



photo: Kristy Janvier taken by Lilla-Belle Jedynak



RE - CENTERING / MARGINS:
MiBC Creative Residency 2019

Essays by Natalie Tin Yin Gan, Emily Dundas Oke, and Simran Sachar
Edited by Sadira Rodrigues

*Made in BC - Dance on Tour gratefully acknowledges our privilege to be able to work and create on the traditional and unceded Coast Salish territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.
Thank you.*

*Made in BC - Dance on Tour aimerait reconnaître que cet événement aura lieu sur les terres ancestrales et non cédés des peuples Musqueam, Squamish et Tsleil-Waututh.
Merci.*

RE - CENTERING/ MARGINS: MIBC CREATIVE RESIDENCY 2019

A residency that centres the practice and concerns of BIPOC artists expands our collective understanding of dance as well as of ourselves. -Lee Su-Feh

Re - Centering/ Margins: MiBC Creative Residency project provides opportunities and professional development for emerging dance artists of colour to create contemporary performance works.

Eric Cheung, Kristy Janvier, and Zahra Shahab were chosen in a competitive process by a Selection Committee of established artists: Justine Chambers, Rohit Chokhani, Lee Su-Feh, and Starr Muranko.

Each of these emerging artists were asked to invite established artists to mentor them with creative feedback to help them realize their artistic visions. Mentors include: Starr Muranko with Emily Solstice Tait, Kimi Clark, Maura Garcia; Tara Cheyenne Friedenber and Elizabeth Milton; Cristina Bucci and Maiko Miyauchi.

The Made in BC BIPOC residency acknowledges how critical it is to explicitly support BIPOC dance artists within our community. The residency both holds space and provides visibility for marginalized artists. - Justine Chambers

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For more info:

madeinbc.org/2019-creative-residency/

NOTE

Jane Gabriels, Ph.D. and ED, Made in BC - Dance on Tour

Thank you everyone for your contributions to this project.

To offer some background context -

This residency is inspired by my seven years of work producing a similar residency project in the Bronx, New York - Dancing Futures: Artist & Mentor Collaborative Residency - to support emerging dancers of colour in partnership with Pepatían and BAAD! Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance.

The residency in the Bronx has become a community-building project, contributing to dance and performance in the borough as well as supporting artists at crucial stages in the development of their works.

As the Bronx has been home for much of my artistic and professional work for over 20 years, for me personally, having a residency here in Vancouver that originates in the Bronx - a site of incredible cultural wealth and one of the poorest congressional districts in the United States - is an important connection to note and celebrate.

While Vancouver BC is very different from the Bronx, this residency project helps support Vancouver as a similarly vital site of creative incubation of new dance and performance works by emerging artists of colour (or BIPOC, Black Indigenous People of Colour - the term used more often in Canada).

There is also something interesting about linking these two very different locations across North America, this Turtle Island. We hope to build on this possible link in the future.

The writing element is something that I had added in the third year of the Bronx-based project to help support different kinds of writing - something more than reviews that would also help creatively document the dance and performance works being made.

Writers are invited into the project by the dance artists; the dancers choose who will step inside their world to connect with their creative processes. Trust is important. The writers are tasked with creating work that is not promotional, and the artists are inviting another creative person to connect with their early processes before the work is complete.

I'd like to thank Sadira for her editorial support in meeting with the writers and helping to bridge these works from personal creative interactions to public readership. In her note, Sadira mentions a quote from Eve Tuck and C. Ree. If you'd like to read more, here are details about the article: "A Glossary of Haunting" (Handbook of Autoethnography, edited by Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and



photo credit: Marisol Diaz-Gordon

Carolyn Ellis, 639–658. © 2013 Left Coast Press).

Also I'd like to thank Zahra Shahab who designed this booklet and was involved in coordinating meetings, workshops, and rehearsals for the project participants.

One beautiful synergy that emerged was how the three artists selected for the 2019 Vancouver project all happened to be originally from the Prairies. This has led to a new partnership with Springboard Performance and Fluid Festival in Calgary. With Artistic Director Nicole Mion, we are creating an exchange with these three Vancouver-based dance artists and emerging dance artists of colour in Calgary. More writers will also be invited to participate so we can grow this element of the project.

By creating *Project686km Artistic Exchange: Calgary - Vancouver*, we are helping to strengthen and create lasting connections between participating artists and diverse communities in both cities, further shoring up Western Canada as a significant place of artistic incubation for BIPOC and emerging dance makers.

Thank you for reading this, and we hope you enjoy the essays!

All the best,

Jane



EDITORS NOTE

Sadira Rodrigues

What does it mean to write *about* dance? More specifically, what does it mean to write about dance within an explicitly racialized framework? What happens when language and movement encounter each other in service of questions of equity and diversity? This is the challenge provoked by the Made in BC BIPOC emerging artist residency and showcase project that paired together three writers and three dancers in an effort to articulate both a process of making new movement work, and the weaving of language and text as a means of giving it form. Each text that follows is a record in time of this encounter, translated into fixity through language, yet attempting to hold to the iterative and unfolding nature of dance. Each text holds movement –in the rhythm and play of language, in the breaking of the textual plane, in the attempt to describe something that is meant to be experienced as an unfolding.

The three writers – Natalie Gan, Emily Dundas Oke and Simran Sachar – were invited by Zahra Shahab, Kristy Janvier and Eric Cheung to write through the development, rehearsal and presentation of new work. Over the course of almost a year they met, talked, observed, shared meals and discussed ideas. The texts are a record of this passing of time, and of the care and respect that emerged through the collaboration.

How does one write within an explicit framework of race? Is there an expectation that the writers have to reveal certain aspects of the work over others? What is the “work” of writing in a project that uses the term BIPOC (I have to reveal that I deplore this term – feel it on your tongue, taste it in your mouth, its harsh, sharp edges). As someone who is apprehended with the reach of its tentacles, I wear it on my skin along with all the precedents that follow and those to come. Terms like diversity, equity and their attendant abbreviations are meant to administrate our bodies – regulate the ways that we are to act, think and participate. They define the arenas that our work is meant to find meaning. This makes me want to resist – to find the ways that I can be a fugitive to these expectations and let another kind of work emerge – the work of care for the artist. How much can I resist interpretation, translation and explanation in favour of concealing and protecting the delicate work of process the complex questions of identity, power and performance. How can I dance the world into being?

The texts that follow provide a glimpse into this space of sharing and concealing. They reveal the care and love between the writers and dancers – not just for each other, but for the potential that the work of dance has to remain in the space of complexity and resist the oversimplification that can often emerge when questions of race are foregrounded. The texts are a testament to working through process and finding a language and form that is in itself an act of love and collaboration. They move towards what Eve Tuck and C. Ree remind us when they write: “I care about you understanding, but I care more about concealing parts of myself from you. I don’t trust you very much. You are not always aware of how you can be dangerous to me and this makes me dangerous to you. I am using my arm to determine the length of the gaze.”

Sadira Rodrigues is an educator, curator, writer and administrator. From social-profit enterprises such as artist-run-centres and public galleries, to museums, grant funding and higher education, she has assembled deep knowledge of the arts and culture sector in Canada and beyond. Over the last two decades, she has developed and delivered new programs and courses across undergraduate, graduate and non-credit curriculum. She has been the recipient of numerous grants to support both her curatorial and academic research activities. In addition to institutional roles, she has kept an independent curatorial practice, organised conferences and cultural events, lectured, and participated on numerous society boards. Her work is committed to examining decolonisation and Canadian cultural institutions. In addition to being the Director of the Sunshine Coast Arts Council, she is currently the co-director of Coppermoss, a new retreat space on the Sunshine Coast that considers permaculture, land remediation and biocolonialism, and how it may inform settler politics on the westcoast.

Sensibilities of longing

EMILY DUNDAS OKE

DANCER: KRISTY JANVIER

Photos by Lula-Belle Jedynak @lulaxbelle

“And in the belly of this story
the rituals and the ceremony
are still growing”
Leslie Marmon Silko
Ceremony
1981

I want this to be a circle. Rippled up and down the rocks and ribs pushed open wide. A circle makes space / holds it through a negative. It's the corresponding distance between all sides - my gaze unto you - that holds its form. This circle will be traced and retraced, its size measured by a dancer's arms held with fingers touching. What is the weight of this space? We won't concern ourselves with being exacting. Willfully misled by the practices of sight, we will learn that this gravity can only be learnt by the body.

Kristy Janvier's *Hide/A Site of Sacrifice* bears this rumination. A dance - installation developed over a seven month Made in BC residency, it too is cyclical. Marking a break from earlier works, Janvier's performance is an iteration of something continuous that will extend beyond this year: a series of reflections and hauntings, informed by the sensibilities of longing in and out of the studio. In this work, the Dene, English/Irish and Ukrainian dancer never carries a weight entirely her own, but a weight of relations. She is careful not to divulge the making of these relationships, but rather asks us to feel the presence of their loss.

SITE/CAVE

“For, to begin with, tell me do you think these men would have seen anything of themselves or of one another except the shadows cast from the fire on the wall of the cave that fronted them?”

Plato: *The Allegory of the Cave* (360 BC)

“I am watching the earth speak to us through you”

Kristy Janvier's notes (2019)

Kristy's work is inextricably linked to the lands she has traversed: movements across the forest being research notes, timber as citation material. She has previously used dance to explore the intersections of water, rivers, bloodlines and healing through opportunities such as the *Young Lungs Dance Exchange* in Winnipeg. Her 2018 videowork *Emerge* connects the dancer directly with a shared breath of the forest. The transformation of water is (a)kin to bodily healing. Much of her practice takes root



outdoors, residencies spent on the land working and moving collectively. She reflects that in this Made in BC residency, she often is working alone, more than usual, developing a sense of comfort of investing into an open and intimate project. [1]

In *Hide/A Site of Sacrifice*, she is able to construct a site of many places, extending her reach to birch forests and prairie road sides. One of our first encounters is the gathering of wood: a projection shows Janvier gathering the necessary poles to build a hide stretcher in warmer times. With the ability to delineate time, the gathering and the dismantling coexist. The hide stretcher is suspended in space, with its making being shown in the background. She is concerned with the life of things, that which carved space for her being and the potential of those same things being carried without being present.

HIDE

The clarity of the gathering is confused as the sightline is filled with numerous shadows. A warm light - embers, fire, sunlight - projects the dancer's form into shadows on a tarp suspended in place of a hide. Unable to see Janvier's body and left to decipher the many images it casts onto the tarp, we are confronted with the multiplicity created by the singular. The semi-transparency of the tarp lends well to this use: as her

hands approach the tarp from behind, they cast darker forms, her movements always abstracted by the embers that warm the space. How many rivers would it take to make a hide transparent?

The tarp plays a cunning trick visually. By obscuring Janvier it simultaneously conceals and brings her into fuller view, her pulsating movements growing, projected in shadows larger than her self and echoed numerous times. We have been gathered to witness this weight, which can't bear the burden of being seen. These formations take inhuman forms, hearkening the relations that a single hide can stand for. They too feel circular: continually enlarging, no movement ever rushed. Perhaps this deceit of shadows points more accurately to a certain truth. These interspecies relations and representations, fluid in form and never quite measurable, bring us to a site wherein it is the connection between, our similarity and kinship that is our constituent matter. It is a move away from objecthood and discreteness, a pleasurable "confusion of boundaries"[2]. This earth cries and it's echoes are my marrow.

"The fact that this thing we call the inhuman is never fully knowable, because of our own stuckness within humanity, makes it a kind of knowing that is incommensurable with the protocols of human knowledge production. Despite the incommensurability, this seeming impossibility, one must persist in thinking in these inhuman directions."

- José Esteban Muñoz
Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms
2015



GATHERING

Janvier emerges in front of the hide stretcher, reciting the marks. Scraper colliding unto skin, in circle. These violent marks the love letters to the hunt. She holds the bone scraper firmly but it is never directed at a hide. Her arms extend blows cascading towards her sides, propelled towards an other. Her reach extends beyond an imaginable surface. She is protecting this transference, the care for the hunt reoriented and shifted towards our gaze as convulsions toss the scraper further and further from her body. Eventually it recoils, her back arching forward, folded into herself. Care is often hard to discern as the same blows that reach into oneself are hurled at another.

Eventually she grows again, a connection to the ground always sensible. Despite the use of material props, it seems that which it given the most sensible magnitude is that which never appears. It is particularly this longing on which the earth pulls heaviest. Emerging from the ground she does a sort of jig, arms extended softly towards the earth and caressing that which is not present.

I read that missing is antithetical to cherished, loved, prized, protected; yet it is exactly those terms that tether this grief. I've learnt not to trust dictionaries when dealing with stories. When the rope is cut and weight slips into gravity, there is always a pull. Gravity reminds us it has other subjects beyond matter, the thingness of our burdens as a directional force. Janvier is concerned with who authors the cut. Implicated in simultaneous sets of sacrifices and inheritances, this work is set upon the reality that decisions are not made by us, yet we inevitably support their magnetism.

REFUSE

Janvier honours the necessity of sacrifice. Each "simple thing or complex event is linked, inextricably, to a near infinite number of others, also demonstrating the possibility of their happenings".[3] In order for one event to happen, another, possible event did not. This reality of negation underscores everything that comes into being. Janvier's work confronts our inevitable implication in this order of possibility and negation - brushing up against the sides of what wasn't realized, running her fingers along the contours of what could've been just enough to dance its absence into our space.

If, as Sartre deemed us to be, we are "condemned to be free"[4], Janvier's work makes tangible the eternal lingering responsibility of choice. It is the ability and constant need to choose our actions that condemns us to this freedom. We



inherit the stories of before, but their recurrence is always unique: the next step never determined by a being other than my own. Agency brings with it the sharp tools required to slice open new worlds, but I'm tired from carrying them, tired of the incessant reminders of responsibility. What world do we make from the earth we've met with these feet? Responsibility often slips its way out of the present, coming at us as a charge for what happened, pushing its way forward as we imagine a more robust future. It is because "the present tends to be too fresh and fluid to hold with any surety"[5] that responsibility is able to sneak by, allowing us to relax into the given moment without recognizing that responsibility is ever-present. With this freedom to choose, to act, comes the burden of being constantly committed to enacting agency. In *Hide/A Site of Sacrifice*, Janvier disposes of surety and makes a room out of the fluidity of the present. She holds the possibility of what could have been in one hand, while deliberating in the uncomfortable reality that every choice is both an act of agency and refusal. Each moment is a simultaneous affirmation towards a chosen future and a rejection of a possible alternative.

This freedom is never removed from context and inheritances. Despite the consistent enactment of agency through an infinite number of choices, we are subject to confronting the very real circumstances which act upon us. Janvier's work comes out of developing an astuteness for recognizing these

parameters, and engages directly with their agitation. Is this missing the inheritance of another's decision, thrust unto me? Janvier proposes that dissonance spurs action, that there is "a 'thing' feeling that needs to go somewhere"[6] when constraints not our own are made for us. This work, *Hide/A Site of Sacrifice* brings clarity to emotions we may carry with us, without even knowing. Yet it does so by reenacting agency. Janvier's ability to work abstractly and to transfer the very precise sacrifices she contemplates (without putting them into view) enables her to retain her story for its protection. It is a piece that ruminates on very particular circumstances within her and her communities realities, yet she is careful not to divulge, calling to mind the words of Unangax scholar Eve Tuck and artist C. Ree: "I care about you understanding, but I care more about concealing parts of myself from you. I don't trust you very much. You are not always aware of how you can be dangerous to me and this makes me dangerous to you. I am using my arm to determine the length of the gaze."[7]

CIRCLE

One of the final moments in this iteration of *Hide/A Site of Sacrifice* sees Janvier cut the tarp from the stretcher. In a certain sense, we've witnessed the life of the moose from beginning to end: embryonic displays of growth cast in shadows onto the tarp, the violent scraping of the hides, a ceremony surrounding it. Yet, the moose weaves through a larger web of interconnectedness

beyond the performance, supporting life and community elsewhere. Janvier's practice accomplishes something similar. This work is a solo performance, yet it reflects on the sacrifices of many, demonstrating that community is formed when we direct ourselves to each other.

[1] Paraphrased from a conversation with Kristy Janvier, November 14, 2019.

[2] Haraway, Donna J. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, And Socialist feminism In The Late Twentieth Century". *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Routledge, New York, 1991, p. 150.

[3] Dale, Wilkerson. "Nietzsche, Friedrich | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy". *Iep. Utm.Edu*, 2019, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/nietzsch/>.

[4] Sartre, Jean-Paul et al. *Existentialism Is A Humanism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 27.

[5] King, Thomas. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People In North America*. Anchor Canada, 2013, p. xv.

[6] Paraphrased from a conversation with Kristy Janvier, November 14, 2019.

[7] Tuck, Eve, and C Ree. "A Glossary Of Haunting." *Handbook of Autoethnography*. Stacey Homan Jones. New York: Left Coast Press, 2013, p.640.

Note: Much of my thinking on the generative aspects of refusal has been shaped by the generous work of Jeneen Frei Njootli, Peter Morin, Ayumi Gyoto, Olivia Whetung and Kimberly Phillips.



Emily Dundas Oke is an emerging curator and interdisciplinary artist. As a 2018 graduate of Philosophy and Visual Art (BA) from Thompson Rivers University, she has been the recipient of numerous awards including the Ken Lepin Award of Excellence. She is an alumni of the TRU Indigenous Knowledge Makers program, where she developed research addressing complicated relationships to land as they are embodied within the performative work of contemporary Indigenous artists. Her philosophical research in epistemology guides her interest in works that deal with the production and retention of knowledge and shared histories. Emily has exhibited nationally and internationally and has been an artist in residence at Nida Art Colony (Lithuania), Ideas Block (Lithuania) and the Kamloops Printmakers Society (Canada). She is of Cree, Métis, Scottish, and English descent and is a visitor on the unceded and ancestral territories of the x̣m̄əθkw̄əȳəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.



From the Freaky In-Between

NATALIE TIN YIN GAN
DANCER: ZAHRA SHAHAB

Photos by Lula-Belle Jedynak @lulaxbelle

It's late April, 2019. Zahra emails me with a proposition. She has been selected by Made In BC for their BIPOC emerging artist residency and showcase. She is working on a new solo dance work entitled *thaw*, and is looking for a fellow artist to write a reflection alongside her process. Zahra and I don't know each other well and this makes me feel flattered and frightened by the invitation. Her email catches me at a time when I am transposing my dancing and choreographic investigations into the practice of writing. So I leap at the opportunity.

.....

It's June when I'm first in the studio with Zahra. She greets me at the gates of WhatLab, out of breath and warm with sweat. She has been upstairs preparing for today's informal studio showing for an audience of three— her project mentor, Tara Cheyenne Friedenber, myself, and another mutual choreographer friend of ours. She tells us she's going to try some stuff for the first time. Zahra begins, heading to her laptop to run the audio between sections of explosive movement, characted embodiment, and negotiations with a giant balled-up sheet of plastic.

I watch intently while grappling with what it means to accompany an artist in their process. I scribble notes:

I experience your joy of movement
The spine as the engine of your vehicle, snake-like and languid
You dance with socks on

Zahra sits down for feedback. I try to say as little as possible. What stays with me is her downcast gaze during the discussion. I relate to the anxiety and treachery of opening up to feedback when early in the sorting, trying phase. Regardless, she receives the feedback with great interest and openness. After, we head out to chat at a cafe.

Zahra says two things that stick in my mind:

I'm in love with my dancing right now
I like to include inside jokes for myself in my work

She tells me she is investigating what arises when she is in the studio alone, and is open to letting whatever happens, happen.

.....

It's mid-July. I leave on tour to Winnipeg the day after seeing Zahra perform an in-progress showing at WhatLab at the end of her Summer residency. I recall a moment during the piece where she is standing centre-stage, clad in white. She slowly drops her gaze at what sounds like the end of the music track, only to look back up when the music glitches in and repeats the denouement. The audience erupts in a laughter that seems to surprise them. At the time, I wonder if it is surprising to her. Now, I wonder if it is one of Zahra's little jokes for herself.

While sitting at a cafe to work on this written reflection, I unexpectedly descend into a long piece of prose named after Zahra. It is a raw, mournful love poem. After a couple of weeks, I get the courage to send it to her. The poem has some uncanny similarities to the piece Zahra is making: shape-shifting celestial beings, portals that fold spaces over like cake batter. In hindsight, it reminds me of Zahra's interest in creating characters and states that abruptly dissolve, just as audiences become comfortable with them. Each time the veil is dropped [1], Zahra hopes to confront the audience with a



reminder of what they are witnessing—a performance. An act. Given her intentional pattern of creating illusion and breaking it, I become curious whether this is an additive or a subtractive gesture. Are we layering or are we shedding? Does the work leave us stirring with multiplicity and accumulation, or do we depart on a tone of nakedness after all layers have been peeled away? The fact that the performance ends with (spoiler alert) Zahra disrobing and a brief moment of her exposed shoulders, nudges me towards the latter [2].

.....

Checking in every month or so, I observe Zahra move through different phases. It's August and we meet on Commercial Drive to catch up over organic omelettes. She appears at peace, letting the work delight, letting it stump. She mentions that, as a way to make sense of creating, and by extension, existing, she has been thinking of life as a dream and that she is just bearing witness. She has this juicy analogy of feeling like a baby being pushed in a stroller. On more than one occasion, we talk about dreams and she tells me about her practice of visualization as a choreographic technique. We joke about how cost-effective it is. I notice that every time we meet up to discuss the solo, Zahra uses the word freaky. I begin to have a sense of what she means— an energetic

queering of creatures and states, and the sinewy spaces in between them.

Zahra speaks to challenge, sharing about days where she showed up to the studio with overwhelming resistance. Days where she napped. I think of my Fitzmaurice Voicework instructors who encourage students to sleep in class, pointing out that the body is able to learn and absorb information (perhaps even better) if the nervous system is resting when it needs to. Rest allows the brain to process and the body to come home to itself. For me, it is an essential part of accessing creativity. We talk about how to work when you are loathing the process, which happens for most artists, I imagine. We share similar sentiments about letting creation be informed by the fluidity of who we are. About acknowledging and giving space to the range of emotion and sensation experienced along the journey of creation. This is not only a more humane, sustainable, and anti-colonial way to work, but I think this is the only way forward. With an earth that is broken, divided, and reeling with grief, there are many things that dancing and dance-making can offer us about how to exist in the world, with one another, and with ourselves.

Zahra talks about failure, about the rehearsals that are flops. I'm

relieved by this. It is popular in contemporary dance to fetishize perfection and the myth of the contemporary dancer as machine. Although the discourse around this culture is shifting, much of dance education and the dance profession continues to celebrate this ableist and capitalist view of strength and professionalism. It is refreshing to hear about the days when Zahra finds herself unable to work past the resistance, and packs her bags to go home.

Respecting myself on days when I cannot overcome the resistance allows me to give respect for the days that I can.

Zahra mentions that rehearsals this month were paused briefly for a visit to her family in Calgary, which she says is always a rigorous exercise in knowing her boundaries and expressing them. After the ten-day emotional workout, she came home with an emboldened capacity to tackle being in the studio alone. All of a sudden, the work feels easier, and now she's starting to have fun.

.....

By the time Zahra performs the piece at KW Studios in late November as the culmination of her MiBC residency, it is her eighth performance. The solo has already premiered at Calgary's Fluid Festival where she performed for her hometown crowd, family, and former dance instructors. I scribble notes in the dark:

*the absurd is refreshing
colours bring us places
when I hatch, I think about water*

For Zahra, these showings have been less about audience response and feedback in order to revise the work, and more just a continuation of Zahra's research into these creature characters and what it feels like to inhabit them in front of others. After watching Zahra perform, I feel a bit sheepish. I don't feel like I have built intimacy with her process, and I know because it is



palpable that she has. I see it in how she sees the audience see her, and I'm struck by the difference between Zahra's first performance in July and what I'm seeing now. I jot down one last sentence:

you know we are here but you don't really care

I write this, not from a sense that I, as an audience member, feel abandoned and neglected. Instead, it is testament to the unapologetic fierceness with which I am seeing Zahra wield her queer brown mischief.

.....

It's December when we meet over coffee for a final debrief in Chinatown. At this point, Zahra has spent ten days in a research workshop of my own [3]. We feel closer—laughing about one of us having had romantic relations with the cafe barista— and from this proximity, I glean more nuance when listening and watching her articulate her thoughts. The original intentions and priorities Zahra had for the work have not wavered. She talks about cultivating and investing in knowledge-creation that is from her spirit, from this— she gestures towards her solar-plexus. We talk about mentorship and the valuable contributions of others who have been in the room, including her two mentors Tara and Elizabeth Milton. Still, I hear Zahra's focus on centering and legitimizing the logic, desires, and ideas that stem from her own brain-body. She contrasts this with a recounting of herself in dance school, a young brown girl in Calgary beginning to train at the ripe age of eighteen, and the experience of only being able to look outward and upward for approval. With a great deal of compassion for that teenager, Zahra is no longer interested in building a

performance practice that relies on acknowledgment from the outside to exist or to thrive.

I realize that what Zahra has been cultivating, in asking herself to show up day in day out, audience or no audience, recognition or no recognition, is spiritual resilience. Zahra is masterful at her own pleasure, an avid fan of her own experiences and curiosities. Although she jokes that the self-confidence that drives her practice may be naive, what I see is the burgeoning of a steadfast, sustainable career in the arts, one that is grounded in self-honour. The process of coming to one's own power is a different journey for everyone, and my own is a slow and tedious one. However, within the context of global neocolonialcapitalist tyranny that feeds off the disempowerment of BIPOC, and similar enduring, insidious legacies within contemporary dance that ask bodies of colour to divorce themselves from their own wisdom and stories in order to survive, I sit with what it means for Zahra to champion herself. I reflect on what it means for her, what it means to me, and what a gift it is to our community.

[1] I mean this both figuratively and literally. Reflective of Zahra's background as a visual artist, much of her body of choreographed works features the use of plastic and fabric as prop, set, and costume. This is a clear continuation of this research.

[2] After taking more time with this, I have since become disinterested in my previous desire to muse about the work's affect on me, or on its audience, in binary terms. It is more poignant and in the spirit of Zahra's preoccupations that I sit with the gestures of layering and shedding as simultaneous truths.

[3] Since 2018, I have been leading various research phases to workshop a new project, was it the smell of solitude, with my company, Hong Kong Exile.



Natalie Tin Yin Gan (顏婷妍) is an independent dance artist living on the unceded ancestral lands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. She completed a double degree in Contemporary Dance and International Studies from Simon Fraser University. Her research squats at the intersections of food, feminisms, race, voice, and body. She has shared work in Seattle, Vietnam, Malaysia, and across Canada. Natalie is the Co-Artistic Director of company, Hong Kong Exile (hongkongexile.com) where she explores the historical and contemporary politic around the state of Chinese-ness from a diasporic perspective. Her practice is profoundly influenced by mentor and choreographer Lee Su-Feh (batter opera performance) who instigated her dedication to Fitzmaurice Voicework. Natalie is also the Youth Program Coordinator at PuSh International Performing Arts Festival. Natalie is a late sleeper, a late riser, a late bloomer, a latecomer, and a late-night snacker. nataliegan.com



Iye From an Admirer's Eye

SIMRAN SACHAR
DANCER: ERIC CHEUNG

Photos by Lula-Belle Jedynak @lulaxbelle

Dear Reader,

The following piece is written from an extremely personal point of view, as I am Eric Cheung's partner and also a dance artist.

I wish for more dance to be written from the perspective of the people who love them the most. Please indulge me.

*Sincerely yours,
Simran*

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It is such an honour to write this piece based on the process of Eric Cheung's work titled: Iye. Before I begin, it's important that you know that I am also deeply invested in the arts. First and foremost, I am a dancer and mover of all sorts. I have danced intensively since I was three. Dance has brought me to Calgary, New York City, Los Angeles, Toronto, Vancouver, and Manila.

My love for dance has only grown stronger and to be quite honest more complicated. I welcome these complications into my practice with open arms; Dance is my husband, my wife, girlfriend, it is my daughter, my son, it is my...sun, is my water, it is my depressant, my anti-depressant, dance is my whole heart, my entire body and mind map. As a woman, I'm 22, and as an artist I am six years old, and other times I am 66 years old. It is this constant tug between living like a child while I practice my art, and at other times, having gone through so much as an artist, I feel like I have lived under 1000 moons. While practicing my art full time, I also chose to complete a Bachelor's Degree in Journalism. Writing snuck in under dance and started to reside in a small corner of my heart. I tried to fight it, because it scared me to focus on something else, even for a second. But now, even when I dance, I think of words. A few years ago I met Eric, and he happened to honour the space in my heart. Just like writing, I tried to fight it for a long time, but I couldn't because he felt important. Eric and I are in love, and he is my partner.



REHEARSAL PROCESS

Eric's latest work, *Iye*, centres on the ego and one's identity, and how this can affect one's mental health. Ego, is defined by a person's sense of self-esteem or self-importance. Eric focuses on how identity distorts, warps, and alters perceptions that an individual might have about themselves. For so long, I was unable to grasp Eric's obsession with ego. Every time I thought I had it, it slipped through my fingers. The obsession with ego feels intangible; in many ways you cannot understand someone's intrinsic view of themselves, unless of course you are them.

When I think about Eric, there is something compelling about him as a male and his desire to emit real emotion. It's a trait that is unpredictable, but needed. Eric possesses the ability to display both: a want and a need to share real emotion. In his art, this undeniable and necessary combination emerges.

Eric's presence is not heavy and it is not light. Eric is ever-changing as a human and artist, but if there is one constant in him, it is that

he is just enough. Never early, never late, but right on time. Eric's nature is gentle as he greets me with a slight graze on my shoulder, asking me how I am, how my day went and if I ate enough. Back in May 2018 I had a back injury, but never mentioned it out loud. The first day I really spent with Eric, he and I had a freestyle session where we spent the entire night dancing with another friend. As the night went on, I began grasping my back more, but still not mentioning my injuries out loud. Eric noticed and continually checked on me, making sure I was comfortable. From then on, I have only ever seen Eric as one of the most thoughtful people to ever enter my life. It's not just with me, I see Eric act this way with everyone in his life, even people he has met for the first time. It is in his blood to care deeply about people he comes across. He also brings this caring, gentle nature to his rehearsal process. It shows in his ability to separate his art-making from himself. It's as if the work is a person standing in front of him, which he so carefully addresses, asking, "How was your day? Did you eat today? And you, how are you?" The separation doesn't last long, because as he practices, I witness Eric become the work he manifests.

Eric is a popper, and in this piece, Eric has set up a distorted, sort of mirror-like installation in the studio space. The music mix created by Miguel Vasquez for Eric's piece plays in the background. It sounds repetitive, serene, distorted, and erratic. I sit in the corner with my knees up, feeling unsure of what to expect. Eric begins by walking around the space, heel-toe, touching every inch of the studio, not missing a single tile on the floor. As he loosens up, he interrupts the mix midway to start it over again. As dancers, when we warm up for a piece, or go through it before actually doing a full-run or performance, we call it a "mark-through" or "marking it." Sometimes we even put our mark-throughs on a scale of percentages to define how fully we go through it. This information is important in order to understand Eric's process.

Eric's eyes are closed while he executes short movements, his feet planted firmly while he dances with sharp, jerky qualities at about ten percent. From the start, I feel dynamics from Eric while watching his body move from these sporadic motions into something more fluid. Even though I am physically in front of him, it is like watching an ocean wave during a storm, separated by a screen.

I ask: "What are you thinking?"

He says: "I'm revisiting each section and each identity of the piece. I'm trying to understand how I feel about it in this current moment."

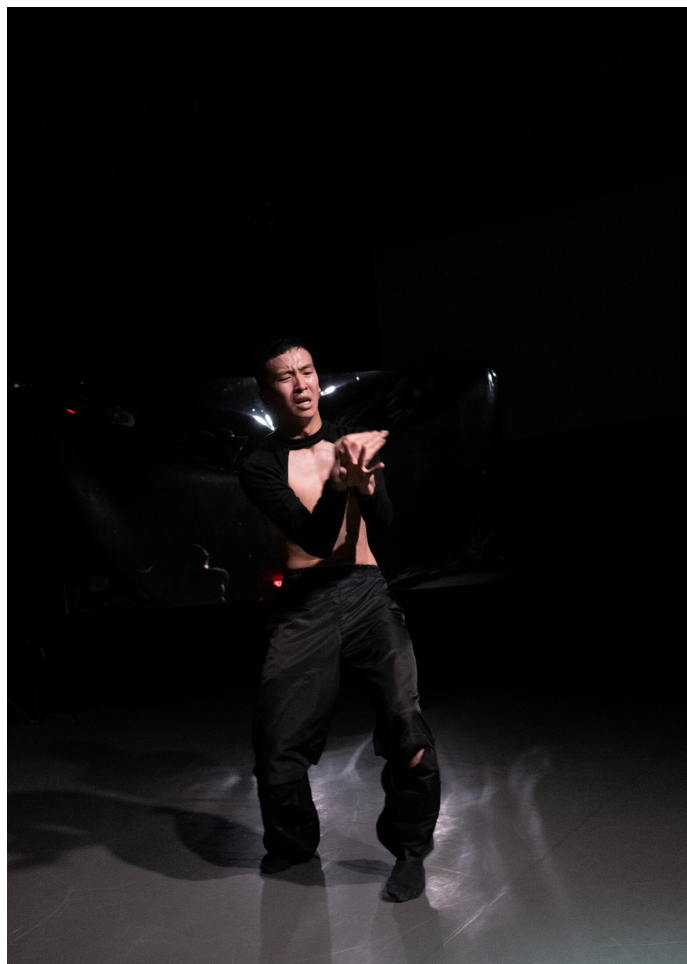
Eric comes back to his notebook to reflect on his dancing.

Eric walks to the middle of the room and begins a full run of the piece.

During this full run, I witness him go through a range of certainty versus uncertainty. There were moments during this run where Eric looked at ease, and others where he looked like he wasn't sure what home meant anymore. I know the feeling of what Eric is going through, because it's familiar; and I imagine every artist goes through this during rehearsal: the uncertainty of yourself and your work where you begin to seek validation versus the ability to be so sure of yourself that the only answer is yes. It is beautiful, so special, and something only we as artists can fully understand. Like being in on the joke. Only it's a joke without a punchline.

PERFORMANCE DAY

As I mentioned, Eric carries a unique perspective on identity and ego. His struggle with identity is complex, but not uncommon. I see Eric change who he is around different people all the time, and sometimes it hurts; but we all do it. Each of us have created several different identities for ourselves which imprint different versions of us onto different people. It is a struggle that bleeds through Eric in his everyday life with his relationships, his family, and his background. These are not different versions of Eric, but all of these



aspects simply are Eric. Eric's struggle with ego is deep, he comes in and out of having a strong self esteem versus a weak one. When he's insecure, his actions follow. I feel it every day when I interact with him, I see it in how he approaches those around him. I know this sounds personal, but it's also very real and valid. Eric is an honest artist, but I see a veil go up when his ego or fear gets in the way. It happens during the moments when his perception of himself is not what he thought it was, or when it begins to change.

This struggle with identity that Eric carries with him comes out in *Iye*. The struggle is so deep, sometimes it makes him lose control, and that conflict is clear in the work. He begins and ends in a state of awareness, but the in-between leaves Eric in a storm of his most inner thoughts and all the outer surroundings.

Witnessing *Iye* in its full form on the day of the show is something I could not have been prepared for. Although I have been through the rehearsal process with him, I felt like I saw Eric as an artist for the first time. In this performance - with me in the audience, my partner on stage - I felt like I met him as a human, flesh and bones, naked, a filled-in skeleton. It no longer felt like I was on the outside; I felt like I was in

the distorted mirror inside of Eric's mind going through each level of his identity.

Eric's foundation as a popper is evident no matter what he does, but his ability to take this foundation and rearrange it is uncanny. It bleeds through him in his dynamic, overpowering, fluid movement. His movement abilities meet the complexity and distortion of his piece. Iye is the kind of performance you work for as an audience member, the message is not spoon-fed.

Through the performance I no longer saw Eric the popper, or Eric the dancer; I saw Eric's most intimate thoughts written all over his skin. This struggle with ego that Eric has been speaking with me for the past two years finally feels tangible. I can hold it with my two hands, and it fits perfectly between my fingers. It hurts to hold, and it feels so heavy. But even after the performance, it was ringing in my ears, sitting on my chest, and letting me hold up its weight.



photo by Cheyanne Ngo

Simran Sachar is a second generation, East Indian immigrant born in Canada. Simran is currently in her first year dancing and working with Immigrant Lessons. Outside of the collective, she is in the process of creating various works through solos and short movement films. She is immersed in people, their walks of life and how she can give them a platform to tell their stories. Sim is head over heels in love with her dance and her art. She is forever a student, and never gives up. She has spent years immersed in her own authentic movement. She is truly a mover with no labels. A maker of magic, with a mind like no other, and a heart bigger than the sun. There is something about her that cannot be witnessed over a screen. It's something you have to experience in real life. Simi needs no introduction... When you're ready to open your eyes, you'll see.

2019 Creative Residency

DANCER BIOGRAPHIES



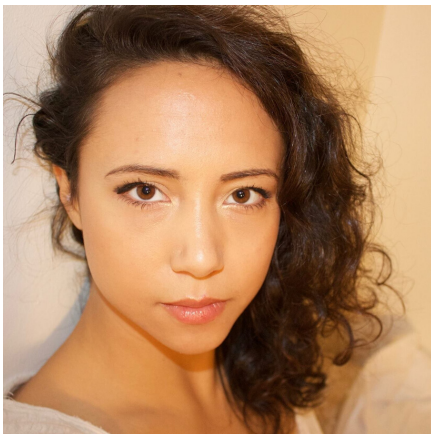
ERIC CHEUNG

Born and raised in Calgary Alberta, Eric Cheung is a Chinese born Canadian emerging dance artist. Specializes in the street style of Popping for 6 years and various other street dance styles. Originally self-taught, he learned popping from the Electric Boogaloo and many of the current innovators of the dance. Eric has also trained and competed in events across Canada and overseas to countries such as Japan, London, and Amsterdam. Recently moved from Calgary to Vancouver as a new member of Ouro Collective 5th season. Eric is performing and part taking in the new creation of "HAKO". Where he is learning a wide range of different street styles and more traditional styles of dance such as Contemporary, Jazz and Ballet. As an artist, Eric strives to always show the most authentic version of himself whenever he performs. Exposing his truths in his movement and intention in every performance. He is passionate about advancing the boundaries of street dance and its possibilities by exploring into different domains. Such as performing in Virtual Reality (VR), creating dance films, and bringing street dance to a theatre setting.

Kristy Janvier was born and raised in Flin Flon and is of Dene (English River First Nation), English/Irish, and Ukrainian descent. At the age of 18 she began working overseas as a professional actress/dancer. After 15 years of working in the entertainment industry with Disney, Kristy sought out other forms of movement and dance making work based on improvisation and interaction with bodies and space. Upon returning to Canada, she has connected to her roots through contemporary-Indigenous dance. She had an opportunity to explore her research on water, the rivers, bloodlines and healing with the support of Young Lungs Dance Exchange in Winnipeg (winter 2016-17). She has attended 8 Days in Toronto (June '17) and performed at the Aberdeen Cultural Centre in New Brunswick (August '17), a solo work-in-progress with Free Flow in Saskatoon (September '17) and Weesageechak begins to Dance in Toronto (November '17), toured as an invited guest with Dancers of Damelahamid (October-November '17). The video work from the E|MERGE artist residency at Earthdance, Massachusetts (February '18) has screened at 5 film festivals in Canada.



KRISTY JANVIER



ZAHRA SHAHAB

Zahra Shahab is an independent dance artist and choreographer living on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish people. She is a graduate of the University of Calgary School of Creative and Performing Arts as well as the Modus Operandi Contemporary Dance Training Program directed by Tiffany Tregarthen and David Raymond. Often creating costume design or installation elements alongside choreography, her work looks to the fantastical to imagine alternative queer futures and ways of being that exist beyond white supremacy. Her practice examines the multiplicity of characters that we use to adapt to the world both as a tool for survival as well as portals of expansion into ways of being that are beyond our cultures normative script. She has presented choreographic work and experimental films in Calgary at the Fluid Festival, Calgary Underground Film Festival, University of Calgary and Alberta Dance Festival, in Vancouver at Dance in Vancouver, The Dance Centre's 12 minute max, Shooting Gallery Performance, Festival of Recorded Movement, and New Works Performance, as well as in Toronto at the Toronto Dance Theatre's Emerging Voices Program. As an interpreter she has worked for Out Innerspace Dance Theatre, Company 605, The Biting School, Hong Kong Exile, Mardon + Mitsuhashi, Mascal Dance, Emmalena Fredriksson and Daisy Thompson.

www.shahabibi.com

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