

To: Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund (LUTSF)
From: Rachel Gomme
Date: 26th July 2004

I am pleased to enclose a report on my trip to Mexico undertaken with the assistance of the Lisa Ullmann Travelling scholarship fund. As you will see from the report the project turned out rather differently from what had been envisaged. Nevertheless, I feel I made some valuable contacts and learned from my experience there, and I am most grateful for the help the Fund provided me. Please contact me if you would like any further information. I am sorry that as yet I have no photos from the performance in Guanajuato, although I hope these will be sent to me within the next few weeks.

Once again, many thanks
Yours sincerely

Rachel Gomme

Rachel Gomme: Project in collaboration with Lola Lince, Guanajuato, Mexico, April-June 2004

The initial plan for this project was that I was to travel to Mexico to collaborate with Mexican choreographer Lola Lince, as part of her ongoing project 'Feminas del Mundo'. The principle of this scheme is that for each stage Lince invites a woman artist from another country to collaborate on an exploration of the theme of death in different cultures, drawing material from the artists' own cultures and from different disciplines. We had talked face-to-face and emailed about the project, which began with Lince's collaboration with Polish theatre director Halina Chmielarz in 2003. In the event the work I found myself involved in was very different from this plan, and I found my experience in Mexico both stimulating and challenging.

Shortly before I flew to Mexico Lola wrote to me that she had been commissioned to make a piece to be performed with the Orquesta Sinfónica de la Universidad de Guanajuato in late May, and that she hoped I would be able to participate in this. I envisaged that we would work on this piece in parallel with our collaborative work on the 'Feminas del Mundo' project, and I hoped that we would also be collaborating on the project with the orchestra. However, in the event what we worked on was Lince's choreography, in which I was to participate as a dancer. I was happy to do this but was still keen that we should be collaborating in other work, and be sharing our approaches in a more open-ended research.

I was met and welcomed by Lola and her husband Xavier, who were my hosts for the duration of my stay. They are based in a beautiful house in the hills above the town of Guanajuato, and I stayed in a studio apartment separate from the main house and ate my meals with them. I was very grateful for their generosity in providing this support, though the situation did raise its own difficulties in that I felt dependent and, therefore, found it harder to negotiate on other aspects of my stay. Lola also has her own studio in the house, and this was where we worked.

The project which had been commissioned was a new version of 'L'Après-Midi d'un Faune', to Debussy's music. I saw this as an interesting challenge, and was prepared to give as much as I could to the devising of the piece, as well as to performing in it. I also hoped that as it is a short piece, and was to be performed at the end of May (two weeks before I was due to leave), we would have time to do some other work too. Work began almost immediately I arrived, in mid-April, and days were very full. We would begin with a walk and run in the morning, followed by a long warm-up and a session of Qi Gong, often outdoors. This session usually lasted about 4 hours. After a break we would move into a further 2-hour session of bodywork (yoga, Feldenkrais or improvisation). In the evening we would work on the choreography for 2-3 hours. The days were thus very long, and I found that I had little time to engage in other activities.

During the first ten days Lola led all sessions, and though I enjoyed much of the work I was still keen to do some of my own work. In the second week she invited me to lead some of the bodywork sessions, and I was happy to offer yoga and lead improvisations based on my work with connection with the earth and stillness/listening.

I took a week out to visit a live art festival in Morelia, a town about 4 hours' bus journey away. This was a stimulating event, and I was welcomed by the organisers and made some contacts which may be helpful in providing opportunities to return to Mexico, to show work or to teach. I also found the variety of approaches in workshops and lectures stimulating after two weeks of working essentially with one person's method, and was able to collaborate on a performance project at the end of the week. This proved to be one of the highlights of my stay, and I found much openness and interest in collaboration among the organisers and other artists present.

When I returned to Guanajuato, work began on the choreography proper with two other dancers, and a third who arrived later in the month. This opened out the work somewhat, and it was interesting to share approaches in the bodywork sessions, using yoga, massage and improvisation. I received good feedback on the sessions I led. However, since I was still feeling that I wanted to do some of my own work alongside the rehearsals, Lola and I eventually talked about the difference between the initial proposal for my stay and the actual work, and how we could resolve this. We agreed that, except for the evening rehearsals, I would choose which sessions I participated in, and take time to do some work on my own. This was not always easy, as I would have liked to feel my work more integrated with the rest of our activities, but I took some time to do a little improvisation work in the landscape, and feel that I can draw on this material for solo work that I am doing here in the UK.

Lola had suggested before I arrived that it might be possible for me to teach one or two workshops at the university in Guanajuato. After being pointed in the right direction I made contact and negotiated with the university administration, and eventually, in my last

week, a workshop was organised - largely through the efforts of the university's deputy exhibitions co-ordinator, who was extremely helpful. Although it was organised at the last minute, 15 students, from backgrounds ranging from architecture through fine art to dance, theatre and circus, attended the 3-day workshop, and I received many positive comments from them on the work, which focused on the sense of presence in body and in place. This for me was another of the highlights of my stay, and I hope very much that I will be able to return to teach there again (the university administrators have also expressed their interest in this).

The performance of Lola's choreography was postponed until the last week of my stay, which meant that we continued working on it up to the last minute. Although I had hoped to collaborate more, I found the choreography itself interesting enjoyed the performance. The performance took place in Guanajuato's prestigious Teatro Juárez, and was well received. I enclose a copy of the concert programme. I left two days afterwards.

Overall, I found myself struggling over much of the two months. I was really very keen to be collaborating and exploring new territory, both in my working methods and in the theme to be explored. It was a disappointment not to be working on the project originally envisaged, and difficult to find a place for myself when I found myself with little time and space to engage in my own creative work. However, Lola has plans to work on the 'Feminas del Mundo' project in November/December of this year, and I feel that the ground has been laid for possible future collaboration, with the joint sessions and sharing of approaches which we undertook during these two months. If I return, I hope that it will be within the context of other work - perhaps teaching and showing work in other cities, through the contacts I have been able to make - which will give me a broader base and allow me to feel more present in the work and the place. I was pleased that I was able to make contacts and negotiate work with them. In terms of exploring collaboration, one of the main aims of this work for me, I feel that a very small start has been made, but I had hoped to go much further. However, this in itself proves interesting in suggesting different ways to approach other collaborative projects that I am now or will shortly be engaging in.

I am extremely grateful to the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund for enabling me to take this opportunity to travel and to explore work in Mexico. I feel I have been able to make good contacts, and I have learned much from my stay, although not necessarily in the areas I most expected. It is difficult to make general recommendations from my experience, but perhaps the main one is to note that work organised through personal contact is always subject to negotiation, and particularly that is important for all involved to feel a degree of independence for such negotiations to be successful.

There are many people in Mexico to whom I am grateful for their generosity and assistance. In particular I would like to thank the following people:

Lola Lince

Xavier Gomez-Mont

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Rodrigo Solís Aguilera (Deputy Exhibitions Organiser, University of Guanajuato)