

RE-CENTERING/MARGINS

2022-23

4TH ANNUAL CREATIVE RESIDENCY



Essays by:

Cole Alvis, Brenda “Bee” Kent Colina,
Aryo Khakpour, Misha Maseka

Edited by: Sarah Wong



DANCE WEST NETWORK

Image Description: A coloured front cover with three images arranged in a collage centered on the page. From left to right, we see individual profile images of Ana Sosa - a Mexican woman in her thirties, Mohammed Rashead - a Syrian person in his twenties, and Sidney Chuckas - a Black person in their twenties. Each of them pose with their arms up and folded towards them in various positions against an off-white background. Ana and Mohammed wear grey tank tops and Sidney wears a white dress shirt. Text above the images reads, "RE-CENTERING/MARGINS" in dark purple bold text, with smaller font beneath it reading "2022-23, 4th Annual Creative Residency." Beneath the images, the credits read: "Essays by: Cole Alvis, Brenda "Bee" Kent Colina, Aryo Khakpour, Misha Maseka. Edited by: Sarah Wong." At the bottom, the dark purple text reads: "Produced by Dance West Network." The Dance West Network logo appears on the bottom right corner, consisting of two intersecting yellow and purple circles within a purple spiral.

Cover photos (L-R): Ana Sosa, Mohammed Rashead, Sidney Chuckas
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Bios

Dance West Network gratefully acknowledges that our work is situated on the traditional, ancestral and unceded Coast Salish territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

Introduction

Since 2019, the annual *Re-Centering/Margins* Creative Residency has provided opportunities and professional development for three emerging dance artists of colour to continue their creative processes and produce contemporary performance works.

Dance West Network is thrilled to support the 4th annual cohort of artists including **Sidney Chuckas (he/they)**, **Mohammed Rashead (he/him)**, and **Ana Sosa (she/her)** for the 2022/23 season.

Each of these emerging artists received an artist fee, mentorship, professional development workshops and conversations, access to free studio space, as well as in-process and culminating residency showing opportunities for their dance works. This year's mentors - ie: established artists invited by the artists to provide creative feedback - include: Josh Martin and Lisa Gelley (Sidney Chuckas), Becky Izad (Mohammed Rashead), and Ziyun Kwan (Ana Sosa).

The artists were also asked to invite a writer of colour to accompany their creative process. In this booklet, edited by Sarah Wong, four writers - **Misha Maseka** (Sidney Chuckas), **Aryo Khakpour** (Mohammed Rashead), **Brenda Kent Colina "Bee"** (Ana Sosa), and **Cole Alvis** for the Ancillary Project (Marco Esccer) - crafted beautiful responses to the dance artists' works.

As the participating dance artists do not always have a writer in mind to invite into their process, we work with the dance artists and suggest possible writers - often from a pool of artists we've worked with in previous projects and/or suggestions from other colleagues (in this case, Khosro Berahmandi, recent Artistic Director of Festival Accès Asie, Montréal) - to find a writer that the artist feels is a good fit for their work.

Writers were then asked to connect with the artists' creative processes - while keeping their own voice - to create essays that support different kinds of reflection, as well as creative engagement and documentation of these new dance works.

To give some additional context: this residency is based on a similar project, *Dancing Futures Residency*, that I initiated in The Bronx, New York in 2014 as a result of conversations with several local artists. This residency is produced by Pepatián: Bronx Arts COLLABorative in a unique partnership with BAAD! Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance and supports emerging artists of color and/or Bronx-based dance artists. I began working on a doctoral dissertation

about Bronx-based artists and non-profits (available here: familiasdancingcommunity.com), and adding writers to The Bronx project in 2017 was partly the result of completing my doctorate.

The Bronx doesn't have a lot of writing about its artists, and written documentation helps connect the work with future researchers who are dependent on written documentation for their dance and performance writings. These essays are also another way to support participating dance artists and emerging writers, offering an additional platform to share insights and raise visibility for all involved. Essays are edited by another writer in the community, and are then brought together into PDF booklets available for free online as well as print-on demand. Generating more original writing also signals that a borough historically underserved like The Bronx is a place worthy of research and reflection; the artists' work is part of the larger conversations on dance and performance and if writing is the door that opens the work up to those conversations, then we will - as The Bronx often does - provide it ourselves.

I use "we" and "ourselves" to include myself in this work. Recognizing that I am a white woman with family ties to Ireland and Puerto Rico working in this predominantly Afro-Indigenous-Caribbean-Latinx/a/o borough, here's the important thing about The Bronx - if you've shown up and supported others in the borough for long enough, you become included. The dissertation I wrote about The Bronx artists and nonprofits is at least a decade past due. The "we" and "ourselves" signals involvement. And in that work - the heart of the work - is that The Bronx knows how to welcome and create community. There is a generosity at work. You gotta earn your stripes to get there, but there is an invaluable reciprocity that happens. When you discover that you have family relations buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the borough and in Puerto Rico, it increases the bond. After 25 years of work in the borough directing and now co-directing Pepatían and a dissertation with resulting published chapters about artists making work in The Bronx, my greatest teacher is the borough. And once you're in, The Bronx doesn't let go.

It feels good to be connected and interconnected with a community other than your own - to find the commonalities and the differences, and to put your shoulder to the collective wheel. There's a reason why I've been working there so long to support the artists and non-profit organizations who offer the many creatives -- from visual art installations in neighbourhood windows and drummers in the park to the stages and museum exhibitions and from the block party dancers to the open mic poets -- with pathways to connect with their hometown and with other communities. There's always more to be done to support the incredible cultural wealth that is also a deep, deep part of The Bronx's history, present and future.

My dedicated work producing writing and research in The Bronx has naturally found its way

into my work and advocacy for artists here in Vancouver. Having booklets of essays offers “strength in numbers” and signals that these areas - The Bronx and here in Vancouver - and the artists who live and work there are (in)valuable. From the outside, in comparison to other cities with seemingly outscaled, and more widely known resources for artists and communities - I’m looking at you Manhattan, Montréal, Toronto - these corners of the world might seem isolated and artistically quiet. In this humble - and why not throw caution to the winds and say - impactful project, artists from dance and writing communities connect and get to be who they are and want to be in their own context, meaning: the vibrant and bubbling creative incubators of The Bronx and Vancouver. Here, new performance work by emerging BIPOC artists is offered immediate introduction to the written canon as places worthy of research and written engagement.

If you look around - where is writing about dance and performance happening - in newspapers? Magazines? Scholarly journals? A journal attached to a dance institution? Blogs of critical writing? Academic papers? High school assignments? There are few public platforms for writings about performance and what is available is mostly reviews, promotional writings, interviews or academic essays. These kinds of writings are part of the conversation, but they don’t always offer the artists opportunity to reflect on their work for future development. They are not often written for the artist by an artist. This booklet offers writers a chance to dig into the process of the performances, along with their own questions and the larger atmospheres that emerge in these dances.

There’s also something that happens when creative writers are given the full field to entangle with dance. The writing can become unbounded in thinking about movement and the body speaking in motion. The mind becomes moved. Thoughts become movement. The writings lead into pathways that startle everyone in the room.

Here, with full creative freedom to work across genres - from more formal essays, to fiction, poetry - writers are encouraged to work in collaboration with the dance artists to find an expression that supports and documents their works best. And here we are - with four strikingly individual works encapsulating time and attention offered to creative comradeship.

Additionally, in late April 2023, we had a blast from left field due to a sudden Covid emergency which led to a cancellation of two sold-out shows (sold out meaning: 55 seats at each performance) and a reschedule (Friday October 13, 2023) for the culminating showcase of the 2022-23 *Re-Centering/Margins* artists. The writers wrote about this year’s cohort without seeing the fully realized works. In a way - as Sarah Wong points out - this booklet is its own testament to the importance of process, and the value of having documentation amidst a time that often feels very fleeting and precious.

Thank you Sarah Wong for your edits and ever-insightful additions to this Introduction!

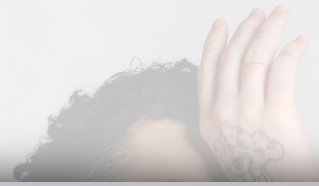
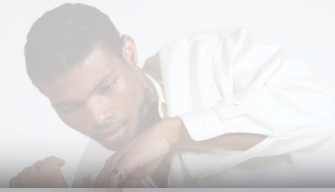
Happy reading to all,

Jane Gabriels, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Dance West Network

Producer, Re-Centering/Margins creative residency

Image Description for collage on next page: A coloured collage with the same three images that appear on the front cover. From left to right, we see individual profile images of Ana Sosa - a Mexican woman in her thirties, Mohammed Rashead - a Syrian person in his twenties, and Sidney Chuckas - a Black person in their twenties. Each of them pose with their arms up and folded towards them in various positions against an off-white background. Ana and Mohammed wear grey tank tops and Sidney wears a white dress shirt. The main collage appears in high resolution centered on the page, with the same images repeated, but faded into the background behind it.



Editor's Note:

Our Creative Resilience

By Sarah Wong

Content warning: mention of suicide

What is the linguistic existence of a fire escape?

Queer Vietnamese-American writer Ocean Vuong asks this question in a podcast reflecting on his essay titled "The Weight of Our Living," which he wrote following his uncle's death by suicide. He reflects on the way language is a double-edged sword, reckoning with its capacity both to fail and uplift, to conceal or reveal our raw humanity. Using the metaphor of the fire escape, he dreams into being an architecture designed to hold our heaviest realities. Vuong insists on the practice of writing as a form of care and persistent truth telling that make our resilient existences undeniably clear.

I don't have a fire escape, but almost every day of the COVID-19 lockdown, I spent time outside in my parent's backyard. Rain or shine, I sat on their steps with my journal or practiced tai chi in the grass, passing the time and trying to make sense of a world in collapse. There, cradled in the earth, I wrote the opening line to a poem:

*FUTURE DREAMING SEEMS IRRELEVANT
BUT THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF IT
MAKES IT THAT MUCH MORE DREAMY*

I was writing in response to a movement of dreaming as a form of resistance that I was witnessing and taking part in amongst communities of queer and BIPOC artists (one of such community spaces happened to be co-run by my dear friend and 2019 Re-Centering Margins artist, Zahra Shahab - whose presence is deeply missed and felt throughout all the work I do, including this booklet). Emerging in the conversations with these artists was a sentiment of refusal and reclamation, of charting our futures in a world that deemed us disposable. This response was one that had been brewing far before the pandemic started. It emerged from wisdom already being articulated in movement for justice spaces, but which was catapulted into a more global scale through the arrival of COVID-19 and the 2020 resurgence of Black Lives Matter.

Now, three years into a global pandemic, despite the dominant majority's eagerness to

“return to normal,” it has never been more clear that our world is in a fragile state of collapse. Historically marginalized communities, who are most severely impacted and targeted by systemic failures and injustices, know this reality more than anyone. Whether we’re speaking about the pandemic or racial politics or the climate crisis (which we also know are all interconnected issues), it feels confusing and frugal to dream of a future that isn’t guaranteed.

And yet, we do. And we have. We are still here, persisting.

To be resilient is to embrace a creativity that allows us to express ourselves beyond the margins dictated by the dominant society. The poems, dances, music, and art that have emerged from marginalized artists reacting to the current state of apocalypse are evidence of the ways our resilience dreams new forms of life into being. This creative expression is the building of fire escapes, a crafting of spaces where our bodies are safe, valued, and held.

I witnessed in awe this practice of creative resilience in the process of forming this booklet. It showed up boldly and unapologetically in the works of the 4th Annual Re-Centerings/Margins Creative Residency artists - **Ana Sosa, Sidney Chuckas, and Mohammed Rashead** - with a resounding theme throughout the works being reckoning with dystopia and the unpacking of deep grief. And then I met that creative resilience again, even more clearly through the writing commissioned for this booklet authored by **Brenda “Bee” Kent Colina, Aryo Khakpour, Misha Maseka** and **Cole Alvis**.

My deepest gratitude to Dance West Network for including me in such valuable conversations.

Here is a glimpse of what you will bear witness to in this booklet:

Bee Kent Colina paints a visceral portrait of Ana Sosa and her work “Post-Truth.” Embracing their shared Mexican heritage, they reflect upon the influences of their culture and the traditions they wish to keep versus the ones they wish to question. They discuss the cathartic practice of using art to process intense emotions and the impact of creating safe spaces for artists to come together to explore their emotional truths in collaboration.

Misha Maseka’s “mo[u]rning thoughts,” is a short fictional story inspired by Sidney Chuckas’ work “Manzanar.” Drawing from Sidney’s complex character building and detailed visual aesthetics of their choreography, Misha writes a story portraying a girl’s struggle to gain agency in her environment. She pays homage to the powerful storytelling in Sidney’s multi-faceted dance practice, and brings the reader on an unexpected adventure of embodying darkness and mystery.

Aryo Khakpour leans into the unknown as he uses his reflective essay to get to know Mohamed Rashead for the first time. What emerges is a connection that is both new and deeply familiar, a kinship emerging from shared connections to the Middle East that inevitably connects these two artists. Aryo captures in his poetry and prose the act of embodied witnessing and reciprocity that creates a web of care for candid conversations around family, homeland, and identity.

Lastly, Cole Alvis writes about Ancillary artist Marco Esccer. She reflects on the questions brought up in Marco's work about his experience of immigration and search for identity, and ponders what knowledge has the potential to be lost or gained throughout generations. Through graceful poetry and song, she speaks about the intrinsic bonds linking us who live in the present with our ancestors who came before us, and how those bonds are representative of wisdom and hope for our future paths.

This booklet holds the relationships formed between dance artists and writers who came together with absolute skill and sensitivity to process their heavy realities in community. Showing up for one another materialized a weaving of bodies, hearts, and minds that created a safe cocoon where their vulnerability could be held and acknowledged in a warm embrace. Together, they built fire escapes to hold their multiple truths, and furthermore, demonstrated how such a space is not meant to be occupied alone, but in relationship with kin. It is a space where we become visible to one another and become stronger in our resistance and our dreaming.

This booklet documents and wraps up the year-long creative processes and culminating work of the 4th annual Re-Centering/Margins artists. Yet, as I read through each of these tender and thought-provoking pieces of writing, I am left with a sense of suspense at the end of each one. This feels in my body like a confirmation that despite the concrete finality of the end of this year's residency, there is more dancing and dreaming yet to unfold. The resilient persistence of these artists refuses to be contained and so it continues to move, evolve, and spill into the future that each artist is crafting into being.

I hope you enjoy the many waves that this booklet and this incredibly talented cohort of artists will take you on, between and beyond these pages.

Consolidation: In Observation of Ana

By Brenda Kent Colina



Photo by Vitantonio Spinelli

Image Description: A coloured photograph of Ana Sosa, a Mexican woman in her thirties. Ana is captured in a backbend, twisting her mid-back to place only her right hand on the ground as she looks at the camera. She is wearing a sleeveless top with two different tones of grey panelling, the darker grey matching the colour of her pants. Her black hair falls toward the pale wooden dance floor, as sunlight illuminates the area.

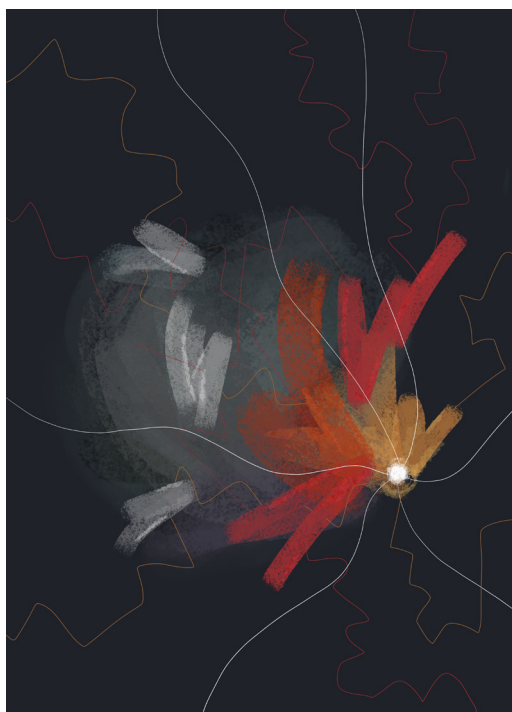
On a particularly frigid and gusty winter afternoon, Ana Sosa and I join a Zoom call to meet for the first time. We sit in our respective spaces while impenetrable grey clouds, as thick as the knit sweaters we each wear to keep our bodies warm from the cold, roll in outside my window. The world feels sleepy; its colours muted. I am gently lulled by the distant sound of eagle calls and the hum of my refrigerator.

Ana greets me with a warm smile. She is soft-spoken and palpably kind. Even through a screen, I can easily tell she is fully focused on our time together. We begin conversing in Spanish, and I immediately feel a sense of home hearing her Mexican accent. As we prepare for the interview questions, however, we switch to English in order to simplify the writing process. Evidently, this type of swift language change is something we are both accustomed to.

Like myself, Ana immigrated from Mexico at the age of eight. And also like myself, she grew up surrounded by music, dance, and the overall encouragement for artistic expression. Ana's eyes light up as she talks of her upbringing, of how her artistry stems from a culture where embracing emotional intensity, one's inner fire, is perhaps more widely accepted in comparison to much of Western society. "There is this kind of emotional tendency amongst Mexican people," Ana tells me. "That vulnerable place where we connect. Nobody is shy about crying, or being upfront about things like death and violence."

We both come from a country of vigour and contrasts – of vibrant colours and rich flavours, of revolution and celebration, of passionate artistry and incomprehensible injustice. It is also a country that despite its strong matriarchs, comes to expect a carefully crafted dance from its women, oftentimes detrimental in its rigidity. This is a dance of generosity, selflessness, grace, and of controlled composition. In many ways, it is a dance of sacrifice.

And yet, Ana stoutly pushes back against such gendered expectations, allowing her body to speak loudly – and at times even alarmingly – through its movements. Watching Ana dance reminds me of the electrical storms that roll by my aunt's home in Guadalajara. They are undeniably thrilling and unnerving to experience. Low rumbles transform into deafening cracks without notice; the sky ignited as threads of lightning jolt and weave throughout. And so, Ana lurches, dashes, and plummets. Her body contorts, expands, and seems to wrestle with unseeable beings. Seemingly without much effort, startling movements are executed with elegant precision.



Drawing by Brenda Kent Colina

Image Description: A coloured abstract drawing with a charcoal black background, with short, wide brush strokes emanating from a small white circle sitting to the right of the drawing. The brush strokes to the left of the circle are white, with the ones closer to the orb being red, orange and yellow. These same colours are also present in thin threads leading from the circle to the edges of the image, the coloured strands being jagged and the white lines having a slight wave to them.

Ana's ardent, dynamic style is a result of training under a wide range of cultures and teachers. Her mother came from the city Pachuca (where Ana later grew up), while her father grew up in a small village Acaxochitlan. Both of these places are located in the state of Hidalgo, roughly 1-2 hours by car from Mexico City. This is where she was first exposed to folk dancing, an artform highly passionate and vulnerable in nature. "Almost irrationally so," Ana adds. "It still affects the way I approach choreography – which is intense and direct. I like making things intentionally overwhelming." Later, as a young adult, Ana moved to New York City for ten years, yet another setting that was unapologetically eclectic and assertive. This formative decade added to Ana's "fire"; her driving interest in turning various complex emotions (those often seen as societally taboo) into fuel for her artwork.

"Insanity is one of them," reflects Ana. "So is grief. I want my audience to think to themselves: 'I've never seen a human vibrate this way.' I am drawn to moving in a way that disturbs, almost. To creating a creature that shocks the viewer." Through her work, Ana's past traumatic, mind-altering experiences have been pulled apart and moved through, upheld and transformed. They have been transmuted from something to fear into a tool for provocative, cathartic impact. In a world that often encourages numbing oneself from difficult emotions, Ana wants to feel deeply and make others feel alongside her. After all, so much about the process of art-making is centered around learning to navigate emotional intensities.

"It's all about energy," Ana explains avidly. "There have been a few pieces in my life that have really shaken me up. They have made me feel excited about life again. I want to be the person that ignites something inside of you."



Post Truth choreographed by Ana Sosa. Photo by Kathy Zang

Image Description: A coloured photograph of a group of five dancers of diverse backgrounds and gender expressions in a small circle in a dance studio, all of them wearing black and facing outwards from each other. The dancers stand with their feet slightly apart and their hands by their side, their eyes closed in a meditative state. All of them have their hair tied behind them, either in a ponytail or a bun, with some of them wearing different styles of tops and pants from tank tops to quarter-sleeve shirts, and straight leg pants to leggings.

This pursuit of ignition can be found in Ana's choreographic works, including her latest piece "Post Truth"; a 30-minute dance performance supported by Dance West Network's Re-Centering/Margins Creative Residency and New Works. Directed by Ana and created in collaboration with the dancers - Oksana Augustine, Caroline MacCaull, Rachel Helten, and Samantha Krystal, "Post Truth" is set in a post-apocalyptic world filled with war, natural disasters, and disease. Here, a new virus is ruthlessly infecting people, turning a once collaborative group into greed-driven, competitive individuals.

Throughout the piece, the dancers share moments of intimacy, embracing one another and visibly seeking to protect their group. As the fear spreads, however, the dancers are seen retreating in fear, violently shaking, worryingly rubbing their skin, and abruptly collapsing to the ground. Patterns are momentarily created as the dancers fall in and out of unison, fluctuating between quick, frenetic movements and slow, suspended poses. While rhythmic and hypnotic, the music feels overall chaotic and all-encompassing, never providing a moment of ease. The rapid, hollow, beating sounds make me think of urgently running through narrow spaces, of being cornered and chased down.

Despite the heavy themes of the piece, there is still an ever-present tenderness within the dancers' dynamics and interactions with one another. The countless hours of blending their movements and visions in preparation for this piece are clearly perceivable. It is a harmonizing undertone that directly speaks to Ana's role as choreographer, and how she strives to create a collaborative space that feels engaging and welcoming to all. As I sit in front of my computer screen listening to Ana describing her hopes for the dance industry, I feel myself relax more fully into my dining room chair. I too delight at the thought of stages filled with diverse bodies, where dancers are fully encouraged to tap into their frenzied, tumultuous inner worlds. It is a vision of ardent, uninhabited movement and exhilaratingly dynamic emotional expression- one that my younger self unknowingly craved.

As a young girl, I remember wearing figure-hugging white tights and leotards in ballet studios, by the barre, standing on stage. My scalp pulled tight by sharp, metal bobby pins; toes glued together under the force of pointe shoes. A teacher I was reasonably afraid of would often push my chin up, turn my thighs outward, and lift up my elbows. She would tell me to smile ("Look up! Look up! Smile!"). I remember impatiently watching the clock, counting the minutes while counting the beats.

As a young girl, I remember wearing floral dresses in churches, at fiestas, at my grandparents' home. My mother would often remind me to cross my legs, draw my belly in, and sit upright. I remember the women around me laughing loudly, dancing, and feasting. I also remember mainly being held in women's arms. The same arms and hands that cleaned, cooked, and arranged things just right. Hands that incessantly created, but were not always given the freedom to choose what they brought to life. (Would they have created in bolder, more self-indulgent ways if they could?)

Nearing the end of our conversation, I ask Ana one final question: how would you title this chapter in your life? "Consolidation," she answers. "I have been wondering who I am

in this body, how to embrace my past, and how to bring my energy back to the source. I feel the need to consolidate and cocoon inside myself.”

After some kind-hearted parting goodbyes, we exit the video call. I take a moment to come back fully into my living room, looking out into the wildly beautiful winter storm that continues to exist outside my window. Seagulls slowly pass overhead, laboriously flying against the overpowering wind. They tumble and pivot, their long calls blending with the sounds of creaking trees and crashing waves. I let my mind wander, brushing up against twirling crimson skirts and the plucking of guitar strings, hot, humid air, thick raindrops and the crack of lightning, the contortion of bodies moving in unison, the pleasure of witnessing someone lose themselves and find themselves as they dance.



Photo by Vitantonio Spinelli

Image Description: A coloured, vertical photograph of Ana Sosa mid-movement, with her left leg tucked behind her bent right leg, both of her arms reaching toward her right. Ana is standing on a pale wooden floor against a white brick wall, her long black hair falling past her shoulders and her gaze following her hands in reaching to her right. She is wearing a sleeveless top with two different tones of grey panelling, the darker grey matching the colour of her pants.

mo[u]rning thoughts

by Misha Maseka

Content warning: Description of physical violence/assault.

I am no more over there than I am somewhere. Somewhere is a pretty picture in their minds and it's always over there, back there, by there. Never here. But that is where I am. Here – I am simply here.

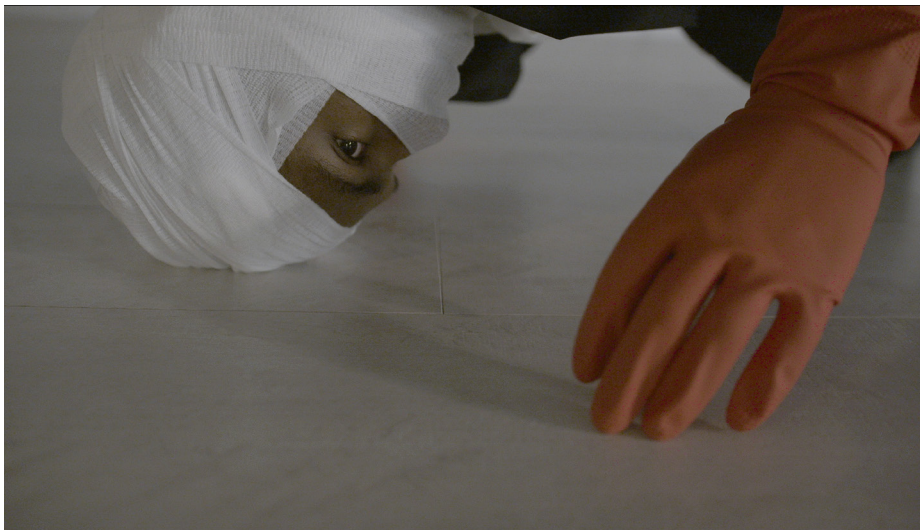


Image Description: A colour photograph of Sidney Chuckas, a Black person in their twenties. Their head and fingers make contact with the studio floor, and their hand is swathed in an amber-coloured rubber glove. The side profile of Sidney's face is captured in the upper left corner of the frame, wrapped in a white gauze bandage so only their eyes are visible. Sidney's gaze is focussed on the gloved hand on the diagonal, landing in the lower right corner of the frame.

A girl in a white dress sits in the corner of an empty sunlight-filled room. Eyes heavy with lashes and a daydream, she observes the exposed red brick making an appearance on the bottom half of the wall opposite her. An unraveling of a layer. The ringing and dinging and chirping of bells and birds bring an absurdity to an otherwise mundane moment. *Sometimes, I sit alone in my house and think surely this can't be it. Time moves slowly and I like that. There's a luxury in watching the sunlight tickle the walls with shadows of the leaves. I wonder – do leaves know that they are green? Do they know that they are essential to the*

air I breathe? And what am I essential to? I wouldn't know. I've never seen my reflection. Or perhaps, once. Once in a dream, yes I remember. There was a depth to my eyes.

Her eyes were just like the night sky – infinite. She recalled a memory of her much younger self, hiding under a kitchen table cover in a white cloth much like the veil on her head, watching the stars twinkle through the window. Scurrying out from underneath the table to the window, she pressed her small face up against the glass and tried to see where the stars ended. Taking a few steps back, she noticed her reflection. Her eyes were dark just like the sky and shone bright like the stars stuck in it.

I didn't know that I saw infinity until I saw my reflection.



Image Description: A coloured close-up image of Sidney Chuckas, shot so only the area around their right eye is captured in frame. With their pupil looking up on the diagonal, the brown of Sidney's eye matches the colour of their eye-lashes which softly curl upwards toward the eyelid. With the exception of Sidney's eye and eyebrow, their face is wrapped in a white gauze bandage which cloaks their nose, forehead, and hair.

Back in the empty sunlight-filled room, the girl tries to get up but gets caught in her veil. She struggles, wrists wrapped in the fabric like delicate chains. Circling her arms to break free from the soft shackles of the veil, she slowly rises. Once upright, she takes a step forward, but this time gets her shoe caught on the front of her dress. A series of uniform tugs and she breaks her shoe free, falling back to the ground. Lying on the floor, eyes heavy with lashes and cheeks flushed with blush and frustration, the girl in the white dress observes the exposed red brick making an appearance on the bottom half of the wall closer to her.

What an odd thing to happen, getting caught. Am I not meant to go somewhere? Do I just simply stay here and let the dust slowly turn this white dress into the colour of the earth? I wonder if this fabric knows it is white as much as the leaves know they are green. But it must, for everybody marvels at its beauty.

Three loud knocks and a violent jostling of the door.

"Your guests are waiting!" a voice snaps through the entryway.

Rolling over and picking herself up, the girl in the white dress glides to the door, unlocking it quietly and returning back to her place on the floor. Eyes heavy with lashes, she closes them shut.

Suddenly, she feels strong hands around her ankles and another pair around her wrists. The next moment, she is floating in the air.

Is this what the leaves feel like dancing in the breeze?

Opening her eyes, she realizes she is being carried out of the room forcefully. As the birds and the bells still chirp and ring and ding, she thrashes and throws and screams. Another hand comes over her mouth, muffling her to silent screams. All she sees and feels is the softness and strangling of the white fabric and strong hands taking her somewhere.

Settled in another room somewhere, her heavy eyes of lashes are dry in surrender. Her cheeks heated with humiliation and helplessness get powdered and repainted. Lifting her arms up, the white dress is removed to be cleaned and steamed. In this room of red velvet and gold, there is a large mirror hung directly in front of her. Looking at the stranger in symmetry with her movements, the girl steps forward in wonder.

This person looks and moves like me. But why is she over there, while I am here?

The girl begins to speak and gets interrupted by her white dress forced back over her head. Clean and pristine. The donning of a layer. The hands that carried her here applaud enthusiastically. Eyes full and big with lashes, the girl in the white dress bows low. She twirls and twirls for all to see the beauty of her. The applause stops. Silence.

Is this not what they wanted? Is this not what they asked for? Let me bow once again to each side of the room.



Image Description: A coloured, full-body image of Sidney Chuckas, donned in a dark grey blazer and grey dress pants. The photo captures Sidney in motion, torso bent over their legs, their back in a curve as they lean forward. Their right arm is bent in front of them with their left arm bent behind them, with the top of Sidney's gauze-banded head landing centre frame.

As she starts to fold, she gets caught in her veil. Off kilter and off balance, she is caught before she hits the floor. Straightening back up, she starts to bow again, but gets caught in her veil once more. Strong hands catch her, placing her upright again. Three loud knocks and a sharp open of the door.

"Your guests are waiting," presses the same voice. Offering her a fresh bouquet of flowers, the voice summons all the strong hands out the room. Taking a step towards her, the voice gently beckons the girl in the white dress.

"Do you have everything now?"

Nodding softly, the girl in the white dress smiles big and says, "Yes. Can I have one more minute to look at myself?"

Alone in the room of red and velvet, the girl in the white dress sits on a cushioned stool. Eyes heavy with lashes and a daydream, she observes her reflection making an appearance through her veil.

I guess I cannot stay here.

Rising from her seat, she walks out of the room and into the hands of the ones waiting for her.



Image Description: A coloured photograph of Sidney Chuckas, with their amber-coloured, rubber gloved hands crossed right over left in front of them. The image itself is wide and only captures Sidney's waist on the left side of the frame against a grey background. Wearing a dark grey blazer and dress pants, the amber gloves are a stark contrast to the blacks and greys of Sidney's clothes and the background.

Image credits: MANZANAR - Choreography, performance and concept by Sidney Chuckas. Photos by Peter Smida, edited by Sidney Chuckas.

Throat Whispers of Longing: An Intimate Encounter with Mohammed

By Aryo Khakpour

Beginning

How do I honour a dancer who I don't know and am asked to write about? How do I not make this about myself and honour his practice? Maybe I would honour him by truly making this about me. Khakpour. Aryo. How? I only became aware of him and his work a couple of months ago. And I haven't yet met him in person. Rashead. Mohammed. But maybe I do know him. Maybe I'm paired with him because he looks like my brother who also has curly hair and "brown" skin. Khakpour. Arash. He is close to Arash's age when he started dancing. He reminds me of him. Maybe I'm invited because I also deal with angst, pain... jagged angled gestures and stressed muscles... screams... in my own work as an artist... as a person. Maybe I'm invited to write about Mohammed Rashead because we're from the same place, the middle of the east. The east of the middle. But we're not from the same place. We're from two very different countries. And he actually doesn't look like my brother. He kind of looks like one of my cousins, though. I haven't seen him for 20 years. This reminds me that I should call him.

Then what is it about Mohammed's dancing that I should talk about?



Photo by Bridgette May

Image Description: A coloured vertical headshot of Mohammed Rashead, a Syrian person in his twenties with short curly brown hair and a brown moustache, pictured against a light brown background. He has a relaxed expression on his face with his gaze set just above the camera, and is wearing a black tank top. Small gold hoop earrings hang from his ears, and a tattoo of a rose with leaves and a butterfly can be seen on his right shoulder.

A Video of a Dance in a Studio Showing – Months Before the Grand Public Presentation

I saw you sitting.

I saw you breathing into your tattoo up and down.

A cluster of vines growing out of your arm. Mine and yours. And yours.

I saw it.

I saw you, voiceless claws grasping at your mouth and eyes and head
and mouth and eyes and head

and mouth and hair burst into flames of fingers.

Up in smoke.

I saw you slitting

Curled up skin like a carrot peeler.

Peel me away from this body.

Enough is enough.

I heard you.

I heard the explosion of bones dropping hard on the wooden floor.

Bones dropping hard on the wooden.

Dropping hard. Dropping. Drooping.

Drop it shut.

I am a toy windmill as light as a dandelion.

I am too far to go back to the ground.

I am a tree in reverse. Unbent.

My breath just inhaled the sky.

My mouth and throat and neck

My neck.

My throat.

The Grand Presentation – Friends, Loved Ones and the Public Surrounding

This never happened. A person got covid and they had to shut down the event. All pent up excitement kept penting up and up then stopped.

A Phone Chat – Our Only Real Meeting

Where the voices meet, the boundaries blur and the mind unravels into a tale of loss and longing. Shahab. Zahra. My friend I'm deeply missing. Her memory etched like a photo at the beach, a memorial frozen in time. Shooting Star.

And so, the echoes of a Yebba song resonate—a melody of sadness and loss. The song I saw
Mo dance to in the video:

My mind, my mind, my mind

'Bout to lose my

*My mind, my mind
I think about you all the time
You can't even look me dead in the eyes*



Image still from video by Vitantonio Spinelli

Image Description: A coloured photograph of Mohammed Rashead captured in a dance studio, mid-movement in a backbend. His back is twisted so that only his left arm is supporting him on the ground, with his right arm extending upwards towards the top of the frame. He is wearing a black tank top with black sweatpants, with his blue, purple, and green tie dyed socks extending over the bottom of his sweatpants.

This is not a story meant to capture Mo, for representations can confine the essence we seek to preserve. This writing refuses such comforting replicas, yearning for a deeper truth. I once shared these thoughts with him, uttered the words aloud, and witnessed Mo's fervour to share his own narrative. Now, a sense of responsibility weighs upon me to write for Mo, to honour the space bestowed upon him. The space between us. Was it Mo, Mohamad, or Mohammed? He prefers Mohammed.

Driven by the dance, Mohammed seeks solace in releasing the burdens of his past, the weight of his parents' legacy. Within the dancing body, Mohammed finds joy. His life, once eclectic and chaotic, now seeks a semblance of stability. Forty hours of labour, a partner unburdened by the scars of war (or so I project), and a dog who demands routine and care. Solace.

Yet, dance, his language of expression, was silenced, halted by the pandemic's unyielding

grasp, triggering a cascade of unexpressed emotions. Friends and family gathered, anticipating his performance. His partner would have witnessed his dance for the very first time. Halted.

Mohamad [as I was raised to pronounce it], or Mohammed [as he was raised to pronounce it], opened up during our heartfelt conversation. We bared our souls. We shared vulnerable tales of our fathers and their limited emotional intimacy. He shared stories of his mother and their nurturing reunions, the profound impact of coming out to his parents, the pain of rejection. Our shared and unshared heritage.

And in the depths of our dialogue, other topics emerged. The escalated conflicts leading to physical harm, the haunting reality of men's violence against women, wars and suffocation. The notion of returning to our ancestral homelands, fraught with emotional labour and the weight of expectations. The mere act of seeing family demands much of us.

Going back to my ancestral home is not as fraught for me as it is for many. I always loved the smell of freshly rinsed dusty asphalt. I loved going to my aunt's house and playing with my beautiful cousins. For hours. For days. For as long as it lasted.

As Martik, the pop star I cry to, says:

غم مونده تو گلوم باز از سفر نگو
دل با تو آشناست غم شوق گریه هاست
تو رو یادم نمیره تا هست دلم تو سینه
دستای مهربونت از خاطر من نمی ره
حتی اگه بدونم، دل با غمت می میره

*Sorrow, stuck in my throat
Stop speaking of going away
I'll forever remember you as my heart beats in my chest,
Your kind hands will never leave my mind
Even if my heart drowns in the sorrow of your loss*

A Second Video in Lieu of a Live Performance – A Dancing Body by a Body of Water

My eyes blurred up cause I'm laugh-crying
The joy of the little girl hopscotching on the cool sand
Breeze in her moustache
The joy of play

Pouring sand on sand
Brown on brown
Waves on waves
Trying to love someone into loving you is destroying you
My eyes blurred up cause I'm crying
My eyes on my fingers running through my hairs
Running through my sands
My brown sands
A bundle of twigs bound together
Do you see me
I see you
I see a tree in reverse
Too far to come back to the ground
Is it too late to press my chest to yours
Will I feel your heart close to mine
Will I ever see your face for the first time again



Image still from video by Vitantonio Spinelli.

Image Description: A coloured image of Mohammed Rashead, pictured on his knees in a dance studio, donning a black tank top and black sweatpants. His hands are crossed left over right as they hold his neck in a soft chokehold, his eyes closed in a painful and sorrow-filled expression. The outlines of tattoos can be seen on both of his arms.

El Costo De Irse

By Cole Alvis

The cost of leaving
Leaving behind story, language and home
Leaving for an adventure different from generations before

Charting a course for one's self and those that come after
Hopefully, but not always, by choice

What love and loss awaits you in destinations unknown?

¡Qué lejos estoy del suelo donde he nacido!
Inmensa nostalgia invade mi pensamiento,
y, al verme, tan solo y triste cual hoja al viento,
¡quisiera llorar – quisiera morir – de sentimiento!

So far am I from the land where I was born!
Immense nostalgia invades my thoughts,
and, to see myself, as lone and dismal as a leaf on
the wind, I would like to weep – I would like to die
– out of sorrow!

(Lyrics from *Canción Mixteca* by José López Alavez)



Image Description: A coloured photograph of a large group of young dancers, all of diverse backgrounds and gender expressions. They are caught mid-movement in a dance studio with bright natural and overhead lighting. The dancers are all wearing various earth tones with whites and beiges, with the ones closer to the camera on their knees and the ones towards the back in a more upright position. All of the dancers are in a side contraction with their necks facing up toward the sky.

I am me because of decisions to stay or leave made by those before
What do I have because of what they were able to bring?
What did they leave behind for a new home?

Do you know what makes you 'you' in relation to your relations?

Look at us out here making choices, following impulses
Often emulating those that came before

¡Oh tierra del sol! suspiro por verte.
Ahora que lejos yo vivo sin luz – sin amor.
Y, al verme tan solo y triste cual hoja al viento,
quisiera llorar, quisiera morir de sentimiento.

O land of the Sun! I sigh for-to see you.
Now that, far from you, I live without light – without
love. And, to see myself, as lone and dismal as a leaf
on the wind, I would like to weep – I would die of
sorrow!

(Lyrics from Canción Mixteca by José López Alavez)

The me that I am
Is place and circumstance born
With a resistance to the status quo

There can be rewards for upholding systems
That ask we leave parts of ourselves behind

It's possible to refuse, choosing a path not yet blazed
To transgress, sharing what's inside with the outside

Ikwewaadizi, is an Anishinaabe gender term that translates as, "has the nature of a woman"
This way of being, reclaimed by Language Keeper Awanigiizhik Bruce¹, resonates with me

As does the community role of Auntie, circling up to share food and story
Offering recognition and accountability when needed, a role model for young ones

¹Anishinaabe Gender Terms infographic created by @awanigiizhik.art - <https://www.instagram.com/p/CXbxiN2vkR1/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D>

It's taken a decade (or four) to believe being me brings my ancestors joy

What might future generations

Do

Sing

Dance

Or Be

That would make you proud to see?



Image Description: A coloured photograph of a group of dancers of diverse backgrounds and gender expressions clumped together, facing the right diagonal. All of the dancers are caught mid-movement peeling away from the center of the group with one hand up by their faces, framing it. Emotion and expression pours from all the bodies pictured, emanating from them into the dance studio.

Image credits: Airports Filled With Hope choreographed by Marco Esccer
Photo by Carla Alcántara featuring Coastal City Ballet Dancers

Bios

Cole Alvis



photo credit: Dahlia Katz

Cole Alvis (she\her) is a Turtle Mountain Michif (Métis) artist based in Tkarón:to with Chippewa, Irish & English ancestors. She is one of the leaders of lemonTree creations, manidoons collective, and AdHoc Assembly, and is on the board of the Dancers Of Damelahamid. Cole has performed, directed and toured queer and Indigenous performance across Turtle Island (North America) including venues in Coast Salish territory, Treaty 6 & 7, Robinson Superior Treaty territory, and Mi'kma'ki territory.

Sidney Chuckas



photo credit: Brendan Meadows

Sidney Chuckas (he/they) was born in Evanston, Illinois, and is a current dancer with Ballet BC. He learns, creates, and educates through his multidisciplinary art practices with a larger mission to dismantle the institutionalized marginalization of minoritized bodies. Dancing since the age of five at Dance Center Evanston, performing principal roles in Musical theatre productions at Evanston Township High School, and graduating from the USC Gloria Kaufman School of Dance has taught Chuckas to utilize his diverse experiences to thoughtfully engage in others' work while engaging those around him in progressive conversation and change in accordance with

his greater mission. He has performed the works of renowned choreographers such as Johan Inger, Roy Assaf, Jiri Kylian, Ohad Naharin, Sharon Eyal, and Barak Marshall, danced for Brandy, Chance the Rapper, and Paris Jackson, trained with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Alvin Ailey, and The Joffrey Ballet, and has also created his own works for stage and screen. His time at university also led him to discover his passion for design. He completed his undergraduate studies with a minor in Architecture and received an academic scholarship to attend the Pratt Institute of Design Master's of Architecture program. Sidney is thrilled and honored to be a part of the Re-Centering Margins residency and looks forward to sharing his passion, dream, and story with audiences here and away.

Brenda Kent Colina



Brenda Kent Colina (“Bee”) is a multi-disciplinary artist and movement instructor based in Ucluelet on Nuu-chah-nulth territory. A graduate from SFU’s Film program, she channels her visual and writing skills through documentary storytelling. Bee also writes and performs poetry, oftentimes pairing it with her visual work. While her projects are varied, most relate back to promoting well-being (especially within BIPOC communities) and advocacy for the protection of our natural environment. When away from these artistic realms, she can be found enjoying nature and strongly prioritizing rest.

Marco Esccer

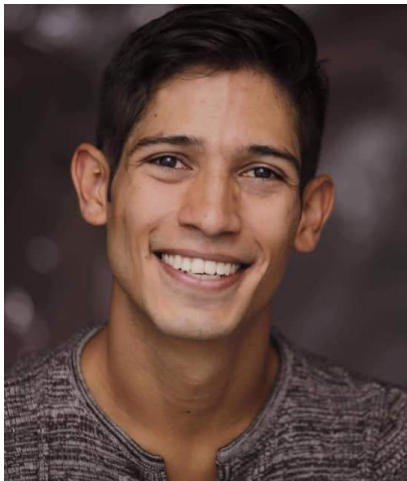


photo credit: David Flores Rubio

Marco Esccer is a Mexican queer artist: performer, creator and educator.

Marco has a diverse background from the technical to the therapeutic aspect of creation. Bachelor in Ballet by the National Ballet and Contemporary School of Mexico City (2011-2016). Followed by certifications in “Research, experimentation and artistic production “(2015-2016); “Dance Movement Therapy” (2016); “Certified Yoga Instructor”(2021). “Progressive Ballet Technique Instructor” (2022). “Mental Application: mind-body connection”(2019-current).

He has danced for many companies in Mexico such as Ballet Independiente A.C., La Infinita Cia, Prodanza México, Convexus ballet by Francisco Rojas, Danza Capital, among others. Currently training in Coastal City

Ballet (Vancouver) since 2019.

Finalist in the choreographer competition in the contemporary company, Ballet Independiente (Mexico City 2015) and winner of New Choreographers of Mexico (2018) he felt encouraged to continue expanding his choreographic endeavors through multiple Dance Films, Videoclips and Short Films such as “You’re not within my power to change” (Vancouver 2020) , “Barcos” (Mex 2019), “En color” (Mex 2018) “Boundaries” (2018) “Noise” (2017); and in the world of musicals as choreographer and artistic co-director of “Broadway Nuances” (Mex 2018).

Some of his most recent contemporary dance creations performed in Vancouver are "Possibilities: Embodied Poetry" (Granville Island Summer Dance Series with New Works Society 2021), "I dream to be me" (performed at Co.Erasga and at the program 12 Minutes Max program with The Dance Center 2022), "Dreams of Sorrow" and "Screams at Home" (Coastal City Ballet in the programs Incubator 2021 and Emerge 2022) and hrs currently creating a piece as a Guest Choreographer for Coastal City Ballet.

Throughout his years in the dance world he has developed a profound interest in creating spaces for awareness of motion, feelings and thoughts through choreographic processes. He believes in art as a perspective opener: personal stories connect with universal stories. And he creates to build bridges of compassion and understanding with others in a deeper level finding the common threads between cultures into humanity.

Aryo Khakpour



photo credit: elika mojtabaei

Aryo Khakpour: I am a multidisciplinary performer, director and dramaturg. I hold a BFA in Theatre Performance from Simon Fraser University. Born and raised in Iran, I have been involved in multiple theatre, dance, and film productions in Vancouver since 2006. I cofounded The Biting School in 2013, which was the company-in-residence at PuSh Festival and The Dance Centre 2018-2020.

In my practice, I explore the dynamics of power, implications of ideologies, repetition of mythologies, and cultural adaptation. I am an intersectional feminist; and I interrogate the patriarchy and its harmful effects on people. My practice is heavily physical and surrealistic; it moves from theatre to performance art to dance to film and back to theatre; it deals with pain and pleasure; it is sex-positive; and it aims to queer the status quo. I was trained in devised practices of non-hierarchical collective creations; that is my favourite way of creating.

During the past year, I co-produced and directed two art films: a film about a uterus and Suddenly Slaughter, which are both supported by Canada Council for the Arts. Upcoming performances are TechniCowlour (a conversation with the 1969 film, The Cow) and Zahak, the Serpent King (a critical dialogue with the myth of Zahak).

Misha Maseka



photo credit: Yanni Laloudakis

Misha Maseka is an award-winning filmmaker, writer and musician. Born in eSwatini to Zambian parents but growing up in South Africa, Australia and settling in Canada, she has seen much of the world and its people. This fueled her innate curiosity as a child and has carried on to sustain her curiosity as an adult. Being inquisitive about the world around her serves her well in her expression of the arts, as she identifies as a multidisciplinary artist. With her auteur debut, "Not That Deep", Misha won "Best Short" and "Audience Choice Award" at Berlin Short Film Festival and was officially selected at Calgary International Film Festival. With music as her longest practice, she makes time to write and perform music under the stage name, Lemba.

Mohammed Rashead



photo credit: Kelsey Kuehnemuth

Performing has always been an outlet for Mohammed, as a first generation Canadian from Syria. Mohammed was always keen for any opportunity and challenge that was brought to the table. With pure optimism and curiosity for the arts, Mohammed started dancing at the late age of nine.

Mohammed joined Team Canada after graduation, training in Jazz, Contemporary and Hip Hop, competing at the International Dance competition in Italy.

Before moving to Vancouver, Mohammed was a part of Vibestreet Dance Studio: training under Jerome Esplana, Alo Galedo, Scott Forsyth, and Roberta Bierman. The experience of training and competing internationally equipped Mohammed with the discipline, focus, and drive to teach at Vibestreet, Raino Dance, and to choreograph for local artists in Victoria.

Once moving over to the mainland in 2017, Mohammed danced with TwoFourSeven Company under the direction of acclaimed choreographers, Carlo Atienza and Roberta Bierman. Now training in his acting career at local studios and working in the film industry on shows such as Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist (Mandy Moore, Jillian Meyers), Riverdale (Heather Laura Grey), and more.

Mohammed is a brave and dedicated individual. His contagious positivity creates a nurturing and progressive environment that fosters growth for his peers and himself. Mohammed is so excited to take on the opportunities that are to be presented in the near future, and is looking forward to seeking out new endeavours.

Ana Sosa



Ana was born and raised in Mexico. When she turned eight years old, she moved to Vancouver, BC Canada where she studied all types of dance at Dance Co and Harbour Dance Center.

When she turned eighteen she moved to New York City where she lived for five years. Ana studied Business at Pace University, and continued her dance education at Steps on Broadway, Broadway Dance Center, Pace University Dance Program, The Tango Company and Gibney Dance. She also opened her own dance company: Sosa Dance Company, which ran from 2013-

2014. She moved back to Mexico City in 2015 where she completed an MBA at IPADE Business School. She choreographed a full time show which she performed as guest artist with Luz Corporea which was presented in The International Book Fair of the Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo in front of more than 300 people. She also continued learning different styles of dance at La Cantera & Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo.

After graduating, she moved to London, UK where she completed a Masters in Science at The City University of London. In London, she learned from teachers at Pineapple Dance, Studio 68, The Place, Rambert, and Oh Creative Space with mentorship from Sivan Rubinstein.

Ana is now in Vancouver, BC, where she has performed with Small Stage & The Dance Center's (12 minute max/Open Stage) and has worked as a freelance dance video artist for artists such as Elle Wolf, Deathly Chill, and SoulPush.

She is currently part of Okam's Racer, a new collective, founded in November 2020 by Ana Sosa, Jenna Berlyn, Samantha Krystal and Will Jessup.

Sarah Wong



Sarah Wong is an emerging writer, choreographer, and interdisciplinary artist based in Vancouver, Canada on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. Her work emerges from her lived experiences as a queer and disabled 2nd generation Chinese-Canadian, focusing on archival processes and accessing embodied intergenerational knowledge to trace relationships between identity and lineage. Her practice makes space for the multiple, creating work that spans score-based improvisational performances, ritual-based research, site-specific installation, textiles, poetry, film, and zines. She is devoted to cultivating practices of care, creating and facilitating spaces for bodies to rest.

sarahwong.ca | @swongski

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