

TRENDING: [GE sign renovations](#) | [Insurance costs explainer](#) | [Fatal Albany shooting](#) | [Barbers](#)

PREVIEW // THEATER + DANCE

From inflatables to interactive rafts: Experimental Corpus Festival debuts at Troy's EMPAC

Curator Tara Aisha Willis brings the Corpus Festival to EMPAC. Discover how movement, body, and space intersect in this unique, participatory art event in Troy.

By [Tresca Weinstein](#), *For the Times Union*

April 21, 2026



[Subscribe](#)

[Sign in](#)



Kate Ladenheim's work "Monumental Death," which will be part of the first Corpus Festival at EMPAC in Troy, Thursday through Saturday.

Courtesy of Kate Ladenheim



Listen Now:

From inflatables to interactive rafts: Experimental Corpus Festival debuts at Troy's EMPAC

About 6 Minutes

1x

Everlit

TROY — Dancer and choreographer Tara Aisha Willis has a visceral memory of walking into the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center for the first time, long before she became a full-time curator for the arts center.

"I remember walking up the stairs and seeing the concert hall floating within this glass building, like a ship in a bottle," she recalled. "It kind of shifts your sense of

space and scale, and I felt very aware of the scale of my own body.”

If You Go

Corpus Festival

When: Thursday–Saturday, with select works on view through May 8

Where: EMPAC, 50 8th St., Troy

Tickets: Free, RSVP required for some performances

More info: empac.rpi.edu or 518-276-3921

That moment was the seed of the Corpus Festival of movement-based art, which takes place Thursday through Saturday at EMPAC. Willis has curated a selection of installations, video and live performance that explores what it means for a body to be in relationship with place, space and other bodies.

“Thinking about moving and dancing in this building, on this land, developed into questions about how our bodies are part of a landscape in which power dynamics, social structures, all of these different minutiae [impact] how we navigate and compose ourselves in the world,” the curator shared.

The works address these questions in myriad ways. Some pieces are more contained and intimate, like Kate Ladenheim’s inflatable sculpture “Monumental Death,” which is activated by the motions of viewers as they fall onto a mat. Others are vast in scale, like the dance film “The Oath,” by choreographer Annie-B Parson and director Alla Kovgan, a cycle of sweeping movement performed in unison by a large ensemble.



Don't miss the next big story

Make the Times Union a Preferred Source on Google to see more of our journalism when you search.

[Add Preferred Source](#)

The festival will unfold throughout the building, from the lobby, where Yellow Lab Vintage & Books of Troy will host a pop-up bookstore and reading lounge, to the glass-enclosed bridges, where the multichannel video “Primordial” will be installed. The work by Meg Foley and Carmichael Jones captures Foley as a lone figure within striking natural landscapes, moving ever-so-slowly beneath layers of concealing fabric.

“It’s a very meditative piece — she’s trying to channel the life span of a stone, connecting with the earth beneath her feet,” Willis said. “The screens are fabric stretched within the floating bridges, and because of where it’s placed, the landscape line in the videos will align with the hillside and the Troy skyline.”

Downstairs in Studio 1, Yanira Castro’s “Raft” transforms a collection of what looks like trash—wooden pallets, old clothes, inner tubes—into an island of sorts that participants are invited to climb and play on.

“A raft is a really incredible metaphor for humans together trying to survive, making the difficult decision to risk everything to escape their situations,” Willis said. Two group activations, Thursday and Friday, invite viewers into a guided experience of the work. The installation also has low-sensory hours during which the lighting and sound are less heightened.

Audience participation is also an element in the improvisational work “preámbulo,” in which artist nibia pastrana santiago employs movement, light, sound and objects

gathered from around the building, as well as performance practices developed in public spaces across Puerto Rico.

“She’s performing in the proscenium theater, but she’s rethinking what a theater is,” Willis said. “She’ll have the audience on stage and moving throughout the space, and she’s responsive to the dynamics that come up in the room.”

Improvisation is a movement art close to Willis’s heart; she’s a member of the Bessie Award–winning improvisation collective Skeleton Architecture, a group of Black and gender-nonconforming dancers. Formerly a performance curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Willis is also a researcher and author who has been awarded numerous research fellowships, from organizations including the Getty Research Institute, Jacob’s Pillow and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

The first festival she curated for EMPAC, last year’s “Ephemeral Organ,” examined the role of choreography in transmitting memory, history and Black lived experience. The premiere on Saturday of the work “Black Holes Ain’t So Black” covers related ground, using archival images, film clips, narrative and movement.

“It’s a collage of fragments of text from different sources across Black thinking and cosmology writings, grappling with the relationship of Black life and the Black body with the landscape and with the entire universe,” Willis explained. “The team [writer-filmmaker Thuto Durkac-Somo, choreographer-writer Jonathan González and performer Mario Gooden] is threading together these multiple concepts to create a kind of lecture experience that’s very unconventional.”

A more traditional lecture on Friday, “Dancing Land, Dancing Power,” with dance scholars Arabella Stanger and María Firmino, looks at the connections between concert dance and land use, social struggle and other forms of performance.

Ultimately, Willis seeks to illuminate how our movement shapes our understanding of the world, ourselves and the structure and systems in which we function. She hopes the festival will encourage viewers to become more aware of their own presence and ways of moving — and from there, to make more conscious choices about their actions.

“It’s no accident that there’s so much participatory work,” she said. “Each of the artists is asking us to show up, to be really present with the performers, to pay attention to the other bodies in the space we’re in, and to notice how we move and how we might move differently.”

April 21, 2026



Tresca Weinstein

FREELANCE WRITER



Tresca Weinstein writes about dance, visual art, and culture for the Times Union. She also writes, edits, and manages content for national corporations and organizations, with a focus on the arts, yoga, health and wellness, and positive psychology. Her favorite part of her job is talking to people who are passionate about making the world a better and more awe-inspiring place, whether that means creating beautiful things, researching the science of happiness, or doing eight pirouettes in a row.

Report an error

We take accuracy seriously and strive to earn your trust with fair and complete coverage. If you spot an error, please let us know about it using [our corrections form](#).

You also can respond to a story: [Submit a letter to the editor](#).

If you need help unrelated to a specific story, [please contact customer service](#).
