

May 18-21

TESSERACT

A two-part work by
Charles Atlas/
Rashaun Mitchell/
Silas Riener

Filming and photography are not permitted during the show.

*Friday's performance and the following conversation with the artists
will be filmed for OntheBoards.tv*



TESSERACT □, a stereoscopic, three-dimensional video, is a six-chapter work of science fiction. It is also Charles Atlas's first dance video in more than a decade. Filmed with a mobile camera rig that moves with the choreography, *TESSERACT* □ traverses a series of hybrid and imagined worlds. It was staged and filmed over a series of production residencies at EMPAC/Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Each chapter combines a specific set, choreography, and camera motion to encompass duet and ensemble pieces choreographed and performed by Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Riener. Manipulating the three-dimensional footage to combine live dance with animation, Atlas's distinctive video effects reach into otherworldly dimensions beyond the stage.

The second part, *TESSERACT* ○, expands the view from film frame to proscenium stage. A performance for six dancers and multiple mobile cameras – the footage of which Atlas will manipulate in real-time and project back onto the stage – *TESSERACT* ○ superimposes the space of dance with live cinematic production, rendering a choreographic analogue to the four-dimensional cube from which the piece takes its title.

Running time: 2 hours, including a 10-minute transition



PART I – TESSERACT □

Directed and Edited by
Charles Atlas

Choreography by Rashaun
Mitchell + Silas Riener

Music by Fennesz

Set and Costume Design
by Rashaun Mitchell +
Silas Riener

Performers

David Rafael Botana
Kristen Foote
Hiroki Ichinose
Cori Kresge
Rashaun Mitchell
Silas Riener
Melissa Toogood

Produced by Victoria Brooks

Project Managed by
Ian Hamelin

Camera Operator,
Steadicam Operator, and
Color Correction
Ryan Thomas Jenkins

Steadicam Operator for “Fog”
Victor Lazaro

Stereography
Andrew Parke

First Assistant Camera
Alena Samoray

Second Assistant Camera
and Photography
Mick Bello

DIT and Compositing
Eric Brucker

Assistant Editing
Lazar Bozic

Post Production Assistance
Collin Leitch

Digital Landscaping
James Siewert

Lead Audio Engineering
Stephen McLaughlin

Audio Engineering
Jeff Svatek

Direction of Stage Technologies
Geoff Abbas

Assistant Technical Direction
Eric Lin

Lighting Direction
Dan Swalec

Master Carpentry and Rigging
William Fritz

Production Technicians
Carl Lewandowski and
Michael Wells

Grip and Scenic Assistance
Amanda Cherlebois

Scenic Assistance
Daniela MacCallum

Costume Fabrication
Julia Donaldson

Black-and-White Textile Drops
Fraser Taylor

Artist Services Administration
Zhenelle Falk

General Management for
Rashaun Mitchell + Silas Riener
Katy Dammers

World premiere January 2017 at EMPAC/
Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center
at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Special
thanks to Penelope Armstead-Williams, Ali
Naschke-Messing, and Joe Westmoreland.

PART II – TESSERACT ○
Choreography by Rashaun
Mitchell + Silas Riener

Video by Charles Atlas

Music by Mas Ysa

Performers

David Rafael Botana
Eleanor Hullivan
Kate Jewett
Cori Kresge
Rashaun Mitchell
and Silas Riener
Kayla Farrish (understudy)

Lighting Design
Davison Scandrett

Costume Design
Rashaun Mitchell and
Silas Riener with Mary Jo
Mecca and Yvette Helin

Steadicam Operation
Ryan Thomas Jenkins

Assistant to Charles Atlas
Lazar Bozich

Assistant Camera
George MacLeod

Stage Management
Dani Prados

Costume Construction
Yvette Hellin and
Mary Jo Mecca

General Management
Katy Dammers

Scrim courtesy of Juilliard. Special thanks to
Melissa Toogood, Justin Faircloth, Stanley
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Feldman, anonymous, Mary Fillardo, Ariane
Harrison, Liz Radke, Dorothy Reilly, Katherine
Sonnenborn, Vicki Mitchell and Greg Mitchell,
and Cathy Reilly and Joe Riener.

Tesseract □ by Charles Atlas / Rashaun Mitchell
/ Silas Riener was commissioned and produced
by EMPAC/Experimental Media and Performing
Arts Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
and co-commissioned by Triangle France.

Tesseract ○ by Charles Atlas / Rashaun
Mitchell / Silas Riener was co-commissioned by
EMPAC / Experimental Media and Performing
Arts Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic
Institute, the Walker Art Center, the Museum of
Contemporary Art Chicago, and On the Boards.

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England Foundation for the Arts' National
Dance Project, with lead funding from the Doris
Duke Charitable Foundation and The Andrew
W. Mellon Foundation. Additional funding from
the Dean's Grant administered by the Tisch
School of the Arts through New York University.
Tesseract was developed, in part, through
residencies at EMPAC/ Experimental Media
and Performing Arts Center at Rensselaer
Polytechnic Institute, The Watermill Center, and
the Walker Art Center.

This performance is graciously sponsored by



CHARLES ATLAS DURING REHEARSAL. PHOTO: MICK BELLO, EMPAC

Fri, May 19: Post-Show Conversation with Charles Atlas, Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Riener

Join us after Friday's show for
discussion led by OtB writer-in-
residence **Claudia La Rocco** with
introduction by **Emily Zimmerman**,
Director of the Jacob Lawrence
Gallery at the University of
Washington.

Location: Mainstage

ABOUT *TESSERACT*

The hypercube or tesseract is described by moving the generating cube in the direction in which the fourth dimension extends.

– Robert T. Browne, *The Mystery of Space*

Rotations through a fourth dimension can't affect a three-dimensional figure any more than you can shake letters off a printed page. . . .

As I see it, in a four-dimensional figure a three-dimensional man has two choices every time he crosses a line of juncture, like a wall or a threshold. Ordinarily he will make a ninety-degree turn through the fourth dimension, only he doesn't feel it with his three dimensions. . . . it must be a matter of subconscious orientation.

– Robert A. Heinlein, *And He Built a Crooked House*

Robert A. Heinlein's 1941 novella *And He Built a Crooked House* describes a California architect who designs a house based on a four-dimensional cube, a tesseract, comprised of eight cubed rooms. Unbeknownst to him or his clients, however, an earthquake has caused the invisible fourth dimension to shift prior to their first tour through the building. The tesseract house then takes its new inhabitants on a disorienting journey through multiple rooms, perspectives, and timescales that ends with another earthquake induced slip of space/time as they are dropped with a jolt into the desert landscape of Joshua Tree National Park.

Charles Atlas, Rashaun Mitchell, and Silas Riener's *Tesseract* charts a similar course: worlds shift and flip, and dancers spin and fall across unstable planes. Parallel timescales are reflected back on themselves, and emotions run high as speed, scale, and gravity refuse to remain constant. This journey starts from the perspective of three-dimensional stereoscopic vision and progresses to the performative dimensionality of the theater stage. Although the artists had previously worked together with Merce Cunningham, *Tesseract* marks their first independent

collaboration, and like the architect's project in Heinlein's novella, this ambitious work is conceived of as a chance to explore the potential of imagined architectures that can drift, from cinema screen to proscenium stage.

THE LONG CINEMATIC HISTORY OF STEREOSCOPIC FILMS CONSTRUCTS A SHARED LANGUAGE AMONG THOSE OF US WHO WATCH THEM.

Industrially produced science fiction, like the three-dimensional animation and live-action hybrid *Jupiter Ascending* (2015), the constrained B movie horror effects of *Cube2: Hypercube* (2002) and the world-bending stereoscopic effects of *Doctor Strange* (2016) all provide material inspiration through which each element of *Tesseract* – the choreography, the sets, and the image manipulation – emerge. Far from telling a narrative that posits three-dimensional film as an on-screen duplicate of how we see in reality, the media has the potential to engender a different sort of vision, one in which sci-fi dimensionality can be explored.



LEFT TO RIGHT: RASHAUN MITCHELL, CORI KRESGE, MELISSA TOOGOOD, SILAS RIENER, KRISTEN FOOTE, AND DAVID RAFAEL BOTANA. PHOTO: MICK BELLO, EMPAC

Tesseract ◻ moves through these wildly divergent visual worlds in order to transport the protagonists, and audience, into the fourth dimension. *Tesseract* ○ takes the opposite approach.

An empty black stage resists fantastical sets or computer generated environments to give sole focus to the choreography. As in Atlas's film, the dancers respond to divergent situations, but this time the environments are invisible to them and the choreography alone communicates entirely new worlds. At times the performers come together to build and define spatial geometries. At other times, they appear caught between dimensions,

defined only by their responses to unusual atmospheric or gravitational effects. As Atlas projects the dancers' doubles back onto the space of the stage, viewers are sucked beyond the void to imagined worlds as vivid as any Hollywood blockbuster. The dancers shapeshift, moving between roles and personalities, between affect and effect, marked as much by cinematic pathos as the recorded images previously on-screen.

Of course, in some ways this attention to extra-dimensionality is present in all three artists' previous work. Atlas, well known for his pioneering approach to the relationship between technology and the body, has developed a vivid cinematic language for articulating dance on screen using an active, mobile camera that not only mediates but also draws attention to the camera. In his work, the camera is not just witness but also dancer, resulting in an image wholly inseparable from the dance it records. Riener and Mitchell are equally driven by the potential of choreography to reach beyond the limits of its inherent language of dimensionality. *Tesseract* combines Riener's work at the interstitial space between language and movement with Mitchell's approach to choreographing at the edge of spiritual and physical transformation.

RASHAUN MITCHELL AND SILAS RIENER
PHOTO: MICK BELLO, EMPAC



DURING THE PRODUCTION OF *TESSERACT*, THIS NOTION OF DIFFERING TIMESCALES AND PARALLEL UNIVERSES REMAINED AT THE FOREFRONT OF OUR DISCUSSIONS, ALTHOUGH NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF ARTISTIC INSPIRATION.

The friction between the necessary rhythms of those in front of the camera and those behind it, who switch the lenses, adjust the lights, balance the rig, and review the footage, remains resolutely opposed. At a very practical level, the dancers need

to stay warm and mobile for performance and to prevent injury. This organic, bodily timeframe works against the staccato starts and stops of a movie production. This is especially the case on a three-dimensional film set, which requires an extra crew-member, the stereographer, who measures the convergence of the two focal lengths before every take in order to have the image protrude or recede from the screen.

RATHER THAN DENY OR AVOID THESE FRICTIONS, ATLAS, MITCHELL, AND RIENER INCORPORATE THESE DIFFERENT MODES OF PRODUCTION INTO A MULTIFACETED ARTWORK THAT COMBINES THE CONTRASTING TIMESCALES OF THE RECORDED AND THE LIVE IN ORDER TO USE THE MATERIAL FACT OF THE ARTWORK'S PRODUCTION AS AN UNDERLYING DRAMATURGICAL AND CHOREOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY.

This technique and its contradictions are especially foregrounded in one scene from *Tesseract* □, in which the camera continually circles the dancers as dense fog swirls at their feet. However, by deliberately eschewing montage in favor of showing the continuous time of the dance, the Steadicam operator's body feels the double strain of the technical and the physical by undertaking a series of "straight-takes" while carrying a seventy-five-pound, two-camera, three-dimensional rig to frame the dancers' duet. While this work remains invisible, the effect on-screen is one of the camera's delicate switch from observer to participant, as its close-up and mobile viewpoint traces a liminal space beyond the theatrical language implied by the choreography.

In response, *Tesseract* ○ reveals the means of production of *Tesseract* □ as Mitchell and Riener's choreography places the Steadicam and its operator center stage. The camera operator, Ryan Jenkins, now takes on the dual role of operator-performer, both foil and accompaniment to the dancers through his presence both in front of the audience and behind the camera. In essence he represents the collapse of two parallel universes. This gesture dramatizes the elliptical relationship between film time and theatrical time, between the technical and the artistic.

TESSERACT POINTS TO THE RICH HISTORY OF THIS SUBJECTIVE CAMERA, OF WHICH THE DEVELOPMENT OF STEADICAM FOR COMPLEX TRACKING SHOTS IS KEY, WHILE THE USE OF THE STRAIGHT-TAKE PRESENTS THESE TWO MEDIA TIMESCALES AS ONE.



The word tesseract is derived from the Greek *tessares*, or four, and *aktis*, a ray of light. Atlas, Mitchell, and Riener's *Tesseract* alludes not only to the romance of science fiction's beaming rays, but also to light as the principal element of cinematography, projection, and theatrical technique. The artists combine *aktis* with the fourth dimension, usually understood as time. However, there is an extra-dimensionality here that is revealed through the interaction of the real and the imaged, the live and the recorded. In the midst of *Tesseract* □, the dancers find themselves in a sci-fi desert landscape, which recalls both the end of Heinlein's novella and also Edwin Abbott's 1884 society-baiting satirical novel *Flatland*. Yet as *Flatland* describes a class society in which the protagonist's geometry equals hierarchy, here the interaction of the dancers with their designated geometries is imagined with humor as an alternate framework. Like the space between our two eyes that nevertheless see as one, this framework articulates an alternate fourth dimension with the potential to become visible.

VICTORIA BROOKS

EMPAC Curator of Time-Based Visual Arts, 2017

About the Artists

CHARLES ATLAS has been a pioneering figure in the creation of time-based visual art for more than four decades, extending the limits of his media and forging new territory in a wide range of genres, stylistic approaches, and techniques. Over the years he has made media/dance works, multichannel video installations, feature-length documentaries, video art works for television, and live electronic performances. Throughout his career, he has fostered collaborative relationships, working intimately with such artists and performers as Leigh Bowery, Michael Clark, Douglas Dunn, Marina Abramovic, Yvonne Rainer, Anohni, and most notably Merce Cunningham, for whom he served as filmmaker-in-residence for a decade from the early 1970s through 1983. Since 2003, Atlas has been interested in exploring different contexts that exploit the use of live video, such as in *Instant Fame* (2003–06), which consisted of a series of real-time video portraits of performers and artists created live in the gallery space. His recent live video/installations include *The Pedestrians* (2011), in collaboration with Mika Tajima at the South London Gallery, and *Charles Atlas and Collaborators* (2013) at the Tate Modern. Atlas has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, three Bessie Awards (New York Dance and Performance), the Foundation for Contemporary Art's John Cage Award, and a 2016 USA Gracie Fellowship.

DAVID RAFAEL BOTANA was introduced to movement at a young age through Spanish dance, gymnastics, and Goju-Ryu Karate. He has a BFA in dance performance from New World School of the Arts (2006) under the direction of Daniel Lewis, and also studied tai chi and contact improvisation. He worked with Jonah Bokaer as a performer in *On Vanishing* (2011) at the Guggenheim Museum and in *Filter* (2011) at festival de danse Les Hivernales in Avignon. He was also part of the last Merce Cunningham Repertory Understudy Group (2010–11). He has worked with Pam Tanowitz, Bill Young, and sculpture/painter Jonathan Van Dyke, and has collaborated with Leslie Satin and Bradley Teal Ellis. Since 2011 Botana has been a cast member of Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* at the McKittrick Hotel. He has been a dancer with Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Riener since 2015.

CHRISTIAN FENNESZ is a guitarist and composer active in electronic music and records who is known as Fennesz. He uses guitar and notebook computers to make multilayered compositions that blend melodic and treated samples with glitch-influenced sounds and washes of white noise. His first duo recording with Jim O'Rourke, *It's Hard For Me To Say I'm Sorry*, was released in 2016. Fennesz is published by Touch Music and lives and works in Vienna, Austria.

ELEANOR HULLIHAN is a performer, teacher, and dance and music maker based in Brooklyn. She has



LEFT TO RIGHT: RYAN JENKINS, VICTOR LAZARO, HOROKI ICHINOSE, AND CORI KRESGE. PHOTO: MICK BELLO, EMPAC



created dance and performed with Tere O'Connor, Lily Gold, Beth Gill, Sufjan Stevens/Jessica Dessner, Zeena Parkins, Jmy Leary, Katy Pyle, Jennifer Monson, Mike Mills, Sarah Michelson, Andrew Ondrejcek, Neal Medlyn, and John Jasperse, among others. She has served as a curator and teacher for Movement Research and presents work in the New York area. Currently she is exploring dance for video. Hullihan has a BFA from New York University Tisch School of the Arts and graduated from University of North Carolina School of the Arts High School. She studied Pilates under Kathy Grant Kelly Kane and owns a Pilates studio in New York. She is on the body conditioning staff for American Ballet Theater's JKO training program. Her current teachers and mentors include Clarice Marshall, Janet Panetta, Genny Kapuler and Christine Bratton.

RYAN JENKINS has been the Senior Video Technician at EMPAC/ Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute since 2008, and has an MFA from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute with a focus in sculpture and the moving image. His specialty in multidisciplinary performance and film is in Steadicam, gimbal, and camera operation. He has created film and sculpture and has toured on productions for Laurie Anderson, Charles Atlas, Jem Cohen, Brent Green, Cally Spooner, Eve Sussman, Martine Syms, The Wooster Group, and many more. Jenkins lives in upstate New York with his wife, dog, and two young boys.

KATE JEWETT has a BFA from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. She was part of the Merce Cunningham Repertory Understudy Group for the creation of *Split Sides and Views on Stage*. In 2005 she joined Shen Wei Dance Arts. She was named Rehearsal Director in 2009, and as the former Education Director helped create the company's dance-ineducation program for New York City public schools. Her own work has been performed at DeSales University, the United Nations, Park Avenue Armory, SCGSAH's Gunter Theater, Milano Teatro Scuola Paolo Grassi, and Fabbrica Europa and *Performatica* festivals. Jewett is founder and cocurator of *Watusi Regime*, a site-specific collaborative performance series in New York.

CORI KRESGE is a New York-based dancer and teacher with a BFA in dance from SUNY Purchase. Kresge is a Darmasiswa International Scholarship recipient for studies in Balinese dance in Indonesia. She has been a member of the Merce Cunningham Repertory Understudy Group, José Navas/Compagnie Flak, and the Stephen Petronio Company. As a freelance dancer she currently performs with Esme Boyce, Bill Young, Sarah Skaggs, Ellen Cornfield, Rebecca Lazier, Wendy Osserman, and multimedia artist Liz Magic Laser, and filmmaker Zuzka Kurtz, among others. Kresge has been dancing with Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Riener since 2012.

RASHAUN MITCHELL AND SILAS RIENER have created dance since 2010 in response to complex and active spatial environments, often

merging elements of fantasy, absurdity, and quiet contemplation into challenging multifaceted performance. After working together for years in the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, Mitchell and Riener developed a keen interest in the way abstraction and representation coincide in the body. Their collaborative work takes many forms, including site-specific installations, improvisational dances, and traditional proscenium pieces, as well as highly detailed and intimate immersive experiences. Their historical influences and aesthetic forms collapse into a visually charged hybrid physical language. Together they have been part of Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Extended Life Dance Development program and the New York City Center Choreographic Fellowship, and have been artists in residence at EMPAC, Mount Tremper Arts, Wellesley College, Jacob's Pillow, and Pieter. Their work has been presented at MOMA PS1 as part of Greater NY, The Chocolate Factory, New York Live Arts, Danspace Project, the Vail International Dance Festival, REDCAT, ICA Boston, and the O, Miami Poetry Festival.

DAVISON SCANDRETT has supervised lighting and technical production for more than 1,000 performances in forty-six states and twenty-eight countries. He met Silas Riener, Rashaun Mitchell, and Charles Atlas during his 2008-12 tenure as Director of Production for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. His lighting and visual designs for Mitchell and Riener include the productions Nox, Veal, Interface, Taste, Way In, Performance, Light Years, and Blue Name. Scandrett's

other lighting design credits include works by Pam Tanowitz, Sarah Michelson, Andrew Ondrejcek, Rebecca Lazier, Paris Opera Ballet, and the Off-Broadway productions of Mike Birbiglia's Thank God for Jokes and Neal Brennan's 3 Mics. His production management credits include Wendy Whelan's Restless Creature, Marina Abramovic's Goldberg, Jennifer Monson's Live Dancing Archive, Denis O'Hare and Lisa Peterson's An Iliad, and numerous productions for the Lincoln Center Festival. He was the recipient of a 2007 Bessie Award for his collaboration with Sarah Michelson and Parker Lutz on the visual design of DOGS. Scandrett would not have been able to do any of it without the guidance and support of his colleague and best friend Carrie J. Wood (1979-2016).

THOMAS ARSENAULT (MAS YSA) composes and performs as Mas Ysa. Born in Montreal, Canada, he spent his formative years in São Paulo, Brazil, before moving to the United States to study modern composition at the Oberlin Conservatory. While living between Brooklyn and Woodstock, NY, he released two albums, Worth (2014) and Seraph (2015), both of which received critical acclaim. He has also toured internationally. Tesseract marks Arsenault's third collaboration with choreographer Rashaun Mitchell, having previously collaborated on Nox and Interface. He currently resides in New York City, where he is working on a new collection of songs and compositions.

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About On the Boards

Founded by artists in 1978, On the Boards invests in leading contemporary performing artists near and far, and connects them to a diverse range of communities interested in forward-thinking art and ideas. We believe if we are successful in our work that we can grow our field, enrich peoples' lives, and contribute to civic and global dialogues.

We value • artistic risks while being fiscally responsible • leadership in our field and the multiple communities we serve to strategically advance the role contemporary artists play in society • racial and social equity to ensure our organization includes multiple viewpoints • provocative art as a vehicle to connect people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives • our local creative community as we engage with international artists and peers.

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