



FALL 2020

indance

DISCOURSE + DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN + AMPLIFY



P.36 Out of Touch



P.4 IN PRACTICE



P.30 In Community

MEMBERSHIP

Dancers' Group – publisher of *In Dance* – provides resources to artists, the dance community, and audiences through programs and services that are as collaborative and innovative as the creative process.

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I HOPE YOU'RE WELL, AND I HOPE YOU'RE SAFE.

For most of 2020 these daily words were written in emails, texts and in posts on social. They do bear repeating: Dancers' Group hopes you're well, and we hope you're safe.

These direct and caring sentiments reflect the many unknowns taking place during this shared situation known as COVID. I'm OK. Are you OK? I think that trying to make sense of this time is in part a realization that human and natural systems are not separate. Hey, World. Are you OK?

We find ourselves in an unreal reality. Being told to carry on with our life as if all is OK: like, the paradox of being ordered to shelter in place, yet the expectation is that we keep working, keep producing; and then there's the reality of lost income and still having to pay our rent and loans and bills. How does this make sense — well it doesn't and yet, it's our reality.

Even during a pandemic — a time like and not like the HIV/AIDS pandemic — we dance. Times of great loss stir up questions of what to do? What comes next? These questions, past and present, guide us forward and provide options and opportunity to share. I do believe that dance is a sharing and forever kinda thing. It's primal, and it feeds us, and it continues to be the thing we come back to. So continue to question. And continue to demand change.

As we've put together this Fall issue we've asked many questions, and one was, who's in the community? This has led us to look at numerous dance organizations in the Bay Area — over 700 the last we surveyed. Within these pages we highlight a smattering — that's a technical term — to illicit action from our readers. Meaning go to their website or social media page, and learn more about their work, activities, transitions, offerings. Be ready to be gob-smacked by what continues to take place here.

Let's dance with those that protest. Let's dance with those that dream. Let's dance to ensure a shift in power. Let's stomp out systemic racism. It doesn't matter how we dance, it matters that we do something, we move, we are in action.

Let's be kind and generous and ready to move toward truths we know to be true — in dance, in the World.

I hope you're well, and I hope you're safe.

—Wayne Hazzard, Artist Administrator

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(Left to right): Cherie Hill, Hope Mohr, Karla Quintero

STEPPING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD

with Cherie Hill, Hope Mohr & Karla Quintero

by SIMA BELMAR

Beginning on September 13 and running through November 21, HMD's 2020 Bridge Project presents [POWER SHIFT: Improvisation, Activism, and Community](#), a festival that features the improvisational practices and diverse dance genres of leading Black/African American, Latinx/Latin American, Asian American, female-identifying, and queer improvisers and social justice activists from around the world. In a swift pivot to online and outdoor platforms, the festival

organizers will offer art and activism workshops, improvisation practices for both rookies and old hands, and live-streamed performances.

HMD stands for Hope Mohr Dance, and The Bridge Project has been Mohr's curatorial platform for ten years. But this spring, the organization announced a shift to a "distributed leadership" model, which might mean that Hope Mohr Dance goes the way of the Oberlin Dance Collective—from words to acronym.

HMD's leadership is now composed of three co-directors: Mohr, Cherie Hill, and Karla Quintero. Quintero is HMD's Director of Marketing and Development, and Hill is Director of Art in Community. Titles aside, the three women now work as a co-curatorial team. I spoke with them in July about what the shift to distributed leadership looks like in practice.

Sima: What led to the shift to a distributed leadership model? And what is distributed leadership?

Hope: The Bridge Project's programs have been social justice-driven for a long time. More recently, that engine has become more focused on cultural and racial equity, most specifically with *Dancing Around Race* (2017-2018). Through that project, I was in a lot of working and personal relationships with artists of color and involved in conversations where I was frequently hearing the need for white people to step back. I started thinking about what that would mean for me personally and what that would mean to apply that to the organization that I founded. I also felt like there was an increasing disconnect between our public facing programming and our internal organizational structures. I wanted to bring the internal structures into alignment with those values.

Sima: What did the social justice drive of the organization look like before *Dancing Around Race*?

Hope: The program was anchored originally in feminism and a commitment on my part to honoring and centering female-identified voices and lineage in dance. Over time that curatorial commitment became more intersectional.

Central America. I had that awareness, but I hadn't yet figured out how to implement it into curating.

Sima: When did you, Karla, come into the organization?

Karla: My first engagement with HMD was as a dancer in the [2016 Bridge Project](#). [Ten Artists Respond to Locus](#) (a multi-disciplinary response to the legacy of Trisha Brown). I started working as a dancer in Hope's work in 2017 and then as an admin person later that year.

Sima: I've seen you in a lot of different admin spaces. And dance stages.

Karla: Yeah, I do a lot of different support roles for folks in the non-profit space. Before dancing, I used to work in transportation advocacy in New York, particularly in Spanish-speaking communities. I started working with HMD as an admin manager, mostly helping Hope carry out the programming in whatever way was helpful. It may not have been distributed leadership, but a lot of the work was collaborative. It's interesting that "distributed leadership" is a buzzword now because there's always a lot

Sima: A shift from second to third wave feminism.

Hope: I wore two hats for a long time: an activist outside the dance world and an activist inside the dance world. Within the dance world, my curating had been tied up in my own aesthetic lineage, which is white postmodernism. So when I started curating, I was bringing in people like Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, Lucinda Childs, Trisha Brown—all white women. All of the choreographers I've ever danced for professionally have been white. As an activist outside the dance world, my awareness and engagement was much more intersectional. I was a Latin American Studies major, I did fieldwork in the domestic violence movement in

of collaborative leadership within non-profit spaces. Maybe it's not acknowledged as such.

Sima: I'm always a little leery of the word collaborative because, yes, it means we work together but it doesn't necessarily mean that we do so in a non-hierarchical way. Does part of announcing a shift to distributed leadership mean claiming a non-hierarchical relationship between the organization's moving parts?

Karla: Yes. There is that desire among the staff and also with the artists to figure out ways to flatten the hierarchy between all of us when we're working together. What I've observed in the move to distributed leadership is that it's tied to these macro questions that people have had in the dance community around how sustainable it is to run an organization, to put on a dance concert, to make work using the models and paradigms that have been prevalent for however many years. In part it's a conscious effort to counter existing patterns of how we do things, the way that we fundraise, the way that we put excess value on production driven work.

Sima: How has your role in the organization changed since the shift?

Karla: My work is changing a lot because I have to change the way that I see it. Even though I felt that my contributions were acknowledged and respected, I was not hired to vision for the program. I've been thinking a lot about what that shift means because it seems like an easy shift, but it's not. In particular, if I'm part of something I respect already, I'm inclined to support it in the way that it exists.

Sima: To suddenly become part of not just promoting but creating the vision.

Karla: Yes, that's a very different thing even if you've already had a lot of autonomy in terms of the work that you were doing in the organization.

Sima: What's your relationship to HMD, Cherie?

Cherie: A year ago I came on as HMD's Community Engagement coordinator. I was mainly working with the [Community Engagement Residency](#) (CER) program, which I was really excited about because of its focus on cultural equity and working with artists. I've done a lot of work in equity in dance education. But I was interested in what

PHOTOS BY (L. TO R.) ROBBIE SWEENEY, COURTESY OF HOPE MOHR DANCE, MARK PRENNINGER



Our board is now 100 percent working artists and that was not the case six months ago.

on our part and because of that there's a high bar. We need to implement the values not only in a structural way, but also on the level of organizational culture. It's not just about creating a democratic workplace or horizontal power relations among staff. It's also about changing how things get done. And distributing power to artists and bringing artists into positions of power over aesthetics and resources.

Sima: What's an example of how one might distribute power to artists? Or what did it look like before you embarked on this process?

What's something you might dismantle?

Hope: Our board is now 100 percent working artists and that was not the case six months ago. After we announced our move to distributed leadership, three of the board members, in conversation with me, decided it was time to step down. There's been an intentional transition away from a traditional nonprofit board that's conceived as a fundraising engine comprised of people with connections to money and networks. I think that's an outdated model. Value-aligning the board has been an important part of this transition. We're also having former lead artists in the Community Engagement Residency program select the next round of artists in partnership with HMD staff and I am stepping off that selection panel. We're also talking about a paid artist council with curatorial power or the power to hold the organization accountable to our stated and aspirational values. Things like that.

Karla: When I came on board, the CER program supported one lead mentor artist and a number of mentee artists. In a recent meeting a couple of artists brought up dismantling hierarchies within mentorship as well so it can be bidirectional. That already started happening in the CER program in 2019 where we transitioned to three lead artists who have collaborators they work with. The CER also transitioned from a mentorship program to a capacity building program. We're still asking questions about what it means to shift, share, cede power within a program where you have an organization that's regrating money to artists. That program could radically transform over the next few years.

Sima: You write the grants that get the money to support your programs? Is there a disconnect between how you get the funds and how you distribute them?

Karla: The CER is funded by the California Arts Council Artists in Communities pro-

gram. This application supports organization/artist partnerships for sustained residencies in community settings. For many CAC programs, artists must partner with a nonprofit in order to be eligible and competitive for the funds. In terms of how we distribute CAC funds, initially the majority of the money from the grant went to one lead artist with the rest divided among the mentee artists. Now that's more equitably distributed among the three artists for three different projects.

Hope: We've also started implementing financial transparency practices regarding how we communicate internally to each other and with artist partners about budgets and funding. A lot of historically white-led organizations have positioned themselves as regrating organizations. They regrating funds to artists of color. That's problematic for a lot of reasons because the regrating nonprofit 501(c)3 retains control over the money and over the relationship with the funder. Often this can disempower the artist because they don't have the direct information or direct access to the money. If there's poor communication, too often the artist pays the price. So the question is, how can nonprofits step away from that gatekeeping role and provide more direct access to resources?

Sima: What kind of problems do artists run into in that model?

Hope: Sometimes it can happen even in the application process. If an artist is relying on a nonprofit for a foundation opportunity because the foundation only accepts 501(c)3 applicants and the nonprofit messes up on the application, the artist pays the price. Or if the nonprofit fails to be transparent with the artist or fails to honor their agreement, the artist pays the price. Funders need to shift as well. If foundations made applications less burdensome, accessible to artists with no staff and less time, and if fiscally sponsored artists were eligible for all funding opportunities, that would help level the playing field.

Cherie: HMD is also connecting artists we partner with to foundations and program officers that they didn't have a connection to previously and might not even know of. Hope's connected a couple of our CER artists to people at Hewlett or CAC so they can start to build their own relationships with them. As an artist, no one ever introduces you to the foundations even if you're working with a 501(c)3; they keep those relationships to themselves. That's another way that we're being more transparent with the artists we're working with and also helping them estab-

that would look like in a dance company that wasn't dance education focused. My long-term goal is to start my own residency program in the Caribbean, so this was great field research for that. Then in January, I met with Hope to renew my contract and the idea of distributed leadership and moving me into a bigger role as Director of Art in Community surfaced. I didn't know exactly what that would mean, but I was in for the ride.

Sima: Can any of you name the first real step HMD took toward enacting distributed leadership?

Cherie: All of us co-curated this year's Bridge Project. The theme of improvisation was really intriguing to me as a creative dance and improvisation teacher and as someone who loves to put improvisation into my own cho-

reographed work. I was also really happy that we could focus this Bridge Project on improvisational forms that come from the African, Asian, and Latin American diasporas and people of color who teach and perform improvisation because it feels like so much in the US focuses on improvisation from white artists.

Sima: What did the co-curating process look like?

Cherie: There was a lot of collaboration and shared decision making. We would meet to talk about artists we'd want to invite, share videos of their work. Hope was really supportive of who we were interested in bringing. The process felt really empowering to be able to make decisions and bring my vision into what the Bridge Project would be this year. We've been in intense distributed lead-

ership training starting with hiring LeaderSpring as consultants to help us delineate what distributed leadership means for us and for HMD. We talk about power and decision making, and some critical questions that have come up around the relationship of HMD to The Bridge Project.

Sima: Karla mentioned bringing artists in to help flatten hierarchy. What role do artists play in the distributed leadership model?

Cherie: Something I've learned about HMD is that there is a high value for artists, paying them and respecting their time. We recently had three sessions where 10-15 artists were on a Zoom call with us and LeaderSpring, talking about what distributed leadership means to them.

Hope: And we paid each artist \$100 for each community meeting they attended.

ARTWORK BY XX

lish their own foundation. A lot of artists have expressed the need to know more about fundraising and how to think about long term sustainability.

Hope: That's another aspect to this commitment to distributing power. White artists who move in circles of power and have relationships with funders, donors, and program officers can directly connect those folks with artists. This is one way of bringing new voices to the table. Instead of saying, "I'll get that grant for you," say, "Meet this person, you can apply for this grant directly."

Sima: This sounds like a sideways movement. Unblocking access. Stepping aside rather than stepping down.

Hope: I just published a blog post about stepping back. White folks shouldn't withdraw and disengage as a way of avoiding the structural work of antiracism. What does it mean to stay in the work while also making space for other voices? Sometimes it's appropriate for white people to step away entirely and that might be what I do eventually, but I also feel like there has to be capacity building, a transitioning of relationships and resources, and an engagement in difficult conversations. Just saying "I'm out of here" may not always be the best thing

We want people to check out *Power Shift, The Bridge Project* that's coming up and join us.

to do. In dance, there's a dominant model: the founder starts the organization and puts their name on it and then all the programs are tangled up in the founder's personality. It's crucial to disentangle the cult of personality from the public programs. It's crucial to separate curating from the founder's ego and lineage.

Sima: So what's the plan for the relationship between HMD and The Bridge Project?

Hope: It's a work in progress.

Karla: I think people in general undervalue what it takes to build enough trust to get a bunch of people in a room to share how they think with each other, in particular when they're coming from different places and backgrounds. The trust I've seen grow through the distributed leadership meetings with the community, between the organization and the artists we work with, and how it keeps growing, is a real tangible thing we've been striving for. The things that come from this place are reflective of equitable practice. Many programs that aim to advance cultural equity reflect a savior mindset: we are giving something over, or up, for you. This change we are seeking can't start from this place. It has to start from a place of conversation and maybe what emerges from that doesn't serve

everyone that was there, but at least everyone's perspectives are acknowledged, heard, and taken into account. More and more we're starting from this place of dialogue, and more and more we're able to because we're building trust with artists.

Hope: It's interesting to think about the implications of distributed leadership work for art making. Many choreographers and directors claim to work collaboratively in the studio, but typically that ethos only goes so far. The pressures for authorship in the studio are different than in administrative and institutional contexts. In antiracist and equity-driven work, I don't think we should let artmaking off the hook.

Sima: It's important to take the temperature on how local dance communities feel about your organization. Whether or when you can make a practical shift, if the community feels the organization is there for them, that's a huge difference already.

Hope: There are a lot of organizations doing surveys right now of their "community." A survey's good—it's better than not doing a survey—but there's a difference between having artists weigh in as some sort of ancillary unpaid or underpaid focus group, whose

input you cherry-pick according to your comfort level, and actually bringing artists to the table and giving them a stake in the future of the organization.

Sima: What I'm hearing about the definition of distributed leadership is inviting other people, more people, different people, large amounts of people to the table, even if it becomes harder to determine what everyone needs, and then the three of you are in constant communication about the decisions you make based on those conversations. Is it that simple?

Hope: No, I don't think it's that simple. I resist defining it. This work is emergent, iterative, and dynamic. And in our case it's value-driven. It's not a business decision. We're not doing this because I'm leaving town or I'm dead. The more we do, more reveals itself as needing to be done.

Cherie: I agree. I don't think we have a definition yet because it's still in process and we're at the earlier stages of it. I think distributed leadership in general is unique to whomever is doing it. I think the things you said are parts of it, at least where we are with it now. A year from now there could be a lot more components. I would also add that stepping back is a big part of it too. I've seen

Hope step back in a lot of ways—being more cautious about time, sharing decisions with Karla and me. I've even stepped back, just listening to the artists and what they need, rethinking curation and who that should come from. It's been about sharing responsibilities and giving up power at times.

Sima: In an older paradigm, I'd think it would be more efficient because you would delegate tasks.

Hope: It's less efficient.

Cherie: And more work.

Karla: In particular when we're talking about partnering with artists. It's about providing the resources and information artists need to take ownership or leadership over something. If people don't know the structure that's currently in place, where things come from and what the thinking is behind them, then it's a really tall ask to say, do you want to share leadership over this. A lot of it is about how we communicate information with each other and the community. That's where the focus of distributed leadership is right now. Also, it's revealing that what is most scarce is our time.

Hope: For me, distributed leadership is not just structural. It's cultural. The culture of the organization needs to shift and that takes time. It's about unpacking the layers of power. It's about relationships. It's about shifting how the organization relates to time, efficiency, and control. Those deeper organizational shifts get at white supremacist culture, which pervades nonprofits and philanthropy. Just changing who's inside the system is not going to change that much.

Sima: What can In Dance readers do to support HMD's new adventures?

Hope: We want to bring more working artists onto the board, so if people are interested in being a part of this work, [reach out to us](#). Also, I'm interested in being in conversation with other organizations who are doing this work or navigating similar shifts. To normalize these shifts, I think it's important that the learning doesn't happen behind closed doors. We need to share our learning curves, our mistakes, and our vulnerabilities.

Karla: We're calling for organizations to be more transparent with the artists they work with.

Cherie: We want people to check out [Power Shift](#). The Bridge Project that's coming up and join us. That's a step toward engaging in equity and supporting diversity for our community in dance. People should read [HMD's blog](#). Folks have asked that we publicize our process and decisions more, so keep an eye out for that.

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THE 14TH EPISODE OF
HOUSE/FULL OF BLACKWOMEN

NEW CHITLIN CIRCUITRY: REPARATIONS VAUDEVILLE

BY TOBE MELORA CORREAL, DANA KAWANO,
FRANCES PHILLIPS, MARVIN K. WHITE, & ZAKIYA HARRIS

PHOTOS BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

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BLACK WOMEN GENIUS, BLACK WOMEN MAGIC, BLACK WOMEN POWER

BY TOBE MELORA CORREAL

JUNE 2013...

I want to do “A House Full of Black Women!” —Amara Tabor-Smith

These were the words that came falling out of Amara’s mouth, sweet and easy, like fat golden corn falls ripe and juicy off a late-summer cobb. It was mere hours after the soul-stirring finish of Amara’s 2013 presentation of *He Moved Swiftly*’s “Room Full of Black Men” and I was still speechless with awe at the majesty that had taken place there. We were two sister-friends of 40+ years having some kitchen table-talk and debriefing the show. A house full of Black women??? I didn’t know what that was; neither did Amara. But what our heads didn’t know our bodies could feel: a She-presence that came into the room, something thick and round, wide-bellied and dark. Not the so-called inferior-dark of white supremacy, nor the despised-feminine dark of patriarchy. This dark was a radiant-dark Mother Force, primordial and rich in beauty and mystery. Amara’s words had called open a portal and this spirit, House/Full of BlackWomen, was now with us at the table. With chills running up my spine I looked at her. “Yaaasss Amara, oh my god, YES.” She looked back at me with sharp eyes, her lips in pursed determination, and nodded her head three times, resolutely.

Dear Beloved House/Full,
Mother of Black Woman Medicine
Who Restores and Transforms...

At first I watched from the sidelines, quietly stalking you while Amara joined forces with her long-time collaborator, the formidable Ellen



Sebastian Chang. Together they gathered a circle of Black women who began showing up in places you would not expect to see them, doing things you would not expect to be done; shaking a loose preconceived notions about what constitutes art, audience, theater and performance, making a place in the streets of Oakland for this new/not-new¹ thing Amara had named Conjure Art.

At that time—in addition to the challenges of a chronic health condition and the heart-wrenching death of my mother a few years before—I was dealing with an extended crisis around housing and resources and so was usually too unwell to show up in person for the various House/Full “episodes” that were taking place around town. Instead, I mostly learned about you through

girlfriend chats with Amara and photographs. Then one day Amara said to me, “we’re gonna do a 24-hour song circle for Black women.” Which sounded so glorious it made my eyeballs pop with excitement, until she finished her sentence with, “and I would like you to lead the opening prayer.” All I could say, with tears in my eyes was, “I can’t. I know you love me but I am not worthy of the job.” *I can’t...* because I spend my days feeling empty and lost, choking on despair. *I can’t...* because I am worn all the way down from the struggle of just barely making it. *I can’t...* because I don’t have anything of value to say to anyone right now, let alone a whole ass song circle full of Black women, who deserve the very best and should have an opening prayer



from someone in far better shape than me... Amara let me cry-talk for a while then leveled her gaze at me and said, "This is not a show. I am not asking you to perform. Just come as you are. I know you can't see right now but I still see you. I know your power. I know your magic. Just come and speak what your tongue knows to be true. That's all you have to do and it *will* be enough."

And so I did that, brought my true tongue, unvarnished and vulnerable. At first it was hard because I felt so exposed with all my pain and struggle hanging offa me. But word by word I just kept going, feeling my way with authenticity as my touchstone. And I soon found out this was indeed enough. With the breath and bodies of all the women in the circle holding and supporting me, before I knew it I was in the flow of prayer and praise, no longer feeling broken; the magic had begun. For the next 24 hours, 75 or so of us sang and hummed and made sound together continuously without interruption. We howled and sobbed, raged and bellowed. We napped when we needed, nibbled on snacks, moved our bodies and shared sleepy-wild laughter. Leaving nothing out, we filled that massive room with Black Woman True-Tongue. Together we brought down a fiercely powerful healing--on the city of Oakland, on the Black women and girls of our bloodlines and most importantly, on our own beloved selves.

This is what you give us, House/Full: an embracing invitation to, as Amara said, come as we are, to entrust it *all* to your circle. Tucked and pinned into the folds of the full spectrum of our Black Womanness, we bring offerings of sweet bread and tears, comfort and courage, for you House/Full, our Sacred Ground. Mother Who Turns Jagged Edges To Magnificent Joy, you are our bowl of sugar, our honey water cleansing. When the poisons of systemic racism and misogynoir have us confused about who we really are, you still see us. By the bright light of your gaze we learn to treasure one another when, through the eyes of a sister, we re-find truths we have forgotten we know. You remind us we deserve to be held, our stories honored. You insist we are worthy of being seen and heard, fully and with the deepest love.

Never do you ask us to explain any aspect of the unique intersectional web of oppressions we each have to fight against every day as we do the endless work of challenging the structures of greed and what Ellen calls "the lies of whiteness." You make a place for Black women to gather and bear witness to one another as we make revolution. The House/Full revolution is Black women creating a culture of loving mutuality and radical acceptance, mending and tending, as together we stitch the fabric of renewal. For our people, for our ancestors, for ourselves and--whether

they know it or not--for the world. While we tarry in your healing presence, the lost ones who work against our aims, the hungry ghosts who would rather dominate than love, feast on the entrails of their own rotting flesh, devouring themselves into annihilation.

Some say House/Full performs. "Ha! We do not perform," we whisper amongst ourselves. We pour libation to the Deep Dark Bowl of Ancient Feminine Mystery, wherein all manner of Black Woman genius, power and beauty dwell. We sit at the table of She-Who-Brings-A-Thickness-Of-Blessing. Where Black woman pain is offered up to communal digestion, and the metabolic powers of our togetherness are activated and unleashed. By dancing and resting and processing² and remembering together we conjure medicine in your name, House/Full, to serve the sacred work of your alchemical mission: That Black women be free, so that all may be free.

TOBE MELORA CORREAL was initiated in 1990 as a Yoruba-Lukumi priestess of Yemaya. She has an M.A. in Consciousness Studies and is the author of *Finding Soul on the Path of Orisa*. She is honored to serve as spiritual advisor for House/Full and lives in Oakland, California.

1 "New" as in contemporary. "Not new" as in expressive of and grounded in ancient healing practices of earth-based ritual and medicine-making traditions
2 As in processions.

PHOTOS BY ROBBIE SWEENEY



IMBUING SPIRIT INTO CLOTH



PHOTOS BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

I didn't wake up one day thinking I should create ritual costumes. They snuck up on me. They whispered to me, they brought magic into my home and drew me into their clutches. Those whispers came from a human most people know as Amara Tabor-Smith. In this article I share an inside peek into the approach I use to conceptualize and render ritual costumes in general and take a look at how that works in practice in my collaborations with House/Full of Black-Women Co-Creators Amara Tabor-Smith and Ellen Sebastian Cheng.

The starting point for a successful ritual costume process lies in drawing out a clarity of the intention behind the planned ritual performance and then breathing that intention into each step of the design and construction process. Ritual performance combines art and aesthetics as an instrument to inform viewers about beliefs, the constructs of our ancestral origins. It calls upon education and contemplation to understand diasporic experiences while honoring and retaining our cultures and grounding in our identities. It brings about perspectives that we might otherwise overlook, deny or refuse to see. It often infuses... It is a digestion that can transform us.

You see, what I have learned about ritual costume design and creation is that it is in essence a guided process with spirit at its core. It is not based on perfect construction of the garment but rather a mindset born of an earnest desire to understand, honor and respect the traditions where they are derived. It is an openness to embark on a journey where you as the creator let go of ego to solely embrace the intent of those who will wear it, heightening awareness of the messages and materials that appear during the process of creating and then trusting that those materials showed up so you can integrate them in a meaningful way. It is as if spirit is guiding you through the process, telling you what to do—as long as you listen.

Costumes and fabric share a long history. French poet Charles Baudelaire's phrasing of the essence of that relationship speaks for me: "fabrics speak a silent language." RISD Museum expands that, speaking to the Egungung costumes I create:

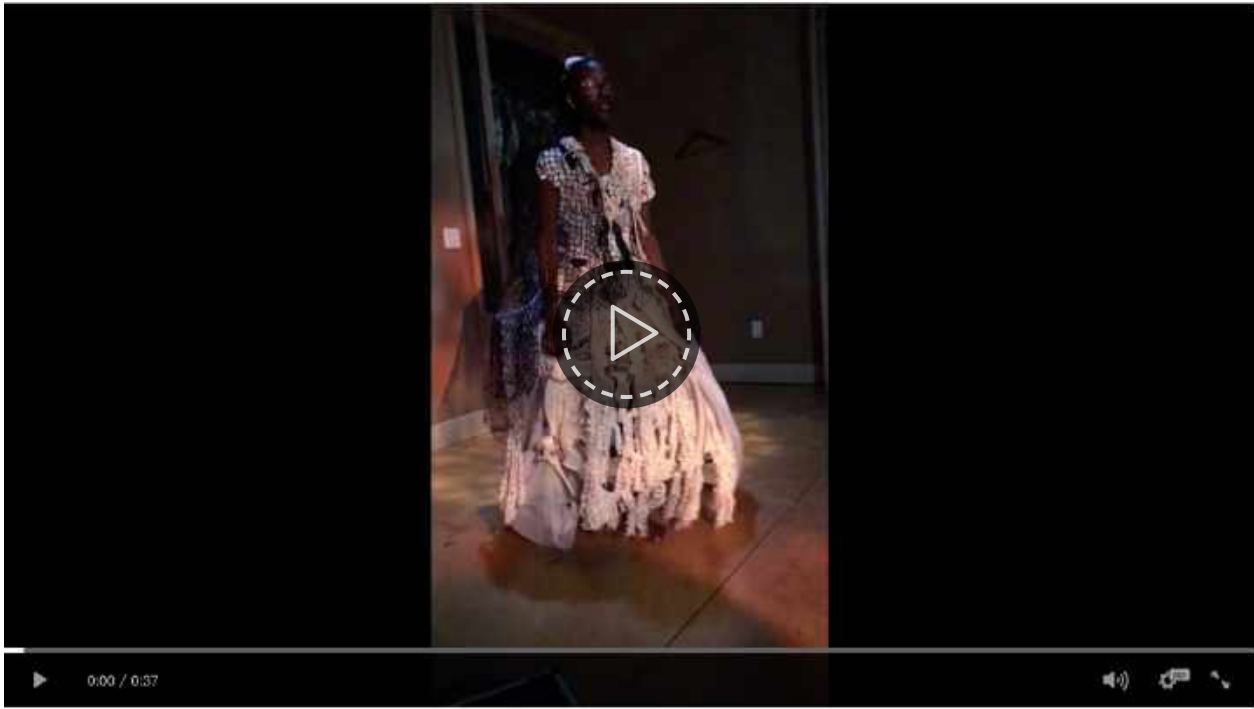
Its universal significance and applicability might sometimes be culturally specific, but in essence spans the entire gamut of our collective human experience. Though it has no voice, cloth speaks in complex, multisensorial fashions.¹



The ritual costume serves as a dramatically symbolic vessel carrying a story all its own while holding space for embodiment of spirit. It is an instrument called to action that is imbued in the fabric of intention whereby we can carry out those intentions with respect to the world, our fellows, ourselves and our traditional beliefs. They hold a backbone of courage that dares to hold truth through subliminal messages, alluring layers with complex meaning carried on the backs of channelers. They are a canvas for the integration of symbolic references, for spirit and woven in the fabric of life's journeys. They recall ancestral guides deepening our awareness and bringing forth new perspectives in moving forward. They are a protective womb of safety to release the injuries of the past and move forward toward healing.

THE CONCEPT

My process of conceptualization draws inspiration from various points during development. There are typically portions of Amara's and Ellen's projects where they are clear in their vision while other parts that remain open, providing room for improvisation. As they tell the story underlying the performance, it gives rise to strong visions of the setting within me. Their explanations evoke a series of symbols, metaphorical relationships, spiritual overtones/undertones, objects, textiles, organic matter, texture that seem to appear within my mind. Having



worked with Amara and Ellen for nearly eight years now, I have gained an understanding of the general aesthetic that appeals to them and communicates the feeling with which they hope to fill their audience. Once I understand the environment, I inquire about the main characters, their roles and their deity overlays. The pivotal points in the performance determine where visuals need to make a specific impact and where the costumes integrated with the set design are of major importance.

The performers selected for those characters inform the final phase of the costume design process. Amara's identification of the role, the deity overlay, coupled with the chosen performer can bring clarity defining the essence of the costume. In my design process, I draw from African traditions, Yoruba

traditions, historical era, specific objects related to a specific era, possessing symbolic significance with an earthly element to it.

WHAT IS AN EGUNGUN?

The Egungun plays a prominent recurring role in Amara's and Ellen's House/Full series. Some readers may appreciate knowing a bit of background on Egungun and their history. The RISD Museum offers one of my favorite descriptions:

Made into elaborate decorative patterns, forms, and colors, these carefully arranged fabrics must follow the well-established conventions of the past, best defined here as

those representing the treasured values of Egungun traditions, or asa. Asa represents a conscious attempt "to select, choose, discriminate, or discern" (Yai, 1994) while being cognizant of the historical past. Quite logically, artists-priests-devotees use their oju ona (design consciousness) together with oju inu (inner eye or artistic insight and sensibility) as well as laakaye (intuitive knowledge) plus imoju-mora (unusual sensitivity) in order to make deliberate choices (Abiodun, 1989; Lawal, 1996) in the selection of colors, patterns, and designs. This dynamic artistic process is constantly inventive, revitalizing, and modern. The result is that the cloth panels come in a multiplicity of designs, patterns, hues, shapes, and colors—a curious blend of disparate elements fully reflective of the multidimensional vision and power of departed ancestors.²

THE COSTUME

The moment I live for is when the performer puts on the finished costume for the first time. Embodying the character in the costume brings the costume alive and the costume transforms the spirit of the performer, which together become the vessel to deliver the intention to the audience that the directors articulated weeks or months before.

In the House/Full of BlackWomen episode "Passing Through The Great Midde," the directors said they wanted a "bone dress." Curiously, I wasn't shocked. They told me the story of a young woman aboard a slave trader ship who was ordered—and who refused—to dance for the crew. So they

bound her to a halyard, hoisted her up the mast and dropped her to the deck, again and again long after she perished. When Amara and Ellen retold this story at each rehearsal, I could feel my own body being hoisted, followed by the free falling weightless emptiness only to crash in blinding pain. This sensation imprinted itself in my soul. This bone dress was to honor this young woman's spirit, to tell her story, to set her free. This costume needed to scream in anger, it needed to cry in pain, it needed strength held deep in principle, it needed an ocean's sway, it needed air for spirit to flow through it, it needed to hold the echo of ghosts, it needed the allure of beauty followed by a recoiling to the ugly, ugly truth.

ANATOMY OF A RITUAL COSTUME

Garment construction begins with a visualization process. I mentally visualize the entire set design look and feel while thinking about how costumes might punctuate the space. I ask how the performers will move through the space, how much movement will they be doing, will they be solo or part of a larger group in movement?

From there I can see the silhouette of the costume followed by a general understanding of the overall construction. Typically starting from the base garment or garment that is closest to the body, I define what will work best in terms of form and function. What would be most comfortable, identifying fabrics, style that support their movement. From the undergarment I think in layers, what needs to be composed over that undergarment to achieve the silhouette.

Once the scenes are laid out, other specifics emerge driving costume design, such as the number of performers per scene, who is cast in those roles, what the set will look like, the amount and type of movement, what function they will support in the story line. Now specific deity references enter the process which informs the essence of costume character such as Mother of the Ocean, the universal element they embody such as water, fire, earth, wind, the objects that are symbolic for the deity and colors.

I strive to bring a consistent look for the overall production entailing purchasing similar items with variations of style and then there are special ritual costumes for key roles. As advocates for material reuse, we place intention on items that are purchased for future reconstruction or creative alternative use.

When designing the special ritual costumes, during the construction process I consider versatility in form, function, sizing



and simplicity in reconstruction. Versatility plays a key factor as cast members can change requiring quick costume adjustments. Honoring the spiritual nature of the performance, these special costumes are built with clear intention as a vessel that will hold the intended grace of the message.

The underlayer garment typically includes a form of protection for the performer who will wear the costume. That protection can be in the form of a talisman/amulet/herb/symbolic characters etc. The structural inner layer I view as the bones (usually figuratively, though not always!), which provides a strong structure to build on.

The outer layer includes the fabric base of which specific embellishment and symbolic object oriented adornment can be supported. Through the combined integration of each layer that imbues the costume in preparation for the ritual performance. This includes the collaborative collection of meaningful fabrics and objects, ritualistic processes often used to create the objects, spiritual practices in placing the objects—all with clear intention throughout.

INSIDE THE EXPERIENCE

The feeling I get when entering a rehearsal space can only be described as like entering a remote island, a village, with people who share a deep love, compassion and acceptance for each other focused on the positive aspects of the gifts that each person brings. The space holds a respect that is beyond words where each individual feels safe to be their authentic selves and are able to express in a way that is grounded at a level that allows them to share who they are in whatever way that they truly are. There is a grace, a gentleness and understanding that is held by all to support each other in a way that I've not experienced in the outside world. It feels to me that it is

a world that existed in the past, a world as all worlds should be based in a love for each other that we as human beings have lost along the way, making it feel unsafe to be our authentic selves.

My experience with House/Full has been grounding. It has given me a perspective rooted in extremes: one like a raw open wound to another of unlimited power to express. It has afforded me the opportunity to understand deep pain and pure joy—sometimes together. Doing so widens my awareness not only about others but also within myself. It can be uncomfortable at times but looking back over the years my depth of understanding my place in this world, what I bring, where I fall short and how I can use what I have as best as possible to help others continues to become more and more clear. That clarity about who you are and what you bring helps to inform all choices you make with clear intention.

I never thought that making costumes would open a door into such a rich life journey. But I often think that I have the best job in the world as I am able to intimately collaborate with highly talented artists that process life in a deeply profound way, dig into the roots of understanding ancestral history and traditions, gain a perspective on history and how it informs us today, integrate all of those aspects and create tangible references that can support visual impacts to provoke questions, raise awareness, promote healing and celebrate our existence. What can be better than this?

UNTIL THE NEXT TIME...

It's been great to have a chance to write about and bring words to my work—a space that ordinarily has precious few of those. I would like to take this opportunity to express thanks to the Bay Area ritual dance community, the directors and dancers, for inviting me into your sacred midst. I consider myself privileged to be a member. Looking forward to seeing you all in a theater as soon as we are able!

DANA KAWANO is an award-winning Ritual Costume Designer, Scenic/Installation and Visual Artist who has worked with artists like Amara Tabor Smith, Ellen Sebastian Chang, Dohee Lee, Yayoi Kambara, and others. She is versed in a multitude of artistic mediums. Her focus is to create 'visual landscapes' of elaborate wearable and/or scenic art that incorporate textiles, found materials and traditional mediums while integrating cultural/ritual layering to tell the story.

1 By Bolaji Campbell, *Cloth as Metaphor in Egungun Costumes*, RISD Museum, July 10, 2016, <https://risdmuseum.org/manual/445_cloth_as_metaphor_in_egungun_costumes>.
2 By Bolaji Campbell, *Cloth as Metaphor in Egungun Costumes*, RISD Museum, July 10, 2016, <https://risdmuseum.org/manual/445_cloth_as_metaphor_in_egungun_costumes>.



PAINTING AND PHOTOS BY DANA KAWANO



PHOTOS BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

IN TRIBUTE TO TRANSFORMATION

BY FRANCES PHILLIPS



House/Full of Black Women has been built in episodes over a five-year period, sustaining a question posed by Ellen Sebastian Chang and Amara Tabor Smith: “How can we as Black women and girls find a space to breathe and be well within a stable home?” While I had known Ellen since the late 1980s and Amara for a decade, I met their shared project – as I am often introduced to projects – in a grant proposal. It was described as a site-specific ritual performance examining issues of displacement, well-being, and sex trafficking of Black women and girls in Oakland.

I’m always interested in artists tackling difficulty and defying categories, and *House/Full* certainly did that. It wasn’t going to be a single event but sustained over a long time. It wasn’t going to be a piece for a repertoire: likely its sections would be shared once. It wasn’t going to be distinctly contemporary or traditional in form. It wasn’t driven by a single arts organization but porous to contributions by Chapter 510

Ink; Eastside Arts Alliance; Regina’s Door (a boutique dedicated to protecting women from trafficking); and others. It was going to encompass ritual, faith, dance, theater, procession, film, and even sleeping. One artist was not “the lead” – Ellen and Amara described one another as “my art wife.”

The piece dissolved boundaries between indoors and outdoors, performance and ceremony, between the ordinary and the transcendent; and it combined those who were initiated in a spiritual practice and those who were not. Participants moved in and out of the piece, following a singular and communal path to healing.

Can I admit how much this work challenges and compels me? I have seen two of the episodes live and viewed excerpts of others through documentation. In my memories of sections and excerpts, I feel as if I have dreamed them. I’ve also taken notes. I heard what I heard. My memories, my hearing may be in error. I will tell you about a few episodes.

I struggle to fold a spiritual dimension into my daily life. The religious observances of my childhood were not overtly about “the spiritual.” They were composed of Protestant church-going and occasional pot-lucks. For two years, we lived in a small town in Massachusetts, if we didn’t go to church, neighbors would turn up at the door with casseroles, assuming we were too ill to get out of bed. My father was impatient with “church people.” He saw them as gossips and hypocrites. When we moved to Southern California, we attended a church with large windows that was perched on a cliff overlooking the ocean. He tolerated religion then because there was a view.

Surrounding the church were flagstone paths one of which arched into a bridge over a koi pond. It was treacherous when wet, especially if one was running in new, slick-bottomed Mary Janes.

I was once that girl. And now, this is what I’m viewing:

Women dressed and veiled in white carry white parasols and white lanterns, walking down a street in Oakland.

Many have round mirrors, framed in white fabric, and sewn over their bellies. The clothing is not identical, but its laciness, its somber affect is. I refrain from using the word “costume,” because what they are wearing seems to be more about revealing themselves than about obscuring themselves. While processing, the women are quietly singing something akin to “A wick, wick, wick; a wick, wick, wick,” a song about breathing. Sometimes there is a whispered lash-like sound. The streetscape is loud. At times the women wearing white are in the roadway and then they move along the sidewalk. They pass a white limousine and a restaurant whose annoyed hostess stands outside. They pause alongside a police car and I’m shaken in fear for them.

II

When I first met Ellen Sebastian, she was co-founder and artistic director of Life on the Water. She had written and directed, *Your Place is No Longer with Us*, which took place in a Victorian mansion. The audi-

ence moved through the house for the performance and, at the end, she served them black-eyed peas, cornbread, and mustard greens. Later, Amara Tabor-Smith served the CounterPulse audience vegan cornbread and gumbo at performances of *Our Daily Bread*. They had in common these histories of performing acts of caring, breaking out of “the theatrical,” expressing heritage through food and in distinctive spaces.

House/Full of Black Women has moved inside and out of spaces that were transformed to be more than sets or frames. Most vivid to me – perhaps because it is the episode that the Creative Work Fund partially supported – were the spaces for sleeping and dreaming at Chapter 510 Ink in Oakland.

An installation in a storefront window for resting. A rocking chair. Women position themselves. Some recline. Some watch over others. The aesthetic is tenderness. A hallway is lined with cotton. It’s hard not to touch the fragility, the suggestion of the sky and clouds and dreaming.

Chapter 510 Ink is a writing center for youth, and young women read pieces they

have written about selves and fear and comfort. I remember thinking they were brave – revealing. Later I wondered about the symbolism of the cotton balls.

This 2017 episode of *House/Full of Black Women*, “Black Women Dreaming,” wasn’t the first section. It was informed, in part, by one of the work’s most radical strategies, creating a time and place for Black women to rest, recognizing the likelihood that they are juggling multiple jobs and raising children and healing others. Black women could sign up to sleep for between two and ten hours at a West Oakland boarding house, where they would be met with beverages and food as well as comfortable resting places. One-hundred and eighty women chose to sleep and dream for the project.

Later at a grantmaking conference, Amara and Ellen asked a room full of funders why “being well rested” wasn’t acceptable as a measurable outcome.

III

In grants we grab onto words and overuse them for three years or longer until they lose their power and then we grab onto new words. Two words that I believe we are about to release are *engagement* and *immersive*. How, then, do I find the right words for *House/Full*’s capacity to transform me into more than a witness? It happens here:

The dance is in her shoulders. She is leaning back. Her angel-open face to the sky. Draped in white. The dancer places her hand on the shoulder of a seated performer as if to comfort her, as if to tell her “It’s time.”

She bends over backwards and rises like a loping bird.

I try to identify the bird being portrayed and read, “Drag is higher in rotational motion of the wings.” That’s in contrast, an ornithologist writes, to gliding.

The dancer claims slow, rotational motion. When she crouches, her hand is jiggling. An invitation and a warning. Then her body buckles as if she is trying to eject something.

Another dancer on the floor in blue.

The third dancer is shaking in her shoulders and her whole being falls backwards. The movement quickens. The women sitting against the wall cry, laugh, yelp. Then singing:

“Black crow/black crow/please hear my cry
Black crow/black crow/I’m calling for you.”



IV

We’re in the alley behind the Eastside Arts Alliance. Women are scrubbing white fabric in shallow galvanized buckets. Amara is keening with her arms full of white, washed fabric.

V

My mother’s mother was very beautiful as a young woman and engaged to marry a man who “left her at the altar.” This was in a small town, and the shame of it was known by all. So, a week later, after meeting a man in the street, she married him and put that shame behind her. That was when the real pain came. They had five children – four sons and my mother, the middle child. I’ve been told that when the older sons could hear their father coming home from a night of drinking, they would awaken their mother and run her out into the woods to save her from being beaten.

I never knew that grandfather. He abandoned the family when my mother was 18. While he never beat his daughter, she carried the burden of his brutality and her mother’s fear. We’ll continue to carry it.

That abuse is small in the context of women who have lived through trafficking. The 2019 episode “Slowly, Cautiously,” is a grief ritual, to “quell the voice of familiarity with terror and tap into a different voice of the ability to move through.”

On film, a nurse is speaking of the heart-breaking aspect of her job, the business part of it, the need to move quickly, to cut corners, to get the vitals, and move on to the next patient. She describes the work as, “Don’t do a full assessment, but make it look like you did a full assessment.” I can only imagine what she would say now, feel now, during the pandemic.

I’ve lost my sense of who is an “artist,” and who is a woman who has practiced the

rituals, the songs, the movement alongside the artists. The women on film say they are beginning to find a space to breathe and be well. One says that the process has taught her how to love because it has taught her the work it takes to adjust and find balance in one’s life again.

One speaks of being in the mystery and learning to be comfortable in the dark. Women appear in butterfly forms. I think the woman says – and I love this quote but may not have it right – “When I’m a calendar...I’ll never become a butterfly.”

She also says, “I am a caterpillar moving cautiously/slowly/cautiously slowly....”

In the middle of my journal is this note: “Those who walk with the dead and the sea cannot fear either one.”

VI

I’ve been intimidated to write about this work. That may be because I’ve grown so fond of Ellen and Amara and want to get it right, and I am humbled before them.

Given the frame, the ambition of *House/Full of Black Women*, it could fall in upon itself. Its leading to the women’s being healed could appear contrived. How does it not? I was raised to believe that simple ideas were elegant ideas. If that’s true, a place where 180 women sleep is one of the most elegant notions I’ve met. And *House/Full* is a container for such a range of material, from the nurse’s interview to a ceremony to a chant to a folk song.

It’s created a place where spirit, art, place, and social justice come together to save lives. Nothing less matters.

FRANCES PHILLIPS is program director for the Arts and Creative Work Fund at the Walter & Elise Haas Fund. Prior to her work in philanthropy, she was executive director of Intersection for the Arts. A poet, she is the author of three small press books.



PHOTOS BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

WITNESS AND ARCHIVE

BY MARVIN K. WHITE



There, don't nobody question you sittin' between another woman's legs when she plaitin' your hair. There, she ain't gotta be "My cousin. My roommate. My soror." She can be "My baby." She can be, "My familiar." She can be, "My Harriet. My Nina. My Audre." She can be, simply and finally yours. There, not every woman undressing you with her eyes is somebody you gotta beat down or measure up. There, if you can just get back there, everything is "it's just how women are here."

There, ain't a devil or a God telling you how wrong your urges are. There, ain't no preacher tellin' you what God want you to put in your thing. There, what comes out of your thing is not a lie, it's a life. There, it's the potential of life. There, it's the reminder of life. There, it's the remainder of life. There, ain't no bottles of gin reparative therapy. There, ain't no hair falling out. There, ain't like pulling teeth to get a honest answer and ain't no question you should acquiesce to someone else, the answer to yourself.

There, we machetes. There, no red tape. There, cut to the chase. There, freedom close to the quick. There, we pencils. There, we archive and witness. There, our bodies journal. There, every name of every women called is an offering to every woman. There, there, there, ain't no fallen woman. Just a woman pushed down when she wasn't looking.

There, she ain't askin' you to love him, make a baby with him, or make his dreams your dreams. There, you ain't even gotta be up under him in a way where the rest of the world know you taken. There, he took you. There, he took you there. There, you don't get taken if you don't take. There, is a way. There, is something about you. There, there girl. There, we are.

There, we are conjoined. There, we not bled. There, we blood. There, we are made family, we are a family. There, we choose who. There, we a spice rack. There, we are a blended family. There, now. There, can be more than one woman in the house. There, we can open each other's pots. There, we don't say what's missing. There, we say what's missing

out. There, to let it all go to seed, to return to stillness, to knowing stillness not being the same as waiting or feeling overlooked or impatient, or inanimate, or thinking born better than formed, there, wanting to be born so bad, and forgetting that nothing in the earth is imprisoned or gone, there, is to stand up to God and say, possibly, impossibly, "I ended up a black woman. Better yet, I ended up in a House/Full of BlackWomen. And I won."

MARVIN K. WHITE, MDiv, is currently serving as the Full-time Minister of Celebration at GLIDE Church in San Francisco. He is a graduate of The Pacific School of Religion, where he earned a MDiv. He is the author of four collections of poetry: *Our Name Be Witness*; *Status*; and the two Lammy-nominated collections *last rights* and *nothin' ugly fly*. He was named one of YBCA's "100" in 2019. He is articulating a vision of social, prophetic and creative justice through his work as a poet, artist, teacher, collaborator, preacher, cake baker, and Face-book Statustician.



PHOTOS BY ROBBIE SWEENEY

RESTORATION THROUGH TRANSFORMATION

BY ZAKIYA HARRIS



Let's face it. Pretty much everything, as we know it, has changed. So much of what we believed to be true and invested in is collapsing before our very eyes. As we pivot away from extractive systems of capitalism, built on false foundations of white psychosis and patriarchy, a new set of tools is required to support us in navigating the shift and bringing our true gifts to the world. The good news is, as BIPOC communities, many of these tools are already embedded within us as part of our ancestral legacy and tradition—IF we choose to activate them.

Being a member of [#HouseFullofBlackWomen](#) has been part of my ritual of activation. It has given me the space to heal, to be seen, and to reconnect to the wisdom of who I truly am. Little did I realize when I joined this project years ago, how much I would rely on this tribe for support during these times. It continues to buoy my spirit and remind me that we are not performing, we are midwives, ushering in the greatest paradigm shift of our lifetimes, conjuring on behalf of Mother Earth, who we owe so much to but have given so little. This is what has inspired this video, to remind people that although death is inevitable it doesn't have to be the end. Let the rebirth begin!

[Zakiya Harris](#) affectionately known as Sh8peshifter, is a woman who has truly charted her own path in life. A Cultural Architect, she has over 2 decades of experience working at the intersections of Art, Activism and Spiritual Entrepreneurship. Zakiya is the co-founder of nationally recognized projects Impact Hub Oakland, Grind for the Green and a past Fellow of Green For All and Bold Food. Currently she serves as the Co-Founder + Senior Advisor at Hack the Hood, an award-winning non-profit that introduces low-income youth of color to careers in tech by hiring and training them to build websites for real small businesses in their own communities. Zakiya is the published author of *Sh8peshift Your Life: The Creative Entrepreneurs Guide to Self Love, Self Mastery and Fearless Self Expression*.

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we sorrow

we shot as we run like deer as we run

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we drip

we die

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we blood

we by every mean

we reckon the wrought

you wreak

we lay in wait

we know you

can't escape

we all mighty

we ran free

we forced to flee

we ain't your boy

we black girl

joy

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we the pearl

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We was originally published in Hole In The Head Review

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ODC

[The ODC Healthy Dancers Clinic](#) is offering an array of online workshops, panels, and pre-recorded videos for free throughout September in celebration of the Month for Dancers' Health.

BALLET FOLKLÓRICO MÉXICO DANZA

Originally an after-school program intended to provide a safe place for children, [Ballet Folklórico México Danza](#) has flourished for nearly 30 years by encouraging students to love dance and appreciate Mexican culture.

TANNERY WORLD DANCE & CULTURAL CENTER

[Diaspora Performance Project](#) seeks to support a thriving community of Artists of the African Diaspora, providing opportunities for performance, the development of new work, and deep & meaningful connection to the community. Offers online classes from Diaspora Artists.



AFRO URBAN SOCIETY

[Bakanal de Afrique 2020: 'Mi Soon Come'](#)

Fri, Nov 6-Sat, Nov 28, where Pan Afro Urban artists converge for a month-long, virtual festival exploring the significance of transportation in communities and culture.

RoCo

[RoCo hosts 175 classes weekly](#) at their two locations in Marin County including an entirely Outdoor Program for Youth through November 21st and Online classes for Adults taught by the Bay Area's finest instructors.



PHOTO BY KG PHOTOGRAPHY



ZACCHO DANCE THEATRE

Celebrating 40 Years: Zaccho Dance Theatre presents performance work that investigates dance as it relates to place, while also offering community engagement, arts education, and youth performance programming.

PHOTO BY STEPHEN PHILLIPS



PHOTO BY FU MINA



WORLD ARTS WEST

NEW INTERVIEW SERIES

In partnership with Eastside Arts Alliance and NAKA Dance Theater, Live Arts in Resistance, focuses on social justice work. Season 2 of Living Traditions, Exploring Dance Beyond the Performance in October, introduces artists beyond Northern CA.



PHOTO BY ANNIE THISTLE

Performing Arts Academy of Marin

PAAM provides dance, theater arts, youth musicals and summer programs that equip young performers with a well-rounded arts education and confidence.



PHOTO BY AMY DRANE

Academy of Danse Libre

Academy of Danse Libre performs a variety of pieces from the 19th and early 20th centuries in authentic period attire.

A. SPEARMAN & CO.

A. Spearman & Co. is a contemporary fusion dance company that seeks to design and create unique vocabularies of performance.



PHOTO BY ARIS BERNALES

DIABLO BALLET

2020-21 season subscriptions now available; featuring *The Nutcracker Suite*, *Coppélia*, *Carousel (A Dance)* and new works.

TAMALPA INSTITUTE

Sep-Nov 2020

Online workshops introducing the Tamalpa Life/Art Process. Use movement, drawing, and writing to tap into art's symbolic language to explore current life themes and generate new resources. Find more details on their calendar.

CONTACT IMPROVISATION-INSPIRED WEEKLY SCORE & JAM

Organized by Zach Pine
Saturdays at 9:45 am-11am.

Creativity, playfulness, physicality, and connection. Breakout rooms to facilitate interaction.



TURFinc

Empowering youth through the movement and culture of TURF dancing.

[LEARN MORE](#)



PHOTO BY @BHOLOCREATORS

Los Lupeños de San José

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS IN PHOTOS



PHOTO COURTESY OF CASHION CULTURAL LEGACY ARCHIVES

LIKHA PILIPINO FOLK

Celebrating Philippine Culture and Tradition



LIKHA-Pilipino Folk Ensemble Presents Hariraya: Kasanduayan; Pangalay; Kuntaw Kabkab



LIKHA-Pilipino Folk Ensemble Presents Kanyaw



LIKHA-Pilipino Folk Ensemble Presents Semba



LIKHA-Pilipino Folk Ensemble Presents Binanog-Banog



KIMIKO GUTHRIE

Congratulations to Dandelion Dancetheater co-founder Kimiko Guthrie on her debut novel [Block Seventeen](#) — a timely tale shaped

by Guthrie's mother's experience of internment during WWII.

ALICIA THE DANCE DRAGON SLAYER

Offers wildly fun and exuberant [Diaspora Dance classes](#) (outdoors and online) as well as transformative coaching for anyone who has ever experienced doubts or fears about dance.

SOUL SANCTUARY DANCE

Sundays at 11am-1pm.

[Live Interactive Online Soul Sanctuary Dance](#). A weekly uplifting gathering featuring wide-ranging music, freestyle movement, and connection.

CHOREOGRAPHERS & COFFEE

[A weekly, virtual meet up](#) for choreographers of all genres, at any stage in their career to engage in conversation. C&C offers a place outside the studio where artists from around the world can stay connected and offer support.

CID PEARLMAN PERFORMANCE

Congratulations to Cid on being awarded a [Rydell Visual Arts Fellowship](#) at Community Foundation Santa Cruz.

DESTINY ARTS CENTER

Inspiring and igniting social change through the arts, [The Black \(W\)hole](#) is a healing, celebratory film experience which mourns and honors the lives of six young people who died in and around Oakland before the age of 32.

MONA KHAN COMPANY

[Their virtual doors are open](#). Classes and workshops for kids, teens and adults as well as custom classes and packages for groups and corporate events.



IN THE GROOVE STUDIOS

Bay Area's Top Hip Hop Dance Instruction and more.

[Visit their website](#) for news and updates



PHOTO BY JOE GROCO

LINES

One for You, One for Me Program:

Students can add a few dollars to their own paid tuition to add to a "bank" of paid classes for others who don't have the resources right now. No applications, no hassle, [just make a request](#).

ANTOINE HUNTER

Artist and Arts Activist who established platforms for Deaf and Hard of Hearing artists through [Urban Jazz Dance Company](#) and the annual Bay Area International Deaf Dance Festival. With DropLabs, he recently released innovative shoes that allow people to feel music.

FOLK DANCE FEDERATION OF CALIFORNIA

Monthly Online Folk Dance Parties

[The Folk Dance Federation of California](#) promotes the art and education of international folk dance.



OUT OF TOUCH

by ROWENA RICHIE

Part 1

“Secretly I want to be ‘Amma’ a.k.a. ‘the hugging saint,’ the Indian spiritual leader who goes around the world giving hugs to millions of people. I want to midwife life after COVID-19, to bring people back into their bodies.” —APRIL 20, 2020

When I wrote that in my journal in mid-April I was already grieving the loss of touch. I had no idea we were going to be “out of touch” for so long. No idea just how traumatic the loss of touch would be for so many. I never expected to mourn my dad’s death from cancer against the backdrop of a pandemic.

Now it’s mid-August. Last night was the first time since shelter in place that I hugged someone outside of my family bubble: Ryan Tacata, a collaborator and dear friend. Ryan, Erika Chong Shuch and I “Zoom” several hours a week. We have a performance-making collective called For You that has been very active remotely. But we have not been in the same physical space since February. Today Ryan is moving to Vancouver, British Columbia to start a new job. Last night Erika and I went to Ryan’s to wave goodbye. We gathered outside. “Can I have a hug?” Ryan asked through his mask. “Fuck yea,” I exclaimed through my mask, adrenaline rushing in.

This morning when I cheerfully announced that I hugged Ryan I was met with head-shaking disapproval from my husband Ed. To be fair, Ed adores Ryan. This wasn’t about Ryan, this was about Ed and I not always being on the same page when it comes to “proper” coronavirus behavior. A few weeks ago we went on an off-the-grid retreat. We gave each other calming massages. We took a long, sunny walk in a nature preserve where we encountered a group of ponies. A gray pony approached us and rubbed its muzzle against my outstretched hand. I patted the pony’s cheek. Then it bent down and bit my ankle. No blood, but totally alarming. I shielded myself with the umbrella I’d been carrying as a parasol and we swiftly backed away.

“Perhaps a fitting metaphor for the virus,” Ed later remarked. “Don’t get too close or it might bite you.”



PHOTO BY ERIKA CHONG SHUCH

Part 2

Eli Nelson and Christian Burns were two of the last people I danced with pre-pandemic. It was during the Practice, an improvisation group that Christian formed. I go back to that last Practice often in my mind:

Six inches above the floor, my face exploring Christian's palm / Draping backwards over Eli's shoulder, one leg in the air / A teetering tango with Eli, falling into and catching each other / Breathing back-to-back with someone / On all fours, a hand between my scapula.

I reached out to Christian and Eli by email. I wanted to know if they were missing touch, too.

Christian, a faculty member of the LINES Ballet degree and training programs, responded that he has had no dance-based contact with anyone since COVID. But he has taught virtual classes and has experienced what he calls “direct inner contact” with students. For Christian, the sessions have been a way to help his students—and himself—adapt to these touchless times. “Teaching via distance has been strangely interesting and felt vital to support my students in such a time of need,” he said. He calls this remote teaching and inner contact a kind of “emotional triage.”

“All the moments of connection that we take for granted carry more significance now,” Eli, a dancer, composer and University of San Francisco educator, replied. “Someone brushed by me in the supermarket and my body had a mixed series of reactions: revulsion, upset, enjoyment, fear, nostalgia.”

Eli and I often join online Gaga classes taught by James Graham. Gaga is the movement language developed by Ohad Naharin/Batsheva Dance Company in Tel Aviv, Israel. Gaga classes are guided movement experiences that incorporate a lot of imagery. I jot down things James says that I want to hold onto, like these images featuring the touch of natural forces or inanimate objects:

Slide your skin inside of your clothes / Dust can land on you / Grab yourself by that tight swimsuit / Move into air you've never touched before / Feel the sun on your back / Smear butter / Get taken by the wind.

Though James’ movement practices have fed him—and his Gaga classes have fed us—James shared via email that he was mentally and physically “hyperaware” of not touching or being touched for the first three months of shelter in place. He has been doing “research” on his own: could he feel touched by a loving smile through Zoom, or plants, or other living things he resides with?

James told me a story about our fundamental need for touch. Years ago, James wrote, doctors believed that not touching premature infants was best—to protect them from adult germs.

“They were kept in isolation in their protective beds,” James said. “But they noticed that babies in one wing of the hospital were living and the babies in the other wing were dying. They studied it and tried to find a reason until a nurse said, ‘It’s probably Anna.’ A local grandmother who would volunteer by walking around cooing and loving and touching the babies she walked by.”

James explained that Anna didn’t have time to go to the other wing to provide the same loving touch. The babies in that wing “were literally dying because of lack of touch,” James wrote.

I was so struck by James’ story that I looked into the topic of babies and touch myself. Indeed, [a study earlier this decade](#) found that premature infants who receive skin-to-skin contact instead of incubator

care tend to thrive; this included having healthy responses to stress. Untouched babies were more likely to develop problems as children, including depression.

Eli and Christian are both dads, grateful to have their kids to be physical with. But for Eli, “That type of contact is qualitatively different from the informed touch that goes hand in hand with good Contact Improvisation. That’s a big piece that’s missing for me.”

Part 3

Erika’s mom Suk lives a few miles away from Erika’s family and is like a third parent to her 7 year-old grandson Wakes. On the phone Suk told me, “Our family is very touchy with Wakes.” Quarantine prohibited Suk from seeing Wakes. So, Wakes made a pillow in the shape of his hand that attempted to satisfy Suk’s loss of all physical touch. Suk would place her hand on top of Wakes’ pillow hand and try to feel him. “Touch is like her first language,” Erika said.

Erika was afraid it was not only hurting Suk’s heart not to see Wakes, but her mind was getting cloudy. “Humans have brain pathways that are specifically dedicated to detecting affectionate touch,” Johannes Eichstaedt, a social scientist and psychology professor at Stanford University explained in [“How to Hug During a Pandemic,”](#) an article that appeared in *The New York Times* in June. Eichstaedt laid it bare: “Affectionate touch is how our biological systems communicate to one another that we are safe, that we are loved, and that we are not alone.”

Not only has Suk spent much of the pandemic unable to touch Wakes, but unable to see him. She doesn’t do Zoom or FaceTime. And the toll has been high. Suk told me that when she couldn’t be with Wakes physically, “I would tend to not get dressed and just sit. Seeing Wakes and Erika is the only thing I have going right now.” Suk’s struggle brought into focus just how many elders are suffering from lack of contact.

The two tenets of For You are to bring strangers together for shared, intimate encounters, and to think of performance making as gift giving. Erika, Ryan and I wondered how we could pivot our methodologies and resources to serve vulnerable elders like Suk during the pandemic.



PHOTO BY ERIKA CHONG SHUCH

THE TWO TENETS OF FOR YOU ARE TO BRING STRANGERS TOGETHER FOR SHARED, INTIMATE ENCOUNTERS, AND TO THINK OF PERFORMANCE MAKING AS GIFT GIVING.

With awareness that many elders are struggling with isolation For You launched “Artists & Elders.” We pair one artist with one elder — from granddaughter to grandmother, young artist to mentor, both the familial and new—for a bit of virtual conversation and creative connection. We ask the artist to create a gift for the elder specific to what emerges from their exchange. Since May we’ve launched 40 dyads and are in the planning stages with organizations in Chicago and Oregon to generate Artists & Elders in their communities. For now we are indexing these poetic exchanges on [our website](#). We dream about these gifts coming together, in some form, on the other side, as a portrait of our creative mutual-aid.

Part 4

According to the article “How to Hug During a Pandemic” the safest thing to do is *not* hug. But if you’re like me, you *need* a hug. In the article aerosol scientist and airborne disease transmission expert Linsey Marr spells out the safest way to do that:

Wear a mask / Hug outdoors / Try to avoid touching the other person's body or clothes with your face and your mask / Don't hug someone who is coughing or has other symptoms / Point your faces in opposite directions — the position of your face matters most / Don't talk or cough while you're hugging / And do it quickly / Approach each other and briefly embrace / When you are done, don't linger / Back away quickly so you don't breathe into each other's faces / Wash your hands afterward / And try not to cry. Tears and runny noses increase risk for coming into contact with more fluids that contain the virus.

I visualize hugging Ryan this way, though in reality I did not. My neck gets stiff, and I feel anxious and robotic just thinking about the scientifically sanctioned style. Now I visualize the hug I actually gave Ryan, cheek to cheek, and I can feel the warmth rising to my face. When you visualize your movement with the same intentionality, and in the same amount of time it really takes to execute an action, that’s called motor imagery. According to functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) measurements, when you’re in this dynamic state the same brain circuitry, including those areas responsible for the emotions you are expecting, light up. Meaning, we can actually strengthen and stimulate our hug circuitry by imagining real hugs.

Part 5

To Have To Hold is the most beautiful performance art piece I’ve *never* seen. Except in my imagination thanks to an evocative description by its Arkansas-based creator Cynthia Post Hunt. Cynthia told me about her performance when Erika, Ryan and I were in Arkansas last fall developing [First Things First](#). In *To Have To Hold* Cynthia lies passively, eyes-closed, carried supine, or cradled in the arms, or slung over the back of members of the curious public. [The work asks:](#) *Whose job is it to care for this body? Yours / Mine / Ours / Other?* I fantasize about gathering personal protective equipment and volunteers to ritualistically remount this piece, me in the role of held, me in the role of holder.

Whose job is it to care for this body? All of these: *Yours. Mine. Ours...*

Other: “Every night I wait until my dog is exhausted and then use her as a weighted blanket,” Rose Huey wrote me. Rose is an Oakland-based artist and educator I invited to share her thoughts about touch in the time of corona. She gave anecdotes about isolation and taking advantage of her “pooch” and professional resources. Last week, after tweaking her knee, Rose got professional body work for the first time since March (“outside, masked, lots of hand sanitizer”). She felt vulnerable after not having been touched this way in months. She felt “out of practice.” “At one point I worried that I was ‘doing it wrong’—as if it were possible for me, laying on a massage table, to receive body work incorrectly.” On the drive home all the emotions and sensations she wasn’t able to feel in the moment rushed in. She felt “the joy of having someone...help heal me.”

Part 6

My dad had this epiphanic vision a few days before he passed, like something from a Gaga class: a silk scarf slowly floating down and completely covering him. He lowered his hand fluttering his fingers gently to illustrate. “Total healing,” he said when I asked him over FaceTime what it meant. He wanted us to bring him a silk scarf to the hospital. Mom and I put one in a plastic bag with his name and room number on it and dropped it off at the front door of the hospital. Because of COVID we weren’t allowed to visit him. The silk scarf ended up symbolizing the permanent kind of “total healing.” Leaving the bones on the earth.

But he didn’t go alone or untouched. His attending nurse Stephen put his job on the line to let us all into the hospital— my mother, my parents’ pastors, my brothers, their wives, siblings, in-laws, grandchildren — my dad receiving us all like Amma, “the hugging saint,” to give *us* the comfort of hugging him goodbye. He squeezed my hand so hard I was wincing, but I knew it was the last time so I didn’t want it to end. We had the privilege of receiving the touch of Dad’s last breath.

And maybe that’s the thing that has been so hard about coronavirus. We didn’t know it was going to be the last touch or hug or dance or time or trip. We still don’t know when it will end.

As shelter in place wore on Suk worried that Wakes might have outgrown hugging her. Four months into shelter in place, after gradually introducing safely distanced visits with masks, Suk and Wakes had their first hug. Erika captured it on video. I was so moved watching it. I’m getting goosebumps now remembering it. From the second they spontaneously roll into each other on the mat where they have been playing 6 feet apart, Wakes chirps with joy, “The first time we’ve gotten to hug in a long time!” He beams, arms slung around Suk’s neck. Suk laughs and hums and squeezes him long and tight to make sure she’s not dreaming.

Coda: [Watch the Artists & Elders](#) “gift” that emerged from the exchange between Suk and filmmaker and dancer Gabriel Diamond.

ROWENA RICHIE has been a dance theater-maker and performer in San Francisco for 25 years. For 19 of them she has been collaborating with Erika Chong Shuch. Rowena also writes essays about dance and leads senior fitness classes. She recently completed an Atlantic Fellowship for Equity in Brain Health and is working on a series of projects that promote positive aging.

How Much Should I Pay?

by KATIE TAYLOR

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN To pay for the things that you value?
On this topic, I'm full of questions and have no answers.**

Since [Danspace](#) (where I teach and work) launched virtual zoom classes, we've offered a variety of payment options, always including "no one turned away for lack of funds." The priorities of both the school's director and owners have both been to keep paying our faculty and staff as we were before the shelter-in-place order. We don't require any payment to access the classes. Even with the option to not pay, every single student has paid something, and many have paid more than what we've asked as a way to support our school and teachers. Zoom dance class doesn't work for everyone, but of the students we continue to see in class, nearly everyone has mentioned the value and benefit they have received from class. I have been incredibly moved and grateful for all the support and engagement we've had during this time.

[Mary Armentrout](#) moved her Feldenkrais practice online shortly after the shelter-in-place order. Those offerings have been available at an "extreme sliding scale" with a suggested range. In her email with class information, she offers the option to pay more to cover folks who can't pay or can't pay as much. In participating in those classes, I've paid toward the upper end of the range (\$20), because I can afford to pay \$20 for class, I would have paid \$20 (and maybe more) if attending the same offering in person, and because I so value and benefit from Mary making these available while we're all at home. Is \$20 the right amount? Should it be more? What amount reflects the value of the benefit I get from this experience?

The things that have been saving me during shelter in place have been movement practices that I wasn't normally engaging in during the "time before" shelter in place: a 30 minute twice per week [tabata class](#) led by a friend who is also a personal trainer and a [Bollywood cardio class](#) led by a friend of my aunt's who is just starting her dance teaching practice. Both of these started as "pay what you can, if you want" (the Bollywood class is now \$11 per class). I normally pay what I consider a pretty low class rate (\$15). If it's only me at the tabata class I pay \$20 since it feels like a private training. Mel (the trainer/teacher) joked that whatever money I pay goes right back to Danspace anyway.

My sister and my aunt both came to Mel's class. Both asked "how much should I pay Mel?" I still don't know the answer to that, so I told them what I paid and said "but you can pay whatever you can/want to.

She doesn't have a recommended price." So how do you decide how much to pay?

On Saturday, June 27 I attended dNaga's free showing of their dance film [Mom & Me: The Warrior Heart](#). The audience was very engaged (the Q&A went on for a long time, with thoughtful questions and reflections about what mothers of all kinds have given to us). I was incredibly moved by several parts, and had this show gone as planned (in person, in May, at Laney College), I would have either been in attendance as front of house or I would have paid for a ticket. So when a link was dropped in the chat to donate, I paid a ticket price plus a little more (\$25). Was that the "right" amount to contribute? Given the incredibly hard work, additional costs to produce a film (in place of an in-person performance), what is the amount that honors the labor, the artistic practice, and the value I got from being able to experience it?

In all of these instances, I am also in relationship with the folks I am paying. Does that inspire more thoughtfulness about how much I should pay? Does it matter that they also pay me for my work in different instances? Does it matter that we all get value from getting to share our work with one another (while we try to support ourselves financially with it)? What would it mean to always be in deep consideration about what I can afford and what it's worth when paying for anything?

I haven't lost any income during this time, which I think is an important context for my thinking and considerations. Dancers' Group has been incredibly supportive of staff and my teaching practice shifted, but my overall earnings from that have stayed the same. Some summer income/pick-up teaching gigs didn't happen, but I have savings to support that loss for this year.

None of my decisions, behaviors, or thinking is meant to be prescriptive or taken as a recommendation. This is simply my thinking and choices in this time, at this time. I assume it will continue to evolve as I learn more and think more about how to try and line up my values within a capitalist system that demands that we show how much we value something by what we're willing to pay for it.

KATIE TAYLOR is a dancer and teacher on faculty at Danspace in Oakland, and she manages the Adult Division program, supporting brand-new, returning, and experienced adult students in their dance education. In addition, Katie is also the associate director at Dancers' Group.

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