

STAGE

DANCE WORLD'S QUEEN OF POP

Elizabeth Streb has forged her own explosive movement style

Courtesy: Streb Extreme Action
Streb Extreme Action company members will perform at 7 p.m. Friday at the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery.



By Tresca Weinstein

To learn how to fly, you must also learn how to fall. That's the guiding principle that underlies the work of Elizabeth Streb. The MacArthur Award-winning movement artist has been experimenting with the interactions between gravity and the human body for the past 40 years. Along the way, she formed Streb Extreme Action, her company of a dozen "action heroes," as she calls them; founded her Brooklyn-based Streb Lab for Action Mechanics (SLAM); wrote a memoir; and inspired the PBS documentary "Born to Fly."

Now her work is the focus of a series of events and an exhibit at Skidmore College's Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery this month, including a free performance Friday at 7 p.m., workshops with the company on Saturday afternoon and a work-in-progress showing.

At a recent public workshop, company members Cassandre Joseph and Fabio Tavares introduced participants to Streb's movement approach, which she calls "pop action." It's a method that takes performers (and amateurs) from one position on the floor—or in the air—to the next by popping, or exploding, the muscles to initiate the movement. It's extremely

difficult—yet, for just a moment here or there, even an amateur can glimpse the possibility of eluding the rules of physics, even if only for a fraction of a second.

Pop action is the building block of Streb's daring, boundary-pushing investigation of speed, strength, flight and impact. To create and record works, she documents her performer's changing positions using choreography notes that

resemble a cross between hieroglyphs and architectural drawings. (Examples are on view at the Tang this month.) After the workshop, Streb chatted about her work, drawing looping conversational lines between her very first performance in 1981 at Dance Theater Workshop (Merce Cunningham and John Cage showed up), her early years as an athlete and her lifelong aversion to the traditional philosophies of modern dance. "Music is the true enemy of dance," she says. She uses equipment—giant rolling wheels and scaffolds—to "locate zones I haven't located before, different forces and different spatial problems."

Streb has spiky black hair and a small dog, and she's wearing a tartan suit with a shirt patterned with safety pins and tall, black combat boots. "I look like an artist, I sound like an artist, I smell like an artist," she says—but she'd love nothing more than to shake off that classification and bring pop action to people who don't particularly care about dance or art or theater.

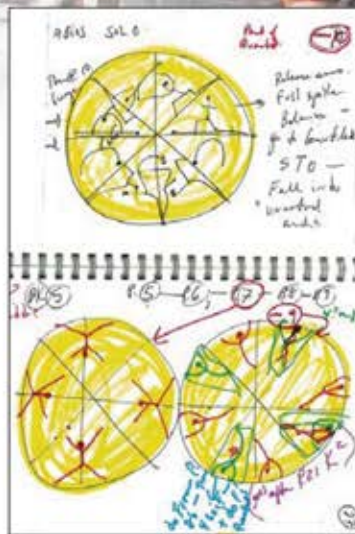
"What if it was like NASCAR or Motocross?" she muses. "In the end, it's a magical moment about being human that everyone can recognize, not just the art world and the dance world."

Events at the Tang

- **7 p.m. Thursday:** Dialogue with Elizabeth Streb, Anne Bogart and Ian Berry
- **Streb and Anne Bogart, Obie-winning director and co-artistic director of SITI Company,** discuss "Falling and Loving," a new piece they are collaborating on while in residence at Skidmore. The dialogue will be moderated by the Tang's Ian Berry.
- **7 p.m. Friday:** Streb Extreme Action in Performance

The program features new and recent works, including "Molinettes," "Air," "Tilt," "Revolution" and "Remain."

- **Saturday, June 15:** Gallery talk at 2 p.m., workshops at 2:30, 3 and 3:30 p.m. Sign-up begins at 1 p.m. in the museum.
- **7 p.m. June 20 in the Skidmore College Dance Center:** "Falling and Loving," work-in-progress showing



Courtesy Elizabeth Streb; Tang Teaching Museum photo

A page from Elizabeth Streb's notebooks, which are being shown to the public for the first time in the exhibition "Streb Action" through July 21 at the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery.

► Tresca Weinstein is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.