

Repertorio N° 3

DAVI PONTES &
WALLACE FERREIRA

In the heat of the confrontation



Marina Srnka
Gezien op 28 juni 2025
Koninklijke villa, Oostende, in het kader van Dansand!

With the sand and the sea enveloped in white heat, Brazilian Davi Pontes and Wallace Ferreira's Belgian premiere of their 'Repertório N.3' on Saturday June 28 during the Dansand! festival felt almost upstaged by the blazing two-o'clock sun. The audience members shaded their eyes as best as they could as they tried to hold their gaze upward at the two entirely nude bodies. The sun soon covered the dancers too, in a glittering coat of dripping sweat.

08 JULI 2025

Yet the sun was not the only challenge posed by this performance. As the name suggests, 'Repertório' is the third installment in Pontes' and Ferreira's long-term project of challenging and resisting the violence and oppression that black bodies face. As Pontes explains in their aftertalk following the performance, the project is born in Brazil and intrinsically tied to the black Brazilian experience. However, this brave elaboration of a queer black (self)-defense against physical and discursive violence finds a fitting home in Ostend. A bronze-green Leopold II on horseback still looms imperiously 30 feet above the seaside resort fashioned by his colonial spoils. It is a fortunate programming choice to stage this piece of queer Black Brazilian anti-colonial resistance on the grounds of his Royal Villa. (Although the walls and fences of a temporary construction hide the dancers from the Leopold statue, I imagine him grimacing with impotent rage).

Confrontation is a crucial part of this performance. The two dancers enter nude, and dare the audience, sitting on chairs decked out in a rectangle around the white rubber mat, to acknowledge their existence. They pause motionless and move their gaze around the circle of onlookers, defiantly. Then, with a quick look and a nod, they begin moving in unison. The movement is a simple side shuffle, shooting their hip out, shuffling back across, and repeat.

The program notes mention the influence of capoeira, and indeed their movement style shares its easily recognizable powerful, rapid physicality, but

the sensual and expressive hips borrow more from samba. Nonetheless, throughout the performance, the artists continue working with a minimalistic movement vocabulary, with simple movements such as mimicking swinging a lasso, a feminine roll of the wrists or shading of the eyes, and reclining on a rolling table in a pose reminiscent of Manet's Olympia while being dragged around the stage by randomly chosen spectators.

But while the simple movements enables clear communication with the audience, at times the gestures lean too much into cliche, like when the performers create half a heart with their hand and invite members of the audience to add the other half with their hands.

The performers seek out the gazes of the spectators, and test their boundaries.

As the performance moves on, the confrontational intimacy of the performers increases. They move towards the public, charge ahead, bend down on all fours, and stand on their heads, exposing their genitals just a mere feet away from the audience. It is distinctly unflattering, yet however much they purportedly seek to explore violence, the confrontation never feels aggressively sexual (Harald Bhaire's 'Batty Bwoy' is arguably more shell-shocking). The gazes of the two performers stay explorative, emphatic, and open.

More memorable is the way in which the performers open the floor to individual members of the audience itself. The performers seek out the gazes of the spectators, and test their boundaries. The two naked and sweat-drenched performers take turns taking seats among the audience, while the other locks his eye on a 'victim'. In the ensuing confrontation, there is no telling how the audience will react. Some victims play along, others try to laugh it off or mimic the postures of the performers mockingly (I have seldom seen the function of mockery as a form of self-defence of fragile egos revealed so strikingly). As Pontes explains, the preparation for a reaction is an essential part of self-defence, and here, the opening up of the performance to the uncontrollable and unpredictable responses of the spectators adds to the tension of the piece.

Nonetheless, as the performance moves on, the tension releases imperceptibly. In the hot white sea breeze, the gazes turn soft, the interactions turn humorous. By the end, it is solidarity and empathy that prevail. As the exhausted Pontes and Ferreira complete their final rounds of the circular two-step shuffle, the warm sympathy of the audience overshadows both colonialist statues and personal discomforts.