

## News from the Morrison-Shearer Foundation Summer 2024

### Sybil Shearer Company Member, John Neumeier, Hailed by New York Times



John Neumeier (center) and Sybil Shearer Company members rehearsing in the Northbrook studio in 1961

## The New York Times

### The American "Pope" of German Ballet Steps Down After a Long Reign

John Neumeier has run the Hamburg Ballet for 51 years, putting his stamp on the company and the city.

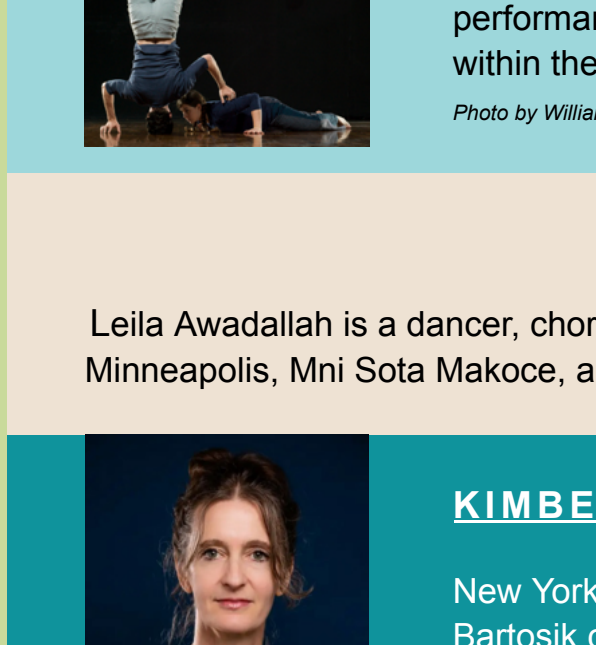
"Neumeier is American, born in Milwaukee, and strongly influenced by his early training with the experimental modern dance choreographer Sybil Shearer in Illinois. But his career has been in Europe, where he is counted as a major figure in ballet who has created over 170 works, many in company repertoires around the world."

On July 8, 2024, the New York Times ran an article about the life and work of legendary Director and Chief Choreographer of the Hamburg Ballet, John Neumeier. Neumeier's early dance career and formative training took place in mid-century Chicago, most notably with modern dancer Sybil Shearer.

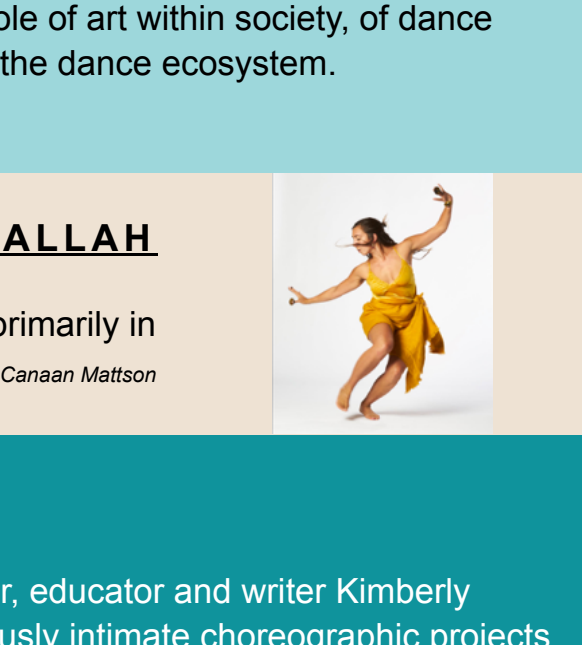
Follow [this link](#) to read the full article.

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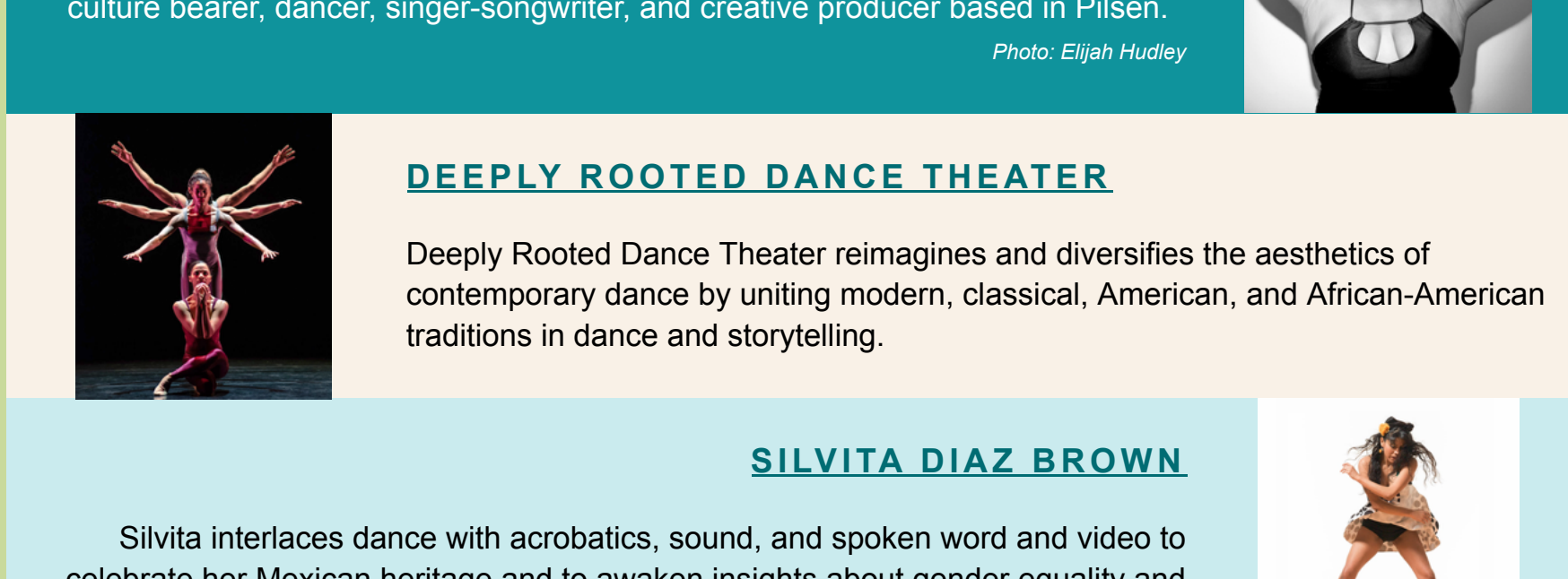
## More than 80 Dancers Benefit from Residencies in Sybil Shearer Studio at Ragdale



Photos by Mike Schwartz, Woodhouse Tinucci Architects

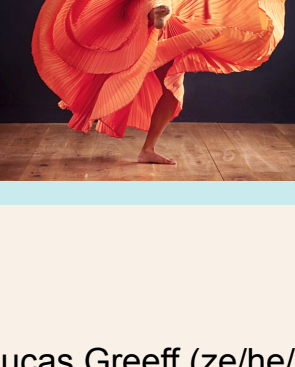


Since the Sybil Shearer Studio at Ragdale opened in the fall of 2021, the space has been host to dozens of dance and movement artists from across the country. An innovative, institutional collaboration, begun in 2016 between the Morrison-Shearer Foundation and Ragdale, resulted in a state-of-the-art dance studio being built amid Ragdale's historic, 50-acre artist retreat.



It was important to both organizations and the architects from Woodhouse Tinucci that the building reference the essential form and connection to nature that characterized Sybil Shearer's original home/studio in Northbrook, Illinois. The new studio provides artists with space for contemplative creativity and the opportunity to explore their practice within a group of other artists, just as Helen Balfour Morrison and Sybil Shearer had envisioned. With extreme sensitivity to the site and the adjacent native prairie preserve, this unique partnership created a new home for dance art fellowship and study that will extend the tradition of progressive dance making into the future.

You can learn more about the remarkable array of artists who have already used the Sybil Shearer Studio at Ragdale since its construction by following the links provided below.



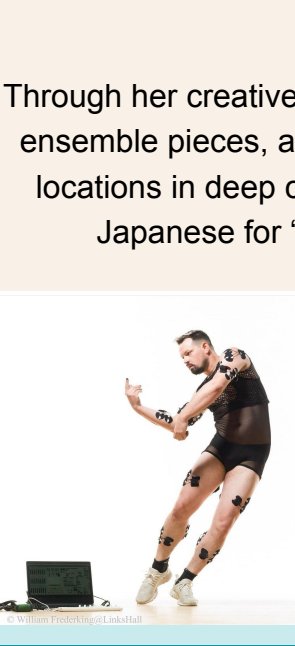
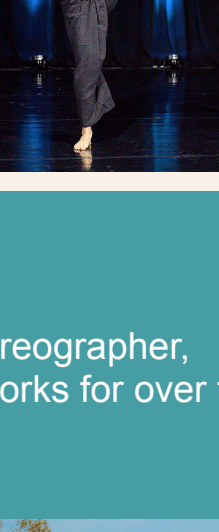
#### **JULIE RAE ANTONICK, JONATHAN MEYER - KHECARI**

Khecar creates dance works furthering the transformative power of live performance and advocates for the essential role of art within society, of dance within the arts, and of all artists working within the dance ecosystem.

Photo by William Frederking

#### **LEILA AWADALLAH**

Leila Awadallah is a dancer, choreographer and film wanderer based primarily in Minneapolis, Mni Sota Makoce, and sometimes Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Carian Mattson

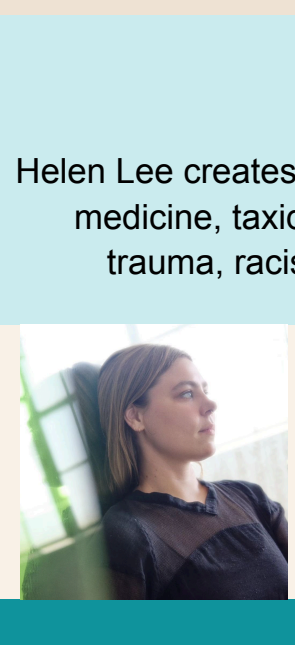
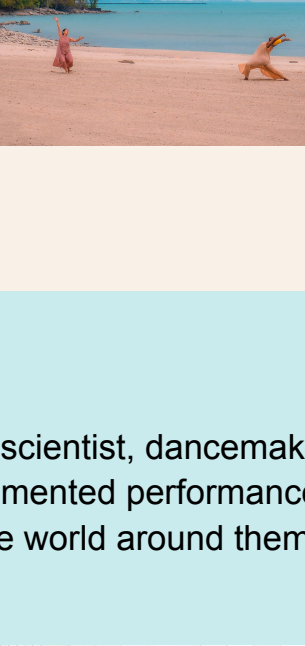


#### **KIMBERLY BARTOSIK - DAELA**

New York City-based choreographer, performer, educator and writer Kimberly Bartosik creates viscerally provocative, ferociously intimate choreographic projects that illuminate the ephemeral nature of performance. Photo by Scott Shaw

#### **JAN BARTOSZEK - HEDWIG DANCES**

As the founder and artistic director of Hedwig Dances, the Chicago-based contemporary dance company, Jan Bartoszek has choreographed over 70 dances that critics have described as "intelligent, accomplished, moving" — Chicago Tribune. Photo by Eileen Ryan Photography



#### **ASHWATY CHENNAT**

Ashwaty Chennat is a movement artist and educator whose interdisciplinary and cultural exchange work sows seeds for empathy-building experiences.

#### **CAROLYN GARNEY - GOLDBRILL**

Dubbed the "fierceness of femininity" by AfroPunk, GoldBrill is an Afro-Panamanian culture bearer, dancer, singer-songwriter, and creative producer based in Pilsen. Photo by Eliah Haddley



#### **DEEPLY ROOTED DANCE THEATER**

Deeply Rooted Dance Theater reimagines and diversifies the aesthetics of contemporary dance by uniting modern, classical, American, and African-American traditions in dance and storytelling.

#### **SILVITA DIAZ BROWN**

Silvita interlaces dance with acrobatics, sound, and spoken word and video to celebrate her Mexican heritage and to awaken insights about gender equality and female empowerment.

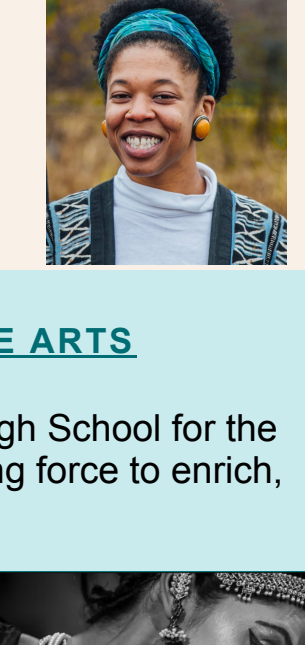


#### **NON EDWARDS**

Non dances to understand her body and what it represents, and as a skin for the audience to project onto. As a performer and a teacher, she explores the transmission of somatic experience between people. Photo by Katie-Brennan

#### **IRENE HSIAO**

Irene Hsiao is a dancer, writer, and multidisciplinary artist who creates performances in conversation with visual art in museums, galleries, and public spaces, including site-specific intervention with visual artworks and experimental engagement with arts institutions and the public. Photo by Rachel Storm

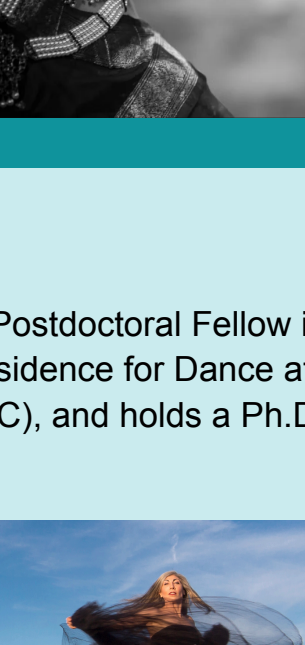


#### **JOEL HALL DANCERS - WILLIAM GILL**

Joel Hall Dancers was founded to showcase and celebrate the artistry of Black and Brown LGBTQIA+ performers. Joel Hall Dancers & Center stands as the embodiment of Joel's life-long passion for creating, performing, and teaching dance artistry and technique.

#### **LUCAS GREIFF**

Lucas Greiff (ze/he/they) is a choreographer, circus artist, and dancer whose work focuses on expanding the scope of queer & neurodivergent performance, engaging inherent energies, and challenging physical extremity through movement experiment.

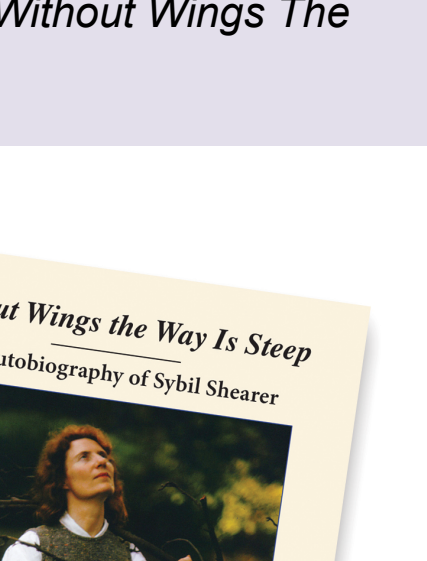


#### **CORINNE IMBERSKI**

Corinne Imberski is a Chicago based dance performer, choreographer, improviser, and educator, presenting solo and ensemble works for over thirty years at venues grand, small, and impromptu.

#### **AYAKO KATO - ART UNION HUMANSCAPE**

**Sybil Shearer Fellowship at Ragdale - 2024**  
Through her creative nest, Ayako Kato/Art Union Humanscape, Ayako creates solos, ensemble pieces, and movement installations for traditional stages and site-specific locations in deep collaboration with live music, grounded on the principles of fūryō, Japanese for "wind flow," cyclical transformation, and human motion in nature.

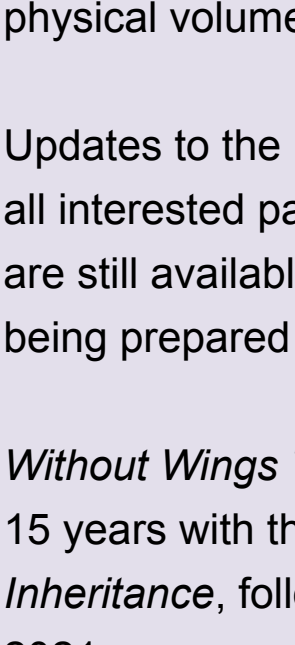
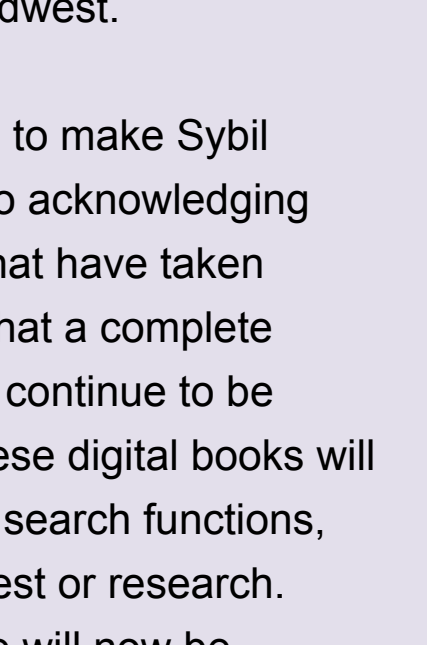


#### **CHRISTOPHER KNOWLTON**

Christopher Knowlton is a transdisciplinary movement artist, scientist, dancer-maker and engineer who uses emerging technologies to create augmented performance work that connects people to themselves, each other, and the world around them. Photo by William Frederking

#### **GINGER KREBS**

Ginger Krebs is a Chicago-based choreographer, performer, visual artist, and leader of collaborative ensemble performances. Using precise, systematic choreography, dry humor, and perceptual disorientation to address facets of empire and colonization, surveillance technology and image-driven culture.

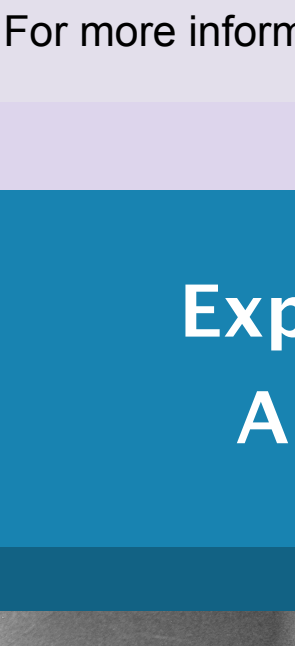
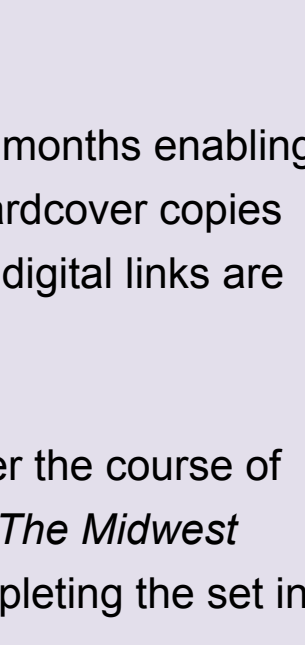


#### **SHALAKA KULKARNI**

Shalaka Kulkarni is an interdisciplinary dance artist. Trained in Indian Classical dances, she creates experiences that bridge the ancient and contemporary, uplifting marginalized voices.

#### **HELEN LEE**

Helen Lee creates performances that weave movement, storytelling, video, plant medicine, taxidermy, installation and/or social practice that examine facets of trauma, racism, grief, joy, healing and meanings of home. Photo by Kristie Kahne

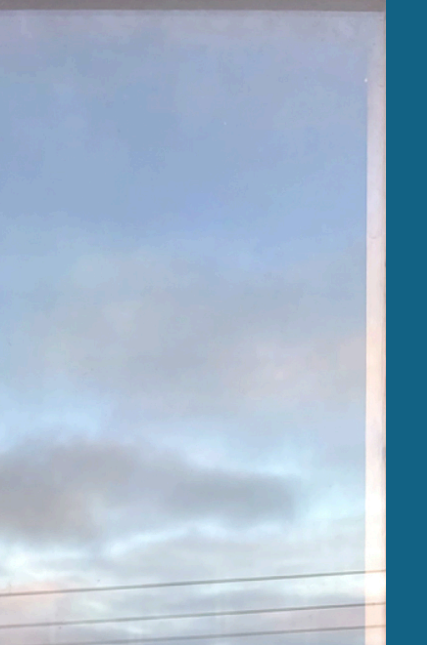


#### **COURTNEY MACKEDANZ**

Courtney Mackedanz is a movement-based performance artist with a practice founded in conceptual dance, critical writing, and the creation of visual art objects.

#### **STEPHANIE MARTINEZ - PARA-MAR DANCE THEATRE**

**Sybil Shearer Fellowship at Ragdale - 2023**  
Chicago-based choreographer, Stephanie Martinez, moves her audiences along a journey guided by the kinetic momentum of her award-winning works with psychologically revelatory works that challenge the viewer's notion of what's possible. Photo by Andrew Weeks Photography

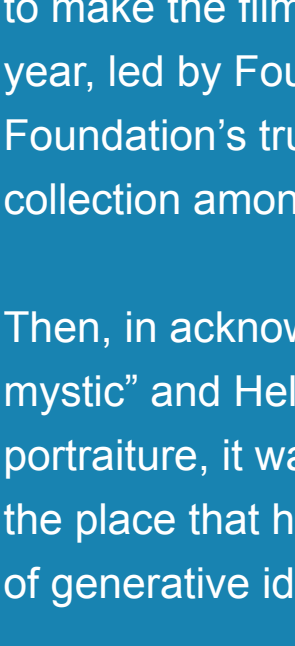
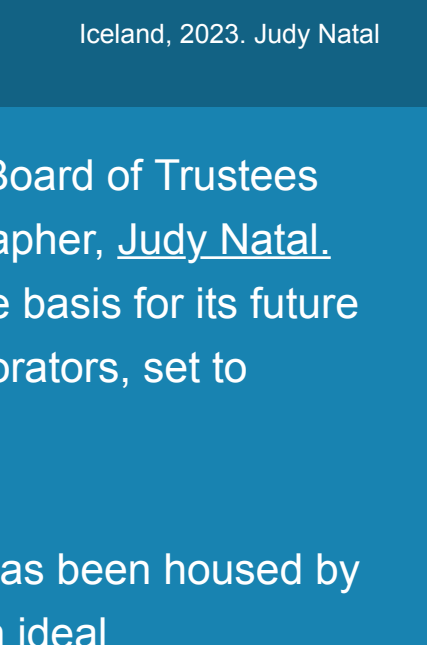


#### **MEIDA MCNEAL**

Meida is Artistic and Managing Director of Honey Pot Performance, a woman-focused collaborative creative community committed to chronicling and interrogating Afro-diasporic feminist and unconventional subjectivities amidst the pressures of contemporary global life.

#### **ROBYN MINEKO WILLIAMS**

Robyn Mineko Williams is the founder and director of Robyn Mineko Williams and Artists which houses and shares a body of interdisciplinary performance created in collaboration with an evolving roster of dynamic artists and designers.

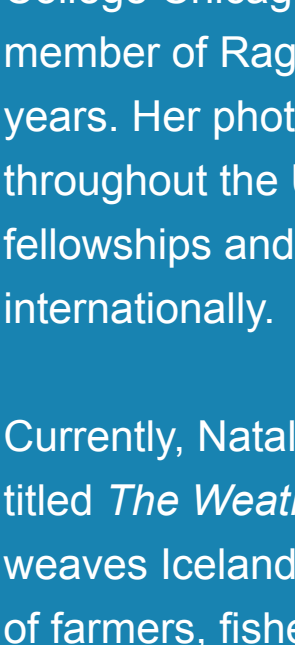
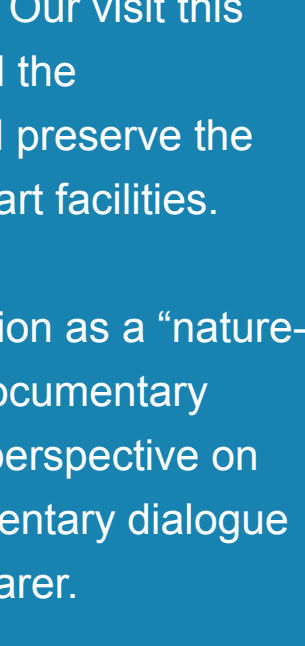


#### **ZACHARY NICOL**

Zachary Nicol is an artist and performer based in Chicago. Their performance and video work uses research in dance, movement, site, and image to unfold problems of representation and the performing body.

#### **MAYA ODIM**

Maya Odim is a writer, and dancer who choreographs from writing. The work Maya shows is purposefully mounted in performance spaces that challenge occidental approaches to performance praxis. Photo by Chris Elvira

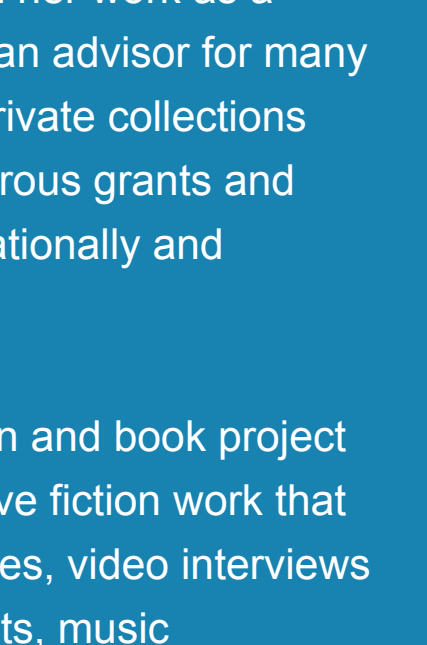


#### **GREER REED - CHICAGO HIGH SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS**

As the head of the Dance Department of the Chicago High School for the Arts, Greer Reed's dedication to young people is a driving force to enrich, empower and inspire.

#### **KINNARI VORA**

Kinnari Vora, born and raised in India, shares stories of universal human conditions and emotions through movement, meditation, and theatrical practices rooted in Bharatanatyam (disciple of Samsthitha Sarkar, India), various Indian folk dances and Kalaripayattu martial arts. Creator: www.joehphoto.com



#### **TARA AISHA WILLIS**

Tara Aisha Willis will be a 2024-25 Getty Research Institute Postdoctoral Fellow in the African American Art History Initiative, is a Curator-in-Residence for Dance at The Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC), and holds a Ph.D. in Performance Studies from New York University.

#### **NEJLA YATKIN**

**Sybil Shearer Fellowship at Ragdale - 2022**  
Chicago-based choreographer Nejla Yatkın travels around the globe inspiring empathic connection between people and their environments, creating solo and ensemble dances for stages and sites, collaborating on plays and film/video projects, and educating young artists. Photo: Erik Andrews



## Without Wings The Way Is Steep, Volumes I – III, Soon Available in Digital Formats

The Morrison-Shearer Foundation is proud to announce plans for the digitization and wider distribution of Sybil Shearer's three-volume autobiography: *Without Wings The Way Is Steep*.



In addition to providing a fascinating view of an insider's history of modern dance in America, the volumes offer intimate views into Shearer's thoughts about leaving New York City and creating a new life for herself and her work in the Midwest.

The decision to start the digitization project was driven by a desire to make Sybil Shearer's writing more widely available than ever before while also acknowledging the changes in publishing, libraries, and personal reading habits that have taken place since the books were originally printed. This effort ensures that a complete digital record is created while the physical copies of the books will continue to be available to researchers who desire to use the native artifacts. These digital books will allow the contents to be instantly searchable using the embedded search functions, providing an invaluable tool for anyone with specific areas of interest or research. Another advantage of digitizing the books is that this new resource will now be available to audiences far beyond the boundaries of the libraries which hold the physical volumes in their collections.

Updates to the Foundation's website will be completed in the coming months enabling all interested parties the ability to upload copies in the near future. Hardcover copies are still available for purchase [via the Foundation's website](#) while the digital links are being prepared for activation.

*Without Wings The Way Is Steep* was published in three volumes over the course of 15 years with the first volume, *Within This Thicket*, debuting in 2006; *The Midwest Inheritance*, following in 2012; and *The Reality Beyond Realism*, completing the set in 2021.

For more information, please contact the Foundation at [info@morrison-shearer.org](mailto:info@morrison-shearer.org).

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## Exploring Opportunities for Media Artists and Their Collaborators



Helen Balfour Morrison



Iceland, 2023. Judy Natal

Earlier this year, members of the Morrison-Shearer Foundation's Board of Trustees visited the Chicago Film Archives and the studio of noted photographer, Judy Natal. Through these visits and others, the Foundation is establishing the basis for its future support of the creative processes of media artists and their collaborators, set to launch in 2025.

Since 2008, the Foundation's extensive collection of dance films has been housed by Chicago Film Archives in order to manage and care for the films in ideal environmental conditions. In 2019, the Foundation gifted its collection to CFA in order to make the films widely available and to preserve them in perpetuity. Our visit this year, led by Founder and Executive Director, Nancy Watrous, allowed the Foundation's trustees to see the work that CFA has done to store and preserve the collection among the hundreds of others in the Archives' state-of-the-art facilities.

Then, in acknowledgment of Sybil Shearer's long-established reputation as a "nature-mystic" and Helen Balfour Morrison's commitment to the artform of documentary portraiture, it was fitting that we visited the studio of Judy Natal. Her perspective on the place that humankind holds in the natural world offers a complementary dialogue of generative ideas and creative practice with both Morrison and Shearer.

Judy is a Chicago-based artist and Professor Emeritus of Photography at Columbia College Chicago. The Foundation was introduced to Natal through her work as a member of Ragdale's Curatorial Board, where she has served as an advisor for many years. Her photographs are in prominent, permanent public and private collections throughout the United States and abroad. She has received numerous grants and fellowships and has also been awarded many artist residencies nationally and internationally.

Currently, Natal is working on an interactive, immersive, installation and book project titled *The Weather Diaries*. This is a creative, non-fiction/speculative fiction work that weaves Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Hawaii with archival images, video interviews of farmers, fisherman, scientists, environmental activists, and artists, music interludes, and craft, to celebrate traditional ecological knowledge.



*The Weather Diaries* continues Natal's earlier explorations of global warming while cultivating a broad-based audience that crosses disciplines & genres. It aspires to put a human face on statistics, bringing an immediacy to the dramatic weather events we witness around the globe, honoring powers of observation as profound sources of knowledge interpreted through image and narrative that are impossible for statistics to depict. The goal of the project is to bring attention to the personal & emotional dimensions of climate change, inviting people to participate through their own stories, expanding notions of the climate change "expert," while interpreting weather cycles written on the land, sea and sky.

All photos © Judy Natal 1998-2023/2024

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## Your Contribution Provides new levels of Support for Artists

*"Art gives us an opportunity to see further than we can see with our eyes alone."*

— SYBIL SHEARER



Donate Today!

We invite you to make a contribution today to help us inspire and nourish the creative process of dance artists, media artists, and their collaborators. Your gift will join with the support of others to provide invaluable creative resources to a new generation of artists and help to strengthen the arts ecosystem at large.

Learn more about the Morrison-Shearer Foundation by visiting [morrison-shearer.org](https://morrison-shearer.org)

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