

# Naoko Maeshiba

*Professor and Director of MFA in Theatre Arts*



Driven by her curiosity about the boundaries between East/West, Visible/Invisible, Naoko Maeshiba has been dancing on the edge of theatre for more than two decades—directing, choreographing, designing, performing and producing her own original work. Bringing this experience as her foundation, in 2013 she took on the directorship of the MFA program in theatre arts at Towson University, an experimental theatre art program with 20 years of history.

Embarking on this task as a leader, her utmost concern was whether students were pursuing their own inquiries in depth. During their 24-month residency, students build work from the ground up as they engage in intensive self-inquiry, questioning their own assumptions and prevailing paradigms in current theatre landscape.

Immersed in an interdisciplinary lab environment, a small cohort of students explores their full potentials, gaining the skills to be total theatre makers who are both self-directed and collaborative. This rigorous, self-based process, says Maeshiba, helps them strip down to their essence and create from a “place of honesty.”

A native of Kobe, Japan, Maeshiba also brings her experience and sensibility of encountering the unfamiliar and unknown into her curriculum conception. M.F.A. students are treated to workshops with guest artists from around the world. They are exposed to different value systems, cultural codes, and various ways art is connected to life.

“I would like to encourage the students to get away from their habitual thinking and compartmentalizing information, but instead help them perceive the whole picture and build a holistic approach towards art making,” she says. “I believe this is the most sustainable way of living as an artist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And in order to get into that mindset, you need to get out of your head and into your body.”

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