

# *Cultural Exchange Rate*

## Tania El Khoury

March 11-16

Boroughs Theatre

Prior Presents 2023–24

**PRIOR**  
Performing Arts Center

# Welcome

Dear friends,

Lebanese artist Tania El Khoury calls her work “interactive live art”: a mode of performance in which the audience is an essential collaborator. *Cultural Exchange Rate* drafts its audience into this role by activating all five of our senses as we seek the story of one family's life on the Lebanon-Syria border. Through direct, if sometimes unexpected, invitations to bear witness, the piece personalizes global tragedies of war and forced migration, surfacing physical and emotional sensations of memory, displacement, and desire. These sensations complicate whatever we might think we know about El Khoury's homeland. El Khoury writes in preface to this installation that “the cruelest of borders are invisible to the eye.” As *Cultural Exchange Rate* suggests, these are the borders we erect between the past and the present, within families and communities, and even within our own psyches.

As we prepared to bring *Cultural Exchange Rate* to Holy Cross, I had the opportunity to experience the work's most recent production at Invisible Dog in Brooklyn, New York. Moving through the installation with the Holy Cross community in mind brought into different focus the piece's provocative questions about what we owe each other—and at what “rate of exchange.” I am delighted that hosting *Cultural Exchange Rate* at The Prior with the involvement of so many academic departments and programs extends a discussion taking place about El Khoury's work on campuses from Bard to Occidental and among audiences around the world.

*Cultural Exchange Rate* draws from numerous traditions of performance art that make participatory claims on their audiences. Yet the piece also underscores the fact that all performance is participatory—that there is no such thing, in other words, as a passive spectator. Today you step into a Boroughs Theatre wholly converted for the purposes of this presentation. Even as it's obvious that the construction of The Prior has transformed the physical landscape of the Holy Cross campus, we have just begun to experience the endless transformations that will take place *inside* the center in the years to come. These include the transformations in ourselves.

Kyle Frisina  
Interim Director  
Prior Performing Arts Center

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# Biography

Tania El Khoury is a live artist whose work focuses on audience interactivity and its political potential. She creates installations and performances in which the audience is a witness and an active collaborator. Tania's work has been translated to multiple languages and shown in 32 countries across 6 continents in spaces ranging from national museums to small boats in the Mediterranean Sea.

She is the recipient of the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts, Soros Art Fellowship, the Bessie Outstanding Production Award, the International Live Art Prize, the Total Theatre Innovation Award, and the Arches Brick Award.

Tania is Distinguished Artist in Residence of Theater & Performance and the Director of the Center for Human Rights & the Arts at Bard College in New York. She holds a PhD from Royal Holloway, University of London. She is associated with Forest Fringe collective of artists in the UK and is a co-founder of the urban research and live art collective Dictaphone Group in Lebanon.

# Prior Performing Arts Center

A catalyst for creativity and learning, the Prior Performing Arts Center amplifies the arts at Holy Cross and provides the College, the greater Worcester community, and visiting creative thinkers with an inspiring environment to pursue diverse questions of the human experience.

For more information, visit [www.priorperformingartscenter.org](http://www.priorperformingartscenter.org).

## Prior Presents

*Cultural Exchange Rate* is the sixth event of this year's **Prior Presents** series, the Prior's signature visiting artist program, which complements the innovation and creativity of work produced throughout the year by Holy Cross students, faculty, and staff. Building on the foundation laid by Arts Transcending Borders (2014-2023), Prior Presents is the keystone of the Prior Performing Arts Center's public-facing programming, merging thrilling live events by visiting artists with robust educational and outreach activities. Defined by exceptional artistic quality, interdisciplinary impulses, and the potential to spark both wonder and reflection, this annual series celebrates artistic risk-taking and the exchange of ideas and perspectives from around the globe. Short- and long-term visiting artist residencies include performances, artist talks, installations, workshops, and experiential learning opportunities for Holy Cross students and the greater Worcester community. Creative residencies, which provide artists with time and space to develop new work, make an essential contribution to the broader arts ecosystem and provide on- and off-campus community members with a window into intimate aspects of the creative process.

Upcoming Prior Presents events include:

### Rhiannon Giddens

March 14, 2024 | 7:30 pm | Luth Concert Hall

The iconic folk artist Rhiannon Giddens, who has stretched her inimitable brand of folk music into nearly every field imaginable, performs from her first album of entirely original songs, "You're the One."

### Boston Lyric Opera

The Wanderer's Tethering

April 6, 2024 | 3:00 pm | Luth Concert Hall

With poetry by Boston Poet Laureate Porsha Olayiwola and music by composer Mason Bynes, "The Wanderer's Tethering" follows the story of Tobi, a descendant of an Igbo community whose members were stolen from what is today Nigeria and who led a revolt against their enslavers on the shores of Georgia in 1803. The program will also include stirring selections of chamber music by Castle of Our Skins.

## Prior Performing Arts Center Staff

Marta Beyer, Manager of Artistic and Engagement Initiatives  
Evan Crocker, Event and Front of House Manager  
Matthew Freije, AV Specialist  
Kyle Frisina, Interim Director  
Christine Goguen, Costume Shop Manager  
Katrina Lewonczyk, Manager of Operations and Administration  
Stephen McGonagle, Technical Director  
Judith Olson, Assistant Costume Shop Manager  
Elizabeth Pierce, Assistant Technical Director  
Brian Saia, AV Supervisor  
Matthew Wasser, Lighting Director

## Prior Performing Arts Center Student Staff

Brendon Alvarez, Kasamba Amiri, Frank Amuso, Cecilia Baillon, Josiah Bargmann, Anna Brown, Emma Butler, Alexandra Carey, Sophie Cassarino, Matthew Conway, Melia Cook-Wright, Tim Cordes, Kelsey Crutchfield Archila, Laurel Denneen, Rachel Dentinger, Delia Drace, Abigail Durkin, Adele Feldberg, Shane Fitzpatrick, Lara Garabedian, Stephen Giannikas, Emmett Griffin, Erin Haddad, Anyelly Herrera, Amelia Hogan, Alejandro Irizarry, Christopher Irving, Abby Jacobs, Ishanpepe Jagsah, Elaine Kelly, Mary Grace Kelly, Jovani Lorenzo, Foster Martinuk, Joel Michaud, Camila Muller-Juez, Natasha Nichols, Vanessa Nolan, John O'Keefe, Elise O'Neill, Alexandria Paradise, Sarah Park, Catalina Powderly, Charbel Saouma, Blake Sheridan, Wesley Smith, Hannah Smyth, Paige Thomson, Marquis Wilson