Festival has once again been home to a diversity of artistic forms and experiences, determined to expand the definitions of theatre and dance and to welcome transdisciplinary works that reflect the latest developments on stages around the globe.

“Each edition is a proposal – we want it to be tested by reality and by our audiences' reactions. For us, FTA is nothing less than a thinking entity in and of itself, and it never ceases to surprise and overwhelm us. This year more than ever, artists from far-flung places found each other within the Festival, and networks of meaning and unsuspected affinities were revealed among their practices. We stood there watching, listening, and we left with our heads and hands full of questions for the future.”

— **Martine Dennewald and Jessie Mill**, co-artistic directors
David Lavoie, executive director



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FTA 2023 in figures

- 80 performances of 24 shows from 13 countries (Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Scotland, United States, France, Northern Ireland, Morocco, Norway, Zimbabwe)
- 264 artists from 21 countries
- 7 shows created in 2023, including 5 co-productions (*Cispersonnages en quête d'auteurice*, *Lay Hold to the Softest Throat*, *Mike*, *The Beach and Other Stories*, *Qaumma*)
- 9 North American premieres
- 61 free activities in the FTA Playgrounds (meetings with artists, workshops, conversations, FTA Clinics, parties)
- 25 schools and 600 students attending FTA
- 180 presenters and programmers from 28 countries
- 191 journalists covering the event, including 74 accredited journalists
- 2175 overnight stays generated directly by FTA's activities

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The walls of our theatres no longer contain us

"You could say the festival has opened in 'sol majeur'*, because it's all about the land and the people who occupy and protect it."

— Mario Cloutier, *Revuejeu.org*, May 26, 2023

For the opening performance by Sámi choreographer Elle Sofe Sara, festival-goers gathered for a prologue in public space before setting off together to the theatre. Sara's show *Vástádus eana - The answer is land* can be considered as nothing less than a manifesto for this year's Festival. A few days later, on Sainte-Catherine, Argentina's Tiziano Cruz kicked off the parade which opened his piece *Solloquoio*, featuring music and dance groups from local Andean communities in a tribute to these vibrant diasporas' collective memories. Out on the streets and inside the theatres, the Festival drew on the solemn urgency of political gatherings and the exhilarating chaos of community feasts and parties.

On three evenings, at the fall of dusk, mesmerized crowds flocked to Dana Gingras's *Creation Destruction*, a welcoming refuge in the heart of the Quartier des spectacles. Eleven performers moved in hypnotic patterns, a dozen musicians enveloped the audience in sound, and the entrancing images of United Visual Artists unfurled on a screen at the Esplanade Tranquille. Under the stars, as part of a brand-new collaboration with Regards hybrides two days later on the same spot, the luminous bodies from a series of dance films populated the cityscape.

*Pun on the French word "sol" = G (as in G major) and "sol" = soil/land

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Decolonial and hospitable performances

“An ethics of justice underpins [*Nehanda*’s] brilliance and the exemplary courage of the bearers of memory.”
— Guylaine Massoutre, Revuejeu.org, May 30, 2023

Even among the highlights of this year’s FTA, the five-hour-long *Nehanda* stands out – a powerful Zimbabwean epic by nora chipaumire, which brought together twenty artists surrounding their audience with songs and dances that literally shook the theatre building. The Inuuk artists Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory and Vinnie Karetak let stories of the dispossession of their culture and their homeland culminate by inviting the audience to join in a final dance around the iceberg, a symbolic piece of the land. Emilie Monnet and Waira Nina Jacanamijoy presented the first stages of a forthcoming work, *Nigamon/Tunai*, a subtle immersive experience in a talking forest. An outstanding actor and storyteller, Cliff Cardinal substituted some of his own artistic and political concerns for the master’s words in *William Shakespeare’s As You Like It, A Radical Retelling By Cliff Cardinal*, in an unmatched act of theatrical daring.

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What if the norm didn’t exist?

In *The Making of Pinocchio*, Rosana Cade and Ivor MacAskill set the stage for myriad questions around the construction of the self, offering a poignant reflection on trans identity and gender hegemony. The local company Joe Jack & John and the legendary Australian troupe Back to Back Theatre, each dedicated to inclusive practices that revitalize theatre from the inside, managed to meet in between their shows: *The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes* and *Cispersonnages en quête d’auteurice*, both featuring neuroatypical performers, share a biting sense of humor while tackling urgent ethical issues.

Unfolding the full potential of theatre

Even though Gisèle Vienne’s work is well-known in Montreal, her new piece *L’étang* left audiences both delighted and disconcerted. Its palpable strangeness was underlined by the unbound yet ultra-precise performance of the actresses Henrietta Wallberg and Adèle Haenel. In a well-attended conversation at FTA’s HQ, Haenel called for a future theatre free of patriarchal power, a space for creativity and emancipation in all its strength. L’Eau du bain offered two shows staged in the same set with identical, dazzling sound and light devices: *White Out* explored the loss of orientation through a heightened experience of the senses; *La chambre des enfants*, enchanted and enchanting, gave up the stage and the auditorium to a flock of children teeming with dreams. Finally, the pitiless, chiseled score of *Tableau final de l’amour* by Larry Tremblay was embodied in flesh and blood, in the solid hands of director Angela Konrad.

Qaumma © Vivien Gaumand

The Making of Pinocchio © Tiu Makkonen

Nehanda © Sachyn Mital

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Choosing when and how to reveal yourself

For three hours, Dana Michel and her comic alter ego activated the vast expanse of her performance **MIKE**, during which festival-goers could move around the space as they pleased. **Lay Hold to the Softest Throat's** astonishing multi-disciplinary and multi-sensory, swamp-like universe gave Ellen Furey and her collaborators the opportunity to reveal deeply lodged voices that often elude us. And the exceptional performer Wanjiru Kamuyu put unfailing efforts into summoning the words of two young black girls in **Bronx Gothic**, a major piece of the recent U.S. avant-garde created by Okwui Okpokwasili.

Shaping legacies

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Malicho Vaca Valenzuela, at the helm of **Reminiscencia**, trawled his computer's memory and the streets of Santiago de Chile in a poetic and powerful tribute to his grandparents. Addressing audiences of the future in **i/O**, Dominique Leclerc delicately laid the foundations for a reflection on the extension of life, fueled by the loss of her father. Sarah Vanhee, joined virtually by her son, portrayed the neglected lives of her two grandmothers in **Mémé**, as a way of connecting with their harsh destinies, but also of illuminating their achievements.

No body is one body

This title is no less than a mantra for Crazy Smooth's **In My Body**, which drew the habitually silent FTA audience into a thunderous exchange of enthusiasm and energy between the auditorium and the stage. This vibrant communion, true to the spirit of the street dance communities, was reflected in a moving intergenerational conversation hosted by the choreographer after the show with his colleague Alexandra 'Spicey' Landé.

In **Libya** by Amazigh choreographer Radouan Mriziga, the dancers fed their bodies' memories with their imagination and invented a sophisticated, acrobatic dance connected to ancestors past and future. In **The Beach And Other Stories**, Maria Kefirova, like an antenna, tuned in to the realities and presences contained in a photographic archive. The breathtaking finale of Oona Doherty's **Navy Blue**, danced by a different performer in each city of the tour, raised those who had witnessed this grand contemporary ballet – a collective antidote to indifference – from their seats. Finally, the dancers in **Encantado** by Lia Rodrigues, from Rio de Janeiro, led the audience from grace to chaos to wonder, closing the Festival in a burst of joy, light and hope.

MIKE © Françoise Robert

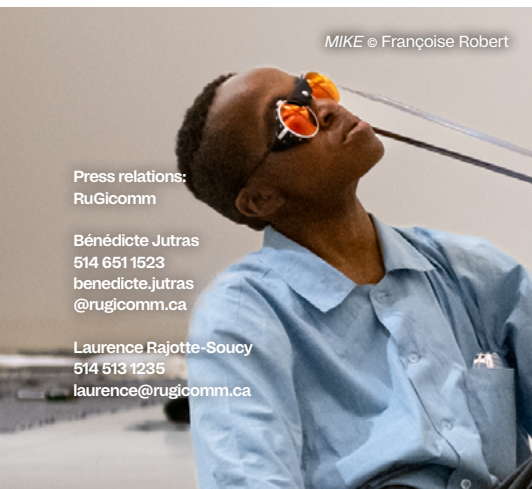
Mémé © Bea Borgers

Libya © Pol Guillard

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The FTA Playgrounds

Exceeding all expectations, the 61 activities in the FTA Playgrounds programme – discussions, keynote, workshops, warm-ups with the artists, parties, etc. – were attended by over 6,000 people. The conversations with Lia Rodrigues, Gisèle Vienne and Adèle Haenel were all sold out, as was *Decolonial Love*, a discussion hosted by Véronik Picard. The panel on *Creative Technical Direction* brought together around fifty participants from the technical professions that are essential to the running of a festival but often overlooked. The nights at HQ attracted audiences and artistic communities who came to dance to the sounds of DJs Rhythm & Hues, Empress Cissy Low, Tupi Collective, Shash’U, etc.

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True to its principles of accessibility and transmission, FTA once again welcomed different groups of young spectators. **Eka shakuelem**, an immersion in the performing arts for young Indigenous people, brought together 8 participants from Pessamit, Wendake and Tio’tià:ke. Students from **Bogotá’s Lycée Français** and **Concordia University** attended and analyzed FTA’s program. **Rencontres internationales** and **Conversations on Performance** welcomed **42 artists and critics** from Quebec, Canada, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Morocco, Argentina, Mexico, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Scotland, Italy and Japan.

To our forests

FTA’s 17th edition opened with the rumor of the Alberta fires and closed as the blazes swept through the country – part of an ecological disaster the Festival cannot afford to ignore. The Decolonial Ecology Day, inaugurated by artist and activist Katsi’tsakwas Ellen Gabriel, mobilized several generations around ecological issues, echoing the concerns of the Festival team in line with its sustainability policy: fta.ca/en/sustainability/

While reaffirming the importance of artists’ mobility, particularly for artists from the countries of the South that are hardest hit by the climate crisis, FTA remains convinced that an international festival can and must take part in the struggle for greater justice, which is inseparable from the environmental concerns at the heart of our work. FTA holds a level 3 certificate of the BNQ Standard – Responsible Event.

Join us from May 22 to June 6, 2024 for the 18th edition
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Festival TransAmérique wishes to thank its partners

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