

Workshop for Creative Process

Emerging artists are full of ideas. Talented dance makers may be supported with residencies and studio space. Good mentors can be wonderfully nurturing for a lucky few. And many young choreographers are capable of the multi-tasking that it takes to produce work, secure commissions and survive.

Our systems and habits, however, don't often highlight a vital aspect of artistic life: The personal exploration and creative resourcing that nourishes a unique, authentic voice.

Makers with a lot of potential, especially new makers or those recently out of school, are left to figure this out and initiate new work, on their own. The notion of supporting the internal creative process of the choreographer is sometimes dismissed with the adage "choreography can't be taught."

While much can be said for innate ability and independent work, I am offering a set of tools that supports and nurtures this, and the creative process generally. This work by no means "teaches choreography"; it also doesn't control the crafting process or advise. Rather, it aims to embolden and illuminate the interests and voice of the artist. It offers one way for artists to self-mentor, and self-support.

This work combines my experience as a dancer, maker, teacher and choreographic assistant, and is largely informed by my 2 years of training with The Tamalpa Institute. This multi-disciplinary process is a way for artists to organize, and develop their creative instincts. The approach particularly supports the seminal phase of new creations, as well as the ongoing challenges of maintaining a healthy artistic life. It introduces a means for developing artistic ideas, but can also address the challenges that may emerge during a creative process.

Through this work, artists can gain a deepened understanding of themselves, momentum with their current artistic direction, a way to nourish their internal landscape and its expression, and/or a set of tools for tuning and re-tuning their artistic compass.

A 3–10 day workshop applies an intermodal arts approach to transpose ideas, instincts and texts into movement and creative vision.

Participants will discuss their ideas and inspirations giving them air and space. They will move these and combine them with their present physical impulses and life reality through somatic movement and focused improvisation. Personal and danced material is captured and re-framed through drawing. Creative writing gives voice to an emergent piece, and dance responds again to the cycle with greater specificity. Methods for giving and receiving feedback offer a healthy way for discussing work. And the ways that personal explorations are adapted for public presentation can also be considered.

By de-centering ideas and sensations, we see them with greater objectivity. By shuttling between artforms, we home in on and develop the concepts that feel important. By playfully iterating and interpreting, we expand possibilities.

Some questions that might be answered by this work include:

- What is most vital or urgent in me as an artist/person right now?
- How can I pull out aspects of my idea, to research and develop these separately?
- How do my ideas relate to my life reality and how can that intersection serve, strengthen and inform my work?
- What element of my work feels important to protect and preserve right now, and how can I do that?
- What are some connections between my work and issues in the larger world?
- What is my work saying? If my dance had a voice, what would it say?

With enough time, this process can culminate in the earliest draft of a new work – the seeds, parts, early structure, and/or direction can reveal itself. For solo artists this presents a straight forward bridge into the continuation of their work. For makers creating group pieces, this establishes a framework, a baseline, for where they are going and what feels true to them. They create movement motifs, writing and/or images that may be touchstones for their process.

Importantly, the workshop is alive and flexible and answers to the emergent needs of the artists. This determines individual takeaways, which can range from creative tools for the future, to self-care, to the building of specific movement phrases. A supportive and safe atmosphere, personal responsibility and an investigative spirit are fundamental to this process in which “productivity” is secondary.

BACKGROUND

I am fortunate to integrate my experience working with choreographers including Crystal Pite, Marina Mascarell, Jiri Kylian, Ohad Naharin and many others. I am informed by valuable lessons offered to me by other artists in my extended community, from Margaret Grenier to Dohee Lee to dramaturg Ruth Little and so many others. And I draw on the opportunities that I’ve had to teach a variety of students and professionals, create my own work, assist other choreographers, and co-direct a mentorship program under Inverso Productions.

I am interested in the infinite and relative possibilities of creative iteration, in the ways that care and intention facilitate experience and process, and in the ability that artists have to draw out that which stirs in the individual and collective unconscious.

I came to the Tamalpa Institute work out of an interest in the nature of art invention - the creative underground, out of a curiosity about the ephemeral aspects of the making process, a desire to serve with and through the arts, and a sense around the yet untapped but potent aspects of the moving body.

Founded at the intersection of dance and psychology by improvisation pioneer Anna Halprin and daughter Daria Halprin, the Tamalpa approach offers ways for somatics, artmaking and performance to come together in a wide variety of contexts. Dance/theatre artists who have directly applied the training to their practice include contemporary dance artist and *Puri Project* founder Dohee Lee, Joy Cosculluela, and lu-Hui Chua among others.

For me, synthesizing the Tamalpa approach with my dance practice has allowed me to combine my own work on iteration, interpretation and presentation with the emotional and imaginal landscape of the artist. Workshops, creative processes and 1-on-1 coaching sessions with dancers and makers have demonstrated the efficacy of the work that I am privileged to pass on. Mostly, I describe “successful” moments as those of reclamation or identification – authentically experienced in the body, mind and heart, and directed towards project initiation, focused research, and presentation. Through planning intermodal scores, by listening and by adapting when necessary, my aim is to hold a container for a freer discovery and clarification of that which artists have to offer.

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“Working with Heather has been invaluable in honing in on the source of my ideas...Heather’s guidance through movement improvisation, drawing, writing, and conversation, allowed me as a creator to dive deeper into my ideas and gain a better understanding of their origin and personal importance. By the end of our time together I realize that my ideas relate to each other and come from a strong root. I can more clearly discuss and talk about them with confidence, and can also more clearly see where they want to go. Most importantly, I leave feeling I have something worthy of sharing through my art form.”

- Rachel Meyer, choreographer

“... It was a transformative and nurturing experience. Heather’s kindness, compassion, creative spirit and vast somatic wisdom inspired me to no end. She created a space where I felt safe and encouraged to be vulnerable, explore my edges, and challenge my own physicality and artistry. The result was a feeling of belonging and the stoking of the flame of creativity within me. Heather is a thoughtful, innovative and generous artist. I not only was granted space to expand my choreographic and improvisational skills. But I was gifted with a sense of healing and wholeness that I treasure...”

- Rachel Helten, workshop participant