

Angus Balbernie.

I received a LUTSF grant to travel to Argentina between Nov 1 and Nov 27 2017. The purpose of the trip was to work with students at the experimental, unfunded dance training LEM, based in the district of Palermo. I have been there twice before, when the project initially started nearly 10 years ago, so it was great to be able to go back and see how the work and ethos had progressed in these years.

During my time there I mentored and guided 9 different student artists, varying in age and experience, in their choreographic and compositional work as part of their final project at the training. The project ended with 2 evenings of performance and sharing with the public. LEM is based in a studio in Palermo in Buenos Aires. The students were from all over the world, and are basically self-funding their training in various ways. This brings a really interesting range of ages, experiences, and ways of working and developing as artists.

The training at LEM is based on blocks of different input, from visiting and resident artists, and from various dance and theatre practitioners, body-workers, film-makers, philosophers, curators, and other disciplines, giving the overall training a varied and experimental approach to creating tools and dialogue investigating how and what the moving body and mind can create for individual artists. The training is modular and flexible, avoiding the tropes and frameworks of full-time institutional training, allowing each individual student to commit to as many modules as they want to, or can.

Alternative forms of training are of great interest to me, in terms of developing artists, supporting creative processes, and questioning how both process and product are supported and assessed outwith the traditional frameworks of institutional qualification. Having had great difficulties myself questioning and dealing with these within formal trainings (to the point of having left all institutional teaching) it was affirming and important to me to be involved again in a very different, and to me, far more relevant approach to arts training.

Buenos Aires is a good city for these kinds of experiments being by European standards still fairly cheap to live and make art in. An explosion of micro-breweries, tattoos and beards means areas like Palermo are full of hipsters and pop-up galleries, which LEM students find supportive in siting and showing work in different locations and situations. Like many cities where there is little official funding and many artists, the sense of people sharing and being generous in supporting low-key, unfunded art making is apparent and positive.

My work was to guide the final performance projects of the students, ending in 2 evenings of performances and discussions with the public. I would meet and work with the students most afternoons and evenings at LEM. Each student was working towards their final piece of work, as a kind-of "summing up" of their training and experiences from having been at LEM, over various lengths of time and at various stages in their careers.

Often we would begin the afternoon showing some videos or pictures of a specific artist, or the work of a poet, sculptor, architect, neurologist, naturalist etc., to open the group discourse on the inter-connecting resonances between art forms, disciplines, resources, and information.

Mentoring to me is quite a "hands off" process, letting students work on their ideas and projects until asked to intervene or really having to. I find that an active studio with a group of engaged and self-motivated artists working in it, is an energised choreographic form, and often self-sustaining in its collective emergence, and that the ego of the mentor/teacher can be a block rather than a positive force. So rather than immediately intervene in the work, I prefer to be present and wait to talk about their specific work when asked, or offer ideas on other work and possible avenues of interest, that might help them progress with their own thinking and project development, if this seems useful or relevant.

I see an active studio as a special generation of spatialities and interactive conditions that if left alone to flourish, will often allow each individual to develop their own work whilst being edged and supported by the work around them. A choreographic form can emerge which informs and supports both the individual and the group in the generation of ideas and actions, a form of shared and individual choreography, and maybe more importantly, a key form of personal and collective learning.

The training is undergoing a large change now, after nearly 10 years based in the studio in Palermo, which is being sold. It will hopefully re-emerge internationally to continue it's core focus of creating modules of training that allow individuals to create their own program and commitment, outwith the norms of institutional training, and specifically focused on each individuals needs and financial reality.

I would like to thank the Lisa Ullman Travelling Scholarship Fund hugely for giving me the opportunity to re-visit LEM and be involved both with its creators, students, ethos and work, in it's final stages in Palermo, and hopefully in its future international re-emergence.

Angus McLean Balbernie.