

UMMA-YA [in progress]

eddy kwon

. **sueann leung**, costume designer

. **charles nicola**, makeup artist

. **mengwen cao**, photographer

. **aggie noh**, translation support

thank you so much for being here today.

i feel so lucky to be an artist. to have these incredible opportunities to create vehicles for self-discovery, understanding, and connection to the world around. this work is like that, like two hands, or a river, holding me in this moment, in a constant state of becoming.

a few years ago, i realized that no one was going to give me permission to be a dancer. i never thought i could be one, for reasons you might intuit. it was the discovery of butoh, and later korean shamanic & traditional dances, that showed me that i could claim for myself a practice that was deeply fulfilling, infinitely challenging, and spiritually excavating. it showed me that my crooked back, chronic conditions, and sorrowful spirit were not blemishes but freckles, beauty marks.

i am so grateful to my dance mentors, crow nishimura, senga nengudi, yokko, and the internet. they have always met me where i'm at, and encouraged me to do less "dancing" and more "becoming," a suggestion i carry with me always, whether i am dancing, listening, or making a snack.

UMMA-YA draws from the visual, sonic, movement, and ritual languages of korean shamanic practice, japanese butoh, and my own personal immersion in the practice that is growing up asian american, coming of age in the midwest, being a queer trans person, and formally studying both european classical music & american jazz. it also carries a thin thread of a little known history, that of trans korean shamans practicing during the periods of japanese colonization, modernization, and US occupation. in alignment with the queer practice of "chosen family," i choose these transcestors as my own.

UMMA-YA is a modest attempt to build a house for all of these things to live in. sometimes, these things eat dinner together, and other times, they can't stand the sight of one another. often, they are passive aggressive and leave notes on the fridge, track dirt inside. often, too, they are tender, pranksters.

tangibly, this iteration of UMMA-YA is a sequence of songs, stories, dances, and rituals, all creating a framework for a simple story: a boy learns he will be a mother. within this frame, i explore transformation & transgression, family & ancestry, and the spiritual imprints of colonialism & imperialism.

much of the work included in tonight's performance is brand new, and – i say this with deep, deep humility (anxiety) – this is my first-ever solo dance performance. thank you for jumping in the river with me.

this project would not be what it is without some extraordinary people & organizations. first, i'd like to thank the incredible team at **roulette & the van lier fellowship** for empowering me with trust, resources, and space this year. i want to also thank my production team: **sueann leung**, who is one of the most talented, creative, and hardworking artists i've ever met. **charles nicola**, who elevated & executed the makeup ideas with such mastery, generosity & patience. **mengwen cao**, who helped us clarify the visual universe with their poetic eye & compassion. my artistic family **crow nishimura & joshua kohl** of **degenerate art ensemble**, and **senga nengudi**, with whom i am exploring UMMA-YA's same themes for a collaborative performance work to premiere in 2022. **bang on a can**, for supporting the creation of one of UMMA-YA's songs. and my partner **lizzy duquette**, whose empathy, perspective, and limitless creative ability inspire me every day.

on the next page, i've included an english translation of the korean text (thank you, **aggie noh**) from the work's opening, as well as some information about my wonderful collaborators.

with love, warmth & gratitude,

eddy
brooklyn 6.26.21

UMMA-YA [in progress]

english translation

*sound is an opening
sound is a soft door*

*flower boy
where are you going?*

dissolve the state unto the land

*flower boy
where are you going?*

*no beginning
and no end*

*cuckooraroo!
oh, so pretty!*

*flower boy!
how can you live like this?
singing, dancing, are you crazy?*

*flower boy ... you are so pretty!
play with me!*

*flower boy! where are you going?
dig a well, dig a water hole!*

*flower boy ... dig a butthole!
dig it up! dig it up! dig it up!
hehehehehehehehehehehehehe*

*note: genderqueer or transgender korean shamans were sometimes called "flower boys" (in korean: "hwa-rahng")

artist info

Eddy Kwon (they/them) is a violinist/violist, vocalist, composer, improviser, and interdisciplinary performing artist based in Brooklyn. They are a United States Artists Ford Fellow, Hermitage Fellow, Van Lier Fellow at Roulette Intermedium, Johnson Fellow for Artists Transforming Communities, and Andrew W Mellon Artist-in-Residence at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College. In addition to a rigorous and evolving solo practice, they collaborate with artists of diverse disciplines, including The Art Ensemble of Chicago, Senga Nengudi, Tomeka Reid, Degenerate Art Ensemble, Jens Lekman, and Lizzy Duquette.

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Sueann Leung (they/them) is a New York-based costume designer and stylist with a keen interest in using design to explore identity and expression. Their background in Gender Studies continues to inform their work using costume design as a powerful tool to humanize and respectfully represent people – particularly those from marginalized groups, especially queer people of color.

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Special Thanks: Hisham Dawoud, Michael Mui, Kingdom Family, Alexander Wang, Kam Yee Leung, Shiu Yiu Leung

Charles Nicola, makeup artist

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