

A JOURNEY INTO THE CREATIVE UNIVERSE OF MOMIX A COMPANY OF DANCER-ILLUSIONISTS

A tour of the farm where Moses Pendleton and his successful company conceive, develop and rehearse works for the stage that look like they grow out of the same natural environment; from Connecticut to the world, and Argentina too

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WASHINGTON (Connecticut) - The trip from New York to the small New England town lasts less than three hours and brings on waves of emotions. One passes from an endless series of skyscrapers into living nature. On the way you take in and caress the view of streams, rivers, forests, mountains. The idea is to arrive at the headquarters of Momix, one of the most important dance theater groups in the world. It was created by Moses Pendleton, who, despite his success, has never chosen to move from his late Victorian house in the green Connecticut hills. Instead of setting up a large studio in New York and becoming a multi-millionaire, he has preferred to build a barn-like studio just across the street from his home. There his closest neighbors are usually deer, raccoons, weasels and even black bears.

Moses and Momix inhabit a 120-year-old house -- of 22 rooms -- with a semicircular porch and a three-storey tower. The company office is located below stairs. When you arrive at the front door, you already feel the heart of Momix. On the front porch, a dummy made of plaster and papier mâché rests on a chair, guarded by two heads of the same construction. Around it are many flowers and plants both dead and alive, tangled together and forming figures like those that Pendleton creates in his shows. Momix Associate Director Cynthia Quinn opens the door with a friendly smile that invites one in to a stimulating world of fantasy and art. As the floor creaks at each step, the walls greet the visitor with wallpaper that is collapsing in folds, as if suffering an artistic peeling. What

could appear old and abandoned elsewhere here looks beautiful, exciting, deliberate. Among these folds hang white antique masks. Paintings, objects, and photographs compose a baroque and sensitive universe. On the furniture in the entrance hall, a bacchanal of old curios, dried





sunflowers, and hard-cover books with yellowing pages. Inside, in the large living room commanded by a fireplace, there are all kinds of armchairs on which lie more masks and an indescribable variety of objects. No one who inhabits this place could have an uncontrollable ego, even if his shows have played on the most prestigious stages of the world or he is considered one of the leading lights of dance theater. After a few minutes he appears, Moses Pendleton, and the preconception is confirmed. He's a modest and genial fellow, one who looks you in the eye, displaying a unique sense of humor and the wisdom of a man who feels that "the future is in the past – we live in a circle."

He proudly shows off a small room that is also a kind of studio, where objects adorn the floor, walls and ceiling. The writing desk (beautifully antique, of course) affords a pleasant view over waves of greenery. In some of the frames his photographs are displayed: very private and personal. Here is his vision, the secret of that unique mind. The photo of a mound of snow conveys a peculiar eroticism; others of flowers and dried plants suggest human and animal forms. Then he invites you to sit and chat in his favorite spot: the pillared, curving porch, which overlooks his own hill. He confesses that this has been his place of inspiration since 1978. On this great hill he himself cultivates different types of plants and flowers. He tells how the hawthorn, a tree whose cottony blooms are guarded by impressive thorns, can inspire great choreography. Below the trees, he has managed to make a solar mandala more than 100 meters in circumference, consisting of 16 radial rows of orange marigolds. It would take many pages to describe the universe of this man who in his leisure time, sitting before the same prospect of the natural world, combines the reading of a poetic compilation by Pablo Neruda with a huge book bearing the title *The Bible of Wine*.

His company, Momix, has been in Argentina on several occasions, and he recalls that when he first traveled to Buenos Aires he was dazzled by a dance show by Miguel Ángel Zotto and Milena Plebs and by the presence of Sharon Stone in the hotel where he was staying. It was in the early 90's. From today, Momix, a company that is the definition of illusionist dance, will return to perform in Buenos Aires, at the Coliseo theater, in four performances through Sunday. In "Momix Forever," ten performers perform the best moments of past shows: Opus Cactus (about to open in New York at the Joyce Theater), Botanica, Momix Classics, Nuova Creazione, Sun Flower Moon, Passion and Super Momix.



Sitting here I imagine that this landscape that surrounds us is its own source of inspiration.

"Nature is a kind of muse for me. Nature nurtures. It nourishes me. Do you see that hawthorn? It has very delicate flowers, cottony drops, and huge thorns. The first settlers of New England placed these trees around their houses to ward off evil spirits. I always say that I don't know if those thorns are there to keep the evil away from the house or to keep it from getting out.

How is it that when you see a tree or a flower you imagine those same forms in the human body?

"I've always been interested in the forms and mysteries of nature. They can express themselves in flowers, or even in dried leaves. You saw the photo of the snowdrifts. It is icy cold yet sensual, like a dolphin having its way with a beautiful mermaid. I love winter, it's so wild. After a storm, I go where man does not go, in snow thigh-deep. I know a place where a stone wall catches the drifts and the wind carves them into fantastic sculptures. I know there will be bodies in the snow and I must go out and find them. Nature is the supreme artist. I follow where she leads me, and make an effort to bring back photo proof.

Do you work with your five senses?

“Five, maybe six, yes. I believe that the human being has become desensitized and that the arts must try to re-open the senses. Through smelling, hearing, touching, tasting, seeing and even managing energy well, one can live better. One can fly like the birds and the bats and shine like the fireflies. The secret lies in how the human connects with the non-human: with animals, with plants, with minerals. I aspire to experience the essence of things. I ride my bike, day and night. “Moses Pedalton,” some call me, but I don’t care, I move through the landscape like a dream, always with music in my headphones.

What kind of music?

It depends on the image I am after. Painters often paint with music in the background, and so do I. I work under synesthesia. Sound is the director. During the day I listen to music that disconnects me; in the evening, when I return to the house, I need a soothing sound that puts me back together. These are necessary, inspiring rituals. This house is my temple, my castle, my solar collector, my cell. When the light comes in through the windows in late afternoon, it fills the whole house with energy. There is a moment of peak illumination, and I like to be there to capture it, and to let it capture me. It liberates me and I am its prisoner. I absorb it like a plant. I turn to it like a sunflower. And then I am ready for dinner.

