

3 weeks ago THREE RITES: Liberty, An Interview with  
Edisa Weeks



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photo by Julie Lemberger

From the artist/ Mabou Mines website:

[<https://www.maboumines.org/production/edisa-weeks-three-rites-liberty/>]

Connected like a puppet to objects that have informed the Black experience in America, multi-media artist Edisa Weeks alternates between black face, white face, storytelling and visceral dance to dig into the foundations of Liberty in America. As our nation grapples with confederate monuments, Black Lives Matter, fake news and economic stratification; ***THREE RITES: Liberty*** humorously and poignantly insists on a reckoning with our past and present.

Created by Edisa Weeks and Delirious Dances, ***THREE RITES: Liberty*** is part of a trilogy on Life, Liberty and Happiness. ***THREE***

*RITES* integrates live music, dance and two visual installations to examine how life, liberty and happiness are guaranteed and pursued in America; and how these rights manifest in the body.

*In the doing of this piece, what discoveries have you made? Was there anything that surprised you?*

**EDISA WEEKS:** At the beginning of making the work if you told me I would be singing, telling stories and speaking with an accent, I would have told you, “Your crazy and smoking crack.”

In 2017 I had a residency at BRIC to develop the *Three Rites: Liberty*, and as part of the residency, I could work with a creative advisor. I LOOOOVED the play, *3/Fifths Supremacy Land*, [<https://www.blogger.com/null>] by James Scruggs, and approached James about working with me as a creative advisor. Secretly I was hoping James would write the script, as my training is as a dancer/choreographer, and I never envisioned myself as a writer. However, James kept asking me questions and making observations. One of his observations was that the character I’m personifying is not nice. I initially was appalled, and my immediate response was, “but I’m a NICE person”, to which James replied, “but you didn’t create a NICE character”. Realizing that the character could be darker and more layered was creatively liberating. I did more research into oppressive Jim Crow laws in America, explored the darker aspects of this character, and ate a lot of watermelon.

*A large part of this work includes a very physical and effective performance element. Is it painful and if how do you manage the physical demands?*

**EDISA WEEKS:** As a kid my grandmother had a picture book about The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, and I was fascinated by images of Chinese acrobats sipping tea, while suspended by their hair about 35 feet in the air. There is a long history of hair-hanging

acrobatic routines in Europe and Asia. Hair is amazingly strong – one hair strand can hold 100 grams of weight. Initially, it hurts, however, once my scalp adjusts to the weight, I forget about it, especially as I have other things to concentrate on.

*How do you approach creating work from the seed of an idea to . . . when is the thing done? Is it ever done? What is your process like?*

**EDISA WEEKS:** My process is slow. It generally involves doing extensive research into an idea or issue, and then figuring out how to translate information into movement, images, and/or text that is tangible, meaningful, and hopefully resonates with the viewer.

The process is always ongoing, it is never done, there is always an aspect that can be tweaked and improved upon, however, if I want to share the process with an audience, I need to establish a structure, a container, that is repeatable.

*Dream places to perform this work?*

**EDISA WEEKS:** A forest, gallery spaces, a courthouse. It would be intriguing to perform the work in an old plantation mansion in the South, however, it might be incredibly disturbing and raise too many ghosts.

Since 2001 I've been taking concert dance out of proscenium stages and placing it in communal environments (storefronts, living rooms, senior centers, galleries, city sidewalks, gardens and more). I'm interested in bringing dance to communities that don't normally attend concert dance. I'm also interested in erasing the barriers between art and life, between performance space and audience space, and between mediums.

*If you could give one thing to your younger self, an artist just starting out, what would it be?*

**EDISA WEEKS:** Ask questions, be curious, be bold. Don't let anyone

undermine your sense of self-worth. Make time to laugh!

***THREE RITES: Liberty***

February 4, 5, 6 at 7pm

Mabou Mines  
150 First Avenue  
Second Floor  
New York, NY 10009

Tickets: <https://ci.ovationtix.com/3092> [<https://ci.ovationtix.com/3092>]



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photo by Julie Lemberger

**Edisa Weeks** is a Brooklyn, NY based choreographer, educator and founder of Delirious Dances. She creates multi-media interdisciplinary work, that merges theater with dance to explore our deepest desires, darkest fears and sweetest dreams. Her work has been performed at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, Emory University, Inside/Out at Jacob's Pillow, Works & Process at the

Guggenheim Museum, Harlem Stage, The Kennedy Center, The Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts, Materials for the Arts, The Mermaid Parade, The National Black Arts Festival, Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Summerstages Dance Festival, as well as swimming pools, storefront windows, senior centers, sidewalks and living rooms. She grew up in Uganda, Papua New Guinea and Brooklyn, NY. She has a BA from Brown University, and received a full fellowship to attend New York University's TISCH School of the Arts where she obtained an MFA in choreography. She has had the pleasure of performing with Annie-B Parsons Big Dance Theater, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Co., Dance Brazil, Jane Comfort, Jon Kinzel, Muna Tseng, Reggie Wilson Fist & Heel Performance Group, Sally Silvers, Spencer/Colton Dance, among others. She is an Associate Professor of Dance at Queens College. [www.deliriousdances.com](http://www.deliriousdances.com) [<http://www.deliriousdances.com/>]

## Jody Christopherson

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