

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Andrea C. Mecchi

This is WOAR: a Dance of Survival, a Call to Action

by Lauren Berlin

Content Warning

This article includes discussion of sexual violence, which may be upsetting for some readers. Please take care while reading.

If you need support, help is available:

WOAR – Philadelphia Center Against Sexual Violence

24/7 Hotline: (215) 985-3333

Website: woar.org

RAINN – National Sexual Assault Hotline

24/7 Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

Online Chat: rainn.org

Dance has the power to confront difficult truths as powerfully as it can express beauty. CASS, a new work by Humble Materials at Philly PACK in collaboration with WOAR Philadelphia, does just that—bringing themes of sexual assault, silencing, and survival to the stage with clarity, fury, and an emotional rigor that feels deliberate and necessary.

Written and directed by Jess Noel, CASS draws from the myth of Cassandra, the Trojan prophetess whom Apollo gifts with prophecy—but curses when she rejects him: she sees the future clearly, yet no one believes her.

Apollo corners Cassandra. The scene is raw and deeply uncomfortable—as it should be. It forces us to feel what many survivors experience: powerlessness, erasure. But CASS

doesn't stop there. Cassandra fights back. She reclaims her story.

This retelling—a hybrid dance/theater piece—reframes not only Cassandra's myth but also Apollo's reputation. No longer the radiant, untouchable god, Apollo appears instead as a vengeful predator. Cassandra—played by multidisciplinary artist [Amy Boehly](#) with fierce resilience and a steady hunger for truth— isn't "crazy," but a survivor of assault and disbelief, struggling to be heard in a world that silences her. CASS confronts this reality head-on. The company—despite its modest budget—remains boldly committed to femme-centered, high-impact work that challenges dominant narratives.

The dancers channel Madonna's Vogue, striking bold, stylized poses that turn ancient myth into a gleaming pop spectacle. A slow, electric sequence to Phil Collins's *In the Air Tonight* finds Cassandra clutching a dagger—not to attack, but to brace herself—frozen in tense anticipation of sexual violence from Ajax...the Lesser. Later, the cast skewers him mercilessly, launching into Salt-N-Pepa's Whatta Man with choreographed pelvic thrusts and pointed, theatrical mockery of his "small character." If this isn't satire at its sharpest, I don't know what is.

Athena delivers the final blow: a line along the lines of "let's cut his d*** off"—funny, brutal, and perfectly timed. The blunt dialogue lands hard: smart, physical, and fearless.

Presented with [WOAR — the Philadelphia Center Against Sexual Violence](#), the city's oldest full-service rape crisis center, CASS is both performance and protest. WOAR offers a free [24/7 hotline](#), trauma-informed counseling, medical and court accompaniment, and outreach to marginalized communities. It has supported survivors for 50 years.

But now it faces a serious [existential threat](#) from proposed [state budget cuts](#). If funding is slashed, the core services keeping survivors visible and believed could disappear.

CASS isn't just myth. She is every woman branded "too much," every truth-teller told she's lying or hysterical. From the Salem witches to Medusa to [Christine Blasey Ford](#)—society has punished women who speak hard truths. But not here. CASS dares to believe her.

Believe survivors. Listen to Cassandra. Support WOAR.

[CASS](#), [Humble Materials](#), Philly PACK, Philadelphia Fringe Festival, September 18-20.

What You Can Do — Resources

[Support WOAR \(Philadelphia Center Against Sexual Violence\)](#)

They provide free, confidential services for survivors of sexual violence. Their work is vital.

Reach Out to Your Local Legislator

[Find out who your PA legislator](#) is and let them know that protecting survivors, funding support services, and ensuring justice are priorities.

Homepage Image Description: Cassandra gazes up at the dagger she holds up to the heavens. Her face is bathed in light as she lunges towards the dagger, one arm and leg extending away. Behind her is a large framed classical portrait, Ajax and Cassandra by Solomon Joseph Solomon. Ajax, naked and muscled carries Cassandra away from the Temple of Athena while she reaches back to it.

Article Image Description: Three dancers in white tunics hold their hands over the head of a fourth dancer who leans back, her face receiving the combined energy of their intention. They are surrounded by deep blue light and white fabric columns. Behind them is a large framed classical portrait,

Ajax and Cassandra by Solomon Joseph Solomon. Ajax, naked and muscled carries Cassandra away from the Temple of Athena while she reaches back to it.

By Lauren Berlin
September 21, 2025