

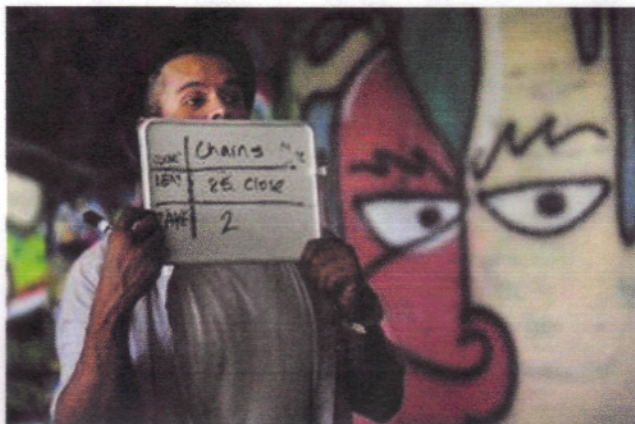
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A Miami choreographer captures the desolate urban glory of the Miami Marine Stadium on film

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EMILY MICHOT / Emily Michot

Amidst the graffiti riot of colors and images covering the Miami Marine Stadium, the three dancers in bright, squiggle-covered leggings snaking up and down the steps almost blend in. Almost.

"Ooohhhh, glass!" says choreographer Hattie Mae Williams, as her face comes perilously close to the gritty concrete steps, which despite her having swept them a few minutes before are still littered with the broken bottles and other trash that covers the rest of the stadium floor.

With momentum gathering behind a [campaign](#) to renovate the stadium, the glass and graffiti could soon be gone. A group called the [Friends of Miami Marine Stadium](#) is working to resuscitate the 50-year old structure, declared an endangered architectural treasure by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Pop stars [Gloria Estefan](#) and Jimmy Buffet have [headlined](#) the drive to raise \$30 million to save the iconic stadium overlooking the water on the edge of Virginia Key.

Williams, however, is working on a dance film intended to salvage a portrait of the stadium as it is now – a surreal, unique monument to urban creativity. In the 22 years since Hurricane Andrew caused authorities to close the stadium, it has become a magnet for graffiti artists, skateboarders, photographers, filmmakers, dancers, adventurers and sightseers.

"Artists have used and reclaimed this space and have brought attention to this space," Williams says. "It's important to recognize we have that power – and to document the space the way it is now."

The trees and bushes overgrowing the front, as well as the paint swirling up the massive concrete beams and walls, make the structure look like a modernist version of an ancient temple lost in the jungle.

Despite the felony trespassing signs on a fence outside, a small but steady stream of

visitors joins Williams, who received an \$8,000 Knight Arts Challenge grant for her project, and her small crew in the stadium on a Friday afternoon.

Two couples in bathing suits are enjoying the water and the sunny views of downtown Miami. A well-muscled group is shooting a fitness video, jogging down hallways and hanging off railings where the graffiti matches their green or purple shorts. Although the people here don't seem worried about being there without permission, they won't give their last names. Simone, 25, snaps photos of her friend Andrew, 25, as he swings from a rope hanging from the edge of the broad roof jutting out over the seats. "We've seen photos on Instagram and always wanted to come," says Andrew, declaring the place "cool, sick, beautiful."

Sitting high in the seats where audiences once watched pop concerts and speedboat races, a man who calls himself Lucky the Raver and his friends, Vicky and Justin, say they've been coming for years. Lucky points out a hole in the ceiling, where he says skateboarders crawl out onto the roof to skate up top. "To me this place is a work of art," says Vicky.

Williams, 33, grew up in North Miami and graduated from the dance program at New World School of the Arts in 1999 before moving to New York City, where she does dance films and projects as [The Tattooed Ballerina](#). Many are site-specific — performed in public places instead of traditional theaters — and focused on social themes.

"I'm at a point in my art form where I want to reclaim and reframe public spaces," says Williams, who earned a BFA from a program run by Fordham University with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. "Not just artistically but socially."

Williams says her film will be partly a visual tribute to the stadium's dramatic, monumental structure, designed by architect Hilario Candela, and will also evoke the urban legends that swirl about the place, from a speedboat racer who died during the stadium's heyday to the ghost stories that have grown up around its dark hallways and the cave-like shells of its bathrooms.

On Friday, art director and cameraman Christian Salazar shoots Williams and dancers Iwalani Martin and Melanie Martel, squatting and rolling and lunging up and down a steep stairway that rises towards the triangular arches vaulting across the top of the back wall. Later, Williams, Martel and dancer Katie Stirman hang, twisting and arching, from a line of chains that dangle from the ceiling of the old concession stand.

Away from the bright vista of the bay out front, with the sound of cars, a circling boat, lapping water and booming music echoing along the dark passageways, the stadium feels disorientingly eerie.

Williams, who is African-American, never visited the stadium when it was open. Her film will refer to the history of nearby Virginia Key Beach, the only public beach for blacks during the era of segregation — using fellow Miami-raised New World graduate Tarell Alvin McCraney, an acclaimed playwright and director, to play the part of an imaginary observer.

Williams says she's been invited to screen her film at Tigertail Productions' ScreenDance

Miami festival in January , and will give a copy to the HistoryMiami museum. Even in the short time she's been coming to the stadium, it has changed. People paint over the graffiti, and some images they've captured on film are already gone.

"I want to show the underbellies, the narratives, the past and present history," Williams says. "There are things that were here that are gone already."

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