

## Awardee Cover Letter

10/08/17

**Awardee Name:** Bethan Peters

**Project:** The Arctic Circle Residency Programme

**Choreographic project:** *Moving North*

**Place:** Svalbard & surrounding Arctic region

**Dates:** 9<sup>th</sup> June – 29<sup>th</sup> June 2017 (3-week trip)

I believe that the purpose of my project was achieved in relation to the objectives and goals that I outlined in my proposal and artistic plans before embarking on the residency. I purposefully kept my research questions and choreographic ideas quite open and flexible as I had no fixed knowledge of what to expect and what kind of work might be possible on a day-to-day basis during the residency and in the Arctic environment.

On reflection, after my return to the UK, I was glad that I took this approach as it meant that even though my work arguably evolved away from my original research questions and choreographic preconceptions, that I was open enough to discover things that provided me with great interest, creative fuel and felt like a genuine response to the environment I was in and were something I doubt I could have ever have imagined prior to the experience.

Some highlights from my trip include:

- Meeting and engaging with such a wonderfully diverse range of artists and scientists and sharing in an extremely unique experience
- Witnessing the ship being moored to an ice flow/iceberg at 79°55,8' N, 012°29,7' E, (the most northerly point we got to) which we were able to work on for a day
- Climbing and capturing footage from the ship's mast and boom nets
- Dancing bare feet in snow and sand
- Seeing a glacier calving from a zodiac boat

Whilst on the residency I kept a daily log of my journey, which I uploaded as a blog on return to the UK. The log provides a daily account of the residency and outlines the creative process I experienced, including my challenges, discoveries revelations and choreographic approaches. The blog can be seen at: [www.movingnorthsite.wordpress.com](http://www.movingnorthsite.wordpress.com)

Having previously undertaken a 14-month choreographic residency at The National Maritime Museum (2015-2016) during which I initially applied for The Arctic Circle, I will be sharing elements of my Moving North research/work at the museum, which will include participatory workshops for families and teenagers. There is also the potential that some of my work will feature as a part of the programming activities for a new Polar Worlds gallery which opens at the museum in late 2018. As outlined in my report I will be continuing some of my Arctic research threads to develop work which will eventually be public facing in some capacity.

In terms of suggestions for future awardees, I would recommend that:

- You allow as much time as you can to plan your trip/project as things generally always take longer than you expect

- If you are going somewhere new, do groundwork research, but try to keep an open mind about what you might actually get to do when you are there
- Lastly, try to enjoy the experience as much as you can and not put too much pressure on yourself to do anything and everything
- Oh and if you are going to the Arctic in the summer, make sure you take an eye mask; 24-hour sunlight, can really mess with your body clock!

I would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to you all at The Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund for supporting my project. Your contribution made a massive difference to me personally and meant that I could focus more of my attention on the artistic attributes of my project.

Kind regards  
Bethan Peters

**Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund  
Awardee Report**



# Moving North By Bethan Peters

In June 2017, I was lucky enough to be selected to take part in an incredible expeditionary residency programme called [The Arctic Circle](#), through which I spent three weeks in and around the island of Svalbard, located half way between Norway and the North Pole.



During the residency 30 artists from a broad range of disciplines, scientists and educators from across the world come together to live aboard a tall ship - The Antigua, for two weeks to explore remote areas of the Arctic region around Svalbard and undertake research projects within their own specialist fields, the majority of which have a focus or strong connection to the impacts of climate change.

The hope is that after the experience of being in the Arctic, residency participants will return to their home countries, share their experience with others and create work that can raise awareness of climate change through a variety of modes.

During the residency I planned to undertake a choreographic research and development project, which focused on the relationship between the human body and dramatically evolving Arctic landscape. I was particularly interested in exploring some key questions and prompts that I wanted to use as starting points including:

- The physical & psychological impact of being in the Arctic
- How do the places I encounter make me want to move?
- What is the character & personality of the landscapes I am in?
- Exploring textures of landscapes

My aim was to explore practically, the physical and psychological impact of the rapidly changing Arctic environment on my own body, by physically immersing myself in the extreme landscapes I encountered. By doing this I hoped to understand further and highlight my personal relationship and responsibility to climate change as well as considering ways in which I could share this process when I return to the UK, hopefully to encourage other people to do the same. I certainly wasn't and am still not an expert on climate change or environmental issues, but I felt a strong personal responsibility to find out more and go on this residency with the goal to discover more tangible information about climate change and explore how I could respond to this creatively.

As much as I had tried to prepare myself for the trip beforehand, I was blown away by the reality of the place I encountered once I arrived in Svalbard. I was struck by a strange combination of experiencing both familiar and totally alien landscapes. I had been expecting a much more remote and hostile environment, but actually saw a great deal of life, from a

bustling township, perfectly set up for tourists (Longyearbyen-where we embarked and disembarked the ship) to a diverse range of incredible wildlife. Once on the ship, we witnessed a diverse range of breathtaking natural sites, some of which were difficult to comprehend as a human, let alone a choreographer.



Before departing, I had been mostly preoccupied with the physical considerations of dancing and generally being in an Arctic environment (especially as I am someone who is notoriously bad at dealing with the cold) and had not really given much thought to the mental and emotional impact the trip might have on me. Once I was there I was surprised to discover that it wasn't actually anywhere as near as cold as I had been expecting (most days the temperature was around 4-5.c) and over the course of my time on the ship, how much my psychological endurance was challenged.

Over the course of the two weeks the ship anchored in various locations around the island and we carried out 'landings' in which we took smaller zodiac boats to specific parts of the land to work on our projects: locations which ranged from sandy beaches to vast glaciers. Often we were given between 2-3 hours to explore and work within a particular site, which was mapped out by our four guides, who were always on watch for polar bears or other dangers that might require a quick retreat back to the ship.

Although I felt incredibly privileged to witness such a diverse range of incredible places and work around 29 other fascinating artists and scientists, in practice, during the first week of the residency I found this incredibly overwhelming. So much so, that I experienced great difficulty in dancing and exploring some of the physical tasks that I had set out before the residency and even those that I was developing as I was there, in direct response to the environments I was immersed in. When I danced I often experienced waves of insignificance and a dishonest connection to the places in which I was moving. I kept asking myself: what am I adding to this place/environment? Why does my movement matter here? I felt that there was a such a vast gap between my own body and the Arctic landscapes I was in. Considering the whole dancing body in the landscapes seemed impossible as it was too loaded with codes and baggage that seemed so irrelevant within this context. It also

emphasised a feeling of guilt, of personally being in an environment that is being so dramatically affected by humans, directly and indirectly.

About half way through the residency I found a way to get past these blocks and began working on a research thread that I discovered whilst working on a barefoot sequence during a landing. The thread idea explored the connections between markings on our bodies such as scars and tattoos and the markings on the land/environment, that are either caused by natural phenomena or are a result of human activity. To develop material around this idea, I collaborated with a number of my fellow shipmates to capture (through photos and film) either a scar or tattoo on their body, which they embedded, juxtaposed or immersed in a particular place of the natural landscape. Due to the localized nature of the body markings, the focus, choreography or curation became zoomed in on particular body parts and very specific parts of the environment. After I captured the encounters between body and land visually, I recorded the participants talking about their particular mark, the story behind it and its significance to them at that moment.



This provided me with a tangible, comprehensible connection between the body and our surroundings, which I had been trying to find in the first week and I was really excited by the creative possibilities that these ideas were offering. I was particularly interested in narratives that were emerging, not only from the people that I was recording, but also the factual and imagined narratives of the land they were relating to.

Alongside the markings project, I also went about trying to document visually the diverse places we visited through photos and film. This was not only for my personal records, but for the purpose of use in potential future work, in which I may use the images and footage I captured for an installation or set design. I became particularly occupied with trying to capture films of melting, physical changes and shifts in the landscape as well as the variety of natural and man-made textures I came across.

Taking part in the residency and actually experiencing being in an Arctic environment has had a major impact on me personally since I returned to the UK. The places I visited and the

landscapes I encountered had a strong physical resonance in both my cerebral and body memory, I miss the vast spaces, the awesomeness of the region's geographical character and extreme juxtapositions within the same environment. Even though I struggled to find a clearly defined movement practice whilst I was in the Arctic, I believe that the experience will somehow manifest itself physically through my work going forward and I have found that personally carrying out various improvisatory and choreographic tasks has helped me to digest some of the materials and thinking I developed during the residency since I have been back.

Taking part in the residency has inspired me to consider how I address bigger, potentially overwhelming themes, ideas and concepts within my work and encouraged me to challenge myself further to make bolder statements or pose questions more explicitly through my artistic practice.

Having physically experienced aspects of an environment where the effects of climate change are being manifested in some of the most dramatic ways on earth, I feel a greater and more urgent responsibility to find out more about what I can do personally to implement more environmentally conscious choices within my own life, but also how I can use the creative work I do as a choreographer and dance artist to engage people in these extremely complicated and daunting issues in ways that might ignite their interest, engagement and desire to take collective action.



From being surrounded by a group of fellow artists and scientists who were brought together by their common interest and passion for exploring alternative ways of sharing the real, contemporary experience of being in this particular place in the Arctic through their very diverse practices, I really believe that collaboration between science and the arts is crucial in promoting awareness of climate change to a wider population. In my opinion standalone facts and statistics about how our world is drastically changing, intended to scare people into change are clearly not working in terms of getting people to act. They seem so gigantic and unfathomable that the majority of people are stunned into a state of not knowing what to do or how to make a change, me included. The arts and for me, specifically dance/choreography, offer a different lens for people to look through, that is often more successful at connecting to our personal, emotional and compassionate human instincts.

I want to do my best to ensure that the physical traces of my presence on the Arctic landscapes I encountered weren't in vain and had a beneficial purpose in a grander scheme of engaging more people in a very real and urgent global problem.

Going forward I intend to develop two strands of the research and ideas that emerged from the residency. The first will develop the materials and ideas from the markings (scars/tattoos) project, which will most likely take the form of an installation. The second will relate more to the physical environments I encountered and will take the form of an interactive, outdoors performance. I am extremely keen to continue relationships with some of the participants who I was on board with and hope opportunities will arise in which we are able to collaborate professionally and utilize our very unique, shared experience.

*The Arctic Circle* was an extremely profound, rewarding and surprising experience, which challenged me in a number of ways both professionally and personally. I met an incredible group of people, including participants, guides and crew, from whom I learnt a great deal in many different ways. I fell in love with being at sea. I saw wondrous sites that I will cherish dearly for the rest of my life and I feel energized to use my experience to create work, which is likely both to include and go broader than choreography and that communicates something of importance about climate change.

