

Lisa Ullman Award Report by Romany Dear 2024

**Participation in Aran-du: A Live Arts Encounter with GERMINAL: A three-week intensive residency and international encounter of live arts. Oct 28th – Nov 18th, 2024, La Paz, Bolivia.**



The International encounter of live arts, known as *Aran-du*, with the organisation: *Germinal*, took place from October 31st to November 18th, 2024, in La Paz, Bolivia. This event brought together a diverse group of artists and practitioners, including: Mariela Richmond (Costa Rica), Sofía Mejía (Colombia), Lucas Feres and Lucas Lagos (Brazil), Poly Rodríguez (Chile), María Landeta (Chile) and a host of national residents including Iby Viscarra, Gabriela Meléndres, Ivanova Gutiérrez, and Viviana Mamani from Bolivia. The encounter was facilitated, curated and organised by Paulina Ona and Tik Michel (Germinal).

I was invited to participate as a resident dance artist in this International Encounter, to share my own movement practice and research as a dancer, teacher, facilitator and advocate of access oriented movement spaces, which was focused on my research into supportive structures, working in trios and

threes, in relation to weight, gravity and suspension- inspired by la milpa, or the three sisters. Through the incredible organisation and support of both Germinal and The Lisa Ulman award, I was able to accept this incredible invitation.

The program included workshops, somatic training, and performative laboratories that explored and investigated the body and its cycles of both life and death, through and from southern epistemologies, centering indigenous knowledge, and sustainable practices.

The primary purpose of my project was to immerse myself in this vibrant cultural exchange and to engage in an intensive program of events, and creative and cultural exchange. This unique experience encouraged us to explore the concept of “a collective body” through the lens of southern epistemologies, fostering a deeper understanding of our interconnectedness with each other through embodied, situated somatic and live art practices.

Over the three weeks, we collectively organised, participated and attended presentations, workshops and laboratories. We also participated and cultivated other community spaces like collective naps, jam sessions, walks, workshops and film screenings, as well as cooking, sleeping and dreaming. One of the objectives was to engage with important conversations around how dance and live arts relate and exist within and across diverse Bolivian and Andino contexts, and territories. The aim was to collectively share and develop strategies for and towards an “eco-somatics” through working with our shared and individual living archives, across both traditional indigenous practices, contemporary movement performance practices and ecological, land-based practices and dialogues.

*“... we were exercising somatic spaces that proposed a slight movement: the Laboratory of practices of the wild(s) and the beginning of the Laboratory for K’epichar (q’ipi) / Caring for death, with the collective naps that occurred at the beginning of the afternoons. In addition to these laboratory spaces, several instances were convened to exercise deep listening, crossing the city environment and also outside of it, based on various drifts proposed at different times.”<sup>1</sup>*

The residency's activities encouraged collective reflection on themes of life, death, and sustainability through the metaphor of composting. This residency allowed me to contribute my practice as a dancer, teacher, and advocate of access-oriented movement spaces while learning from a collective of artists and practitioners from diverse cultural contexts. Through shared workshops, site-specific labs, and community activities, the objectives of fostering and deepening collaborations, exploring eco-somatic strategies, and engaging with collective practices, with the context of Bolivia were achieved. It was one of the most incredible experiences I have lived and I feel incredibly grateful to have been invited and supported to do this.

The program was not only structured around workshops and performances but also involved community-oriented activities and this holistic approach fostered a sense of community among participants and locals alike, enriching our understanding of the cultural and ecological dynamics at play in this vibrant city.

There were many highlights that marked my journey in La Paz, and in Bolivia in general, each and every single moment was a highlight for me, but in terms of moments or practices that I felt a specifically deep resonance with in terms of my artistic work and somatic, movement/dance practice was the intensive laboratory called “prácticas de agreste/s” (*practices of the wild/s*), which was facilitated by Sofia Mejias (Colombia) and Paulina Ona (Bolivia).

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Paulina Ona's article: *Words from the almaciguera: germinations of thought that gave life to the International Meeting of Living Arts 2024*, Arts and Cultures, December 4, 2024.  
[palabras-de-almaciguera-germinaciones-de-pensamiento-que-dieron-vida-al-encuentro-internacional-de-artes-vivas-2024](https://www.artscultures.org/words-from-the-almaciguera-germinations-of-thought-that-gave-life-to-the-international-meeting-of-living-arts-2024)

The collaborative workshops were particularly profound for me- to be in a space that was focused on working with fascia - the skin - contact - and the many many ways that we touch and are simultaneously touched by each other. I loved working with and from Sofia's somatic offerings, exploring our relationship to gravity, the floor, to collectivity and to rhythm. The intensive that we did



with Sofia allowed for a rich exchange of ideas and practices that transcended across and beyond any geographical, language based, contextual boundaries. It was such an important space and I think it was central to supporting us as a group to open up, to trust each other and to trust other ways of "knowing" each other. Supporting us to cultivate body-based strategies, and listening techniques for approaching eco-somatic practices, accompanied by spoken word texts, and cumbia rebajada music, it felt like a space that entangled and moved us through time, a space that both slowed down and expanded time, a space that honored and practised accessible body knowledge, more-than-human movements and gestures and also employed more contemporary somatic, dance and movement forms at the same time.

A space where we engaged deeply with the themes of life, death and transformation in and from the collective body. A space for contemplation and a space that I believed supported our capacity and openness to be able to engage in other intimate community events, like taking collective naps together. Teaching us how to be more porous, and to lean into rest, and to slow down (which felt particularly pertinent for me and my own interests, rooted within access based dance forms). Sofia's facilitations of explorations of lethargy and stillness as a research device - were for me, the closest thing i began to understand about how we can make and create sustainable practices.



This journey profoundly impacted me both personally and professionally. The immersive experience challenged me to rethink my approach to movement and community engagement, embedding eco-somatic principles into my practice. I concluded that the interplay between life, death, and the cycles of nature is not only a theme for artistic exploration but also a call to action for sustainability and interconnectedness in our communities. In conclusion, the encounter was a pivotal moment in my artistic journey, providing me with new insights, collaborative networks, and a deeper connection to the ecological and cultural narratives of Bolivia. The outcomes of this project extend beyond individual growth; they reminded me of the incredible power of working and moving with others, motivating me to continue looking for and cultivating spaces for exchange, horizontal practice and improvisation.

On a personal and personal level, it reminded me of how important advocacy is to me, and made me ever more aware of my many, inherent privileges, learning, and re-learning again and again about my positionality within different spaces. 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 and inspired me to want to learn more somatic techniques to support and use within my own practice.

I plan to disseminate the knowledge and experiences gained during this project through various different spaces, contexts, and platforms. This includes a fanzine that we created that has encapsulated the essence of our activities and insights from the residency. Additionally, I have and will utilize social media, (my Instagram and artist website) to share my writing, images, scores and general documentation of my time away. Hoping to share my individual practices and the collective practices that we cultivated during this residency within and across my communities in Glasgow and beyond. I am committed to sharing the movement scores and modes of working that we developed together, during this encounter through physical spaces dedicated to somatic and embodied movement, dance and learning through workshop formats. Here you can see the digital fanzine that

we



collectively made together post the residency: [view](#)

To end this report about my time with GERMINAL, 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 particular Intensive, or context of Bolivia. I had wanted to apply to the Lisa Ullman but had never managed to organise applying for a course, be accepted onto it and then apply for the Lisa Ullman award within the right time scale. Hence my advice is, if this is you, then don't give up! And apply! Because there are so many amazing international dance and movement opportunities out there and all over the world and the privilege of having your travel covered to get you there and back is incredible!

For future awardees considering a similar path, I would also recommend:

1. **Embrace Collaboration:** Engage with as many local practitioners as possible. The richness of diverse perspectives can significantly enhance your experience.
2. **Stay Open-Minded:** Be prepared to adapt and evolve your practice in response to the local environment and cultural context.
3. **Document Your Journey:** Keep a record of your experiences and reflections. This not only aids personal growth but also provides valuable insights for future projects.

Thank you for reading. I want to say a huge huge thank you to Paulina Ona and Tik Michel and Germinal Live Arts Encounter, to all the incredible participants and producers, venues, artists, cultural centers, streets, and amazing generosity and magic of the people and places in La Paz, Bolivia. A huge thank you to the Lisa Ullman Award for this opportunity, to Bolivian territory for receiving me, to Sofia Mejias for sharing your incredible practice. I am full of gratitude, and excited to continue moving, dancing and making!

Romany Dear (06/01/2025)

**\*Image credits, all taken from the following blog**  
([palabras-de-almaciguera-germinaciones-de-pensamiento-que-dieron-vida-al-encuentro-internacional-de-artes-vivas-2024](#)) and/ or generated by the participants of Germinal, 2024.