

Report to Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund

Choreographic residency with OMI International Dance Collective at OMI International Arts Center
Ghent, New York State, USA

<http://www.artomi.org/dance>

from 6th August- 1st September 2015

by Neus Gil Cortés

To LUTSF Reports Secretary:

I am writing to express my gratitude to Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund for covering the costs of my trip to Ghent, USA, to participate in the annual residency at Dance OMI 2015.

The residency brought together eight choreographers from all over the world to share ideas and work collectively in devising, developing and performing small works at a final informal showing. Director Christopher K. Morgan and mentor Benjamin Van Buren coordinated our sessions together whilst giving us the freedom to explore our own interests.

I also took the opportunity to learn more about the freelance dance scene in NYC, taking classes and attending showings and performances.

The purpose of the project was fully achieved. The time at OMI gave me the opportunity to reflect upon my priorities and interests as an artist whilst comparing processes and experiences with other choreographers. The experience of working collaboratively opened up new questions and possibilities and provided me with new tools for future choreographies.

There were many highlights of the residency, but one of them was to see work from former OMI residents and attend the feedback session at the end of the performance. I could see reflections of OMI's experience on those artists, whilst still appreciating the further development of their practice.

I recommend without hesitation applying for OMI's residency to all choreographers wishing to research on their own practice. I also recommend future awardees of LUSF to leave some days at the beginning and end of their residencies to get to know the context you will be working in, and solidify the connections you established with your collaborators.

I am determined to let more people know about this fantastic opportunity. I will upload all the information on my website and I'm willing to answer any questions future applicants will have about OMI or Lisa Ullmann's Travelling Scholarship Fund.

Thank you for your enormous contribution in making this happen. I hope you continue supporting dance artists with your vision.

Yours warmly,

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REPORT:

My plane from London arrived to NYC, and I was excited to explore the dance scene of the city for a couple of days before continuing my trip up north, to OMI International Arts Centre.

While in NYC, I run from one place to another to take dance classes, meet dancing friends I made in the past, visit MOMA and attend showings and performances.

It was my first time in USA, and I found very valuable to have a first hand experience of the art scene there.

Then I packed again, and took the train up to Hudson, where the assistant of the residency, Darren Rabinowitz, was waiting to pick some of us up.

Arriving to OMI looks a little bit like arriving to Paradise for an artist. The place is a reconverted farm in the middle of the countryside. Surrounding the houses there are big extensions of land full of sculptures from many different artists. Inside the houses there are paintings and some smaller sculptures.

There is a library full of books for the residents that wish to read them. There is also a barn with two dance studios and many quirky, charmingly odd spaces that awaken your imagination. And it's all open for the use of the residents 24h/day

The philosophy of OMI is that, while they are there, artists should only have to worry about making art.

And that's how it is.



The first day of the residency we started by getting to know each other, and the environment we were in, through exercises lead by director Christopher K. Morgan and mentor Benjamin Van Buren.

We were eight choreographers from very diverse countries: Argentina, Mexico, USA, Italy/Turkey, Hungary, Spain/U.K. and India.

We all shared a contemporary dance background, but some also had training in different folk dances, in street dance and hip hop, and in martial arts, such as indian Kalaripayattu.

For the rest of the first week, each of us was asked to lead a 90 minutes workshop to give the others an insight in our own choreographic practice and interests.

My workshop consisted on a leaded improvisation that allowed dancers to connect with their inner emotions through their breath and physicality. I wanted to share with my colleagues my interest in researching body "states", in other words, sensations that affect our physicality, in order to access very expressive movement material that doesn't correspond with traditional dance steps.

Other workshops included exercises in noticing patterns on group dynamics,

research of the relationship between the body and the space, working with text, incorporating



dramatic elements, and sharing different dance vocabularies.

By the end of the week we had an event, open for public, in which each of us presented an excerpt of previous work followed by feedback from our colleagues as well as the audience.

The last day of the first week we had some time on our own to explore the space and come up with ideas to propose to the group. We presented the ideas to each other and started to shape the projects we wanted to research together. Whilst all of the ideas seemed interesting, Christopher made very clear that we should pick the ones that really spoke to us, so we could truly give enough energy to them.



I chose to be involved in seven different projects, all in different locations around OMI's land. One of them was a dance film I coordinated.

We worked collaboratively for the next two weeks exploring the possibilities of each space, deciding the different narratives and devising the movement material. All the pieces were very different on the number of people involved, the location we worked on, and the physical research.

Half way through our creative frenzy we were invited to watch a showing of work-in-progress from former OMI residents at the outdoor theatre PS21. The event included a facilitated feedback process by Christopher K. Morgan based on Liz Lerman's *Critical Response Process*.

It was incredibly helpful, not only did we get to meet them, talk to them and learn from their experience, but we also learned a very thought-of, productive way to approach the difficult task of helping artists through their creative processes.

Listening to what other people saw, and having to articulate my own opinions, was an invaluable tool to look back at my own work with a more analytical perspective.

On the 29th of August we had an informal showing, open to the public, of the small pieces of work we had been working on. We got a good audience size, of about 250 people from different ages and backgrounds. The showing lasted about three and a half hours and by the end we were all exhausted but extremely happy. It was an opportunity to put our ideas forward in front of an audience and test how they would react to them.



The last day I proposed a research that I hadn't wish to show earlier, on some of the questions that I am thinking of for my next creation, "Left", that will be presented at Emerge Festival in London. I asked my colleagues to reflect upon our emotions, feelings and "inner voices" throughout those three weeks. We discussed the impact of our psychology in our body, and hence in our work, and I gathered very interesting information from our collective thoughts.

Christopher K. Morgan said to us that, in their experience, the “seed” of OMI blooms after it's finished. I could already feel the massive learning curve that creating collaboratively was when still at the residency. It's as confronting as it is enriching. You have to leave your ego behind and prioritize the art. You have to learn to listen and to communicate. And when you manage, you can look back and realize how all the ideas intertwine and grow directly from each other, until the final product is created.

The residency at OMI has given me more resources to work collaboratively with other artists. That is an invaluable tool for a choreographer that wishes to create alongside artists from different disciplines (visual artists, designers, composers) and to empower dancers.

I am more convinced than ever that a work of art is a joined effort of all the artists involved. And that it acquires a different dimension when shared with the audience. They can inform the process and help us understand if what we are trying to achieve is coming across.



The residency at OMI has also provided me with the time and the opportunity of trying different approaches to creation, understanding where my artistic interests lay, and where do I want to direct my attention and effort.

It has also provided me with a new network of dance artists internationally. We are already thinking of more possibilities to come together and apply for funding to develop more collaborative projects in the future.

To sum up, it has been a fantastic experience, and I am extremely grateful to OMI and Lisa Ullmann Foundation to make it happen. Thank you!

Neus

*Pictures by Ross Willows and myself