



we like this guy!

A Step Ahead

Choreographer **Robert Battle** shakes things up as the new artistic director of the iconic Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

FEW WOULD HAVE BET ON Robert Battle becoming a great dancer: Raised by relatives in a poor Miami neighborhood, Battle (who was “no bigger than a loaf of bread” when they took him in, according to his great-uncle) wore braces as an infant to straighten his bowed legs. But alone in his bedroom, he was a star, imitating the moves of Michael Jackson, Fred Astaire, and Gene Kelly in front of the mirror. “Performing was my escape,” Battle says, “my way of feeling fearless.” Eventually, he went on to study at Juilliard; found his own dance company, Battleworks; and choreograph for Alvin Ailey, among the country’s most esteemed troupes. This month Battle takes over as Ailey’s artistic director, a position held by only two other people in 53 years: Ailey himself and the beloved, newly retired firebrand Judith Jamison, who has called Battle “without question the creative force of the future.”

It’s easy to see why. Battle’s innovative dances pulsate with primal energy and potent emotion, demanding intense precision and physical prowess from performers. But Battle knows his job isn’t just about beautiful moves: He plans to continue the company’s tradition of fearlessly spotlighting social issues. (Ailey set the bar high with *Revelations*, a 1960 survey of African-American history that galvanized white audiences.) During the company’s U.S. tour next spring, Battle will interpret for the stage ten stories of people confronting HIV/AIDS. “I’ve always believed that modern dance is about activism,” he says. “I want to keep raising the consciousness level.”

For some, the pressure of leading such a legendary institution would be daunting. But Battle believes challenges are what propel him forward: “All of us are overcoming something,” he says. “That tension creates a spark. When we dance, the leg doesn’t always go happily into the air—frankly, it would rather be on the ground. But there’s something about the effort it takes to achieve beauty that makes magic.”

—**BROOKE KOSOFSKY GLASSBERG**

human/
nature

Starry, Starry Night

A National Park Service program works to keep our skies as awe-inspiring as they were centuries ago.

In 1999 Chad Moore was working as a park ranger near California’s Salinas Valley, monitoring falcons’ nests and hiking back to the station after dark. “But it wasn’t *really* dark,” says Moore. “The glow from nearby towns was drowning out the stars.”

Since then Moore and his team have used a specialized camera to take photos at more than 86 national parks and found that in most, vibrantly starry skies—like the stunner that inspired Van Gogh—are fading, thanks to suburbs and illuminated highways.

But there’s more at stake than constellations: Light pollution can cause depression in humans and disrupt animal migration. In that sense, dark skies are a natural resource that needs protecting, just like the oceans. Moore’s research inspired the National Park Service to create the Night Sky Program, which covers park lamps so that less light escapes and educates nearby homeowners, since light can affect areas 200 miles away. “When you realize the consequences of leaving your porch light on,” says Moore, “you might turn it off.” —**RACHEL MOUNT**

How to Enjoy the Night Sky

- 1 Give your eyes 20 minutes to adjust; if you have a flashlight, cover it with red cellophane to reduce glare.
- 2 Purchase a shielded porch lamp. Look for one with the International Dark-Sky Association’s seal of approval (darksky.org).
- 3 Mark August 13 on your calendar for the peak of the Perseid meteor shower—it will fill the sky with hundreds of shooting stars.

CHRISTINA SEELY’S *Lux* portraits capture man-made light over cities like Phoenix (shown here).

PHOTOGRAPH BY **CHRISTINA SEELY**