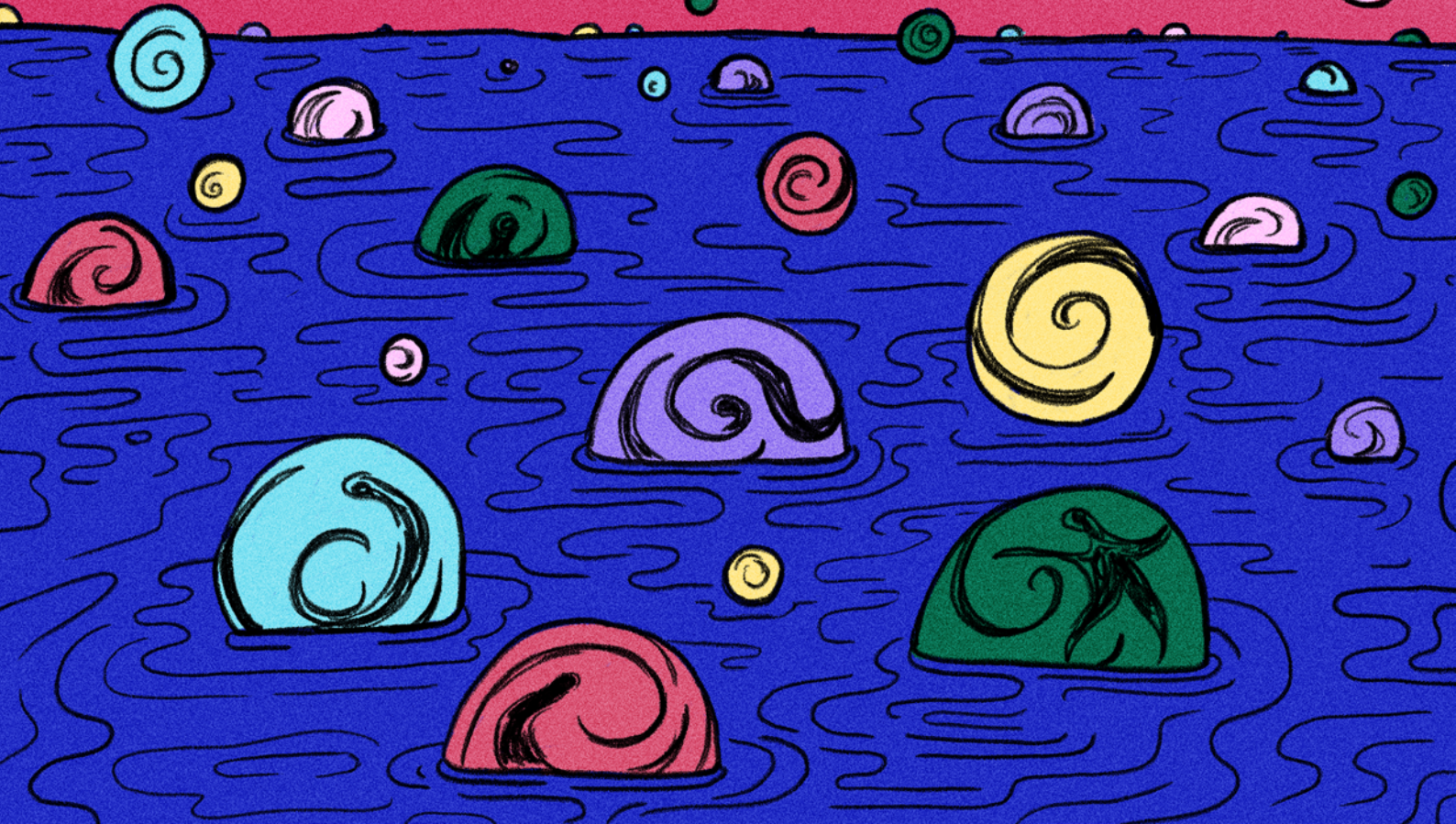




DANCERSDANCEDANCESDANCINGLY

a series of dance portraits



dancersdancedancesdancingly

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Dear Reader,

Through space of time, from gods and spirits, our bodies carry messages in every dance step we take, and dance has been used since ancient times as a form of expression for emotions and thoughts. It has stood by us through the rise and fall of civilizations, passed on through generations of bodies like whispers of souls, continuing to teach people about our history, present and future.

"Dance is essentially coordinated body movements, often rhythmic and to music. Every movement holds the possibility of being a dance", according to Wikipedia.

But, for us, it is a striving, a longing, a desire. A sanctuary of bodily tales in process, a sensory stimulus beyond a human reality, where time and space succeed each other. We carry the language of dance with us, from the past and to this day.

dancersdancedancesdancingly is a collection of portraits that constitutes a collective manifestation with the desire to create a platform for dialogue, reflection, and dissemination of knowledge about dance as a universal artistic language and its significance. A documented space for artists whom in our shared present, in the context that we recognize as Sweden, create and work with choreography within the field of dance, whom are also dancers who interpret varied artistic approaches to dance. A space for celebration and joy, to unite and continue to row together in a deep sea.

The vision of the publication is to highlight artists who we believe have created and continue to create waves, made impressions, impressed and inspired, who in one way or another, together with thousands of other artists, are crucial in weaving together the cycle of dance. We have chosen to take the reader on a journey through artistic formulations of dance, where we have asked questions, twisted conventional frameworks, and found encounters of solidarity in the spirit of dance. The artists are carefully curated beyond the linear aesthetics which are proposed for our shared present, beyond categorizations of genres and expressions, form, language or binarity, beyond the embellishment and discipline of the physical body, and instead straight into questions where the word has been allowed to speak and where dance carries the weight. We hope the reader takes the time to delve deeply into this world to see words transform into dance, and how these artistries become enduring memories in the time we share.

Artists with profound, deep and beautiful breaks like **Cristina Caprioli**, who was recently recognized for her influential artistic work at the Venice Biennale. She reasons and reflects on the freedom of her thirty-year span of dance and choreography making, or for us **choreographership**, a new word that emerged during the process and that we are proud to submit to the language council of the art of dance and choreography. The iconic duo **Reich+Szyber**, who carry living history in their bodies, discuss their collaboration. What does it mean when conversation becomes the guiding principle of an artist's work?

Satoshi Kudo theorizes and reflects on his practice *Motion Qualia*, inviting us into conceptual and philosophical musings. He discusses whether Swedish dance art is characterized by narrow frameworks. A relevant reflection given the development of the last decade in the Swedish dance and choreography field, where the physical craft has been intellectualized and slowly dismantled. The physical craft is intertwined with the pulse, the rhythm of the heart, which is the core of dance. Through **Sofia Castro**, who weaves contemporary flamenco into our context, we talk about the poetry of rhythm as a tool to achieve the will and impact of dance.

She highlights the power of dance as a language for collective change, and all over the world dance is used as a tool for change. **Mohanned Hawaz**, with his unique artistry, redefines the demographics around masculinity norms in traditional dance. He reflects on the implications of pioneering artistry within the framework of honor culture norms. Today, we can enjoy more artistry that challenges the contemporary ownership of what has historically been a gender-transcending form of expression, collectively causing binary frameworks to merge.

The epic **Niki Tsappos** sheals us with her dance and rewrites reality. **Rani Nair**, works in words that take the reader into moments of memory that must not be forgotten. A dancing body always carries memories, and through collective movements, we all share memories we must never forget. Stories of bodily oppression against indigenous peoples around the world, where dance and movement became a weapon for survival. **Ola Stinnerbom** illuminates the darkness with his life, making everything that carries Swedishness disappear, and makes us ask ourselves the question: Who are we and whose land are we dancing on?

The stars **BamBam Frost and Lydia Östberg Diakité**, who merge time and art in the heavens becoming the perfect lovers; dance has no colleagues, dance only has lovers. **Nya Rörelsen** lays the firm foundations and unites in the process to surrender to the power that the collective provides us, a strong voice. We dive into the art of **Nefeli Oikonomou and Sebastian Lingserius**, a duo that eats, makes babies, creates and sleeps together with their dance. It is dance art at its nerdiest, playfully enhancing everything we can imagine being allowed to transform into dance.

Maria Naidu discusses transformation, both physical and geographical, such as Swedish transformation. She embraces the interpretation and depth of what it is to be a dancer, inside and out, stomping in the choreographer's mind. **Nassim Meki**, the dancer who interprets dance, who reshapes the desire for dance by repeatedly breaking it down to finally own it. Like **Daniel Staaf**, who brings out the essence of dance and makes us realize that it exists within its own essence, they are a world-class craft. **Anna Vnuk**, who works with the truth in her heart, and is asked; if you could travel in time, when would you like to be active as a dance artist? She answers: *There is no other time I would rather be active during, and this is mostly because I want to believe that there is a reason why we are right here, right now.*

Ninos Josef & Paloma Madrid,
Editors-in-chief



"My work is a continuous exploration of breaking conventional references while actively seeking collaborations to challenge my physical capacity, artistic comfort and my intellect, whilst, my essence is researching to navigate the balance between enjoying the freedom in dance and movement, my political body and its intersections, as well as my strategic development work."



"While we were dancing, memories previously registered in our bodies emerged, memories that existed in the blood, muscles, legs, hair, eyes, skin...Our bodies came forward through the movements. In the beginning, we observed how our bodies moved, and later we learned to feel different emotions that enabled us to verbalize and physically work out eight dance positions, a movement vocabulary, Rueda de 8 ojos / The eight eyed wheel.

The movement-gestures, that is, the bodily movements, are cyclical and can be looped continuously, making them an endless dance. This means that it is possible to perform the eight movements repeatedly for your entire life. The language of our movements created dances previously unthinkable by the unworldly dance culture."

Ninos Josef, indigenous Aramean/Assyrian, was born in 1989 in Norrköping and trained at the Royal Swedish Ballet School. He has been engaged internationally at several renowned dance companies and opera houses before returning to Sweden in 2016, where he has engaged as a dancer at the Royal Swedish Opera and actor at the Royal Dramatic Theater. His artistic activity transgresses through performative expressions in dance, acting, criticism and text, but also by working throughout the cultural sector for development, strategy and renewal. Josef has previously been editor-in-chief of Kultwatch, Development Strategist in diversity at the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the head of operations for dance at Region Gävleborg, as well as appointed by the government as an expert board member in dance at the Swedish Arts Grants Committee. Today he is engaged through Dansalliansen as a freelance Performing Artist and Development Strategist based in Stockholm.

His artistic practice is a continuous exploration of breaking conventional references and is based on parameters linked to honor cultural norms in relation to queerness, bodily racialization processes and binarity. In Sweden, he has regularly collaborated with choreographers such as Alexander Ekman, Helena Franzén, Paloma Madrid, Sebastian Lingserius and Örjan Andersson among others. Since 2018, Ninos has been the only Scandinavian member of The Legendary House of Commes des Garçons, a ballroom house based in the USA, where he has walked and won around in Europe.

"I listen while I choreograph life"— Paloma Madrid, born 1974 in Valparaiso, Chile. She has lived in exile in Stockholm since 1976. Artistically based in Stockholm since 2005.

Throughout her long term collective research process, *Vuestrxs Cuerpxs son Vuestrx Territorio (V.C.V.T.), Our body, our territory*, we were able to deepen our dance in peace since we had listened to our bodies and knew what kind of dance we wanted to dance.

As an active and intuitive artist and researcher, she is described in the field as the "poetical body investigator", proposing the body as a medium in constant change and as a knowledge producer. Madrid's works constantly explore the intersection between care, collaborative art and social choreography. Founder of community dance in Sweden, her work searches for possibilities of the mind and body to rethink dance, writing, dance education, and choreography. She started Rosales, a dance company and platform that investigates the spaces in nepantla² within the choreographic field.

2. Quote from the book *Nobody can know where to go, if they don't know where they come from*, published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name at Hanninge Konsthall, Sweden, 2022.

2. Nepantla, El lugar de la frontera, or Nepantla the place of the border, is where artists inhabit the transitional space of Nepantla. The border is the locus of resistance, of rupture, and of putting together fragments. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Luz en Lo Oscuro*, chapter 3

Cristina Caprioli

born in 1953 in Brescia, works with choreography and dance

How would you define your art and your dance?

More than as an art, I see my work as the execution of an interest, and the time taken and given by the work. The interest lies in how the movement comes to consciousness and causes us to lose our footing. How it alters reality and why. Why it remains elusive while making us tangibly present. These simple questions require a courageous, ingenious, and resilient mobility, one that is ready to throw itself from the most physically concrete to the fully uncertain transcendental. Pinpointed focus in wide angle. An extended study in sustainable trust.

Even as a child, I had exuberant legs and a pending love for fine print patterns and low-key tonalities. Nervous, almost manic. Immediate, caught in the sensorial, chasing credibility. Even today, dancing is a way for me to step into the world and therein to give up my body in favor of a *belonging*. My dance is a dancing that confirms its own value, while knowing it is nothing special. A thinking-doing that tackles the intangible we cannot grasp, yet perform and perceive.

What is the purpose of your work in the context you operate in?

Provide the place and circumstance for challenging (enriching) participation. Ensure availability to sensory experiences that widen the common understanding of *who* a body is, *how* we move the movement and the movement moves us. Promote a movement that dares make a statement, that respects its participants, and the event of exchange. Assist our surroundings with aesthetic experiences that add value to the world, as we perceive it and cannot yet imagine. Singular as collective. In turn, to maintain a counterweight to the prevailing market-driven values.

What is your work contributing with?

long-term investigative art projects and through art social care interactive meeting places, workshops, laboratories, internships
a stimulating workplace, a rewarding work environment, repeated work opportunities
sensory experiences, physically tangible and imaginary, welcoming but also challenging
inclusive exchange economies that suggest choreography in different formats
free charge attendance, caring choreography that refrains from convincing
dancing that stirs up your senses and touches you at your core

*patterns and shapes, line of thoughts and tonalities
aesthetic experiences, not necessarily useful
non-consumable experiences
from a distance, in the intimate
an infectious condition
an approach*

How do you translate and process experiences into the physical body?

By entering the place and the moment and therein dwell, recognize, and see through. Only to immediately re-embody what has been experienced into arms and legs, torso, pelvis, nerve fibers, further into the space and prevailing circumstance. By sustaining a critical approach to all activities undertaken, while surrendering unconditionally to the reality of the circumstance. All of this drives the work process, the one which entrusts the choreography that affirms, but also reconsiders the place, time and the context that this particular dancing and this particular choreography, which emerges from and at the same time adds itself to. Physical bodies, physical states and physical movements that are making themselves constitutive of their here and now. Real and imaginary.

When do you feel most free in your dance / choreography?

When I, confronted with all the tracks that are given to me, have managed to target one single groove, and already have submitted to this very groove. When the first step has been taken, and the intention assumed, when the work has mapped its working strategy, from where other gestures and disturbances can indicate other intentions and execution. When my person has left room for the work, upon which it can act in its entire register of bonded forms and dislodged formats. When motive, purpose and outcome have begun to interact. When the work has understood how it should work, without controlling its outcome. When every movement brings itself up to consciousness (knowledge?) and stirs up a disorder. When choreography remains in motion. When dancing is truly dancing, no matter if in step or out of step, however meaningful or logically consistent nonsense.

What are the social, structural, and artistic limitations that constrict your work and your art?

Still and again, having to explain why dancing deserves to exist, and having to relate to our time's conservative understanding of dance. All the conventions that incapacitate dancing from moving, all the politicizing manipulations that reduce the dance to a narcissistic battlefield. The demands of the media, the market, and the political rhetoric on dance to turn into a consumer product (entertainment?). All the prejudices that relegate dancing to being an exception. And by that which dismisses dance from being a constitutive part of the body of society. The lack of vision in current cultural politics, our own field's anxious pursuit of attention. Above all, my work is limited by an ambition paired with my fragile self-image. Unless that is precisely what makes my work sustainable.



Photographer: Jens Wazel



Reich+Szyber

Bogdan Szyber born in 1958 in Zabrze, Poland

Carina Reich born in 1958 in Ramnäs, Sweden

Choreographers, Theatre Directors, and Playwrights

What does your art consist of, and why is it important?

What has characterized our art and influenced our working methodology is the given fact that we are two.

A duo.

We have based our creation on the conversation between us. This has taken the form of playing, testing, questioning, and further developing ideas, where the conversation has guided the development of the ideas and, consequently, how the created works looked. This conversation has continued into the working process and invited other colleagues to participate in the interplay between dialog and testing on the floor.

The questioning of phenomena that we have assessed or judged to be prevalent, often based on circumstances in our own lives and/or practice, has been a guiding principle.

To tilt or burst spaces, cultural expressions, materials, bourgeois norms so that something underlying becomes visible; to be stubbornly contrary but with a hint of humor.

Our art consists of a constant search for new formats, places and contexts for our works. A nomadic art on the move since the early 1980s. We have allowed our art to meander across several genres, which has allowed us to gain experience of the knowledge, culture and discourse of different artistic disciplines.

And - the importance of one's art or its impact on contemporary society is probably something for others to weigh and judge? Such as critics, colleagues, art historians and funders ...

What is your driving force, and why do you persist?

The driving force could be desire, anger or curiosity to try 'something different'. It is probably a combination of these three in different portions. We have worked together for 40 years, and sometimes we have asked ourselves why we have persisted.

Sometimes, what moves you forward is something that becomes visible and can only be understood afterwards; in a conversation, when you put pen to paper or hold your tongue.



What are your personal observations on the transformation of dance in Sweden since you started working?

We would say that dance has gone from focusing on the dance format and movement itself to moving across different fields and putting more emphasis on message or concept.

Dance practitioners have verbalized their art form more clearly, partly because writers began to write about dance in a way that inscribed dance in a broader art discussion in the 1980s, and partly because dance artists themselves began to practice talking in the early days of artistic research.

Since we started working in the early 1980s, we have seen aesthetic waves and trends come and go. We have been part of these ourselves. We have both flowed with the currents as well as tried to swim against them. Some examples: "The New York avant-garde of the 70s Is What Really Matters" / "Postmodernism/Deconstruction" / "Dance pure" / "Not dancing and/or training (but quoting Deleuze)" / "The return of somatic practice".

There are more, of course.

If you could travel in time, when would you like to be active as a dance artist? (then-now-future)

Bogdan: I would either want to be a shaman's dance-sidekick in the Neolithic period, performing a ritual trance dance for the tribe, including hallucinogenic substances, or perhaps I would prefer to be in my 20s in the dance/avant-garde in the aforementioned New York in the 60s and 70s.

Carina: I think the experience of moving between different ages is the most interesting leap to experience. It would probably be especially fun to be part of the movement that dropped the corset and shoes and danced barefoot.

Satoshi Kudo

born in 1967 in Japan, based in Stockholm since 1998, Choreographer and Dancer

How do you define your art?

I find art when my perspective changes, or I sense the existence of its essence by the experience of art. It is not just a momentary surprise, but there is also a hidden possibility that the way we read the depth over time, or we discover it as we age and gain experience.

I believe that the dynamism of movement only has meaning if there is a reason behind it to occur. For that, you need to recognize what surrounds the resource. Instead of following one's own wish to create and forward a movement, the movement happens because of necessity, and that becomes a language of dance which is an expression that will always be physical. The way I believe in dance is that the physical expression has its own opinion, rather than my mind manipulating my body. By researching the direction of where the body goes, it navigates me to discover what me and my body want. That way, it makes me feel that I am working with my body in a state of expression.

Instead of working with my body as a tool, I treat it with respect. Just because movement belongs in the moment, dance performance often requires aesthetics or surprises. However, if I focus only on that, I might not be able to convey the concept through the work. I think my works and expressions reflect the perspectives and beliefs of myself. Therefore, I believe it's not only important what I create in the moment, but also how I am receiving and digesting the experiences. This means, how I am living in this moment will affect what I create later. Art is not only about inspiration, but is also a long term influence.

Are you obsessed with dance, or is dance obsessed with you?

There is usually an ego that tries to manipulate and organize the body. However, if I let it do so, I will reach my limits quickly and have a hard time responding to the movements. This becomes a very critical problem with me aging, so I'm currently trying to figure out how much I can take my consciousness away from my dancing. In order to do that, it is first necessary to disassemble the relationship between gravity and my own subconscious mind, and then rebuild a new sense of equilibrium based on the laws of physics. It inspires the body's capabilities to expand.

At first, I lose control of my body and then use the ensuing fear to activate my reflexes. Although this movement may seem dangerous, the body's unconscious ability acts to protect itself. By repeating this, I can read the pattern and then artificially shift the movements created by those reflexes, then the body activates its reflexes again in order to restore its lost sense of balance. By continuing to do this, the fragments of movement will begin to form a phrase and become established as a dance. These movements take me to a new dimension from the one I was in, and they also affect the connection between my body and mind as I went through the fear. Eventually, it initiates me to discover new ways of relationships between facts and flows of everyday life. Simply moving has a profound effect on the mind, and it evokes a feeling similar to awakening. I'm obsessed with developing movements based on this movement theory that I named as *Motion Qualia*.

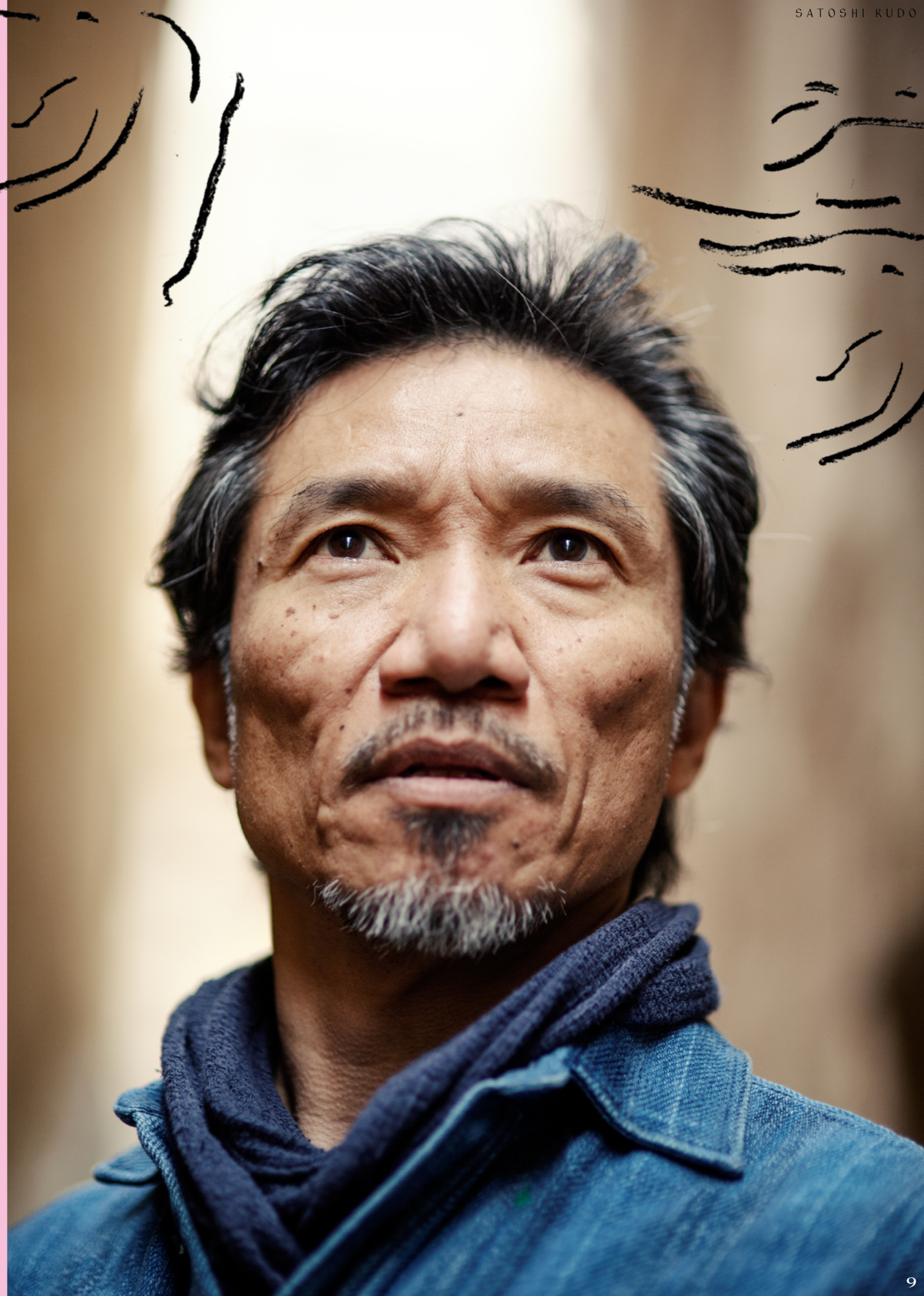
What role or purpose does your art have in the context that you work in? What does it contribute to?

It actually changes from time to time. Since I worked for other artists for some time, their art affected me more than I expected. It drives me in their direction unconsciously. Once I realized that I was walking someone else's path, my art became a signpost to help me get back to my path. When I get confused or get stuck with ideas, instead of looking forward, I lean back onto my theory *Motion Qualia* which drops me into the right field and freedom. When I communicate with other dancers or colleagues, I explain myself by using this theory as a metaphor, and it seems more useful compared to making a logical explanation.

What are your personal observations on the transformations of dance in Sweden, since you started working?

I moved to Sweden in 1998, but my first meeting with Swedish dance was in 1991 in Tokyo, where I saw the show *Cisele* by Mats Ek, which I really liked. I expected there to be similar styles in the country, since I moved here I never found it. But at the same time I discovered many other styles of dance. The most inspiring thing was that the dancers here are affected a lot by politics, which I guess it's because Swedish artists depend on public funding from national and municipal governments. It's probably natural, and I learned how to follow it, but I don't know if I'm doing good or not at it yet. I feel the trend of dance has changed as politics changes, but somehow the dance trend has become more narrow or more demanding. Perhaps, the effects could also relate to the smaller population in Sweden in comparison to other European countries, North America and Japan, in which I have lived and worked most.

In a way, I feel in Sweden there are not so many choices for artists but to navigate in a certain way as many organizations are directed towards conceptual performing arts. Perhaps, it is because of the system here, where we need to or can depend on funds, which I have found to be a better situation than in many other countries'. But at the same time, we must explain our concepts through application before we get into the work, which will tie us once we start to create. I assume we try to make our ideas fit into the Swedish political interests. More or less, we ask ourselves if we are conceptual enough, intellectual enough and political enough, before we ask ourselves if we are artistic enough. I am not sure how much freedom an artist should feel, or whether the artist should be navigated by politics, or what we should achieve.



Sofía Castro

may child, born in Sweden with origins from Uruguay, Choreographer, Dancer and Performer

What is dance for you?

Dance for me is an entwining of bodily movement and a force that has the ability to affect not only one's own emotions but also the surroundings. I see dance as a rich and diverse language, a powerful form of expression and communication. It is not just a series of physical movements; it is an art form that produces subtle but intense echoes of emotions and experiences, and has the capacity to tell stories without saying a word.

What is your driving force, and why do you persist?

My drive stems from the need to articulate my own voice and experiences. I persist in the belief that a diversity of perspectives is necessary, and through my work, I strive to create a platform for different views of the world, as I strongly believe that a multifaceted panorama enriches our society. My relentless pursuit of this goal is also an investment in the future, in the hope that coming generations will grow up surrounded by a variety of perspectives that shape a more open and inclusive world.

How do you process the interpretation of your body from the audience's gaze?

I do not let the idea of the audience's perception of my body control me. Knowing that each individual in the audience brings their unique experience and knowledge, I avoid trying to predict their interpretations. During my years of training and working with flamenco dance in Seville, I have accumulated techniques, knowledge and experiences that are used as tools and mediums when choreographing. I strive to constantly explore how movements are affected by emotions, social conditions, environment and heritage, and how they affect both spectators and performers in different contexts. The expression created is the result of artistic processes, influenced by place, time and collaborators. Although many people have preconceived ideas about flamenco dance, I see it as something organic and constantly evolving.

When do you feel most free in your dance and choreography?

My greatest moment of freedom is when I am dancing and/or choreographing, and I manage to preserve a sense of play. When I let playfulness guide me, it opens up surprising patterns and unexpected movements, which allow me to break barriers and explore the boundaries of the art form. I let go of expectations and allow myself to live in the now. It is in those moments of playful exploration that I feel I reach an artistic peak and create something that is not only technically correct, but also personal and expressive. Every work that I have created has a clear moment like that. That happens in the encounter with another, in duets, trios, or when I choreograph an ensemble where the dancers come from completely different dance experiences and areas of expertise. It starts with listening, curiosity and a desire to connect. Someone begins to speak through their artistic expression and the other responds. A conversation and play take off through movement. Often there is common ground despite the different backgrounds and areas of expertise. The listening to one another is total, and from there a new language and new dance expressions are created.



Mohanned Hawaz

born in Mosul in Iraq, Dance Artist, Sweden

What is dance for you?

Dance for me is to, with the help of and use of my body, describe, tell or convey something. It can be a feeling, but also pure embodiment, of course. The art of dance inspires and motivates, since movement is a universal language that speaks directly to the heart and reaches out to everyone regardless of language and cultural barriers.

Why do you dance?

Dance allows me to express things that I cannot describe in words. It has become a way for me to communicate with myself and the world, as it is sometimes easier to express feelings and describe things through movement than it is with words. Dance motivates me to constantly develop and through the art of dance, I feel a constant strive to become technically better, and at the same time find new ways and combinations. This ambition is what drives me to practice, day in and day out. Through dance, I get to know myself and others. I get to belong to a community and find meaning in my life. It has helped me through extremely tough periods as it allows me to deal with loads of impressions and different emotions. I chose to continue dancing despite death threats and being forced to leave my homeland because of dance. Dance has always been by my side, and it has been my closest friend and family. Without dance, I do not exist. In dance, I feel that I can be myself, I feel safe.

When do you feel most free in your dance and/or choreography?

For most of the time I feel free, but I also feel that I sometimes need to be cautious since I come from a culture whose perception of dance/art has recently worsened, as dance has never been a fully respected profession.

When I work with traditional *Iraqi dance*² I become quite tradition-bound, unlike when I work with modern dance where I feel completely free to choreograph and dance the way I want. But I feel the freest in my artistic expression, in the meeting with other dancers and students, where we can explore in the open space without being judged or when I dance solo on stage and am allowed to be free to improvise and express what comes right there and then. From this flow, many new choreographic ideas emerge, especially when I combine them with my accumulated knowledge.

What are your social, structural and artistic conditions for working as an artist?

I consider my conditions to operate, and even continue to operate, in my art as good, as I have access to most of what I need in Sweden. But with that said, there are always a lot of challenges to make everything work. My biggest challenges are people's preconceived notions of who I am or should be, and that we live in a world where many art forms are getting a lower priority in society and people seem to forget that it is art that brings us together and helps us build relationships to understand each other. I have a wide social network of friends and colleagues all over the world, who inspire and support me whenever needed. Choosing dance as a profession is a constant challenge, but I know I will never give up. Dance is my everything.

² Traditional Iraqi dance includes folklore dances such as Al Choby, Bagiyé, Belaty, Goobaré, Hacha'a and Kawliya, which originate from various indigenous populations and date back to the Mesopotamian Empire. The traditional Iraqi dance is considered a cultural heritage and has different characteristics depending on its geographical origin. It is often characterized by group formations and energetic movements and is both danced in its original form, as well as adapted by contemporary artists for modern stage performances.



Photographer: Gustav Ågerstrand



Niki Awandee Tsappos

Dancer and Choreographer, Stockholm

What does dance do for you? What does dance do to you?

Dance for me has always been the tool to get closer to myself and my truth. It bypasses everything I think I am, takes me past the ego and gives access to a bigger and deeper part of myself that cannot lie even when I try.

It tells me about who I am, who I have been and who I can become. It gives me access to my body on multiple levels and tells me my story. It also gives me access to the stories of others and shares what the soul can look and feel like. It brings me closer to other people with whom I may never exchange a word, but still get access to their story, their life and their truth. Depending on how deeply I listen, the more of my and others' stories can emerge, and there is nothing more amazing than seeing yourself or someone else deeply rooted in their truth.

When I choreograph, it gives me an opportunity to create my own world, in the world, to make room for something I am missing or curious about. To listen more deeply to what this particular time and place is whispering or calling for. It can be a way to assist with a creation, a proposal, an approach, or an offering to one's surroundings and world.

When I teach, I want to provide access to both mental and physical understanding of a language that has been shaped by generations and formed a meaningful culture. I want to honor those who came before and the knowledge from that time by allowing this creativity to be both celebrated and reborn in new bodies, and through that, give birth to new ideas, expressions and cultures.

In parallel with this, I love giving space to personal expression, giving keys for individuals to be able to unlock their inner rooms and feel their own energy and magic flow and take shape. There is such power in it, both to feel it in yourself or witness someone else in that state.

How do you translate and process your experiences into your physical body?

Dance helps me to purify and cleanse, heal and activate the body. I feel the clearest, most open and grounded after dancing, so when the world feels overwhelming, dance can help land thoughts and emotions, giving more power and clarity to navigate experiences.

What role or purpose does your art have in the context that you work in? What does it contribute to?

Hopefully it opens doors, thoughts and hearts... I dance a lot for my own sake, and it has ripple effects that I don't always control or try to control. My purpose in my context is something outside of myself - which I don't always want to think about so much. I usually make a greater difference when I don't think about it and follow my heart. There are times when I do not focus on my own dance but use my knowledge and experience to work in the community and there try to create more opportunities for others, by broadening and anchoring the knowledge in the field. If I focus too much on that, I lose myself, if I focus too much on myself, I lose the context and the feeling of being part of something bigger, so I try to keep a balance.

What are your personal observations on the transformation of dance in Sweden since you started working?

I have been active for almost 30 years, and a lot has happened to dance in Sweden since then. Hip Hop and other Afro-diasporic dances have made a journey where they have been popularized, appropriated, discriminated against, celebrated, diminished, elevated and so much more. I would need a whole essay to be able to speak about this topic in a dignified way. I can see that there is a lot of work to be done, but I also see that the generations after me have access to more opportunities than those before me. We shall continue to work.



Rani Nair

Dance Artist and Choreographer, Lund



I dance
 I dance
 I dance
 I dance (movement)
 I dance (movement)
 I dance because humans have always danced
 I dance because it is the oldest art form
 I dance because it is the most beautiful form of communication
 I dance to understand
 I dance because I don't understand
 I don't dance to be understood
 I dance because no one can dance like me
 I dance because it's something I have to do
 I dance to feel good
 I dance to be happy
 I dance to think
 I dance to explore
 I dance because that's just the way it is
 I dance because it is dangerous to wiggle your hips
 I dance to change the room
 I dance to change people's perception of dance
 I dance to change people's perception of me
 I dance to change people's perception of themselves
 I dance to show other perspectives
 I dance to challenge norms
 I dance to break prejudices
 I dance because I want to
 I dance for my parents
 I dance for you
 I dance because I am a professional dancer
 I dance because it is what I know. I have an education in dance. I have learned to control my body. Taking care of my body, preparing it. Remembering different dance steps and movement combinations, different choreographies. I have learned to move my body parts in different ways, in different rhythms, in different formations. Bending my body in different ways, lifting my legs high and low. I dance different dances from different parts of the world, different continents, different classes, in different rooms, at different times.
 I have danced flamenco, tap, Matt Mattox, hip-hop, ballet, release technique, Graham technique, Cunningham, improvisation, contact improvisation, flying-low technique, instant composition, floor bar, pilates, Kathak, Bharata tyam, Mohini Attam, Kalarippayatu, Chau, yoga, frog dance, grinolle's dance, wash the clothes dance, hang the clothes dance, ring dance. Dancing around the tree, dancing around the midsummer pole, dancing all week, for the boyfriend in Lundagård. slow danced, disco dancing, dance of death, voguing, Baba Karam, shuffle, tango, ballroom dancing, samba, kasedans, solo dancing, moonwalk, robot dancing, electric boogie, electric slide, Riverdance, baroque dancing. Upside down, on the head and on the heels. But only a little on the tips of the toes.
 I dance for my mother, who got into ballet school but never went herself. I dance for my father, who has the rhythm in his body, as my grandmother used to say

I dance for those who can not dance.
 I dance for those who can no longer dance
 I dance for my grandmother, who I first saw dancing when she was 95 years old. I dance for my children. I have danced with them on my body. And I've danced with them inside my body. I dance with them every day because it's the best way to be close. To make someone smile. And to make someone fall asleep. To make someone stay. With me. For a while.
 I dance Baba Karam on my sister's mehmoon
 I dance Sufi dance in Azadi Square with my girlfriend
 I dance a Chilean performance piece with hundreds of feminists in streets all over the world.
 I dance even though the morality police are watching my steps.
 I dance in Damascus late at night after curfew
 I dance in protest on the street, a cupid shuffle in honor of George Floyd
 I dance Lilavati's dance at Seklet's Solon at Kulturhuset Stockholm
 I dance Raj at Stockwig and the audience cheers
 I dance for generations who have not been allowed to dance
 I dance because generations before me have danced
 I dance because I carry a heritage that must be danced
 I dance so that I will never stop remembering
 I dance for you to remember
 I dance for you to see
 I dance even though my body hurts
 I dance so that my body will not hurt
 I dance because I want my children to be free. I want them to own the movement of their bodies. And I want them to know that they own their bodies. I want them to know that through dance they can start a revolution. I want them to feel joy in dance.
 I want them to dance with themselves for themselves
 I want my children to dance with others
 And I want them to feel butterflies in the stomach when dancing with someone they love
 I dance because I am paid to dance
 I prefer to dance with others
 I prefer to dance in clubs
 I prefer to dance in the dark
 I prefer to dance when there is nice music
 I prefer to dance on stage without music
 I prefer to dance at home with music with my children
 I dance soon
 I dance
 I dance and worlds are being destroyed
 I dance
 I dance (movement)

Ola Stinnerbom

born in 1964, Sami Artist and Performer, Västra Ämtervik, Värmland

The Sami dance was a living tradition until the end of the 17th century, when Karl XI ordered “*a council to be held in the Lappish areas to investigate idol worship. The Sami religion shall be crushed and the drums of Sami grace shall be burned, sacrificial sites shall be demolished, and holy places shall be desecrated*”². The original Sami dance was a ritual dance of ecstasy where the *nåetjie*³, the Sami shaman, ran, spun, jumped, crawled and danced low to the ground. The dance became wilder and finally the *nåejtie* falls to the ground as if dead. Around this time, the *nåejtie*, stopped dancing officially, and the dance became hidden and secret.

How do you define your art?

My art is rooted in the understanding for the Sami cultural heritage that has been lost and misses me. In my art, I look for possibilities of expression where the body becomes part of a transcendent form of dance. Being in between and in other worlds at the same time is a first step. This means that I try to share and give my dancers and students tools to create an understanding of other imaginary worlds. Everything that cannot be measured and explained in our overly rational and scientific world seems as though it does not exist. This is where dance becomes an opportunity to learn about other forms of imagination and other beings. In the Sami world, our ancestors are only a thought away, and to be able to dance and have a natural relationship with the dead is a privilege.

I have developed a modern Sami dance form and expression that is performed low to the floor often danced on the knees. It is a sliding and floating expression and at the same time an inner bodily conflict that is shaped and reinforced with counterpoints. Another method I have developed is a drop and rebound technique, where the body takes the form of a bouncing and falling movement in the Sami ecstasy dance. These movement patterns and methods have been a common thread in my movement-schema and choreographies over the years. In relation to resistance and slow motion techniques, the scenic language and dance becomes even more poetic and dreamy. The distinctive low section, with sliding movements at a very slow pace, is like snow clouds just off the ground on a cold winter day.

What does dance do for you? What does dance do to you?

Personally, dance is a way to connect with the other world and my ancestors. It can be compared to a spiritual journey where in my dancing, I leave my body and disappear into another existence. Here I work by embodying the yoik while I dance and yoik simultaneously. The yoik, *vuelie* in Southern Sami is the ancient singing technique where you communicate with other worlds. My vision is to be able to dance a yoik in silence and that the audience see and hear the inner *vuelie*, the yoik, in my dance. The absolute best feeling for me in my creation with dance is when I embody the yoik.

In the Sami realm of the dead, *Jaamie Aimo*, there are the dead and with the ecstatic dance in combination with the yoik, I can put myself in a trance and then travel away and dance with my ancestors. In the Sami realm of the dead *Saajva*, the other world is the place where we can meet and communicate with each other through the Sami movement called *Lihkadus*. The word *Lihkadus* is the closest explanation of what dance is in Sami, meaning the inner and outer movement. There is also an acrobatic and peculiar Sami dance that is performed upside down in slow motion, mostly on one arm, handstand dancing a dance technique where I am a world champion. In *Saajva*, there is a mirror world directly below us, to best connect with that other world, our ancestors danced upside down.

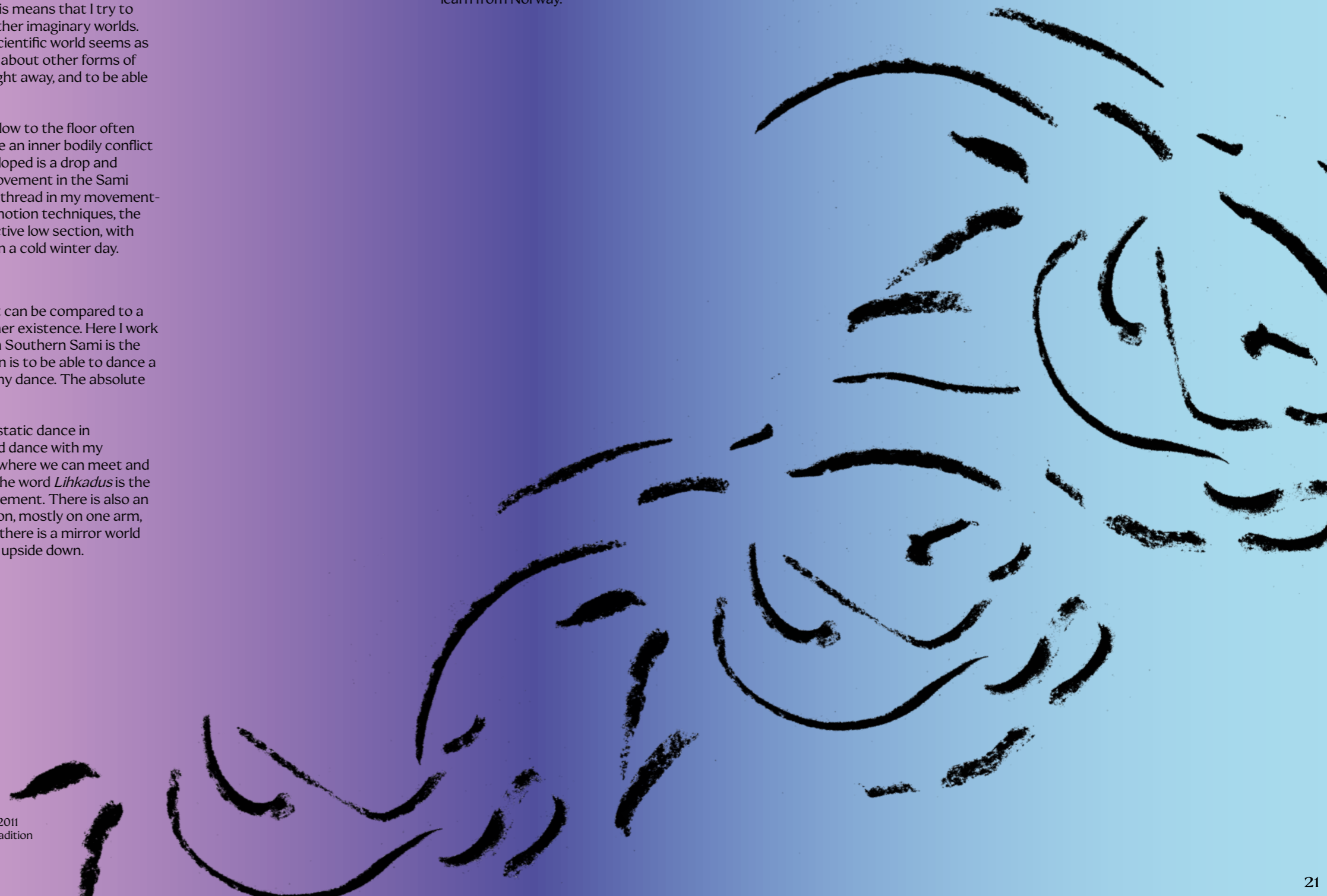
How do you translate and process your experiences into your physical body?

In Sami dance, there is a sort of being that heals and soothes old processes. Our own personal and collective processes of decolonization, and reclaiming ourselves and our lost cultural heritage, are our own paths to healing ourselves and our history. It is also a way to find peace and regain control of our thoughts and historical memories. An important part of my work is also to reclaim and narrate our own story from a Sami perspective. Spirituality is a part of our cultural heritage, intimately intertwined with our identity and our soul. I believe that the historical erasure of Sami spirituality, and the sacred objects and places connected to it, has also erased parts of the Sami soul.

What are your social, structural and artistic conditions to work as an artist?

One example is Norway, where the government has decided that Sami culture should be included in all schools and all cultural educations, including preschools and after-school programs. This has led me to work a lot on developing educational material, dance descriptions and dance films. It is absolutely fantastic that in the near future all Norwegian children will dance Sami dance as a natural part of their education. In Sweden, it is rather the opposite. No one knows anything about Sami dance and in this matter Sweden has a lot to learn from Norway.

2. Quote from Jens Kildal, *Handskrift 2*. Handskrift Erik Nordbergs Arkiv. Umeå: Universitetsbibliotek, 2011
3. Næjtie is Southern Sami for the guide, the Sami shaman, where knowledge is passed on through tradition





BamBam Frost & Lydia Östberg Diakité

Artists, Choreographers and Performers, Stockholm/Copenhagen

A chat between BamBam and Lydia one day in March 2024.

The text is published in its original form

Lydia: Hey! Hi!
BamBam: All right! Lydia! Hi!
Hi!
We are invited to talk about our artistry and have been asked a bunch of questions.

What is dance for you? Why is your artistry important? How do you translate and process your experiences into your physical body? If you could travel in time, when would you like to be active as a dance artist? (then-now-future)

Ok, jumping into the question of time-travelling right away. I honestly do not think I would want to travel in time.

I do not want to travel to stay, maybe fun to travel and visit. Go to old kitschy events, dance a little in a jazz club during the Harlem Renaissance (without in any way glorifying the time in which it occurred).

I think you travel in time and do it all the time, if you stop and look at the journey you are already making and have made.

Okay, but if I were to travel in time, it's because I want to have a long career. To be able to stay in the world as an artist. To be able to develop an artistry over a whole life and not burn out in a day, a month, a year... so that's traveling in time, being time. Staying in the world as an artist, that's what I want too.

What is dance art?

I don't think I've ever put it that way.

Dance, when you create art through dance? hehe. hahaha. correct. It relates more to using the body as a material and time as a frame.

Dance can be completely different.

It is also just something completely abstract.

It's nice to be invited to experience someone being in their senses and exploring time/rhythm/form/concept/feelings, bodily.

It's like I can't bear to break down what dance is. We all know. Everyone knows. and some are crazy enough to choose it as a profession. hahahahahahaha. and some people are completely lost and make art out of it...and I love it.

I think art is art.

(Agreed!)

And art can be created from all sorts of things, sometimes, as you say, it is created from dance. Hmm...dance art is like art in general, in constant motion?

(literally)

How do you translate and process your experiences into your physical body?

I see that everything I do is an extension of me, my dreams, fantasies, aesthetics that I like, etc. I have worked with the concept of subjective objectification, that way I can talk about "translating and processing your experiences". I don't divide myself, I am the whole me all the time, but I allow myself to be objectified and become an image, an experience, a one...but with creating art and being art, there is a separation when I go on stage. It is a (hyper)performative self that takes place, that allows others to affirm and experience the "I" of my body. This does not mean that it is Lydia on stage. It is a piece, art! probably think the same way, and that who I am is of course part of a large network of people, events, stories and experiences. For me, it helps to zoom in on specific interests and from there create concepts or artistic worlds where fairly concrete ideas about the physical are allowed to guide my exploration. These ideas help me to transform what comes from something personal into something I can perform, step in and out of. I've also thought a lot about the question "Why is your art important?" I would not call it important.

What, is our art not important?

Or, to put it another way, I understand the desire to position oneself as important, and that defining why it is important also justifies the art for those who might question it. But I still feel, despite the fact that this is raised regularly, that the market romanticizes that artists who belong to any minority in their context should create based on heavy, difficult, important topics. Because of that, that particular word hurts me. I am not at all against such themes, as long as it is an active choice made by the artist. But you and I work together because we enjoy each other, challenge and inspire each other. It comes from love and desire. Importance is a by-product of everything else that drives our work forward.

Got it. Maybe I have more delusions of grandeur, hahaha.

I strongly believe in the value of being together, pushing, pulling, supporting, challenging, developing each other and the art.

That's what it is. The important thing is that we found each other and loved working together, which then turned into living a life together. I think a lot about heritage and archives. I've never had the motivation of "being important" as an entry point to creating art. My drive to work in the art world has not been that calculated at all. It comes from a much more vulnerable and curious place of trying out what life is and how it can be lived. Then over the years I have thought a lot about my artistry and how much it would have meant to "Little Lydia" to see my art. So it is also a motivation now to continue, that each work is a gift to myself.

How nice, that each work is a gift. I also think about our community, everyone who is intertwined in our individual and collective artistry. About care, love, criticism, drive, inspiration, etc. Being together, practicing being together and contributing to art together is great.

Yeah - that the most important thing is actually being able to create. Insisting on creating - the art that is created - the practice of creating is what is most important. Let's try something new. Like talk a bit about what we have done, about our concepts, etc. How we make the materials, we work with associative creative processes. Conversations that lead to dreams and fantasies, and we paint ideas for each other. We could be a mountain. Really big. The biggest. That's how the *immortal summit*² began.

We talk about everything, everything. Politics, popular culture, emotions. And based on where we are in relation to our time, we start playing with different scenarios, what if this, what if that.

The work and methods we use are conceptual and narrative. Because, since we cannot (yet) read each other's minds. so we paint pictures for each other, repeating what the other said, what we said, more stories, dreams and then after some time... can be transformed into movement material and sculptures and...the process is unpredictable and intuitive, and since we have been working against deadlines, we know that at least at some point something has to happen. decisions have to be made. so here we go.

*We have a lot of trust in each other and trust when one of us has a strong feeling about how something should be. We also have our tumbling.*³

It is really a perfect representation of our collaboration!

We lift, push, support, care for each other, catch challenge and push, *puttar* each other.

Yes, it is 100% the core of our collaboration.

(*puttar* is a really fun word)

hahaha *puttar* is great fun. In tumbling, it's like we tap into (is that how you say it??) a different kind of intelligence you definitely don't - but yes, heightened emotion heightened listening

hahahahahaha

perfect

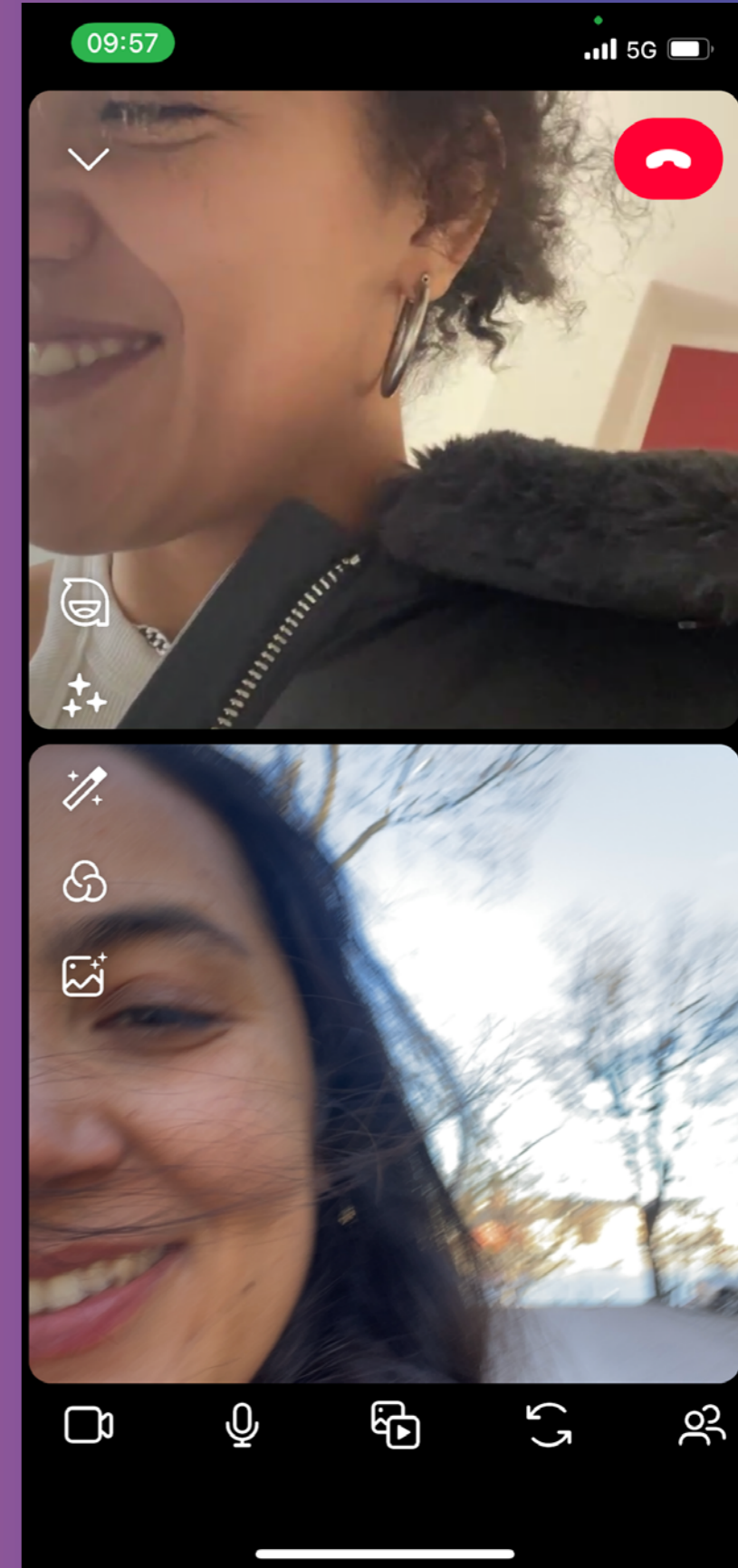
and trust.

trust. yes!

No, but if anything is important, it is that we did it. A direct translation of how we work in a practice. So goodbye hahahahaha. Nice to have done something anyway. I'm a bit stuck on the question of important...

I have been stuck on important for several days hehe. Tumbling is close to our hearts, and to feel that way about something still feels important...

because we really only do one job. We are artists, and it's epic that we can do whatever we want. It's also just what's important to do.



2. *immortal summit*, is a performance that stretches between ideas of greatness and delusions of grandeur. Two characters are bound to an immortal fate and trapped in an ambivalent reality where remembrance of humanity's excessive behaviors is put on display. Searching for something different, immortal summit lives in the borderland of provocation and play, tenderness, and failure, asking questions of how to navigate one's existence in a non-voluntary reality.

3. tumbling quote Lydia Ö. Diakité in Bastard blog "We created this practice where we tumble; through being entangled we carry each other with strength and tenderness. We lift each other in different ways, unfolding images that are filled with all kinds of humoristic, intense and beautiful associations. Constantly connected as bodies we are soft towards each other. In this movement, in this case, two bodies are meeting in full strength and capacity and the only option is moving through trust and care. Like I'm here for you, I move, you move, we move." <https://bastard.blog/lydia-ostberg-diakite/>

Nya Rörelsen, Dance Artists and Choreographers, Malmö/Stockholm

Daniel Jeremiah Persson (1992) South Korea/Sweden, Khamlane Halsackda (1975) Laos, Majula Drammeh (1982) Gambia/Finland, Nidia Martínez Barbieri (1977) Argentina, Rumiko Otsuka (1976) Japan

When answering the questions, our collective went through discussions about what a 'collective' voice means. Even as we seek similarities, intersections, and common motivations, an important aspect of our group which remains is contradiction, and we must recognize and practice acceptance of our differences. Here, we provide a collective answer to the questions, though this is an ongoing process of transformation and movement.

Why is your art important?

We work to act as an artistic platform and greenhouse for artistic growth. Today, Nya Rörelsen is one of the few Swedish choreographer collectives with a focus on minority and diversity perspectives, seen from the perspective of dance artists who themselves identify as BIPOC². We create internal space for each other to operate through collaborations, but also meeting with society and collaborative partners. By sharing our dance work, we feel grounded, happy, and motivated to do more. The love for this art form makes us grow and challenge ourselves further. Collaborating with other artists, we feel generous and welcoming to the community, influencing each other to create something together. Showing diversity on stage, we show how different we can all look while still being alike, sharing the beauty of uniqueness and embracing differences. By doing dance on stage, we help people feel more connected to their bodies.

The interpersonal possibilities that arise in the work that we create and perform in, are also important in contrast to the social structures we live in. Art provides us with the means to do and not just think, but actually physically do and live in other ways. Offering participants/audience suggestions for alternative ways of coexistence beyond what is established, creates a space for contemplation.

There is a thorough awareness of the implications that come with being a minority figure in our field and our society, and what our bodies represent. While our work doesn't singularly focus on race, gender nor minority questions, these themes coexist with other topics we explore in our research processes.

Our artistry reflects the principles of our life: valuing community, perspectives, sharing ideas, ways to connect, truly listening, witnessing, and getting involved. While we experience things from these different and shared perspectives, something to keep in mind, in order to navigate the challenges of collaborating and existing as a collective, is that the process always asks what this actually means and needs. It also questions the meaning of 'contemporary' and how this can bring future initiatives and ways of seeing and being as an individual or together. We provide a small cornerstone of a minority viewpoint that could not be more important than when a right wing government comes into political power. We are one voice of many.

What is your driving force, and why do you persist?

The world needs art to communicate feelings, to raise discussions, to express and to grow. With our experience and passion, we can make a great impact on society. We don't give up - because we have to support our community and our existence for humanity.

Our artistic work helps us to heal. When we create, we can channel, transform, and process our fears, feelings, and life experiences. That's how we experience the healing power of art and creation. We persist in this constellation because we enjoy experiencing 'time' over a durational period with each other, which is different from short projects where the collaborators always change.

We have all, individually, undergone many changes in the dance field according to each decade and socio-political environment. The consistent motivator has been an ongoing desire to express and question an evolving world through the lens of our bodies and identities, and contemporary dance art, constantly reinvesting in our perspectives as we keep trying to understand how we relate to an ever shifting terrain. The longer we work with our bodies, the more we understand how disconnected most people are from theirs, and we strive to be reminders to people about being truly connected to oneself and therefore hopefully to other humans. Nya Rörelsen is always in dialogue on ways to connect (the default of group dynamics demand it). We believe in the impact of performing arts shaping and forming society, and we see the value in creating a platform through dance and choreography as a unifying element. We have witnessed how activism, through arts and culture as a means of communication, has an ability to reach beyond politics. Similarly, this is very much present within the queer movement, and really, any community working to create an empowered platform and room for individuals.

Our art can include ways that are beyond political structures, funding systems, normative lifestyles and even time and space. We are in touch with something fundamental about being human, and perhaps we are figuring out what that fundamental aspect is. We persist because we have room to explore, as in a collective, we are less alone and in doubt. We can take and make space for each other's creativity, and with a minority based collective there is a pre-understanding for things and experiences we don't have to verbalize.

What role or purpose does your art have in the context that you work in? What does it contribute to?

We work in a stage-audience set up and with interactive and/or site specific set up, taking the work closer to the audience's reality. This blurs the social codes and conducts that society typically adheres to. We are interested in the vulnerability of coexisting, in relation to the political baggage that our bodies carry, and to allow this vulnerability to exist without judgment for neither audience nor performers. Diversity in different artistry within the collective makes it possible to support each other's processes.

By sharing time throughout these years in different productions, and maturing side by side, we not only realize how important it is to respect our different voices but also reflect that statement in our artistic work.

Our current project, Statues or To-Stand, makes our group dynamics transparent on stage, in which five different worlds cohabit the same space and together construct a particular and unique world. We see this as an artistic, philosophical, ethical, and political statement.

Our individual and collective work fulfills its own purpose within the field as our topics and viewpoints are often spoken of as theory or political stance, opposed to a humanist perspective of individuals. Our crafts are inspired from our cultural heritages and histories, which are not always given space or presence in our coexistence in the western world.

We have gathered and created again and again, nurturing ourselves through action, contemplation, more action and so forth. We have confronted fears and taken risks, having to face who we are. These moments of vulnerability are a substantial part of concepts we have created and offered to this date. We are not restricted by a particular place or space, we simply acquire what we need, when we need it and place it where it feels instinctively right, according to the context, at a particular moment. What and how does something resonate in us? And how does it affect you and the other? Let's have a genuine meeting to experience these perspectives. Some time to be present with each other.

What are your social, structural and artistic conditions to work as artists?

As a collective, there is continuous work on the collective and the individual. We focus on the local, national, and international within the projects that we do. Usually this involves one's own networking across the different art forms. We analyze the outside world because cultural policies are constantly changing. *What can we hold on to when we talk about sustainability?*

We work to maintain the relationships we have and to create new places, connections and projects, in relation to funding institutions for the performing and visual arts and those who present them as well as associations and public institutions that work with other parts of our society. We exist in an ever-changing infrastructure which, of course, affects the work seen on stage. As individual artists, much of the focus is on renegotiation of: ideas, places, relationships, money, work environment, theory, method, approach, political response, material, body and so on. Longevity becomes, it is not something that you can completely build like a house, it is not something that is guaranteed nor denied. When we think of how we cope within the field of dance, we are full of attempts that sometimes fail or succeed. We mention this because the very idea of structure is created by ourselves and is required to shift under different situations.



Photographer: Alexis Rodríguez Cancino

2. BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Nefeli Oikonomou, born in nineteen eighty-eight in Greece

Sebastian Lingserius, born in the 80's in Estocolmo

Choreographers, Dancers, Dance Teachers and Heads of Operations

How would you define your artistry and your dance?

Our art has different manifestations and variations that are in dialogue with the different contexts, events and situations we are involved in. It is not a fixed entity, but something that changes and develops in a tree-like manner.

Sometimes it can look like this: You dress up in your hottest yoga outfit and perform an intense dance while focusing on how your sweat is circulating around your body (*DANCER, 2016*). All the muscles, all the balance, all your powers are there to control and generate this sweat. To follow it, cultivate it, circulate it. The appearance is no longer relevant because the expression of the water in your body has become the most important component to consider.

Or like this: you are reading through labor conditions for artists' rights while carefully performing pre-classical dances across the room (*The Art of Laboring, 2018*). Your toes glide softly on the floor at a very steady pace, following very precise and subtle motifs. Your voice is even and steady as you read aloud the rules that exist for cultural workers and review what applies in a national, European and global context. Finally, you slowly melt into the floor.

Or, when you start a performance with lots of repeated endings, last movements of bodies, death situations, but at the beginning of a performance. A new type of polymorphism that focuses on the de-unification of the individual (*POLY, 2018*).

Or, when you perform your most refined ballet, but only with your arms (*I Am Ballet, 2024*). All your strongest emotions and memories come to life in the slightest movement of your fingers. We value and respect our differences. It is through our different expressions and understanding of choreography that we can see contrast, friction, and variety.

How do you translate and process your experiences into your physical body and between each other in your joint artistry?

In our art, the physical body is at the center, whether we choose to focus on its materiality, representation, composition, or position within its context. Common discussions in the studio include, for example, whether we should choreograph the body's movements or, for example, activate memories that ultimately generate movements. We explore when, where and how different strategies, such as those mentioned, should be used. These decisions are not made in advance, but are adapted in relation to the theme and requirements of the process. In relation to a changing society, the rules of dance should also change, to avoid reproducing conservative ideologies.

As we both come from different backgrounds and have different experiences with contemporary dance, there is already a good starting point for endless discussions about the role, potential and value of dance in society. This, in relation to the fact that we have produced more than ten choreographic projects together, has resulted in us being able to think "through" each other without being in the same room. By applying our choreographic approaches in our everyday lives, including our shared parenting, dance studio and dance school, we continue to explore and develop our understanding

of dance and its importance in our lives and the society around us. To quote the choreographic work *POLY*: "how many lives have you lived with your partner?" we note that everyone is more than a single individual, for example: each person is already many, has had several eras of their life, passed through various ideological currents and had time to change.

Common questions we ask in the studio when we start new processes are, for example: Which bodies should we now strive to become for this process? What conditions do we need to create new bodily practices?

What role or purpose does your art have in the context that you work in? What does it contribute to?

In our art, we place great importance on analyzing contexts, trends, norms, theories, relationships, bodily expressions, practices and methods, and finding new ways of relating to them, combining or twisting them. To think about the most obvious, and then go in the other direction, or different directions, or on the diagonal, allows us to explore the wide variety of what we perceive as relevant. Our artistic ambition in this sense moves away from trend and even becomes anti-trend, as artistic proposals for new currents for the field. Questions like **how, where, why, with whom and for whom** are repeated time and again to navigate the creative process and deepen our understanding of our common behaviors, movements and contexts. Not looking for the simplest solution has always been a common thread in our art and even though we work with different modes of expression, complexity and diversity has been something we both strive for in the creative process.

Through these common endeavors we have also initiated *SAND Dansstudio*, a place for new, experimental artistic processes where contemporary artists from dance and choreography, but also different fields can meet, exchange ideas and practice. Through *SAND Dansstudio*, we run projects to advance the field, professional daily dance training, but also connect our artistic intentions with the local context.

What are your personal observations on the transformations of dance in Sweden, since you started working?

We have different starting points in our relationship and understanding of dance transformations. Sebastian has been active in the Swedish dance scene since 2004. Nefeli moved to Sweden in 2012, but was previously active in Greece since 2009. We started working together as a duo in 2016 with the project *DANCER*. During this period, the question "how and why do we do what we do?" was actualized.

Through various phases in the Swedish dance field over the past 20 years, we have been able to observe a rapid development, but where many currents have quickly been replaced by new ones, these have been commonly categorized as modernist, post-modernist, conceptual, post-dance, post-conceptual dance, etc., but through a new look, these have rather been starting points for other norms. New questions have had to be asked, and new perspectives have had to be raised again.

Social movements and changes, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, which influenced and had a ripple effect on the dance field in Sweden, and a hope was raised for a renewal of artistic expression. Then a more relevant question in the dance field became "who does and why?": opening our eyes to all the power structures around us and changing hierarchies.

Although there have been many steps forward, and have been taken, we are now facing new changes that affect the field negatively. We are currently in a difficult place for the future of dance, with a dismantling of the entire cultural sector and a devaluation of art in society. Now the question at hand is: "Can we even do?"

How can we relate to this issue now, how will it change the way we look at society in the future, and influence how we move forward?



Maria Naidu

born in 1967 in Lund, Choreographer and Dance Artist, Malmö

What does dance do for you? What does dance do to you?

The influence of dance on my life goes far beyond the professional.

For me, dance is not just a passion or a profession, it is life itself. It is a form of expression that goes beyond words and has the potential to reach the very core of human experience. When I dance, a channel of understanding and empathy towards others opens up, giving me a sense of being truly alive, to be present and experience life deeply and intensely. Dance is my medium for communicating complex emotions and ideas, and the place where I have found my authenticity and voice. It has been my constant companion through all of life's experiences, both beautiful and sad. Dance has made me strong and enriches my life like nothing else has done. Nothing has ever interested me like dance has, it is a constant source of inspiration and continues to captivate and challenge me. I am convinced that I would not be who I am today without dance.

What is your driving force, and why do you persist?

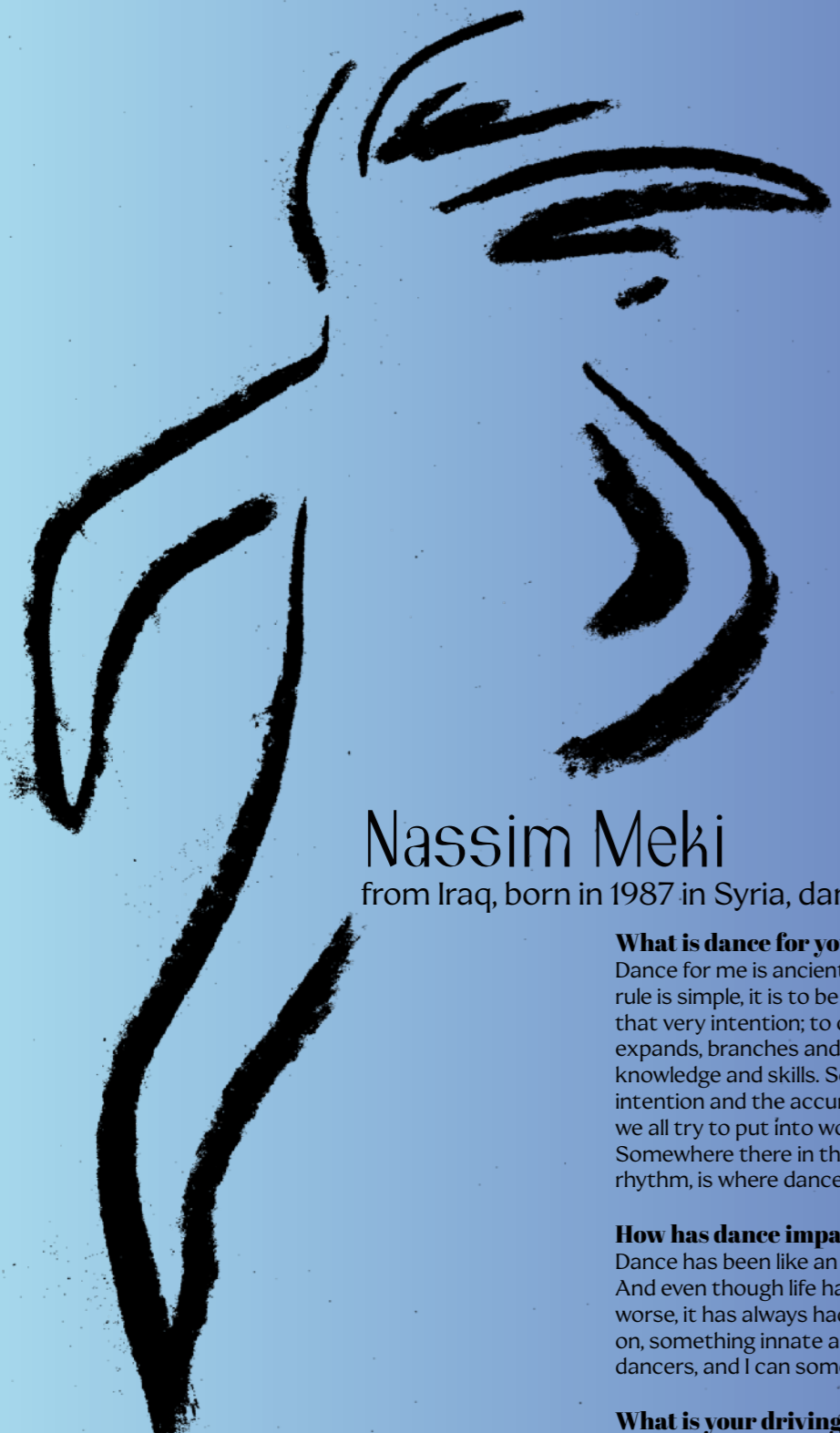
I have a strong desire to achieve my individual full potential and always strive to do my personal best. By nature, I am curious, ambitious and persistent, and it is the combination of these that drives me forward. Curiosity makes me constantly seek, find and explore new opportunities, ideas and perspectives. Ambition gives me the courage to set high goals and to stick to my vision. Persistence gives me the strength and perseverance to overcome challenges. I will always dance, even when I no longer work professionally, it is part of my soul and essence.

Who are you when you interpret someone else's movement into your physical body?

I become a channel for their expression and vision. I strive to understand the other's body language, aesthetics and artistic vision as quickly as possible. When I feel "ownership" of the movements, their expression is interwoven with my own, and their artistic language becomes part of my own experiences and filters - thus creating a personal and authentic fusion of two artistic identities. It is an intimate and complex process that requires mutual respect, trust and time.

What are your personal observations on the transformations of dance in Sweden, since you started working?

When I graduated in 1985, I found that the Swedish dance scene was not very welcoming for someone like me. I did not fit the then prevailing body norm for dancers and this led me to look outside the country, to New York, where I spent 13 years and started my career. When I chose to return to Sweden in 2002, after three years based in Amsterdam, I noticed a positive change in the dance scene. It had become more inclusive and multifaceted, meaning a wider acceptance of different genres and perspectives. The number of professional dance educations had also increased significantly, providing more opportunities for dancers to explore their artistic ambitions. To continue this positive development, it is important to create space for even greater diversity among dancers and choreographers, and to include organizers, curators and other leaders in dance. A crucial component of this is to ensure sustainable economic conditions for artistic work. I have been able to make a living from my profession for 37 years, but the decline in funding and financial resources in recent years has made this increasingly difficult. This is a worrying development and represents a potential disaster for dance as an art form in Sweden. If people from all socio-economic strata are not given the opportunity to practice and contribute to the dance field, what then would be the consequences?



Nassim Meki

from Iraq, born in 1987 in Syria, dancer and performer, Stockholm

What is dance for you? What is a movement for you?

Dance for me is ancient, primitive and scientific. The basic rule is simple, it is to be alive and perform a movement with that very intention; to create a movement. As the framework expands, branches and theorizes, it creates a form of knowledge and skills. Somewhere there, between the simple intention and the accumulated knowledge, is created what we all try to put into words, all that is experienced as dance. Somewhere there in the repetition, synchronization and rhythm, is where dance lies for me.

How has dance impacted your life?

Dance has been like an invisible companion, like a totem. And even though life has influenced my dancing for better or worse, it has always had an unshakeable foundation to rest on, something innate and inherited. I can also see this in other dancers, and I can sometimes experience it more deeply.

What is your driving force, and why do you persist?

Having a driving force seems obvious if there is an interest in doing the work. The fact that there is also an expectation or idea of stubbornness to the profession indicates that there is resistance.

I find the whole idea of stubbornness and resistance problematic, and I do not want to contribute to the romanticization of those ideas about the profession. I am simply fascinated by how the bodily knowledge we possess, can develop and what it can create. I have chosen my profession because I am simply interested and enjoy dance, not because I am stubborn.



Daniel Staaf

born in 1990 in Sweden, Dance Artist, Stockholm

What does dance do to you? What does dance do for you?

Dance was never an obvious choice from the beginning, my parents were neither dancers nor artists, but it was my father's idea that coordination training would help me on the football field which made me start taking dance lessons. Since then, it has somehow just rolled on, but I think it helped that quite early in my life I still found something I felt comfortable with and that gave me a direction in life, which today has turned into life itself.

Since I did not see myself in my surroundings when I grew up, it was probably extra important for me to fit in, when I found dance, I found a way to fit in, which meant that it no longer mattered that I did not look like my surroundings.

Dance for me enables ideas and thoughts that lift me out of the mundane and make me sensitive to my surroundings, it reminds me of what is absolute and what is fleeting. Dance has facilitated meetings with individuals and groups where language barriers would typically have been an obstacle, now I have been able to meet people in a way that cannot be put into words.

Furthermore, for me, dance has been functional, a way to earn a living, a way to find community, a way to process experiences, a way to get to know yourself, a way to understand that you are so much more than just your body and intellect, a way to understand your physical limitations, a way to come home, a way to get away, a way to live, a way to die, dancing is movement and movement is life.

How do you translate and process your experiences into your physical body?

The process of translating experience into movement in practical terms, I must say, is intuitive and usually gets blocked if you try to analyze it. I simply let the body remember and go into its own memory, and let the intellect observe.

My physical body is a translation of my personal experiences.

I was recently told by a choreographer that if I were an animal I would be a wildebeest, which felt right when I think about their physicality, how important the herd is to them and how migration is part of their life cycle.

The physicality is explosive with a lot of tensions, where my explosiveness and tensions come from is likely a result of all the experience, my upbringing, my lived experiences, from Bromma to Stockholm, the countryside in the Philippines, to fire escape balconies in Brooklyn, love, setbacks, insights and the unknown, everything has shaped me and influenced me. Over time, I think I have become better at processing my experiences, and been introduced to and discovered tools that have allowed me to sit with emotions that earlier in life I just rushed past. Today, I understand that it is precisely all encounters, emotions and experiences that create my artistic expression.

How do you process the interpretation of your body from the audience's gaze?

At the beginning of my journey, my motivation for standing in front of an audience was quite vague. It was probably a mixture of the attention, the experience and the feeling of being able to be myself and then being applauded for it. However, over time, I have matured, reflected and discovered tools that have helped me to separate the different motives for why I do what I do and how I can relate to the audience.

I believe the audience is probably looking at the theme or experiencing the poetry of the performance, and not necessarily analyzing or objectifying me. Admittedly, I fit into the normative body image at the time of writing and therefore escape many judgmental ideals, the exception being my skin and hair color, but that depends on where we are in the world.

I think it is good to reflect on why you choose to stand in front of an audience. The clearer you can be with yourself and your personal intentions, the easier it will be to do it again and again. It is a constant process that allows you to get to know and see yourself from different perspectives, but in the end, it is probably also about daring to let go of everything and just be.

My artistic approach is of course personal, but I do not identify myself as a solo artist where one's conceptual world and body is what is to be seen and scrutinized by the audience, but the ancient and impersonal that lies beneath the surface. Once we are there, subject and object disappear, and we are inside the experience, the audience and performer become one. It may sound unimaginable or idealistic, but I believe in it and if I did not, I would probably have gotten tired of standing in front of an audience and sought other ways to lose myself in the experience.

What is your driving force, and why do you persist?

I do not know anything else, and I do not want it to end.



Anna Vnuk

born in 1974 in Luleå, Choreographer and Dance Artist

Why is your art important?

Culture is important because it is an expression of and by civilization. Culture is a great platform to explore difficult topics that we are not already certain about. Religion and party politics are not enough of a platform for understanding human beings. Culture can provide comfort, give us practice in empathy, give us more perspectives and challenge our own self-image. It lets us be divided and lost, but also gives us encouragement and strength. Almost everything I know about life I have learned through art, and art has taught me to think and draw my own conclusions and then be able to re-evaluate them...in painful agony of course!

Whether my art is important to others is not for me to decide, but creating and being in the imagination and inner space is a fundamental part of me.

What is your driving force, and why do you persist?

To function, my driving force is to some extent hidden from myself.

Over the years, it has become more joyful and curious. That may sound pretentious, but it is true. When I started dancing, it was more out of necessity. It was the only thing I knew and for me a way to exist in the world. To be seen. To survive. Now that I am 50, I realize what a tremendous luxury it is to be able to dive into a subject or a world, or whatever we call it. Having access to stages, tax money, audience time and attention is an obligation. If you do not have something on your mind, you should pause for a while. In every show I have done as an author, I have had a clear and sincere core of what I want to say. That is the main driving force. What I want to tell, with each specific performance. That drive has remained intact over the years. I also try not to take it for granted that I have a future and career in culture. I do not want to sigh and go 'to work'. It gives me artistic courage to think that the work I am working on is the last thing I will ever do, because since I have always been a freelancer, there is a possibility that it actually is.

How do you process the interpretation of your body from the audience's gaze?

Processing the audience's interpretation of us is a big part of the work. The context and the way of reading are different from stage to stage. From work to work. Not everyone in the audience has the same gaze either and when I try to communicate with and control or influence the audience, I interpret them based on my prejudices and my gaze. It is a delicate balancing act which is very interesting and quite difficult. It is kind of like dramaturgy. It also requires some guessing and interpretation of the audience. I assume that the audience is as smart or smarter than me, but not necessarily that they have knowledge of the performing arts or the subject matter. To the extent that the audience has an unwanted prejudiced view of me, I "kill them with kindness". For my own sake.

If you could travel in time, when would you like to be active as a dance artist? (then-now-future)

There is no other time I would rather be active during, and this is mostly because I want to believe that there is a reason why we are right here, right now. But having said that, I hope that the performing arts will have an even stronger position in the future, and I think that will be the case. In a time when more and more will be produced artificially, performing arts will be unique in its form. We will sweat in real time with bodies that can age and have human limitations. The performing arts are, after all, a human encounter. In one and the same space. It will be more important than ever.



