



dance at illinois

COLLEGE OF FINE + APPLIED ARTS | UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

LOCATE CENTER.  AND GO FROM THERE.

pivot

ISSUE 31 • 2016

Alex Gossen (BFA'17) in guest artist Ping Chong's *Baldwin/NOW*

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aesthetics meet our civic lives

BY JAN ERKERT



Krystal Collins (BFA'18), Max Gorgol (BFA'17),
in Professor Emeritus Beverly Blossom's *Brides*

“Our bodies force
us to live in the
ambiguities of
the center while
negotiating the
differences of
the extreme.”

It is election year.... and Americans are politically moving ever further apart. In dance, when limbs are stretched to the opposite reaches of the space, a tension builds until the body collapses, falls or recoils. What will be our breaking point?

Dance has always been committed to wrestling with polarities as a space to propose questions. How far can I shift my weight before succumbing to the fall? Can I maintain a quiet, calm center while ferociously attacking a soaring jump? How can I create the largest expanse possible while using the least amount of effort? Our bodies force us to live in the ambiguities of the center while negotiating the differences of the extreme.

This year, Dance at Illinois harnessed the power of dance to wrestle with some big questions surrounding race, social justice, and gender identity.

The passage of the Marriage Act by the Supreme Court inspired us to cast two males as brides, who performed in full white bridal regalia in the reconstruction of Professor Emeritus Beverly Blossom's *Brides*. This untraditional casting wasn't meant to cement a political position as much as to provide an opportunity to consider a variety of points of view. The moving articles in Pivot by MFA candidate Charli Brissey and alum Nickels Sunshine reveal the ways in which they are utilizing the experiential sensations of the body to approach identity politics.

Right after receiving the National Medal of the Arts from President Obama, celebrated artist Ping Chong engaged our community in issues surrounding social justice, just as the Black Lives Matter Movement was strengthening on our campus and nationally. Hadley Smith's article about the creation of *Baldwin/NOW*

shares how Ping asked our community to tune the body to a frequency of listening. A highlight of the year was observing the transformation of teenage boys who worked with Professors Kemal Nance and Endalyn Taylor in building *Chalk Lines*. Each day the boys came to stage with increased focus and commitment as they came to understand that their bodies could give voice to their beliefs.

Another growing national concern is the mounting cost of college so we are kicking off No Debt For Dancers initiative this summer in order to raise monies for student scholarships and alumni projects. Alum Jessica Cornish's article *Body & Place* gives me hope that dancers are providing the alchemy necessary to draw us together.

Vote and enjoy Pivot 2016!

looking back/looking forward

BY JAN ERKERT



Assistant Professor Abby Zbikowski in the studio

LOOKING BACK 2015–2016

Experiencing the weight, dynamics and rhythms of dances and dancers from different areas of the world can be challenging and disorienting, but also provides a space to question our biases and assumptions. Dance at Illinois is committed to providing experiences that extend our cultural knowledge so this year our guest artists came from distant lands and our faculty and students journeyed beyond our borders. In master classes with Vadim Larramenid Paz from Cuba, Maree Remalia originally from South Korea, Niv Sheinfeld and Oren Laor from Israel, Pradhanica from India, and Chad Hall from California, our community practiced skills ranging from daring propulsions into space to articulations of nuanced hand gestures. Dance at Illinois is excited to be a part of the new Global Practice Sharing (GPS) project, which will support exchange programs of students and faculty with artists

from Eastern European countries. Professor Abigail Zbikowski spent a two-week residency in Latvia absorbing eastern European culture and we look forward to hosting Latvia artist Olga Zitlunhina in Fall 2017. Professors Kirstie Simson and Linda Lehovec sent luscious photos from their research travels to warmer places such as Mexico and Chile, and student exchanges abounded. We hosted four students from Coventry University in London and Taipei National University of the Arts, and our students traveled to Germany, Austria, Israel, and Canada. In reconstructing *Brides* (1981), alum Mei Chen (MFA'07) challenged students to time travel into another era complete with subtle glances of the eyes and bold sweeps of the bridal train. At the end of the year, we let loose our joy in fashion shows and workshops with former student Stephen West, an internationally renowned rock star of knitting and dance.

LOOKING FORWARD 2016–2017

We kick off the season with the 3rd Annual Flatlands Dance Film Festival at its new home at the Spurlock Museum. With over 70 submissions from over 13 countries last year, we are excited to provide a venue for discussions about Black ballerinas. November Dance: Six Degrees of Separation, curated by Professor Endalyn Taylor, will celebrate the roots and histories of our form...and we will embrace this history in our semester long celebration of Professor Renée Wadleigh, who will retire in December 2016! Guest Artist Michelle Gibson, hailing from New Orleans, will be our guest for eight weeks creating a new work on our students. A favored teacher at American Dance

Festival, her teaching practice and choreographic works range from genres of the African Diaspora, contemporary traditional modern, Afro Funk, jazz and her own New Orleans second line aesthetic. February Dance: Designed Environments, curated by Professor John Toenjes, will explode on and off the proscenium stage as Toenjes collaborates with Chad Hall, the Artistic Director of Multiplex Dance, a Los Angeles dance company dedicated to exploring the intersection of technology and movement. Finally, our community will drive up Highway 57 to cheer for performances of Tere O'Connor Dance at Columbia College Chicago.



right: Professor Cynthia Oliver modeling former dance student Stephen West's incredible knitwear



Postdoctoral Research Associate C. Kemal Nance and Assistant Professor Endalyn Taylor performing in their piece *Chalk Lines*



Krystal Collins (BFA'18) in *Chalk Lines*

dancing resistance: the *chalk lines* project

BY C. KEMAL NANCE

For many dancers the studio represents a solace, a space where we engaged in fantasy. We use our bodies to create rhythms we want to hear, images we want to see, and narrate the stories we want to tell. What happens when the ugliness of the world infringes on the place where you usually create beauty?

Chalk Lines started as a collaborative choreographic project. Endalyn Taylor and I sought to work together in an attempt to marry our different dance aesthetics. We thought, "Wouldn't it be cool to create a dance that spoke our ballet and contemporary African dance training respectively but also spoke to the commonality of our lived experiences as African Americans?" Our rehearsals in Nevada B would find us moving and playing with Heatwave's "Grooveline" playing in the background. Then, the Baltimore riots happened and tomfoolery transformed into discussions about racism. In particular, we were moved by Toya Graham's public parenting and saddened by how an on-looking American society failed to understand her efforts as an act of love. We found ourselves dancing a response to Black Lives Matter. Our collegial 'jam' session turned into an act of protest from a Black mother of two sons (Taylor) and a Black man (me).

Taylor and I fantasized about how a movement to stop the genocide of African American men could be ensued by a unified Black people. Inspired by the Black Arts movement, we sought to use *Chalk Lines* to mobilize an African American dancing community. Communities from across the country sent

us video footage of Black dancers performing one of our phrases. We received footage from dancing grandmothers from Baltimore, Maryland, Deep Rhythm Dancers (Bethesda, MD), Berry & Nance Dance Project (Philadelphia, PA), Judah International Dance Company (New York, NY), Denison, Indiana, Norfolk State, and North Carolina A & T State Universities. In February 2016, a community of Black dancers from the UIUC, 7 African American boys from Urbana Middle School, Taylor's 13-year old son, and colleague, Cynthia Oliver performed with Taylor and me in February Dance for *Chalk Lines*' premiere.

Ultimately, *Chalk Lines* became more than a dance work; it was an act of resistance. While the ugliness of racism made its way into our dancing space—our solace—it ignited an intracultural solidarity. While the dance, itself, offers no resolution, it empowered its performers and its choreographers with a sense of hope.

"It's about choice, a freedom and a right to choose to live strong in the midst of adversity and not to die a thousand times over because you've allowed the enemy to still your joy. "
—Endalyn Taylor

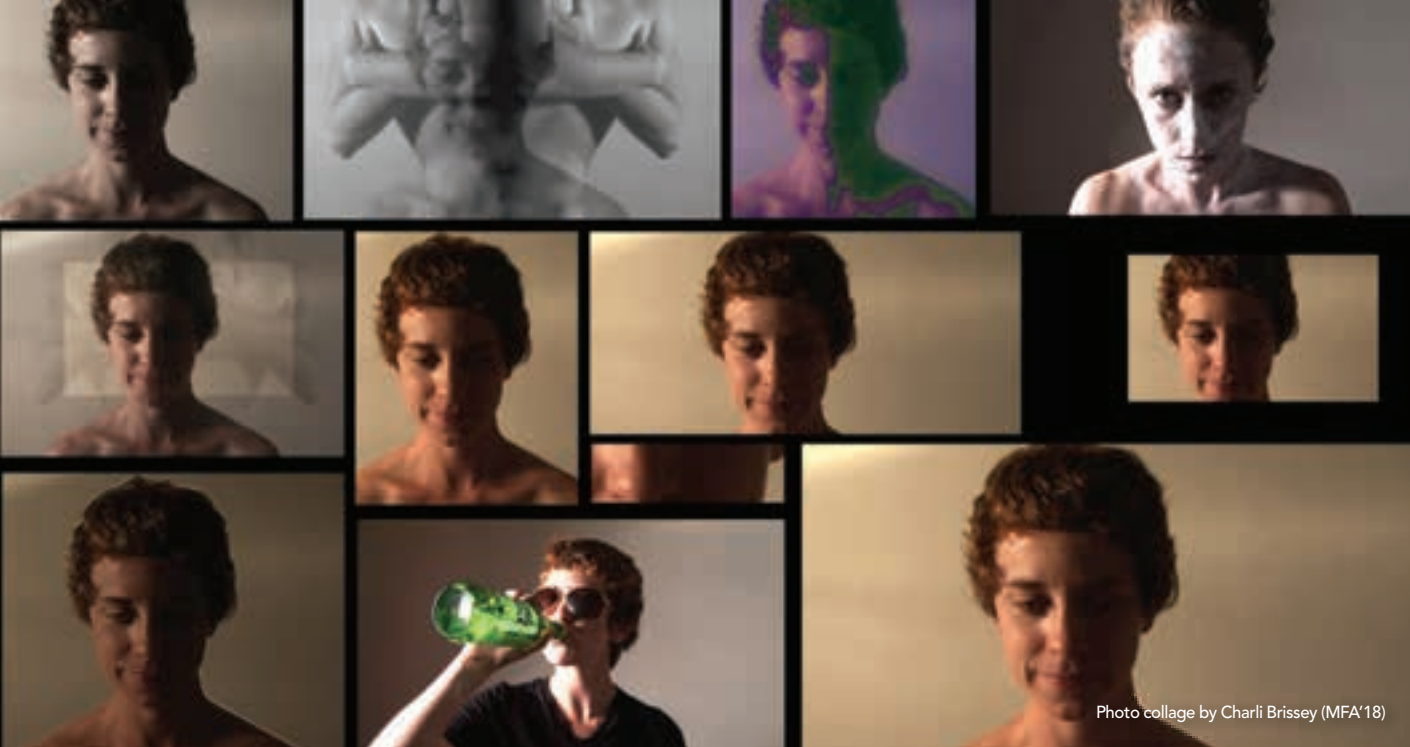


Photo collage by Charli Brissey (MFA'18)

Charli Brissey (MFA'18) and Grant Hill (BFA'18)
in Lailye Weidman's (MFA'16) *Social Animal, Please Tame Me*



reframing the dancing body BY CHARLI BRISSEY (MFA'18)

I knew I was queer at a very young age. I didn't know the language or the history or the future, but I knew that how I felt and what I wanted was not what I was told to feel or to want. This displacement within the world around me and inside of me rendered a rather isolated childhood. As a means of understanding myself within my environments I turned to certain things, primarily the forest, movement, and video cameras. At the time I didn't know that I was dancing, but on a daily basis I would run, climb, swing, chase, throw, hide, and fling my body through the swampy woodlands behind my house, most often with a camera in hand. I loved discovering how I could move my body through the small box-ish video frame and how I could move the camera through space. I would strap it to my

bicycle, sled it down hills when it snowed, swing on vines with it. Spin it. Turn it upside down. It became a body. We became a duet. And as strange as it sounds, a sort of friendship emerged. The camera was another entity in the space that enabled creative agency and made me feel less alone. It enabled the relationships between time, place, and my body to become malleable and reformulatable both visually and choreographically, and its assemblage was entirely up to me. As a rather confused kid navigating the unmapped maze of queerness, this was everything. This was both real and fantastical. This was magic and I was the magician.

As the years went by I learned about the radical feminist video artists of the 60's and 70's and began to understand that I was not creating work in a vacuum, but was in fact situated inside of a rich and on-going history of queer, trans, and female artists who have turned to video as a means of reclaiming and projecting voice within a medium that could also transcend geography. This encouraged me to keep working, and now decades later I have produced over fifty video works and have had the great honor of screening them in several festivals and countries around the globe, including University of Illinois's very own Flatlands Dance Film Festival where I was invited to be a guest artist in the Fall of 2015.

ping chong: community through presence

"Collectively, we were asked to explore crevices of an American history that is most often glossed over; a history of violences, structural and bodily, based on race. A history that continues into the present, that demands our presence."

BY HADLEY SMITH (MFA'16)

As a performer you are always asked to remain in a kind of metaphorical rotation, turning inward and outward at the same time, present to your own reality and the reality of the moment. This presence is often regarded as a kind of magic extra, the thing that makes movement more but during Ping Chong's residency at the University of Illinois students were asked to engage with this notion of presence by looking at, and explaining for themselves, the historical present.

Over four weeks in January, director Ping Chong created *Baldwin/NOW* for an ensemble of University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign students and local actress Latrelle Bright. As a performer, I noticed that an attention to presence, to being present, became a kind of foundation on which the piece could be built. Our rehearsal days were spent reading together, talking together and of course moving together as we tuned in to a kind of visceral listening. A kind of community training made more salient by the inclusion of various activists, artists and teachers from throughout the Urbana-Champaign community. Collectively, we were asked to explore crevices of an American history that is most often glossed over; a history of violences, structural and bodily, based on race. A history that continues into the present, that demands our presence.

Beginning each day by saying our own names as we passed our collective attention around a tight circle, we, as performers, trained not for certain steps or phrases but for a collective presence. Led by Chong and our rehearsal director Lailye Weidman we learned to run improvisatory scores with an increasing attention to one another's breath, impulse and movement. As we moved to the sound of Latrelle Bright's stirring rendition of a James Baldwin speech, we learned to step within the dips and pauses of her voice, we learned a different kind of listening.

Often, when confronted with a history that is discomforting, perhaps most because of how it remains, our response as a town or country, as a community, is to regard it askance. To be only somewhat present to it, memorizing certain names and dates as a practice of holding feeling at bay. Each night of February Dance, *Baldwin/NOW* audiences saw names of African Americans murdered by law enforcement and the dates they died. Underneath them were our bodies, tuned to the same frequency, listening to one another in order to sense a history not yet played out.

nickels sunshine (MFA'11)

One hour until performance; feeling dysphoric, Renée Archibald (MFA'13) offers me the soap and razor I forgot to pack. Eyeliner, mascara, bronze shadow and lips. This is the only time I wear makeup. I put on my dress. The presenter introduces me using the correct pronouns. I can release my breath. The music starts. I introduce my trans body, and I'm aware it falls short of expectations. I love it anyways. My skin touches the light. I lick my dry lips, relax as I let go. I feel eyes on me differently than I usually do. In this moment, I feel seen.

Nickels Sunshine is a Los Angeles based choreographer, performer, and teacher. They are currently teaching at Williams College.



Nickels Sunshine (MFA'11) photo by Lisa Wahlander

the body and place

BY JESSICA CORNISH (BFA'12)



Jessica Cornish (BFA'12) photo by Ania Bilinska

I was born and raised in Pakistan and grew up traveling the world at a young age; my body was thrown about in contrasting environments, landscapes, climates and cultures on a regular basis. My body, being my only constant home, soon grew a hyper-awareness to place and sudden shifts and displacements in location and the ways in which it wanted to react and interact. I began to rely heavily on my body's languages and impulses in order to ground my self, communicate, engage and be a part of new communities despite foreign languages and unfamiliar customs. This is the root of my dancing body: Searching to communicate non verbally and connect with people, places, inanimate structures and objects by riding physical and creative impulses.

Being raised between two such extreme cultures (Pakistan and the US), my body was exposed to incredibly impactful situations which manifested into memory sensation. Being the only white child in the area, exposed and submitted to female oppression, the constant smell of sewage and burning tires, riding a sea turtle into the ocean, digging my grandfather's grave, watching people starve to death and drag themselves on dirt roads with missing limbs, my body has an incredibly heightened sensorial reaction to my surroundings even if it is a tame residential neighborhood in the Midwest.

After graduating in 2012, Cornish has been a part of projects in India, China, Chile, Berlin, Amsterdam and Italy. Currently based in Chicago, IL, Cornish works as a free-lance artist making her own work as well as collaborating and performing in the works of others.

JessicaCornish.com

dance at illinois

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Malik Sharpe (MFA'18), James Washington (BFA'18), Aryanna Aronson (BFA'17), Francesca Burns (BFA'15), Jessica Pretty (MFA'16), Justin Yeung (BFA'15), Ricky Perry (BFA'15) in Professor Cynthia Oliver's *The Who What Where When Why How?*



Gina Matsie (BFA'16) and Shatara Mathis (BFA'18) in Postdoctoral Research Associate C. Kemal Nance's *Imu*



Alex Gossen (BFA'17), in Pxyxl OR Padrão e Compasso OR Boat Price OR 月曜日 OR Trillionaire Has Vacuum
OR يلو ح نم عو م ج ل ا OR Tiene que ser veloz OR Seer OR Has Zero OR «Une Femme ouvre la porte»*
choreographed by Brendan Behan (MFA'16)

future plans

mfa news BY CYNTHIA OLIVER

This year six talented candidates leave us with ambitious and open plans or their promising futures. All of our grads are committed to continue the beautiful choreographic work they engaged in during their time with us.

Brendan Behan will return to the west coast to reconnect with the crews whose movement practices have fed him as he takes advantage of performance opportunities and seeks out teaching positions. He will continue to expand and explore performance possibilities for his solo *Box Cake*, which he worked on extensively with Tere O'Connor and performed in our Studio Dance 2 concert.

Jessie Young will premiere her solo work *silver* at Links Hall (Chicago) and go on to attend Salt Dance Fest in Utah, Fleet Moves Dance Festival in Massachusetts, The American Dance Festival in North Carolina with Abby Z and the New Utility, and round out her summer with a residency in Japan with Chicago Moving Company. She will then head to New York City to enter the dance community there.



MFA Class of 2016: Brendan Behan, Jessica Pretty, Lailye Weidman, Hadley Smith, Jessie Young, Sophia Levine

Jess Pretty earned a minor in Queer Studies alongside her dance MFA, and will continue work she has begun with Abby Z and the New Utility, joining the company at American Dance Festival working on Abby's new piece that will premiere at Abrons Art Center in New York in the spring 2017. Jess will move to New York to begin her teaching and performance life there.

Lailye Weidman will return to the Northeast for the summer, working with a New York-based collective, the Movement Party, to produce the fifth annual Fleet Moves Dance Festival in Wellfleet, MA. While there, she will continue her three-year collaboration with ecologists at the Cape Cod National Seashore. She will also be an artist-in-residence at the Mall of Found in Lebanon, NY and the Somatic Experiments in Earth, Dance, and Science (SEEDS) Festival at Earthdance in Plainfield, MA. She is dedicated to continuing her teaching, studio, and choreographic practice and continuing her explorations on consensus and consent which lead to her thesis work, *Social Animal Please Tame Me*. In addition to her dance practices she will join Contact Quarterly as Editorial Assistant for their 2017 publication cycle.

Sophia Levine has explored monuments, repetition, and the making of civilizations in her recent dances. She will spend the summer driving cross country to southern California where she will begin the PhD Program in Critical Dance Studies at UC Riverside.

Hadley Smith will return to New York City where she maintained a vital and thriving dance career before taking time out to earn her MFA. She will offer movement workshops and continue an ambitious and insightful project creating podcasts that choreographically resituates the museum goer's experience in what is conventionally a static environment.

We look forward to hearing about these talented folks and hearing from them frequently with updates about their lives in dance.

bfa news



BFA Class of 2016: Justin Yeung, Allison Pauley, Skylee Trimble, Gina Matsie, Arielle Dykstra, Elinor Fujimoto, Katherine Williams

BY LINDA LEHOVEC

This year's seniors move out into the world in diverse and interesting ways: as accomplished students, teachers, choreographers, performers, film-makers, and thinkers. They are stepping into teaching jobs, choreographic challenges, European exploration, graduate school programs, yoga certification, film-festivals and life with skill and a sense of agency that makes us proud! Half of this small but mighty class graduated in December and are already working in Chicago and New York, with the other half joining them by the end of summer, moving to Chicago, Colorado, and Berlin as the place to begin the next chapter in their journey into the dance world and life.

transitions BY CYNTHIA OLIVER

if it weren't for Renée....

I was a fresh-faced island girl coming to the big city to become a professional dancer. She was a superbly hip adjunct instructor who rolled into campus on white high-top roller skates with orange wheels. I remember those wheels because I thought, "Damn, this teacher is cool!" She breezed into the classroom and taught us phrases that were long, circuitous, and quirky, like nothing I had seen or attempted before. It was exciting to be in her classroom for so many reasons – you never knew what she was going to say, and when she did say it, there was a flavor that was particular to her, an arresting arrangement of thought that caused one to pause and reconsider your own stance on something. Renée always offered a point of view that was clear and solid and discriminating. She was a task-master and we left the room drenched in sweat and peaked in interest for the different, the edgy, the fresh. I was stimulated by Renée, grateful to her for opening up a whole new world. I went on to have a wonderful career as a professional dancer and when I finally came to a crossroads and went back into graduate school, I came out not quite knowing what I would do. I had a hefty dance resume and a scant

academic one. Then again she presented another world. I received an email out of the blue saying something to the effect of, "Congratulations on all your accomplishments! I have followed your career and should you ever consider teaching in a university, please look into Illinois." Well, that was 15 years ago. I followed that invitation and ended up being her colleague in Dance at Illinois. This position and my involvement in the kind of work that I make and am continually intrigued by is in great part owed to Renée Wadleigh. I have had many teachers and a few mentors along the way who have not only showed me "a way" but have offered me alternatives I never imagined. Renée is one of those whose insight, tenacity, and particular nature has challenged me and opened new worlds, for which I am forever grateful. I am here now because of Renée Wadleigh. And I chuckle when she puts on a devilish grin and says, "I taught her everything she knows!" She may indeed be right...

Renée retires from Dance at Illinois in the spring of 2017. She leaves behind a rich legacy and love of dance. We will miss her.



Carolyn Barry (BFA'10), Renay Aumiller (MFA'09), Julia Radomyski (BFA'10), Young-Sun Lee (MFA'10), Hallie Aldrich (MFA'11), Will Schneider (MFA'10), Kyli Kleven (BFA'09) in *Getting There* by Professor Renée Wadleigh; Not pictured is: Stephen West



be a pivotal force— donate now!

Donors play a pivotal role in the realization of the department's ambitions to become a national center for the development of dance artists and leaders. The collaborative work generated in our program has been spreading across campus and out into the world, and we can do even more to share what dance can contribute to our society. Dance Partners—our generous donors—provide the core strength for our students, our creative work, and our vision for advancing the art of dance.

**We hope you will join us in our mission to cultivate
imaginative, innovative, and sustainable artistic lives.**

To make a gift, please designate the desired fund on your check, made payable to the University of Illinois Foundation/Department of Dance, and mail to UIF, P.O. Box 3429, Champaign, IL 61826-3429.

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dance partners

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no debt for dancers

No Debt for Dancers campaign strives to eliminate college debt and eradicate the notion of the 'starving artist' by raising funds for alumni projects, summer study, and tuition scholarships.

No Debt for Dancers supports our mission to "...cultivate imaginative, innovative and sustainable artistic lives."

The four years spent in a dance program ignites a dancer's career. Students are given studio time, mentorship, professional connections, experience in the field, technical training, and the ability to sharpen their craft. Studies in higher education both further a theoretical understanding of the field, and the knowledge to sustain a highly physical practice over a

lifetime. Graduates become dancers, choreographers, curators, dance critics/writers, scholars, educators, arts administrators, program coordinators, teachers, somatic practitioners, etc. These knowledgeable, experienced, and versatile dance artists expand the field both artistically and academically and our communities are enhanced by the embodied experiences they bring to our lives. No Debt for Dancers is a dynamic way to realize the full potential of dance as an art form.



Kendra Portier (MFA'18) and Jessie Young (MFA'16) in Young's *descend sky*

scholarships

Vannie L. Sheiry Memorial Scholarship
(Est. 1994)

Jessie Young (MFA'16)

Awarded in recognition of outstanding performance.

Moe Family Dance Award (Est. 1996)

Elinor Fujimoto (BFA'16)

Awarded to a dance major with potential for unique contributions to the dance field.

Wanda M. Nettl Prize for Student Choreography (Est. 2002)

Brendan Behan (MFA'16)

Jessica Pretty (MFA'16)

Patricia Knowles Graduate Travel Award
(Est. 2006)

Charli Brissey (MFA'18)

Award designated for an outstanding MFA candidate to be used for travel and study that deepens his/her artistic life.

Beverly Blossom and Carey Erickson Alumni Award (Est. 2007)

Mei-Kuang Chen (MFA'07)

Enables an alumnus to return to campus to teach, perform, choreograph, and otherwise enhance Dance at Illinois.

Lisa Carducci Memorial Scholarship

Arielle Dykstra (BFA'16)

Katherine Williams (BFA'16)

Award designated for an outstanding student.

Mary Elizabeth Hamstrom Award

Kendra Portier (MFA'18)

Awarded to a graduate student's study.

Senior Magnolia Award

Gina Matsie

Awarded to a graduating senior who has shown the most growth and development throughout his/her four years.

Outstanding Undergraduate Performance Award

Jen Lu (BFA'17)

Randi Townsend (BFA'17)

Carducci Scholarships for Dance Projects
(Est. 2010)

Donna Carnow (BFA'17)

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Thomas Welsh-Huggins (BFA'17)

Issa Scholarship

Jaelin Hearisides (BFA'19)

Given to an outstanding incoming freshman

Larry Scholarship

Emmaline Rapier (BFA'19)

Given to an outstanding incoming freshman

These scholarships support dance research and/or study for BFA and MFA students seeking to further their creative, performance, and/or scholarly work. Students are selected based on a diverse range of aesthetics within projects that demonstrate rigorous inquiry, individual voice, and curiosity.

2016–2017 performance calendar

Flatlands Dance Film Festival

August 26 & 27

November Dance

November 10–12

February Dance

February 2–4

StudioDance I

March 9–11

StudioDance II

April 20–22

Senior Concert

December 2 & 3, April 28 & 29

audition dates

Undergraduate Program

October 10, January 14*, February 4, March 6

(*Chicago audition at
Hubbard Street Dance Center)

Graduate Program

February 8 & 9

Gina Matsie (BFA'16), Elisandra Rosario (BFA'17), Kadesha Ellison (BFA'18) in Postdoctoral Research Associate C. Kemal Nance's *hmu*

2015–2016 faculty/staff list & magazine credits

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Mei-Kuang Chen
Ping Chong
Rachel Damon

Chad Hall
Courtney Harris
Philip Jamison
Oren Laor
Mark Morris Dance Group
Philidanco
Joanna Reed/Same Planet, Different World
Maree Remalia
Niv Sheinfeld
Jin Won/Pradhanica

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Rebecca A. Ferrell, *Editor*
All photography by Natalie Fiol, unless otherwise noted.
SURFACE 51, Design: www.surface51.com
Cover Image: Alex Gossen (BFA'17) in Ping Chong's *Baldwin/NOW*

Charles Gowin (BFA'15) in Associate Professor Linda Lehovec's *Kaivalya*

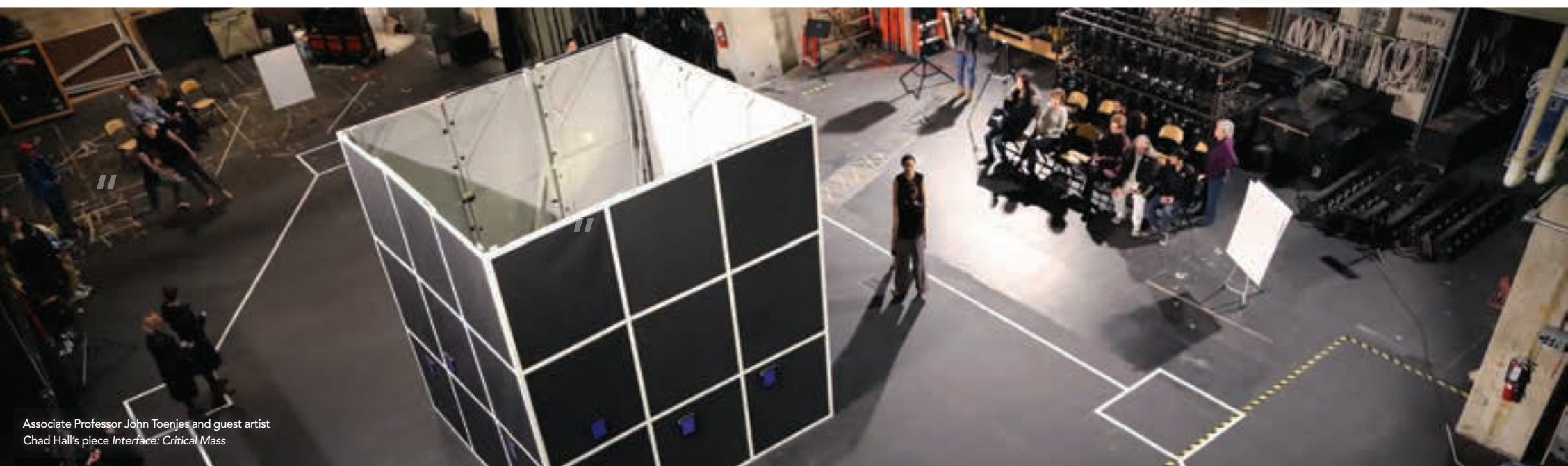


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ARTS



Associate Professor John Toenjes and guest artist
Chad Hall's piece *Interface: Critical Mass*