



**OUR
DANCE
DEMOCRACY**



LIVERPOOL HOPE
UNIVERSITY

175 YEARS OF ACADEMIC
EXCELLENCE

MDI

Liverpool's LEAP Dance Festival 2018 celebrated the theme of suffrage, marking 100 years since some women won the right to vote. Merseyside Dance Initiative (MDI) and Liverpool Hope University (LHU) presented a two-day international conference, Our Dance Democracy, to open the festival. Organisers, Dance Lecturer at LHU **Dr. Sarah Black** and former MDI Artistic Director **Karen Gallagher MBE**, reflect on the conference which had a particular focus on Dance, Performance, Culture and Civic Democracy

We really wanted Our Dance Democracy

(ODD) to focus on dance and performance as the main discipline, with the interrogation of a socially engaged practice to confront the topic of democracy and civic responsibility through the arts and academia. Through an open call out we explored the question of what it means to be democratic in the 21st Century and in an ever-changing world, for both artists, academics and the wider community. Ultimately the conference supported the theme of LEAP Dance Festival 2018, hosted by LHU, celebrating female artists and the power for transformation in contributing to dance practice and its engagement in communities. As with the festival the contributors were 98% female.

We invited four key note speakers for their contribution to performance representing the worlds of academic and professional contexts:

Professor Victor Merriman, Professor of Critical Performance Studies at Edge Hill University, Lancashire, opened the conference with his stunning paper Performance, Democracy and Deficit Culture. Victor discussed the overarching themes of the

conference, which at its core discussed the ways artists and academics engage in performance as a means to enable human flourishing.

Dr Fiona Bannon, senior lecturer at the University of Leeds and Chair of DanceHe, lead our second day examining the role of ethics in participatory dance practices. She engages with relational ethics as effective modes used in qualitative learning experiences and the way ethics informs dance and participatory practices. Her paper presented the delegates with a framework in which to listen to and appreciate the participatory, academic and performance related papers which were to follow.

Rosemary Lee, award-winning choreographer, shared ethics of engagement and processes in her large-scale site-specific performances including Without - a video screen installation capturing a panoramic and intimate portrait of Derry-Londonderry in Northern Ireland.

Charlotte Vincent, choreographer and Artistic Director of Vincent Dance Theatre, reflected upon her role as a choreographer whose work makes significant claims for gender politics, and increasingly for social change.

We are delighted to share a collection of texts which include, papers, interviews, passages of creative writing and images in this special edition of Animated. Collectively they highlight the themes and the ways in which the conference spoke to the lived-challenges, importance and ethics of participatory dance and art practices. From these texts we are able to gather together narratives and storytelling, consider the ethics of our practice and the impact of a lived experience and consider our role and responsibility in making what we do relevant.

The conference was generously supported by the dance department at Hope University, Dr Rachel Sweeney and Dr Declan Patrick, without whom it would have not been possible, and with a contribution by Professor Vida Midgelow who pulled together the vast territory we had covered over the two days. Thank you to all who contributed, for your energy, passion and commitment to dance and art practices. Our aim is to develop and nurture this idea and the partnerships we have made by presenting an ODD 2 conference in February 2020.

Info

blacks@hope.ac.uk

ourdancedemocracy@gmail.com