2017 Denman Undergraduate Research Forum Accepted Student Abstracts
Art/Architecture
Category: Art/Architecture

Title: Creating multivalent danced narratives in Contemporary and Odissi Dance

Student Presenter: Julia Ayau

Faculty Advisor: Eliot, Karen

Abstract: Myths and stories have the ability to serve as life models, informing one about the experiences of others and providing examples of how to engage with one's surroundings. In societies past, religious figures and shamans passed on myths and tales, but today, in a complex world, artists create new "myths," often recreating older ones to fit into a modern mold. Although many of the culturally steeped metaphors and symbols in ancient tales may be lost on today's audiences, the themes and emotions speak universally. I have investigated the idea that narratives from another culture and time, told through dance, a uniquely evocative format, can impact audience members on an emotional level. I have answered this question by performing an Indian dance solo based on Hindu poems and collecting non-Indian audience members' responses, finding that many distinguish specific emotions from the nuances in facial expressions and hand gestures. In addition to the Indian dance solo, I am choreographing a contemporary piece loosely based on a new story, exemplifying the concept that contemporary artists create their own "myths," reimagining or abstracting traditional roots. I will also collect audience responses for this piece once completed, but as contemporary dance was founded with a strong emphasis on experiential qualities, I am also interested in recording how my dancers and myself respond to representing our individual impulses while embodying universal themes. I have researched and applied specific aesthetic vocabularies used in each form to shape a narrative. The significance of this project is to show that dance can serve as a valid means for communication with an audience, extending beyond cultural and temporal bounds, and to also show that while models for story telling may change, the human experience and recognition of these experiences remain the same.
Category: Art/Architecture

Title: French social housing and the human condition

Student Presenter: Spencer Huggins

Faculty Advisor: Kochar, Sandhya

Abstract: Social housing in the U.S. has been considered an unsuccessful model within our culture, and the negative connotation of living in such a setting lives on today. French social housing, or habitations à loyer modérée (HLM) on the other hand has had a more positive feedback within its culture, possibly stemming from a society deeply rooted with collective values. After World War II, France’s urban population had a steep increase, and social housing was adapted to fit those needs. Prices in the housing market have increased significantly in recent years and public housing in the U.S. has been an inadequate model to support the needs of the population. Our project seeks to understand how France’s HLM has succeeded through the employment of certain typologies and ideologies that support socialization in a community, and offer conclusions as to why social housing in the U.S. has not been as successful, while offering solutions to how these issues can be resolved. We traveled to France in order to visit many social housing projects and understand them through diagraming, sketching, photographing and ultimately experiencing the qualities of the space. Our understanding of the spaces allowed us to observe how the architecture promotes the socialization that is necessary for community, as well as opposes the American model. We found that a major difference between the two countries is that France uses a more urban model which leads to better social cohesion, whereas the U.S. uses a more suburban model which supports more individualist ideas. We are using representation and a scaling of qualitative values in order to validate our conclusion. The growing urban population and rising living costs demand social housing, and presenting the French model as an alternative will establish a new paradigm for American housing.
Category: Art/Architecture

Title: My politically active body: how dancing through pleasure kinesthetically cultivates empathy, understanding and peace

Student Presenter: Lilianna Kane

Faculty Advisor: Kosstrin, Hannah

Abstract: With my research project I sought to investigate how dancing bodies cultivate empathy and kindness as a means to deconstruct hegemonic hierarchies that privilege some people and oppress others. I began my research by questioning how power structures, identity politics, and spectatorship influence how we perceive each other and ourselves. Through embodied research by way of improvisation and somatic investigation, and through reading feminist theory of the body, I created a dance solo titled Silk and performed it at the Urban Arts Space gallery in downtown Columbus. By dancing Silk I intended to heighten our awareness of how we see and perceive each other by reading (consciously and subconsciously) markers of identity. I theorize that dance exercises our ability to empathize with one another on a kinesthetic and emotional level, facilitating a deeper level of understanding and appreciation for each other and our differences. Through the process of my research I discovered that cultivating empathy through dance performance can create an environment in which humans see past what is visual and instead connect with one another through shared experience. This phenomenon became evident in a pinnacle moment during my solo in which I hugged an audience member (after receiving verbal consent) and subsequently observed the audience members seeing and smiling at each other through a seemingly kinder gaze. This project addresses the implications about the politics of dancing bodies that remind us of our shared humanity and our potential for peaceful coexistence.
Abstract: As a female-bodied person living in a time where sexual assault is normalized by the president elect of my country, I feel a strong need to create safe spaces around me. This includes the spaces in which we work as dancers. At the start of this project I asked the question: How can we create work environments that value connection, integrity and respect above all else? To address this question, I have worked with five female dancers from the dance department over the past six months to explore consensual touch, sight-depravation while dancing and improvisational games. In collaborative dance processes, the greatest gifts we can offer one another are bodily health and wellbeing, dependability, clarity, consideration, understanding. Through our exploration in rehearsal the dancers in my project have a clearer understanding of community and what it means to foster and build a safe space. My methodology includes movement practice explorations critically informed by the work of dance scholars and practitioners such as Deborah Hay and her book My Body, The Buddhist where she describes how questions can live inside of her body and influence her improvisational practice. Specifically, I have drawn from her the prompt: "What if where I am is what I need?" I begin each of my rehearsals with an exploration of this question. The dance that we are creating in my rehearsal processes is a clear product of this research; the movement itself demonstrates the values I am cultivating. With the political climate in this country and the world at large where violence is often due course of action, any attempt at creating spaces where, connection, communication and care are given precedent is a vital one.
Abstract: I have two goals: (1) to create a dance class in which students gain the ability to reflect critically on dance companies that use dance as a catalyst for social, political, environmental, and economic change, (2) and the application and analysis of theory, technique, and training practices in contemporary movement forms. I chose this project to learn how to connect a traditional contemporary dance technique class with social, environment, political, and environmental justice within my teaching practice. I taught a consistent group of 13 students at Fort Hayes High School for a seven week period with three classes a week. To accomplish these teaching goals, I explored with my students dance principles that stay consistent across all contemporary movement forms. These are: a basic understanding of the principles of the pelvis, weight, and shift of weight, efficiently moving in and out of the floor, and developing an increased awareness of the body’s anatomy in relation to movement. I developed lesson plans that taught students to find confidence and agency during improvisation as informed by three dance companies: Dance Exchange, Ananya Dance Theater and Urban Bush Women that use dance for social, political, economic, and environmental change. Through discussions, students built verbal skills to analyze how dance can impact people at a local and global level. Finally, I used compositional prompts that gave students the chance to translate dance theory generated from discussions to their own movement. I have witnessed firsthand the ability art has to increase self-esteem, improve communication skills, and stimulate awareness of local and global issues. Through this research and teaching process, I have concluded that it is deeply important to my personal teaching style to incorporate material that helps my students learn the impact that dance can make to themselves, their community, and in the world.
Title: Continuing dance in college: educating young dancers about the benefits of pursuing dance in higher education

Student Presenter: Mariel Pierson

Faculty Advisor: Dixon, Melanye

Abstract: The goal of my research is to educate high school aged dancers about how dance is benefitting them both physically and mentally, and further to understand how easy and fun it can be to continue reaping those benefits once they get to college. When I was in high school, I was extremely fortunate to have a mentor who was fully invested in the continuation of my dance education at the university level. She walked me through many different kinds of programs and guided me on where to audition. This kind of opportunity is currently afforded to very few students. Having worked towards an education focus while in the Department of Dance, while also possessing a strong desire to educate young dancers and own a studio of my own someday, this research became my ideal capstone. The process began with gathering information about mental and physical health benefits of dance, as well as the details of dance majors, dance minors, and various student organizations that involve dancing. I then complied this information into a workshop that I have presented at two different dance studios. My results have come in the form of questionnaires from my participants. After my first two workshops, I am seeing a significant increase in participants using vocabulary that I use with them in the workshop in their post workshop questionnaires. Further, after completing the workshop, a portion of dancers that reported prior to the workshop having no interest in continuing dance, reported that they now did want to continue dancing. I believe there are very few other programs in place that educate high school dancers like this. It's vital that these students receive this information, not only for their own mental and physical health benefits, but also for the growth in the breadth of dance in universities across the country.
Abstract: As the result of institutional racism, in the history of American modern dance, there is a strong, yet very suppressed African/Africanist influence. Black dancing bodies have been marginalized within the scope of professional dance, and our abilities have been understated and underestimated. The language used to describe Black bodies, and more specifically those of Black women, intrigues me, and I find a striking correlation to how body-centered much cultural discourse about Black women is today. In the mid-twentieth century the very presence of Black bodies on stage was a form of visual activism. My largest research question is how dance can continue to be used as a method of invoking social commentary. I engage the dilemma that Black dancing bodies have both historically exposed and solved while tracing our dance lineage and legacy throughout time to present day. My research methods are centered around an embodied practice of studying Black dance theory scholarship and Black literature (novels, poems, nonfiction, etc.) and then exploring them physically during my rehearsals. By using my own body as a way to filter my readings, I translate them into a language that is usable for me as a dance artist-scholar. With this language, I have developed an eight minute choreographic work. There is still much room within the field for research regarding Black dance and performance theory, and I hope to bridge the gap between what has been done and what is still to be discovered with my own endeavors. Further, my current research sheds light on how Black dancing bodies are presently marginalized and presents American dance history and theory from an Africanist perspective which is exactly the kind of work I will be doing upon my graduation this Spring.
Abstract: I am investigating the intersection of choreographic methodology, improvisation, and immersive technology to create a dance that addresses ecological crisis. Through my coursework, I learned that dance is inherently political and can address social and political topics without sacrificing the integrity or the aesthetic of movement. By combining the usage of media technologies and dance, my project aims to bring attention to the natural world in a way that encourages people to rethink how they interact with the Earth. The driving question in the research is around the cultural construction of words like nature and wilderness, and what that means for the ways in which human beings see and understand themselves within the natural world. In the creative process, I made use of improvisational scores, freewriting and abstraction (extracting various parts from a holistic idea in order to give audiences a greater opportunity to create their own meaning) as methods for generating movement material. This approach included using visual and audio resources such as, panoramic footage of American land, paintings, and listening to music native to a geographic area. I'm also interested in interactivity, and how the artist can create an immersive space using technology, projection, and predetermined participatory tasks. This research culminated in an installation solo, Paradise Park, in which I constructed a simulated outdoor park out of artificial materials. By placing my own dancing body in the middle of this falsely expansive paradise, I hoped to encourage audiences to reconstruct their definitions of nature in order to inspire sustainable living.
Abstract: Over the past four years, the prevalence of racial injustice in the United States, specifically regarding the African-American community, has come to the forefront of my generation's social consciousness. I've experienced how constantly absorbing videos and images of police brutality began to effect my everyday life and self-image as an African-American woman negatively. This has led me to create a senior project that immerses me in positive images of blackness. Instead of creating art that focuses on negative aspects of the black experience, my goal with this research is to create a joyous and interactive space by chronicling my personal journey with finding my joy in performance. My research questions include: How do I pinpoint feelings such as joy and mobilize them to build positive community through my mediums of dance and film? How does my own experience translate to the experiences of my audiences? And how can artists generate content that intervenes in real ways in social injustice? My research methods are drawn from dance and filmmaking practices as well as the history of participatory artmaking. The outcomes of this research include a solo dance, a series of videos that investigate black joy through the eyes of my peers, and an evening event that invites the audience into the work by writing their thoughts about joy, self-love, and happiness and leaving them in the performance space. Just as being immersed in negative images influenced my life, my hope is that immersing my audience in these different mediums of positivity will have a lasting impact. I hope to shine a light on joy and point out that everyone's joy is relatable and important for cultivating positive relationships through sonder—the realization that everyone has a life as unique and complex as your own.
Category: Art/Architecture

Title: French social housing and the human condition

Student Presenter: Shelby Wright

Faculty Advisor: Kochar, Sandhya

Abstract: Social housing in the U.S. has been considered an unsuccessful model within our culture, and the negative connotation of living in such a setting lives on today. French social housing, or habitations à loyer modéré (HLM) on the other hand has had a more positive feedback within its culture, possibly stemming from a society deeply rooted with collective values. After World War II, France’s urban population had a steep increase, and social housing was adapted to fit those needs. Prices in the housing market have increased significantly in recent years and public housing in the U.S. has been an inadequate model to support the needs of the population. Our project seeks to understand how France’s HLM has succeeded through the employment of certain typologies and ideologies that support socialization in a community, and offer conclusions as to why social housing in the U.S. has not been as successful, while offering solutions to how these issues can be resolved. We traveled to France in order to visit many social housing projects and understand them through diagraming, sketching, photographing and ultimately experiencing the qualities of the space. Our understanding of the spaces allowed us to observe how the architecture promotes the socialization that is necessary for community, as well as opposes the American model. We found that a major difference between the two countries is that France uses a more urban model which leads to better social cohesion, whereas the U.S. uses a more suburban model which supports more individualist ideas. We are using representation and a scaling of qualitative values in order to validate our conclusion. The growing urban population and rising living costs demand social housing, and presenting the French model as an alternative will establish a new paradigm for American housing.