

MA in Liberal Studies *Newsletter*

Fall 2021

“It’s Your Thing—Do What You Want to Do:” MALS Student Fatima Logan-Alston

“There was not a time I wasn’t doing or creating my own dance, even when it was not an opportune time for doing so,” Masters in Liberal Studies (MALS) student Fatima Logan-Alston says. She made her older brother the first dancer in her “company,” propelling him across the floor for family gatherings. As a youth Logan-Alston started a praise dance group in her church in her hometown of Richmond, Virginia. Praise dance has a long tradition in the Baptist church that many link to the African-American ring shout—now investigated in Logan-Alston’s master’s thesis. Her church’s deaconess came weekly to their rehearsals, providing unsolicited direction **Cont. on page 2**



Fatima Logan-Alston began the MALS program in Fall 2020, and is writing a thesis on contemporary African American concert dance.

Tricia McLaughlin’s Illogical Inventions



Tricia McLaughlin’s “delirious” at 41st & 7th Avenue in Times Square

Tricia McLaughlin’s computer-generated animation created from physical drawings and paintings could be found through November of 2021, in New York City’s Times Square. McLaughlin, a professor of Visual Arts at SUNY Old Westbury for the past twenty years, is a Guggenheim recipient whose artistic practice includes painting, sculpture, computer animation, and 3-D design. ZAZ10TS commissioned her digital artwork for its large light emitting diode (LED) Times Square billboard for an exhibition entitled the “In Between Project” where **Cont. on page 3**

“It’s Your Thing—Do What You Want to Do,” Cont. page 1.

to the young group, ensuring ladylike Christian etiquette. At her magnet high school students were allowed to organize their own “people’s classes” in the afternoon, and Logan-Alston’s choreographic knowledge led her to use the praise dances she was familiar with to begin a praise dance group that performed in local churches. The classes were so popular that other local high school students learned about them and pushed to join in. These experiences led Logan-Alston to seek more training and to study modern and African dance. Her love grew deeper, and she joined the City Dance Troup where she refined her skill and travelled to national dance competitions.

Jokingly, Logan-Alston attributes the rich blend of R&B and funk that her father listened to—James Brown, Earth Wind and Fire, Luther Vandross, Prince, and Michael Jackson for amplifying her love of African American music and movement. Logan-Alston’s roots in African-American cultural production go deeper. Her grandmother was a hairdresser on 2nd Street, near the famed Hippodrome Theater (in the Jackson Historic District, called the “Harlem of the South” in the early 20th century). Logan-Alston compares the Hippodrome to Harlem’s famed Apollo Theater. Her grandmother had the pleasure of doing James Brown’s hair when he played Richmond. Being surrounded by such a rich cultural tradition further animated Logan-Alston’s appreciation for movement and its significance.

Logan-Alston attended Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Like many parents, her family hoped her college education would lead her to a traditional, lucrative profession—medicine or perhaps engineering. But dance remained her North Star. Logan-Alston majored in dance, and minored in African American Studies, enriching her knowledge of the dance traditions that motivated her. Her engagement with praise dance set her apart

from many students, as did her interest in African dance and culture. All dancer majors concentrated on ballet and modern dance forms, but Logan-Alston was especially drawn to African dance and became the teaching assistant for all VCU’s African dance courses. Logan-Alston credits her family with imbuing her with the necessary persistence. Though her father hoped she would be a doctor, he also told her, “It’s your thing, you do what you want to do.”



“The Pearl,” Waterside Plaza, NY, 2014, Eric Bandiero photographer.

After graduation Logan-Alston joined Chuck Davis’s African American Dance Ensemble. Based in Durham, North Carolina. The Ensemble toured nationally. Logan-Alston stayed with Chuck Davis for a season and a half, or 18 months, and next did a summer fellowship with the avant-garde New York City-based Urban Bush Women. Afterward she joined the Forces of Nature Theater in New York City, performing as a member of the company for five years. Logan-Alston distinguishes between the concert stage and

Cont. on p. 3

Students who have completed or will complete 15 credits should speak to Prof. Carol Quirke, MALS Graduate Director to begin discussions about a capstone project—either a one-semester internship, or a thesis, which requires two semesters to complete. quirkec@oldwestbury.edu

It's Your Thing." Cont from page 2

community-based events such as residencies or workshops, which offer more interaction between audience and performer. She found herself making a difference in the lives of those struggling with mobility, or those who were terminally ill. While working with Davis and the African-American Dance Ensemble, she engaged with people desperate to move. The experiences were visceral—people claimed to leave a different person than when they walked (or wheeled themselves) into the workshop.

With her husband, David Alston, Logan-Alston founded, VashtiDance Theater <https://vashtidancetheater.com/> about a decade ago. They sought to develop choreography and musical performances that mixed vernacular, classical, and traditional aesthetics to nurture the African American community. The first performance they gave was at the Upper West Side's Riverside Church—Martin Luther King gave his famous anti-war speech there in 1967. Logan-Alston felt that she and her husband were introducing something new to the New York City dance scene—"Old heads came up to us in person, wondering what these two young people from North Carolina were doing." Her company has travelled between Boston and North Carolina, and they are planning performances in

Washington D.C. and Georgia. Logan-Alston has a commitment to clarity—respecting the roots of traditional African dance, and acknowledging its tendrils in African-American dance, while honoring the specificity of the African American culture. She finds some companies seek an "African culture" that dismisses the history of the Middle Passage and the ravages of colonialism on the continent, and which also ignore the interchange between New World and Old that have defined the modern dance scene. Or, some choreographers and dancers take ritualistic dances and separate them from their religious context, disrespecting those who imbue movement with spiritual meaning.

Logan-Alston enrolled in SUNY Old Westbury's Masters in Liberal Studies program so she could explore these questions, and better understand the historic roots to the culture she seeks to communicate in her dance. A professional dancer and educator, she conducts "Artist Talk Backs" where audience members can ask questions about the productions they've seen or participated in, and she believes the MALS program, and the research she is doing in Independent Studies and toward her master's thesis will guide her in developing a rich intellectual understanding of the varieties and complexities of African American culture.

Tricia McLaughlin's Illogical Creations

cont. from page 1



artists' work is intercut with traditional Times Square billboard fare—advertising, the idiom of consumer culture.

McLaughlin's piece, "delirious," concocts delightful, almost childlike mutant creatures with names to match, such as Granny Chicken, Bike Bird, and Red Amoeba. These digitally animated, whimsical creatures appear to be playing as they careen across the screen, yet McLaughlin is fascinated by the ways in which they ultimately conform to the architecture around them as they avoid aspects of the urban landscape such as statues or walls. This effect might be heightened by the viewing experience—a global consumer destination broken not only by advertisements, but by Times Square itself. Beeping taxis, bicycles, yells, and the thrum of traffic accompany McLaughlin's art.

McLaughlin is a graduate of Syracuse University where she painted as

Cont. on p. 4.

“Illogical Creations” cont. from p. 3

her primary medium, though she also studied computer graphics and programming. Creativity is often posited as “right-brained,” but McLaughlin, who has been interested in the arts since she was a child, has an equal interest in “left-brained” mathematics, geometry, architecture, and structures. After graduation she joined the Peace Corps, volunteering in Costa Rica, where she worked in four small communities, teaching adult literacy, sewing, building ovens for baking, and organizing a women’s soccer league. McLaughlin felt the literacy skills she nurtured among adults in Costa Rica made a difference in their lives. She worked for the famous modern dancer Bill T. Jones, and began at Old Westbury in 2001, after receiving her MFA in visual arts at Hunter College. She teaches 3D design, 2D animation, and tutorials.



Tricia McLaughlin, “Gold Minion,”

McLaughlin’s art practice engages multiple mediums, and she moves between working with her hands creating tangible, lasting objects in painting and sculpture, and then computer-based arts in 3D design and digital animation. In her “Fun and War Games” series McLaughlin explored early twentieth-century anarchist Emma Goldman’s speech, “Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty,” to visually muse upon the ways in which the ideals of patriotism demand much of citizens, and the human costs of emotional alliances to the nation-state. Goldman argued, “Those who have had the fortune of being born on some particular speck, consider themselves better, nobler, grander, more intelligent than the living beings inhabiting any other speck. It is, therefore, the duty of everyone living on the chosen spot to fight, kill, and die in the attempt to impose his superiority upon all the others.” McLaughlin’s paintings of apes garbed in brightly colored combat gear push us to consider the line between human brutality in war, goaded on by ideologies of the state, and individuals’ desire to consider themselves heroic participants in such efforts. Her 3D-modeled ape soldiers, kings, and queens were animated for “[good enough for the people](#),” and then posed for their military portraits painted in traditional oil paint, as well as 3D printed in combat action for a chess board.

McLaughlin loves translating two-dimensional maps or blueprints into spaces inhabited with beings that appear untethered to our reality, who are randomly bound to the structures they exist within—even when imaginary. Her work’s antiseptic 3D aesthetic and high key-colors appeal to kids, though the works have a much darker depth. One project, “[Home Rolled](#),” is a mashup—it’s an animated steamroller house which makes roads in the ocean as inhabitants push their house in their travels, leaving their mark and a new city plan in their wake. The sound of “Home Rolled” similarly shifts between ominous music, akin to John Williams’s compositions for the movie *Jaws*, and delightful breaking bubbles, all of which raises unsettling questions about **Cont. on p. 5**

what is being viewed while poking holes in any pretensions about the work.

Similarly, the [Ben Hur Unit](#) animation and sculpture is a house that acts as a bathtub, a waterbed, and a rickshaw, providing living units for one person who is a storm chaser. They must



Tricia McLaughlin, "Belt Parkway."

follow the rain in order to survive. She's fascinated by the fact that we need water, yet too much of it, will kill us.

McLaughlin's MALS class, slated for Spring 2022, "3D Modeling for Art and Invention," will teach students how to use computers to generate imaginary forms—as she describes it, it's like "playing with blocks." Students will learn to make shapes, how to move them, and change their colors and scale. Students will then design and construct their own artistic inventions. They will leave class with actual objects produced from Old Westbury's 3D printers.

Watch for our Spring Newsletter—with news of Fall 2022's Advanced Certificate in Video Production—Hybrid Classes on Saturdays available to MALS students!

Old Westbury's MALS program offers students an interdisciplinary degree drawn from courses in the humanities and social sciences. Faculty bring great expertise to the program—many have won awards from scholarly associations like the Urban History Association, from major federal programs like the National Endowment for Humanities, or international funders like the Abe Foundation.

Students design their degree in conversation with the Graduate Director. Students have had internships at external sites such as the Huntington Historical Society, Herstory Writers Workshop, or the Hempstead Schools Bi-Lingual Department. MALS students have also worked for Old Westbury's Sophomore Jump program, or in the Peer Tutor Program.

For More Information: Prof. Carol Quirke, quirkec@oldwestbury.edu; 516 628-5024.



Fall 2021 MALS students (L to R): Rick Henrickson, Kevin Horton, L. Ambre, Serena Malhotra and Naiya Edwards

Spring 2022 MALS Courses

Monday 4:45-7:00 pm

EL 6540 Topics in World Literature (CRN 26742)
Prof. Deepa Jani
HI 6540 Topics in European History (CRN 26744)
Prof. Chelsea Shields-Mas

Tuesday 4:45-7:00 pm

EL 6530 Topics in Multicultural Literature (CRN 26741) Prof. Jessica Williams-DeLuca
VA 6340 3D Modeling for Art & Invention (CRN 27133) Prof. Tricia McLaughlin

Wednesday 10:30 am-12:45 pm

MH 6500 Lifespan Development (CRN 27645) TBA
(Instructor Permission Required)

Wednesday 4:45-7:00 pm

HI6520 US Constitutional and Political History (CRN 26743) Prof. Carolyn Cocca

Thursday, 4:45-7:00 pm

ML 6530 Cervantes and the Golden Age (CRN 26738) Prof. Fernando Guerrero

Thursday, 7:15-9:30 pm

SY6310 Sociology of Music and Listening (CRN 26882) Prof. Lee Blackstone (blended course.)

Asynchronous or Negotiated Schedule

LI 6300 Independent Study (CRN 27001) Prof. Carol Quirke
ML6540 Points of Contact: US & Latin America (CRN 26739) Prof. Ruben Gonzalez

Bolded/Golded courses are designed specifically for MALS students.