

For Immediate Release

June 2, 2026

**Governors Island Arts presents *my tongue is a blade*, from
sweat variant (Okwui Okpokwasili and Peter Born), June 19 &
20**

**Performed outdoors for the first time, *my tongue is a blade* is a durational
movement work in and around a spinning mirrored structure, questioning the
limits of attention and testing the strength of our bonds**

**Presented as part of Governors Island Arts' INTERVENTIONS performance series
and co-presented by LMCC's River To River Festival**

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Governors Island Arts, the public arts and cultural program presented by the **Trust for Governors Island**, presents **sweat variant's *my tongue is a blade*** June 19 & 20 at **Colonels Row**, Governors Island. **sweat variant**, the collaboration between **Okwui Okpokwasili** and **Peter Born**, asks in this three-hour movement performance-practice: How do we hold and transmit memory through a series of ongoing and intimate embodied entanglements? How do we design an ongoing web of psychic and physical connection?

Supported by a dynamic sonic score designed by **Peter Born**, *my tongue is a blade* sees four performers (**Okwui Okpokwasili**, **Bria Bacon**, **Kris Lee**, and **AJ Wilmore**) commit to remembering one another, holding one another, bearing one another, and sustaining the world that contains them. One performer shapes a distinct physical language and then is joined by another with whom they share it. Inhabiting this movement, they dance as one—until the first departs, and the one who remains moves on, haunted by their absence. A new partner joins, and the transmission continues.

A spinning mirrored structure (production design by Peter Born) serves as the centerpiece of this work and blurs the threshold between the observer and the observed. With this reflective framework, *my tongue is a blade* folds the outside world inward (for the first time ever now in

outdoor space, creating a spinning reflection of Colonels Row) and projects the interior practice outward, inviting the audience to witness this shared practice and to resonate within it. Say the artists, “When we built this inside, previously, in a church, interior courtyard hall and an opera house, it felt like creating a room within a room. Now, we are curious to see if doing it outdoors will allow us to create an 'outside within the outside' through the structure’s mirrored reflections.”

A foundational concept of the work’s soundscape is the idea of acoustic confluence: the juxtaposition of distinct yet subtle variations of sound which converge at mutual points of contact. *my tongue is a blade* removes the rhythmic predictability of the downbeat in conventional songwriting to allow performers to travel within a landscape of their physical imagination.

my tongue is a blade is part of this year’s **INTERVENTIONS** series, Governors Island Arts’ multidisciplinary performance series curated by **Juan Pablo Siles**, Associate Curator and Producer at the Trust for Governors Island. INTERVENTIONS presents local, national, and international artists and invites audiences to experience work made and adapted for the immediate environment. The performance is co-presented as part of LMCC’s **25th River to River Festival**, a summer public arts festival celebrating artistic and creative diversity, and presenting live art and installation in public spaces and in partnership with leading institutions in Lower Manhattan.

my tongue is a blade’s dramaturg is **Katherine Profeta**.

About sweat variant

sweat variant is the collaborative practice of Okwui Okpokwasili and Peter Born. Since 1996, they have been working at the intersection of dance, theater, and visual art to make challenging and rigorous work that reaffirms that which has been deemed marginal as the true center through the exploration of Black interiority. Okpokwasili and Born are interested in building a spectacle of radical intimacy, in which both performers and audience are acknowledged as being locked in a mutual gaze. They hope to activate a space that allows the audience to question who they are looking at, and how they are looking. Okpokwasili and Born have created the Bessie Award-winning *pent up: a revenge dance* and *Bronx Gothic*. The latter continues to tour internationally, most recently to the 2024 Milan Triennale. Other performances include *let slip, hold sway*, *adaku, part 1: the road opens*, *Adaku’s Revolt*, *swallow the moon*, *Sitting on a Man’s Head*, and *poor people’s TV room*, which also toured the US. Their work has been featured internationally, including at the Berlin Biennale, the Young Vic, and the Tate. Recent

works include installations in the exhibitions *Grief and Grievance*, *Art and Mourning in America* at the New Museum (NYC), *Witchhunt* at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and *Sex Ecologies* at Kunsthall Trondheim in Norway. *poor people's TV room (solo) installation* is in the Hammer Museum and Whitney Museum collections.

About Okwui Okpokwasili

Okwui Okpokwasili (she/her) is a Brooklyn-based performer, actor, choreographer, and writer. Okpokwasili has earned numerous accolades, including a 2025 Art Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, 2018 Princeton University Hodder Fellowship, a 2018 Herb Alpert Award, a 2018 Doris Duke Artist Award, and a 2018 MacArthur Fellowship. Okpokwasili was the 2015 – 2017 Randjelovic/Stryker New York Live Arts Resident Commissioned Artist. She was the inaugural artist for the Kravis Studio Residency program at MoMA in 2022, and an artist in residence at the Brown Arts Institute in 2023. She continues to collaborate with Ralph Lemon, Kevin Beasley, Saidiya Hartman, and Kaneza Schaal, among other artists.

About Peter Born

Peter Born (he/him) works as a director, composer, and designer of performance and installation. In collaboration with Okpokwasili, Born's work has been featured in the Berlin Biennale, *Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America* at the New Museum, *Witch Hunt* at the Hammer Museum, *Loophole of Retreat: Venice*, and *Sex Ecologies* at Kunsthall Trondheim, as well as performance work at The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum; MASS MoCA; the Irish Museum of Modern Art; and ICA Boston; among others. He is the recipient of four New York Dance Performance Awards (Bessie Awards). His work as an art director and prop stylist has been featured in video and photo projects with *Vogue*, Estee Lauder, Barney's Co-op, Bloomingdales, Old Navy, *25 Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and No Strings Puppet Productions.

Credits

my tongue is a blade was originally commissioned by the Irish Museum of Modern Art as part of *Take a Breath*, with support from the Sam Gilliam Foundation. Support for *sweat variant* is provided in part by the Mellon and Howard Gilman Foundations, as well as by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project with funding from the Doris Duke Foundation.

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About Governors Island Arts

Governors Island Arts, the public arts and cultural program presented by the Trust for Governors Island, creates transformative encounters with art for all New Yorkers, inviting artists and researchers to engage with the issues of our time in the context of the Island's layered histories, environments, and architecture. Governors Island Arts achieves this mission through temporary and long-term public art installations and exhibitions, an annual Organizations in Residence program in the Island's historic houses, and the curated multidisciplinary INTERVENTIONS performance series. Learn more at www.govisland.org/arts.

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