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CHICAGO

SEPTEMBER 2026

THE CASE FOR A *PARKING* *REVOLT*

INSIDE THE CITY'S DISASTROUS METER DEAL —
AND ONE MAN'S PLAN TO SUBVERT IT

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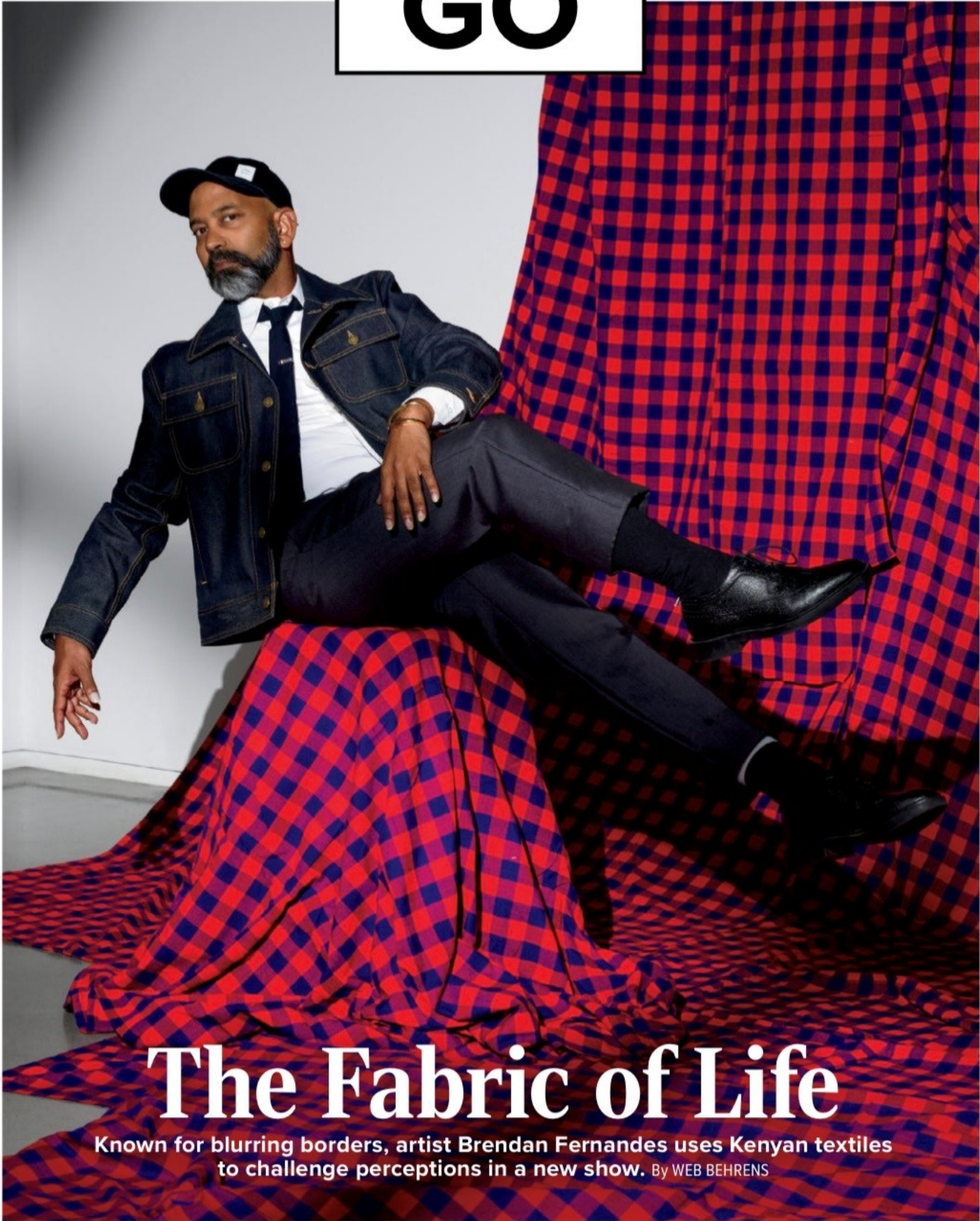
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After coming across photos of a 1920s chateau, the author set out to learn more—and discovered a family secret. **By Meaghan Garvey**

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ON THE COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY EVAN SHEEHAN



GO

The Fabric of Life

Known for blurring borders, artist Brendan Fernandes uses Kenyan textiles to challenge perceptions in a new show. By WEB BEHRENS

FOR ME, DRESSING IS creating a play of who you are," says multidisciplinary artist Brendan Fernandes. "I walk differently in different clothes. Men's clothes, women's clothes, I don't care. I love to gender-bend. I love to play."

A Nairobi native who moved with his family to the Toronto suburbs at age 10, Fernandes was practically preordained to become a fashionista. "We didn't come from a lot of money when we were living in Kenya. My mom's mother was a seamstress who made most of our clothes, and it instilled an idea of feeling empowered by clothing." Indeed, on the flight to Canada, they all wore sharply detailed matching outfits. "We looked like the Kenyan von Trapp family."

His heritage and fascination with fabric come into play in his newest solo show, *The Noise Will Sound*, which opens September 17 at his home base, Monique Meloche Gallery in West Town. The exhibition comprises five new mixed-media paintings (a rarity for him) and eight new photographs. The latter—collectively dubbed *Noise See*, a play on "noisy"—depict two Joffrey dancers, their faces hidden by a striking plaid fabric associated with the Maasai people of East Africa. "It's not an indigenous pattern, but it has become part of their cultural garb," Fernandes says. They use it as a sort of camouflage on the savanna, he explains. "The color waves create a visual noise that affects the eyes of predators, so I was playing on this idea."

He'd bought similar fabric at a Nairobi street market in 2017, and the notion percolated from there, with the artist pondering how the Maasai had transformed an element of British colonial influence into something of their own. When his sister visited Nairobi more recently, he coaxed her to buy 40 identical blankets for him. "I don't think she was very happy

with me," he adds with a puckish smile. He transformed the blankets into something he describes as "kind of weird": drapery Snuggles to adorn the dancers.

Although it's difficult to predict what any given Fernandes work might involve, dance and movement are standard tools for the man who can't be confined to one or two media. The 46-year-old wears many hats: sculptor, painter, choreographer, photographer,

fashion designer, and associate art professor at Northwestern University. (He moved to Chicago 10 years ago for what was intended to be a short-term residency at the school.) During his undergrad days in Canada, he studied visual art along with ballet and modern dance, and eventually he began blending it all together. "I create sculptural playgrounds that dancers perform in," he says.

This fall is a banger season for Fernandes, with eight projects unfurling across North America, including his participation in the Toronto Biennial of Art. Beyond the Monique Meloche show, Chicago has two other concurrent Fernandes exhibitions: He's part of *Slow Dance*, a group show that opens September 12 at the Museum of Contemporary Art; and about half a mile away at the Driehaus Museum, *Brendan Fernandes: In the Round*, an episodic sculpture-and-dance installation, features performances September 16 to 19 (and again in October and November).

At Driehaus, Fernandes collaborated with dancers on a partly choreographed, partly improvised piece in the museum's domed Murphy Auditorium, incorporating mirrored benches he designed that reflect the intricacies of the high-vaulted ceiling. "Brendan can take a space that you know very well and completely change your perception of it," says Lisa Key, Driehaus's executive director, who befriended the artist years ago, when she worked at the MCA.

Skewing traditional perspectives is nothing new for Fernandes. "My art is a strange hybrid, like my identity," says the maverick, who is queer in many ways, including sexuality and nationality (Goan by ancestry, Kenyan by birth, Canadian by upbringing). After his busy autumn concludes, he plans to recoup at home in Lake View, then visit Nairobi again in the new year. **C**



From top: An image from Fernandes's *Noise See* series; a dance performance from his Driehaus residency