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The University of Chicago presents Chicago Premiere of
*Ballet des Porcelaines* (or, *The Teapot Prince*) –
A Contemporary Reinterpretation

CHICAGO, IL (February 11, 2022) – The Center for East Asian Studies (CEAS) at the University of Chicago is partnering with UChicago Arts, the Committee on Theater and Performance Studies (TAPS), the Office of the Provost, and the Department of Music to bring "Reimagining the Ballet des Porcelaines: A Story of Magic, Desire, and Exotic Entanglement" to Chicago audiences at The University of Chicago on March 2-3, 2022.

The 18th-Century French pantomime ballet *Ballet des Porcelaines*, also known as *The Teapot Prince*, is being reimagined by Meredith Martin, professor of art history at New York University, and Phil Chan, choreographer and co-founder of Final Bow for Yellowface, a grassroots organization committed to eliminating yellowface and creating more positive representations of Asians in ballet. The creative pair, having just showcased the performance at The Metropolitan Museum of Art on December 6, 2021, will be bringing this lost gem, along with a team consisting primarily of artists of Asian descent, to Chicago. Together with Judith Zeitlin (William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor in East Asian Languages and Civilizations and Theater and Performance Studies, UChicago) and Julia Rhoads (Director of the Dance Program; Assistant Senior Instructional Professor with TAPS, UChicago), Martin and Chan have organized a riveting 2-day evening program to take place at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts at the UChicago campus.

The program showcases two short performances each night of this groundbreaking ballet that includes an opportunity for audiences to directly engage with the show’s creators, world-class performers, and renown scholars to better understand the historical, cultural, artistic, and performative “entanglements.” Following the performance on Wednesday, March 2nd, a panel on "Reimagining the Exotic" will take place featuring Chan, Georgina
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Pazcoguin (NYCB’s first female Asian-American soloist, Final Bow for Yellowface co-founder, author of Swan Dive), Irene Hsiao (Writer, Dancer, Photographer), Lisa A. Freeman (Department Head and Professor of English, University of Illinois Chicago), and Rhoads as Moderator. A repeat of Wednesday’s performance will take place on Thursday, March 3rd, followed by a panel on “Porcelain, Material Culture, and Embodiment,” which will feature Martin, Zeitlin, Alicia Caticha (Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History, Northwestern University), Ellen Huang (Associate Professor of Humanities & Sciences, ArtCenter College of Design), and moderated by Wu Hung (Harrie A. Vanderstappen Distinguished Service Professor of Art History and the College, UChicago).

The ballet performance blends Chan’s contemporary choreography with a baroque flavor, including traditional pantomime, who studied baroque dance for the past year under Patricia Beaman (NYU and Wesleyan professor of dance history, New York Baroque Dance Company member). Pazcoguin and her colleague, Daniel Applebaum (NYCB soloist), will dance the lead roles of the Princess and Prince. Tyler Hanes (Broadway actor, singer, dancer, choreographer) will play the Sorcerer. Harriet Jung (Reid & Harriet) has designed original costumes, creating a modern twist on eighteenth-century porcelain. Harpsichordist and musical director Dongsok Shin (REBEL) and violinist Leah Gale Nelson, along with composer Sugar Vendil (The Nouveau Classical Project), have developed a baroque-contemporary musical score that combines live performance of the baroque score (by Nicolas-Racot de Grandval) with Vendil’s modern compositions featuring the sounds of porcelain clinking and shattering. The score for the Chicago program will feature Adriane Post and Wendy Benner on violin; Craig Trompeter on the viola da gamba; Brandon Acker on theorbo; and Andrew Rosenblum on the harpsichord. The overall creative concept is based on kintsugi, a Japanese technique for repairing broken ceramics by mending them with gold or lacquer to highlight their flaws. In their creative process, they celebrate the lost historical fragments and imperfections of the work by making them stronger and more beautiful with their modern additions.

The original Ballet des Porcelaines, written by the comte de Caylus and staged around 1740 at a château outside of Paris, was based on an Orientalist fairy tale in the same literary milieu as Beauty and the Beast (1740). The story tells of an Asian sorcerer who lives on a “Blue Island” and transforms anyone who dares to trespass into porcelain cups, vases, and other wares. When the sorcerer turns a captive prince into a teapot, a princess comes to rescue her lover by stealing the sorcerer’s wand and turning him into a pagod, an eighteenth-century version of a porcelain bobblehead. Displayed today in museums like The Met, pagods were collectible trinkets that inspired Oriental caricatures in the performing arts. European choreographers mimicked the features and gestures of these porcelain figures, which persist in such iconic, problematic productions as The Nutcracker’s “Chinese Tea” dance.

While the original Ballet des Porcelaines—not performed since 1741—can be seen as an allegory for the aggressive European desire to know and steal the secrets of Chinese porcelain manufacture, the 2021 production will flip the narrative to center the actions and desires of Asian protagonists. Nothing survives of the ballet’s original set design, costumes, or choreography, which provides an opportunity both to reimagine and update the performance for contemporary, multiracial audiences. In the new version, the characters’ identities flip: the royals are now Chinese, and the sorcerer is a mad European porcelain collector modeled on Augustus the Strong, founder of Meissen, the first European manufactory to succeed in making true porcelain. Rather than its original aristocratic setting, the dancers will now perform in public museums and spaces surrounded by chinoiserie artworks whose pejorative depictions of Asians are confronted and subverted. Ballet des Porcelaines also aspires to use an 18th-century baroque mime vocabulary to comment on contemporary social events, such as Orientalism in the performing arts and the rise in anti-Asian xenophobia and hate crimes.

The ballet will tour the US and Europe throughout 2022, adapting to a variety of settings including museum galleries, gardens, historic houses, and university theaters. Many performances will take place near world-renowned porcelain collections and historic manufactories, animating these spaces and linking the 18th-century fairy tale to our present reality.

In addition to the Logan Center program, a special ballet masterclass with Daniel Applebaum, as well as the concurrent exhibition Porcelain: Material and Storytelling (February 15-March 6, 2022) at the University’s Smart Museum of Art will also take place during this time. Representing figures, porcelain can also be used to tell stories...
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in two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms, with its own materiality that can also be made into the subject of artistic expression. The Smart Museum’s exhibition presents possibilities that demonstrate how porcelain is an artistic medium as well as a material substance with selected examples from different cultures and periods on display.

The Chicago production is co-sponsored by UChicago Arts, the Committee on Theater and Performance Studies, the Office of the Provost, Department of Music, and the Center for East Asian Studies at the University of Chicago with generous support from a Title VI National Resource Center Grant from the United States Department of Education.

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TICKETS
This event is FREE and open to the public with registration required. Full schedule and registration at: https://ceas.uchicago.edu/content/ballet-des-porcelaines

COVID-19 POLICY
We want to ensure your visit to is enjoyable, welcoming, and safe. We have adopted health & safety protocols to promote a healthy environment. These protocols include self-monitoring and masking requirements. Please visit the UChicago Arts COVID-19 Updates page for the most recent health & safety information.

Events are open to all invitees who are compliant with UChicago vaccination requirements and, because of ongoing health risks, particularly to the unvaccinated, participants are expected to adopt the risk mitigation measures (masking and social distancing, etc.) appropriate to their vaccination status as advised by public health officials or to their individual vulnerabilities as advised by a medical professional. Public convening may not be safe for all and carries a risk for contracting COVID-19, particularly for those unvaccinated. Participants will not know the vaccination status of others and should follow appropriate risk mitigation measures.

All visitors over age 5 who are attending public events in venues with fixed seating must provide proof of vaccination with a photo ID and wear masks. By exception, visitors who are unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons or due to a sincerely held religious belief may provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of the event, or proof of a positive test 14-90 days prior to the event with affirmation that you are not experiencing any symptoms. Proof of vaccination or COVID test must be in English. University of Chicago students and staff subject to the University’s vaccine requirements may demonstrate proof of compliance by presenting their UChicago ID (UCID).

We are committed to protecting the health & safety of our visitors, artists, vendors, students, faculty, and staff. The decision to be present on campus serves as your acknowledgment and acceptance of the potential risks posed by COVID-19 and your agreement to comply with all health & safety protocols, including wearing a mask. We reserve the right to deny entry to or remove visitors in violation of our protocols. Any visitors who are disrespectful or discourteous to other visitors, artists, or staff may also be asked to leave.

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PRESS CONTACT – Ballet tour
Please contact Phil Chan (phil@yellowface.org) or Meredith Martin (msm240@nyu.edu) for more information regarding the ballet tour.

PRESS CONTACT – Chicago performance
For more information regarding the program in Chicago, please contact the Center for East Asian Studies at the University of Chicago (eastasia@uchicago.edu).

PRESS IMAGES
Available here. Banner image: The Ballet des Porcelaines cast in the Venetian Room, Albertine Headquarters, Cultural Services of the French Embassy, NYC. From left to right: Daniel Applebaum (Prince); Georgina Pazcoguin (Princess); Tyler Hanes (Sorcerer). Photo by Joe Carrotta.