

Black Velvet

TRIBE
 EDUCATION RESOURCE

Resource developed by
 Deanne Bullen 2020

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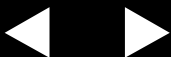


Image: Rebecca Stella

Black Velvet

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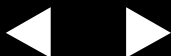
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Show rundown

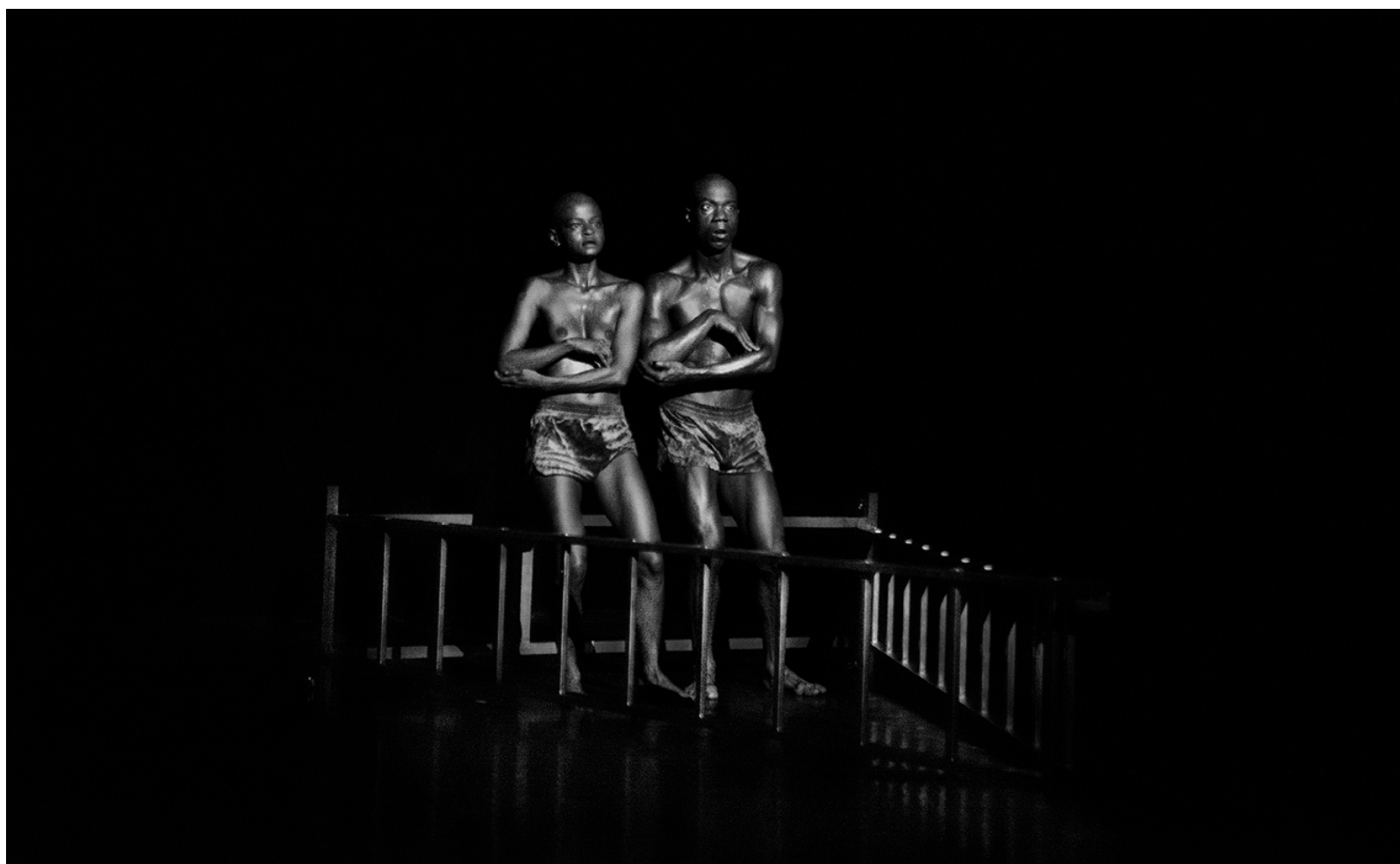
Australain Premiere / Australian Exclusive

Duration: 55 mins, no interval

The work *Black Velvet*, is a celebration of the many textures, beauties, delicacies, and the power within us. It is an art piece that aims to share and reflect on the colourfulness of blackness – especially in regards to black women – in a relationship of love, compassion, and camaraderie.

WARNINGS

- Both performers are topless
- Flashing and strobe effects



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Themes

Shamel Pitts describes *Black Velvet* as a theatrical meditation on transcending the boundaries of gender, race, love, friendship and identity.

Production

Style and Conventions

The language of Gaga is foundational to Pitts' work, but, with Martins, he has built upon it to fashion his own movement dialect.

Lighting effects by Lucca Del Carlo are the main actor in the first few minutes.

Martins' "dress" pulses with highways of dashed-line light.

A "pool" of water forms at the foot of the ladder. The humans onstage seem incidental for a while, until Pitts begins a solo of increasing intensity.

Music and sound

Aggressive music and soundtrack by Tentáculo Áudio (Ed Cortes) feed energy into the space and back up the dancers.

[OffOffOff dance](#)

Lighting

Black Velvet is performed in a space that's lit only with projections designed by graphic designer and video artist Lucca Del Carlo. He uses a special, single-point projection technique that utilises video mapping to project three dimensional images around Pitts and Martins movements.

Costume design

The loincloths, shaved heads and naked torsos blur the boundaries between masculine and feminine. The two bronzed bodies glow as if they are made of liquid metal as they explore the contours of dark and light.

Curriculum links and activities

This education resource has been developed with links to SACE Stage 1 and 2 in relation to the subject outlines.



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Before the show

From 2009 to 2016, Shamel Pitts lived in Israel and danced for *Batsheva Dance Company*, a company led for years by choreographer Ohad Naharin, who developed a movement language called Gaga. The language of Gaga is foundational to Pitts' work, but with Martins, he has built upon it to form his own dialect.

Working in small groups:

Students use the collaborative Jigsaw learning activity to research Gaga dance movement and explore the themes of *Black Velvet*.

The Jigsaw process is great for learning a large range of information and sharing the load.

Process

- Class is split into groups – approximately 5 in a group. Class of 25 would be 5 students in 5 groups.
- Each group has a focus for their research and needs to decide how they are going to collect and share the information, for example:
 - How to explain information
 - What diagrams, maps or prints of photographs are required
 - What keywords or definitions will need to be explained?
- Once each group has completed their research they are ready to re-group to share. One student from each group forms the new groups to share with each other.

Stage 1

- Each group selects one of the questions from the possible research questions provided.
- When each group believes they are "experts" in their question they regroup to teach and learn from others.

Stage 2

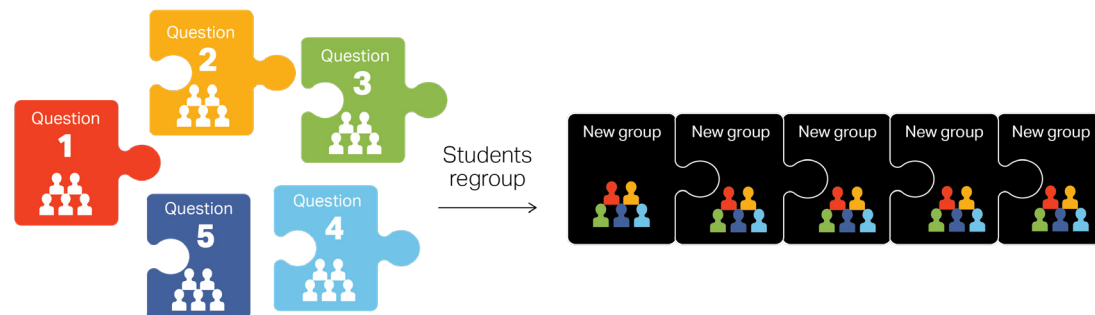
- Students should check they have one expert from each group at their table. Students present their information to each other.

Stage 3

- Whole class discussion about what they have found out.

Possible research questions to explore Gaga dance and the themes of *Black Velvet*.

- What is the Gaga movement?
- Who is Ohad Naharin and how has he influenced modern dance?
- What are the common terms and instructions in Gaga dance?
- What does it mean to be black today?
- What does it mean to be black and a woman?
- What do semi-naked bodies signal in an oversexualized society? Can they also be simply beautiful?



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Gaga dance movement

"Gaga is a new way of gaining knowledge and self-awareness through your body.

Gaga is a new way for learning and strengthening your body, adding flexibility, stamina and agility while lightening the senses and imagination.

Gaga raises awareness of physical weaknesses, awakens numb areas, exposes physical fixations and offers ways for their elimination.

Gaga elevates instinctive motion, links conscious and subconscious movement.

Gaga is an experience of freedom and pleasure. In a simple way, a pleasant place, comfortable close, accompanied by music, every person with himself and others."

(Ohad Naharin, Gaga introduction sheet)

Common Gaga Dance Terms

- float
- shake
- draw circles with different body parts
- imagine the floor is getting very hot
- become a string of spaghetti in a pot of boiling water - connect to pleasure

Gaga Dance Prompts

- feel like you are kneading dough with your hands
- imagine little explosions going off inside your body
- imagine a point within your chin (or other body part); where can you put that point?
- sense and explore the space behind your neck (or other body part)
- quake as if there is an earthquake beneath you
- move as if your flesh has melted off and you are just bones

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Here are some links that were prepared earlier:

YouTube videos to explore Gaga movement

- [Ohad Naharin discusses Gaga movement](#) (2mins 8secs)
- [Trailer for Mr Gaga documentary](#) (4min 20secs)
Mr Gaga is a documentary that tells the story of Ohad Naharin, renowned choreographer and artistic director of the Batsheva Dance Company, an artistic genius who redefined the language of modern dance.
- [What is Gaga dance?](#) (1min 35secs)
- [Gaga Dancing: Lesson 1](#) - A 360/VR experience (10mins 41secs)
- [Gaga Dancing: Lesson 2](#) - A360/VR experience (7mins 8secs)
- [Ohad Naharin explains the Groove to dancers](#) (2mins 43secs)
- [Dance in Israel – Going Gaga: My Intro to Gaga Dance Classes](#)
- [Harvard Gaga dance course teaches students to listen to their bodies](#)
- [Ohad Naharin - Deca Dance](#) (27mins 10secs)

Explore gender, sex, culture and race

- [The Guardian – Growing up black in America: here's my story of everyday racism](#)
- [Bodylore – Gender, Sex, Culture, Folklore and the Body - Black Women and Their Oversexualised Bodies](#)
- [Everyday Sociology Blog – The Social Construction of Race, Ethnicity, Sex and Gender](#)

- [Black Velvet – Architecture and Archetypes Trailer](#) (1min 21secs)
- [Tranzforum Berlin recording](#) (2mins 50secs)

SACE – Stage 1

Creating Dance CD2

Communication of choreographic intent to an audience through composition or performance.

Responding to Dance RD2

Investigation into different cultures, historical periods or dance traditions.

SACE – Stage 2

Understanding Dance UD2

Knowledge and understanding of appropriate language and terminology relevant to the dance context.

Creating Dance CD2

Communication of choreographic intent to an audience through composition or performance.

Responding to Dance RD1

Critique and evaluation of a dance presentation, performance, or choreographic piece.

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As a whole class:

After students have completed their group and class discussion for the Jigsaw activity watch the two trailers for *Black Velvet*.

- [Trailer \(1min 21secs\)](#)
- [Trailer \(2mins 50secs\)](#)

Questions for small group and class discussion

- What connections could you make with the trailers and the research you have completed?
- What influence of Gaga dance could you see in the trailers?
- What response did you have to the partial nudity?

International Baccalaureate

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Identify the appropriate compositional processes and structures to support dances with different subject matter or content.

APPLICATION AND ANALYSIS

Demonstrate the use of compositional craft to support the intention, form and content of the dances.

SYNTHESIS AND EVALUATION

Critically reflect upon the creative process of compositional problems encountered, including possible appropriate solutions for future development.

With a partner

1. Create a dance piece – influenced by the Gaga style they have investigated.
2. The narrative of their dance piece should be inspired by their own experience and understanding of gender, race, love, friendship and identity.
3. Identify the movements that express either one or more of these ideas.
4. Sequence and rehearse movements as a continuous piece of dance work with no stopping between the two ideas.
5. Identify music or sound effects to accompany their dance piece.
6. Rehearse and perform.



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After the show

Individually students

- Write down their initial thoughts after seeing *Black Velvet*
- Write down any questions they might have for Shamel Pitts or Mirelle Martins

Questions to ponder

- How did the performance of *Black Velvet* make you feel?
- Can you identify where in the performance you had that feeling OR feelings?



Individually students read one or more of the interviews with Shamel Pitts and Mirelle Martins

- [Dancer and choreographer Shamel Pitts returns home to Brooklyn with *Black Velvet*](#)
- [Time out – Shamel Pitts and Mirelle Martins bring dark harmony to Israel's stages](#)
- [New York Foundation for the Arts NYFA - 2018](#)
- [Sharing the unspoken: An interview with Shamel Pitts and Mirelle Martins](#)

Writing the review to *Black Velvet* – Architecture and Archetypes

Drawing on the conversations from the Jigsaw groups, whole class discussion and reading one or more of the interviews with Shamel Pitts and Mirelle Martins students write a review of *Black Velvet*.

[The Guide for Writing a Dance Critique](#) will support students to plan and write their critique of the performance of *Black Velvet*.

Tips and hints for students when writing their critique:

- Don't forget when you are expressing an opinion you have to back it up. You can't just say it was awesome!
- Discuss the execution of the moves, the relationship between the dancers and the miniature sets and the filming
- Describe don't tell
- Reread, edit and have someone else read your critique before you print

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Tribe meet TRIBE

Shamel Pitts

Choreographer/performer

Shamel was born in Brooklyn New York. He began his dance training at LaGuardia High School for the Performing Arts and continued, simultaneously, at The Ailey School. Shamel then went on to receive his BFA in Dance from The Juilliard School and began his professional dance career with BJM_Danse Montreal and Mikhail Baryshnikov's Hell's Kitchen Dance. Shamel continued his career with Batsheva Dance Company for 7 years. Shamel is a teacher of Gaga, the movement language created by Ohad Naharin, and has taught for both Batsheva Dance Company and Ensemble. He has been on faculty for Movement Invention Project in NYC under the direction of Alexandra Wells. He has also been on faculty and a guest teacher at Netherlands Dance Theater Summer Intensive, SUNY Purchase, and The Juilliard School. Shamel created a poetic dance performance installation entitled, *BLACK BOX: Little Black Book Of RED*.

Mirelle Martins

Creator and performer

Born in Goiania (Brazil, 1984) Mirelle received her Bachelor Degree in Social Communication at Universidade de Brasilia - UnB (2006). She moved to Sao Paulo in 2008 to work in creative teams in advertising and digital marketing. She started to research movement language and performance art in 2013 at the Gaga.People.Dancers Intensive in Brooklyn, where she met Shamel Pitts who was the teacher of the course. They established an artistic partnership in 2015 with the project Gaga/Brazil to promote Gaga and produce Pitt's first choreographic work in the South American country. *Black Velvet* (2016) introduced Mirelle to the stages and has been touring internationally since 2017 with performances in NYC, Berlin, Tel Aviv, Vienna, Singapore, Italy, Stockholm, Stuttgart, Atlanta, Rio de Janeiro beyond other cities. Pitts and Martins continued in 2018 with the creation of *Black Hole* (2018) and in 2019 with the launch of TRIBE: afrofuturistic arts collective led by Pitts, where she also performs as creative director.

Lucca Del Carlo

Light artist and video mapping

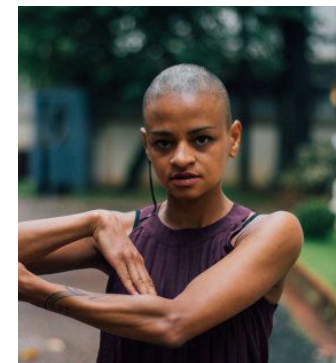
Lucca Del Carlo is a graphic designer and video artist, from Sao Paulo, Brazil. He specialises in transmedia, mixing techniques of cinema, architecture, visual arts, light design and technology, applying them in the direction and creation of scenography, immersion environments and visual effects. His work explores new ways of human communication expression and breaking common patterns.

David Gap

Costume Designer



Photo credit – David Katzenstein



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Additional resources

Reviews

- [OffOffOff dance review – The Art of Blackness](#)
- [Medium – review *Black Velvet - Architectures and Archetypes*](#)
- [Black Velvet Production video](#) (2min 45secs)
- [BAM \(Brooklyn Academy of Music\)](#)
- [Black Velvet: Architectures and Archetypes: Interview with Dancers Shamel Pitts and Mirelle Martins](#)

Guide for Writing a Dance Critique

Opening Paragraph

When	
What	
Where	
Performance Overview of the production and the intent of the choreographer... The artistic contributors – choreographer, dancers, set designer, lighting, costume	

Language Features:

- Usually in past tense
- Uses subject-specific language
- Descriptive language
- Third person voice
- Analytical language
- Modality (how certain we are about something)
- Cast and crew referred to by their full names or last name
- In text references (quotes or specific moments)

1st Paragraph - Movement and choreography

What movements did you observe?	
What was the structure of the dance?	
How did the dancers relate to each other?	
What were the technical and expressive abilities of the dancers?	
Were the dancers focussed and energetic?	

2nd Paragraph - Space and staging

How did the dancers move through space?	
Where did the movement occur?	
Did the lighting focus or distract?	
Were the costumes appropriate?	

3rd Paragraph - Music

Was the music fast or slow?	
How did the music add to the dance?	

Concluding Paragraph - Summarises the viewers opinion

How did it make you feel? What did you learn from the dance?	
What did the dance communicate to you? What stood out the most?	
Did the dance create any questions for you?	