

## Lisa Ullmann Award Report by Romany Dear

### Participation in AXIS dance company summer intensive and teacher training in Oakland, California from the 29<sup>th</sup> July until the 7<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

My project was to travel to Oakland, California and participate in the summer intensive with renowned inclusive dance company AXIS. Founded in 1987, AXIS is the nation's most acclaimed ensemble of disabled and non-disabled performers based in Oakland, CA.

*“AXIS Dance Company's annual summer intensive draws disabled and non-disabled dancers from around the world to engage, share and learn from one another. Over ten days, students will learn new skills in three different modules derived from the company's working ethos and repertoire that will enhance and develop their own practice. Our specialized 3-day teacher training provides professional dance teachers and experienced artists the chance to enhance their skills and working methods in inclusive dance and translation for dancers with physical disabilities. Modules will be taught by AXIS Company Dancers and led by internationally renowned choreographer and AXIS Dance Company's Artistic Director Marc Brew.”*

Above I have included a synopsis of the training, taken from AXIS's website. As mentioned every year the summer intensive consists of three distinct modules which I was lucky enough to participate in. The three modules were as follows, Site Specificity and Improvisation, Choreography and Performance and Teacher Training. The intensive took place from 9am until 5pm every day, and each module lasted for 3 days. The training took place in a beautiful building called The Malonga Centre, which is a dance space located in downtown Oakland, the home of AXIS and used by other community dance classes and groups. The building has huge beautiful studios with tall windows that allow the light to pour inside every afternoon. Below is a photo from one of the studios during the intensive.

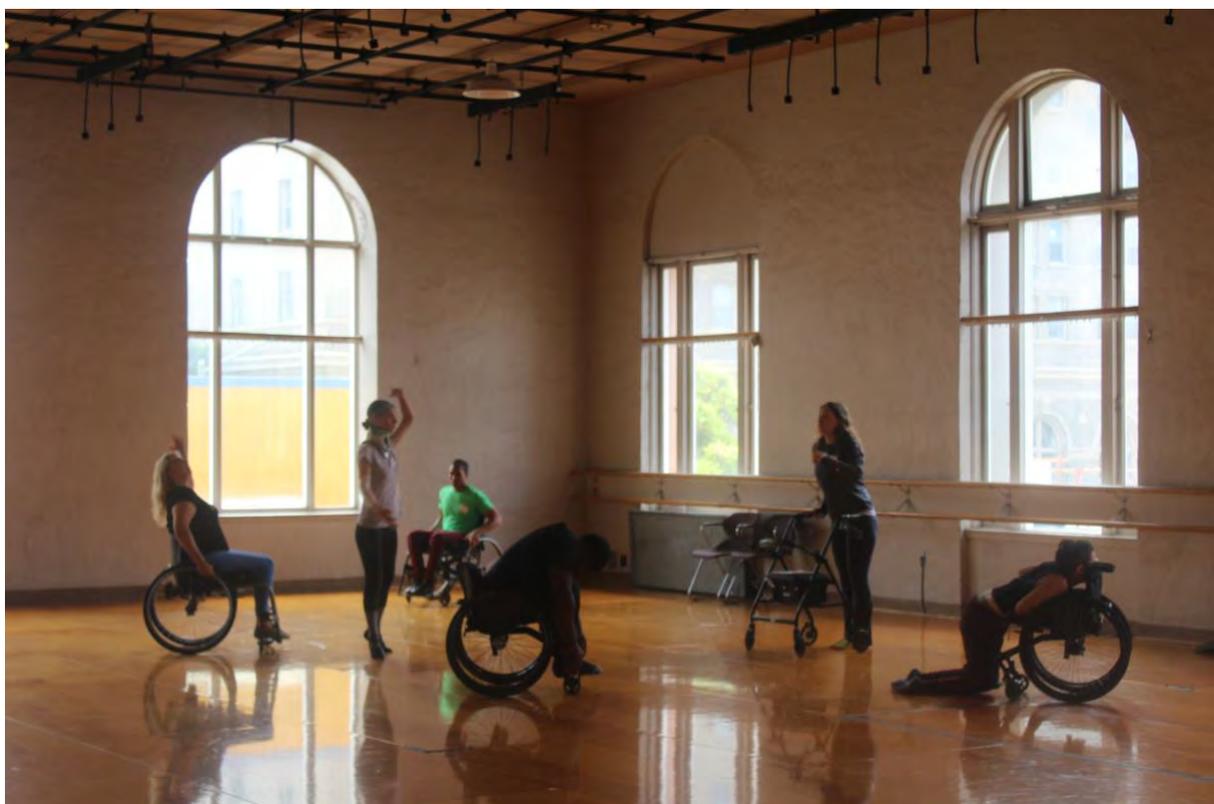


*Photo of the beautiful afternoon light in the downstairs studio in The Malonga Centre.*

Every day we would arrive to the centre and take part in a daily check in. This became something very important and upon reflection, I think could or should be an integral part of working with inclusion and - or inclusivity. The “check in” would or could consist of different elements ranging from your sharing your name and a movement, to sharing your preferred pronouns and an internal weather forecast, to where you're from and or anything we, the group, may need to know about you that day. Every day we made this circle and took turns to listen and share in the elements of each day's check

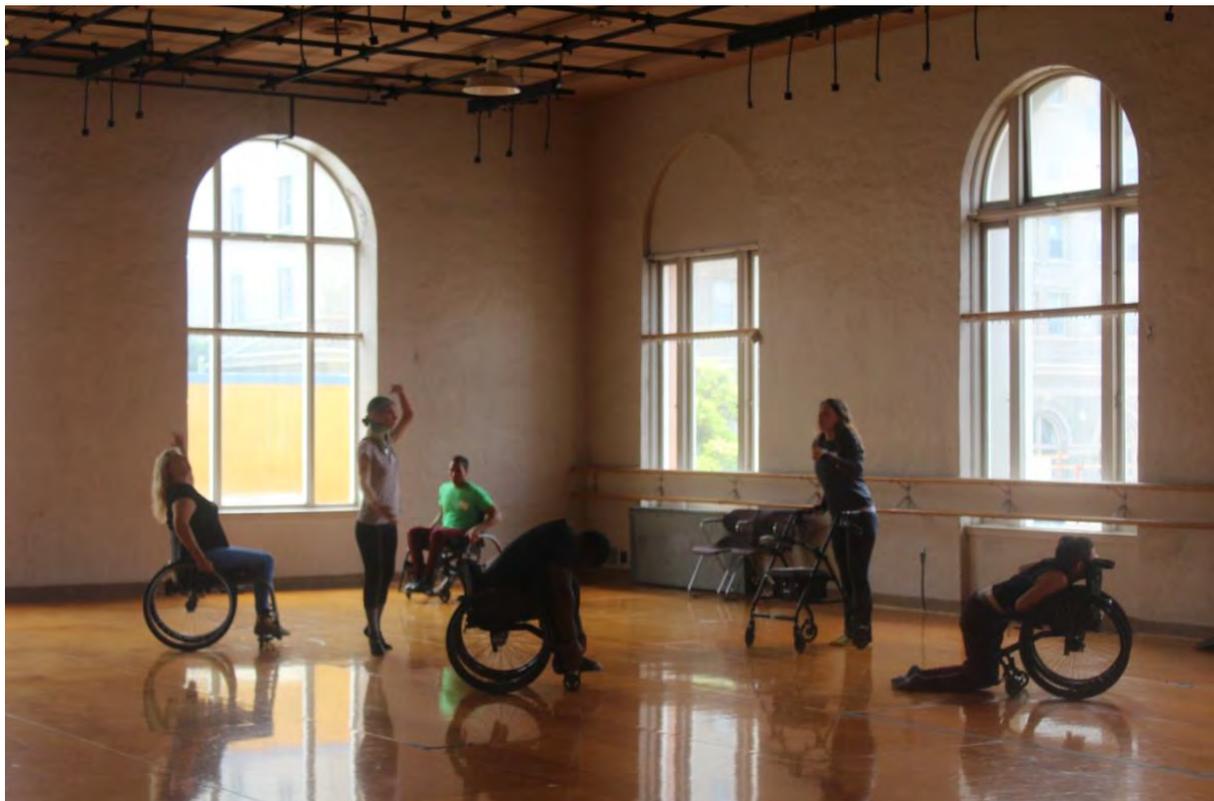
in ritual. Following this, the modules would begin. Over the three modules, we explored propositions for working in inclusive dance through different exercises including warming up, learning and teaching technique, creating performance and working with improvisation and music. The elements and emphasis changed across each module as did the participants, there were people from different states of the USA, Brazil, India, The Philippines, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and me and two others from the UK. The intensive was international with people coming from hugely different backgrounds and experiences. This made the course an incredibly rich environment to be within and at times challenging. How can you meet the needs of each person in a space? How do you make sure that methodologies of inclusion are extending to everybody? It's not an easy thing, however the space was created with good intentions by both the participants and staff and each day, we collectively found and re found our ways to be together and to dance together. This was also why I felt the check in was integral to the training as something I would like to continue using in my classes.

My purpose or intention to participate in this training was to continue to deepen my practice as a dancer, teacher and advocate for inclusive dance. I was working with companies, Independance in Glasgow for over 5 years and later with Con Cuerpos in Colombia for two years, the experience of working with both these companies in hugely different contexts, cultures, countries and languages was hugely rewarding for me and the opportunity to continue to experience this in yet another felt invaluable. Oakland and San Francisco share an incredible history regarding the coining of the term "disability justice" and so having this as a backdrop to the AXIS summer intensive was hugely inspiring for me, being in a place that has the history of this advocacy and so many DIY groups and organisations working around disability rights. I learnt so much from both the other participants and the staff during the intensive, listening and learning about AXIS's understanding of the social model of disability opposed to the medical model for example; Or how the use of language (in the broadest sense of the word) is both political and personal and so integral within these spaces. On a personal level, it reminded me of how important this work and advocacy is to me and made me ever more aware of my many inherent privileges as an able-bodied person, re learning again and again my positionality within these spaces. On a professional level also, it was incredibly energizing and filled me with passion and desire to continue working, teaching and learning within these fields, continuing to push for more visibility and opportunities outside of the very ableist dance world.



*Photo taken in Module 2, Choreography and Performance. A creative group exercise.*

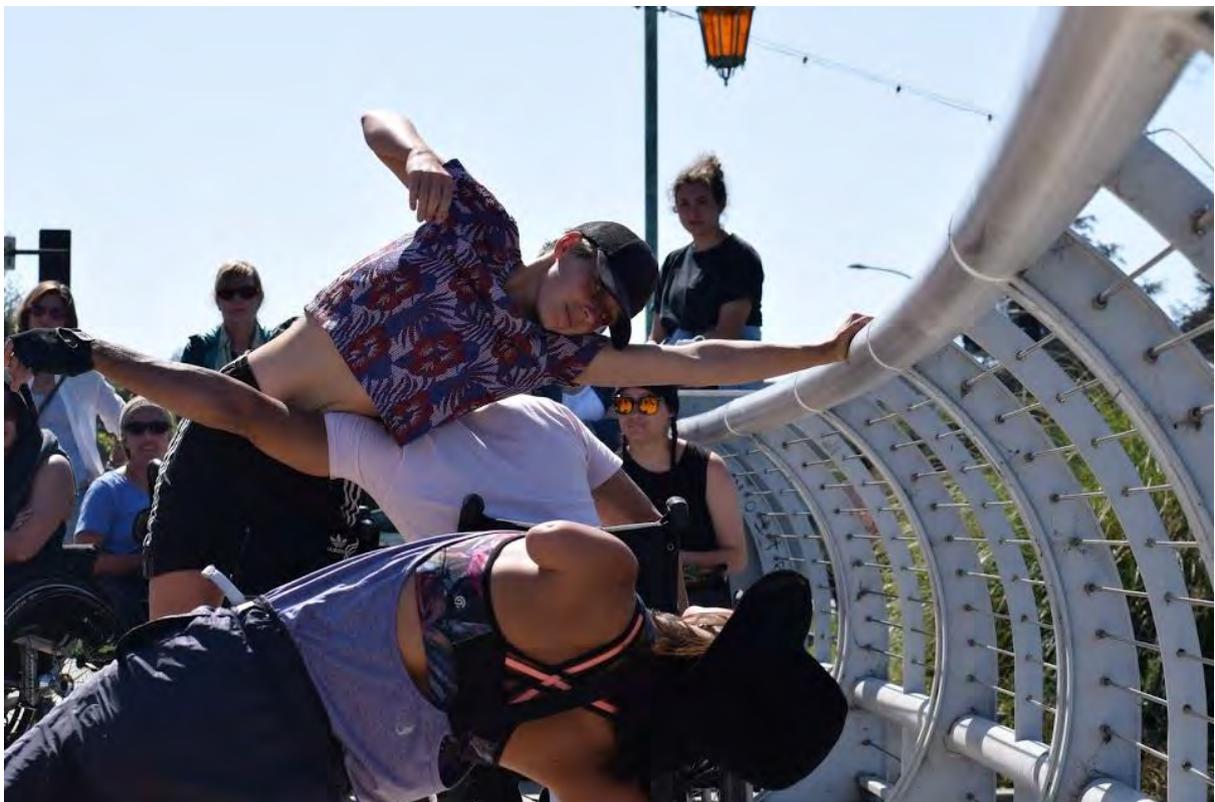
The highlights of my time with AXIS were primarily just to be there. I had been accepted onto the intensive the previous year with a half paid scholarship from AXIS and had been applying to different funding bodies to assist my trip. This year, in 2019 after receiving both The Lisa Ullmann Award and the Professional Development Award from Creative Scotland I was able to participate. So, for me, the initial highlight was just actually being there, arriving in San Francisco, driving over the famous Bay Bridge into Oakland and feeling so incredibly lucky that I had made it to this training and to this part of the world. The sun was hot, and the city felt alive. I had never been to the West Coast of the USA before, so it was all incredibly exciting for me, the food, the culture, the people and the politics. Once the course began, I think the highlight for me was the chance to meet many amazing new people from all over the world, each with their own unique and invaluable life experiences and perspectives. The pleasure and privilege of dancing and relating via and through the body with other people every day for 10 days straight was incredible for me. Dancing and moving with others who are dedicated to the work of disability justice and of trying to create inclusivity and visibility of disability within the dance world. Another highlight for me, was learning or naming the concept of Translation. This for me was a highlight in a more professional sense, it was like a moment in which all my understanding and previous experiences within inclusion and integrated dance came together. It is also now something that I am continuing to work with and with the help of funding from Creative Scotland, I can continue developing and sharing my project based upon this training and this concept of TRANSLATION within inclusive dance. I plan to spend the next months developing an instructional animated video, alongside a downloadable fanzine and podcast around the theme of Translation and Inclusion within dance and education. This will act as a material that people can use as both a virtual and physical learning resource. The intention being to share and distribute ideas and methodologies around how we can expand our perspectives around disability and visibility and attempt to be more responsible for how we can work Inclusively within dance, movement and educational contexts.



*Photo is taken of an exercise from Module 3, in Teacher Training. This was an exercise in translating pre-existing choreographic material and re-creating your own translation of it in small groups.*



*Photo taken in module 2 in performance and choreography, a group exercise creating choreography from personal experiences and then taking turns to teach and share and translate to the each other.*



*Photo taken during Module 1 in Site Specific Improvisation; this photo is taken from our sharing's on the last day. Each group made a collaborative improvisation that was site responsive.*

To end this report about my time with AXIS, I have been thinking of a few suggestions for future awardees for the Lisa Ullmann award or for people who may potentially be interested in this Intensive. I had been intending on applying to the Lisa Ullmann award for many years. Since I discovered the award, I had wanted to apply but never managed to organise applying for a course, be accepted onto it and then apply for the Lisa Ullmann award within the right time scale. Hence my advice is, if this is you, then don't give up intending to apply. Keep going, keep researching and apply because there are so many amazing international dance opportunities all over the world and the privilege of having your travel covered to get you there and back is incredible. Also, for anyone reading this who is interested in inclusive and integrated dance, I do highly recommend this program with AXIS, especially the Teacher Training Module.

I also want to mention the following other inclusive dance companies and intensives in inclusive dance in other parts of the world that I am aware of that may be less known about but are 100 percent worth checking out. If when reading this report also you are interested in my current follow up project, please feel free to contact me so I can send you the materials once they are completed. I wish you all the best with your international dancing dreams! Thank you for reading, Romany Dear.

**Con Cuerpos**, based in Bogota in Colombia. Every year they have a two-week intensive and there are scholarships from them available to participate, although the course itself is also very reasonable.

**Sin Fronteras**, an inclusive company based in Buenas Aires in Argentina.

**Candoco** who are based in London in the UK and **Indepen-dance** based in Glasgow in Scotland.



*Photo taken of all the participants at the end of Module One in Site Specific Improvisation. The site was Lake Merritt in Oakland where we worked outside in small groups creating a piece of improvisation in response to the Environment.*