

Visualizing 22 Percent



As Hallie Chametzky dances in front of images of data and maps, she tells a story of shifting landscapes, of loss and of gain, of percentages and identity.

It's a story she's wanted to explore for years, but one that has only recently been fully realized.

As a Jewish American growing up in a secular household, Chametzky didn't feel the deep-seated connection to Israel many Jewish Americans harbor. However, when she later began to explore her Jewish identity, she started to question the roots of Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

She felt an urge to make something related to the subject, but the idea didn't start to take shape until last spring, when the VCUarts [Department of Dance + Choreography](https://arts.vcu.edu/dance/) hosted the American College Dance Association's Mid-Atlantic Festival. There, she saw a screening of Okwui Okpokwasili's *Bronx Gothic*, a one-woman show about the story of two 12-year-old black girls coming of age in the 1980s.

Around the same time, Chametzky's mind was on the work of one of her dance heroes, Liz Lerman. Chametzky was particularly inspired by *Fifty Modest Reflections on Turning Fifty*, a performance that premiered the same year the nation of Israel turned 50. Lerman, a Jewish choreographer, mapped Israel on her body as a way to contend with her complex feelings about the nation.

"I think these seeds had been planted at different places," Chametzky says. "Then, out of nowhere, this idea sprang into my head, fully formed."

Still, she felt it wasn't completely her story to tell.

"I wanted it to be a storytelling performance," she says, "but I didn't want it to feel like I was either co-opting the stories of Palestinian people or that I was like, 'Here's my story [as a white Jewish American] and it's the only relevant story.' Neither of those felt right. So, I thought of projections as a way to bring in some more concrete elements."

To create the projections, she sought out Kinetic Imaging student Fiona Penn, who developed a series of animations that incorporated maps, text and data visualization. Chametzky rounded out her production with [music](https://arts.vcu.edu/music/) by composer Colton Dodd (BM '18); videography and lighting design from [Photography + Film](https://arts.vcu.edu/photofilm/) student Zephyr Sheedy; and advice from faculty mentor [Kate Sicchio](https://arts.vcu.edu/dance/people/faculty-staff/dr-kate-sicchio/), a choreographer, media artist and performer.

In *22 Percent: A Disintegrating Data Visualization*, Chametzky explores the cultural, emotional, spiritual, and physical consequences of land loss for those displaced in the 70 years since Israel's founding. Through storytelling and choreography, she embodies decreasing numbers, starting at 100 and working down to 22—reflecting the dwindling percentage of historic Palestine that remains in Palestinian control. Sometimes the statistics are represented by physical items like clothing and the barrier separating Israel and Palestine. Other times they manifest in bodily elements like breath. Each vignette aims to communicate the challenge of living with a fraction of what one once had.

Chametzky submitted her idea for a VCUarts [Undergraduate Research and Innovation Grant \(https://arts.vcu.edu/grants/innovation-grants/\)](https://arts.vcu.edu/grants/innovation-grants/) and received funding to bring her concept to life. *22 Percent* premieres this weekend at [The Anderson \(https://arts.vcu.edu/programs/theanderson/\)](https://arts.vcu.edu/programs/theanderson/).

"It's my first big public performance of my solo work, which is scary," she says. "I don't like to perform as much; I like to make work more. But this felt personal and not like something I would want to coach someone else to do."

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